

Free Sample Chapter of The Bedouin which can be purchased from [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) and [barnesandnoble.com](http://barnesandnoble.com) in soft cover or ebook format.

## Chapter 1

### Grief

"Her small grave haunts me."

Tears cascade down my face for there is only pain at the loss of this child. I know that Lukenow, my mate, will mourn with me that his child did not live. A quick anger pierces me for he is not here to wrap me in his warm arms. We cannot weep together. I need to sob on his broad chest, take refuge in his familiar body. But he is a man of the sea and grows restless if he is not on it; if he is not pitting his wits against those who would take what is his. I want him here with me, as he was when so many other of our children fought their way into the light of day, to lay upon my breast, to be nourished from my body and grow strong. I know not when he will return.

I wail - "She came before her time and was never strong enough to suck at my breast." Blue skies I see not, the soft desert wind I feel not, the heat of the sun warms me not.

My brother, Petros the Wise, studies me. I barely see him, yet I can feel his eyes on me, deciding what to say. I rely on him, as we all do. He knows that much depends upon his timing. If he speaks too soon, I will refuse to hear him, too late and I will again be immersed in my everyday concerns.

"Serena, I have a problem."

He has judged that the time is right. I brush at my tears and look at my elder brother. Before he was named the Wise, he was named the Warrior and then the Protector. Petros was often exasperated at the problems of protecting our beautiful and willful sister, the original Sardow. From our earliest times, he and I protected Sardow who stubbornly went out to the dangerous streets of Ugarit to collect images for her work. She who forgot to protect herself when gathering those images, unaware of the danger that surrounded her. Yet, it was I who was captured. I know that Petros carries within him the grief that he failed to protect me; just as I will always carry the grief of losing this child.

I speak with a semblance of calm, for I am always curious to know what Petros is thinking. "What problem, Petros?"

"Dalil and Kaliq have a plan."

I sigh. "What scheme have they hatched?" I wipe the last of my tears from my eyes and walk around the small mound with Petros.

"It's not a bad scheme, Serena, but they are young and have not enough experience for such a hazardous journey."

I am used to the schemes of the young so I can believe that their scheme lacks any prudence. Petros's schemes had always been prudent, perhaps my brother was never young, yet that can't be so, for I remember laughter from our shared childhood.

"What do they want to do, Petros?" I brace myself.

"They want to go to the land of the one river to locate the source of the evil and destroy any who would be a danger to us. You know that Salama, the far-sighted, is uneasy that there is still danger in some of her family in the land of the one river. Danger that will seek us out to finish what the evil one could not."

I draw in my breath so sharply it hurts. "Dalil and Kaliq? But they would be recognized. Those who returned, even if not evil, would know them on sight, which would make it too dangerous."

"Dalil says that he can disguise himself so that he would not be recognized by those who only saw him in the guise of my foolish son. You have seen how he can change the way he looks, speaks and moves so that you can scarcely believe your eyes that this is the man you have known since he was toddling in the sun. He might succeed."

Petros glances sideways at me. I stop walking and look at him alarmed.

"He also, although he has not said so to me, wonders if he possesses courage. He looks tired during the day, unusual in one so young and vigorous. I hear him call out in the night, although I never let him know that I know. He fingers the scar that is almost healed. It is clear to me that what has not healed is his shock at being threatened with having his body parts cut off by the evil one. He thinks, mistakenly, that he has to prove his courage, even though he kept his wits about him when the evil one had his dagger pressing at his neck. Needing to prove his courage to himself is not a safe basis for an adventure and likely to lead to mistakes."

Petros paces along at my side, I can see by his glances that he is gauging my response. The dust stirs in the wind. Already the small grave has tiny plants growing on it, covering up the raw marks of the freshly dug final resting place. My great grief still consumes me. He continues:

"Kaliq, on the other hand, was not clearly seen. His dagger went so swiftly to the target that he too believes that he would not be recognized. That might be so. Kaliq has the added advantage of being slightly built so that he could be overlooked as not important. His viewers do not see the fine muscles underneath his quiet exterior. It is not such a bad idea. It might even work."

Petros pauses and then says- "They want to take the young singer of songs with them."

Surprised, I stare at him as maternal horror surges up even though the singer of songs is not one of my children. "She is not yet grown into her womanly body." My eyes widen, "Dalil has his eye on her does he not? We can't have a romance in the middle of such serious business. They will be distracted and come to grief. We cannot allow this trip in its present form."

Petros heard the 'we' and as I heard that 'we' realized that I allowed myself to be persuaded. I have never been called a protector, even though I am one. Hasna, too, was a protector, but even in our kin, where the women are respected as much as the men, the women have not been granted the title.

Petros tells me that the singer of songs has told Dalil more than she has told others. They are already closer than the elders suspect. Sardow and Lukenow belonged to each other when they were no older than Dalil and the singer of songs. As did Hoval and his mate. They may have belonged to each other but they were still under the protection of their elders. Petros shudders at the thought of these three youngsters, ardent and talented, alone on a trip that requires discretion and nimble changes of plans. I shudder along with him. They are too young and have too little practice. Petros forgets that he was the same age when he led dangerous journeys. I forget it too.

"Serena, I wonder if maybe you might consider being a part of this journey. You were never seen by the ones who lived to return to the land of the one river and your sons, who are well known there, do not resemble you in looks. You have the tongues that need to be spoken, and if not, you pick them up quickly and speak them fluently, just as our revered ancestor, Hasna, did. The youngsters might even listen to you, if they listen to anyone. I know Dalil asks your help in using his talent. Kaliq appears to follow his lead, although I get the feeling that it is another clever ruse to mislead the elders. That it is actually Kaliq who is the leader. I would rest easier if you were along. Not that I am going to rest easy in any event. I will not sleep until all return safely."

He looks at me and asks- "Will you help me?"

I regard my impassive brother, who so rarely asks for help. I realize that Petros thinks to lessen my grief by sending me on an adventure. Well, I think to myself; *I'll show him that I'm still capable of adventures. I faced down that woman on Minos and I can still outthink those who would bring harm to me and mine. I will bring my daggers with me, and my seeds that can affect the minds of men. I will be prepared.*

"It will take some thinking and arranging and plans being made but yes, Petros, I think it is a good idea. We must consult with Salama and Nakhti to get any information we can. As well we must speak again with my three sons, Arudara, Diripi and Petros the Younger. And let us not forget to speak to the two who came to us from the gold maker to see what they can add to our store of knowledge. We will need, besides the warriors to

protect us, scraps of knowledge that will light our way on the dark road to where the evil resides."

There is a job to be done. My grief eases. I can breath again. Even the thought of leaving my other children to be looked after by others does not hold me back. There are many who will take them in and protect them. It has been many months since I have taken a journey, and I find I look forward to different sights. And to being away from that small grave. I look at my brother and surprise on his face a fleeting look of satisfaction.

