

Gold in Havilah: A Novel of Cain's Wife

EPILOGUE

Know this before we begin: I never planned to turn away from the true God. I didn't intend to exchange heavenly love for fleshly, or dismiss that One who was all purity, as though he were evil. Yet I, Akliah, daughter of Adam, gorged on the same forbidden food he and my mother, Eve, ate on the day they chose to die. I was born with the tainting poison in my blood that first coursed through theirs in a garden called Eden. I craved the mysteries of unearned knowledge instead of the simplicity of God. This is the true curse that drove my parents from paradise: the lost desire for the heart of God.

Few people beyond the lands of Havilah know who I am. Yet most know of my brothers, Cain and Abel, and the story of how one murdered the other. The prophets have scratched out a brief record of what happened between them, setting down the obscene narrative of Cain's slaughter of my womb twin in sharp-edged cyphers on smoked leaves of palm, so that those who come after may read, and consider. Only the proud or willfully ignorant will not understand that this story is about more than the earth's first pair of brothers: It is about us all. For the truth is that we all murder our brother, if not with flint or stone then through slander and the jealous broodings that fester in every heart.

Killing takes many forms.

I understand the need for brevity in telling Cain's shameful deed. The details of such blatant crime so early in the human story are perhaps best left obscured. But the truth is that none of the elders of my people were there in that early time, hundreds of years ago now by the reckoning of the stars. I am the only one left who knows the story first-hand, and only in these latter days have I begun to understand that if I die without telling it all, the things my family suffered and learned those many years ago will be lost forever and of no use to anyone. That is why I now sit well shadowed within the women's prayer cave, ready to unburden the story of my life to the young scribe who kneels before me with her stack of blank folios, ready to receive my words. Don't misunderstand: I am not an ignorant woman. I learned to form the cyphers myself years ago at the insistence of my brother, Seth. He was always asking me to put my story down for all to know. But to speak of it too early would have been to give away too much of myself. To remain quiet was better, for there is power in a secret.

And now it is almost too late. My hands shake and my eyes are as dim as the depths of a shadowed spring; I know few days are left to me. So this eager girl, fresh from the scribes' school, will record my story of boundless, willful desire and then

relinquishment and what came after; of despair so deep I thought I stood at the door of the abyss, and of certainty as broad and clear as the firmament that stretches like a tent above the earth. Perhaps by knowing what happened, people in this day will better understand themselves. For whether our bodies were formed from the rib of Adam himself or nourished in the wombs of mothers a thousand generations afterwards, we are not so different from each other, you and me. There are few stories on the earth, and we are all derived of one heart.

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