

Chapter 1

Atlanta, Georgia, October 2005

Bobbie

I rapped twice on the door of the seventh-floor apartment in the posh retirement home on Peachtree Street. “Peggy? You in there?”

I unlocked the door and found her, as I knew I would, sitting on her balcony looking out at the hubbub below. At ninety-two, Peggy Milner rarely strayed outside in the late afternoon. She reserved her errands for the morning, before her body pitched its daily fit, as she put it.

I knelt down by her wheelchair, and she slowly maneuvered it so that she was facing me. Her thin wrinkled face was surrounded by abundant white hair, cut in a bob. Her green eyes, still bright in spite of cataracts, met mine. “So?”

“The doctor says I have a year to live. And that’s optimistic.”

Her eyes misted. “I’m so sorry to hear it, Bobbie,” she said, reaching out a feeble hand to stroke my face. “I wish it could be me.”

I knew she meant it. Peggy had been ready to go meet Jesus for years. “Well, I’m thankful you’re still here for me. What would I have become without you, Peggy?”

“You and the Lord would have done just fine, no need of me. What did the doctor say about treatment?”

“A pill for two months. After that, aggressive chemo, if the cancer hasn’t spread.”

“Then you know what you need to do. As I’ve been saying for nearly twelve years, Bobbie, go back.”

Tears sprang to my eyes. “But I’m afraid. What if I can’t make it right? What if I fail again?” She sat back in her chair and said, almost sharply, “Dear child, what have you to lose now? Go back.”

“Tracie wants to go with me.”

A smile spread across Peggy’s face, lifting the sagging skin. “So you *have* made plans.”

“I didn’t say yes yet.”

“Say yes, Bobbie. Close the wound. Let it heal. Go back.”

Still on my knees, I laid my head in Peggy’s lap, let her hands rest softly on my back, heard her voice, the sound of age, the sound of wisdom, whisper a prayer for me. “Dear Jesus, take Bobbie back, so she can forgive herself. So she can remember what she knows. You make all things new.”

Timisoara, Romania, a few weeks later

Slowly, deliberately I walked into Timisoara’s Victory Square where back in December, 1989 thousands of protestors fighting to bring down Communism had stood with their candles lit. Where I had stood on that fateful night. I placed my cane carefully between the cobbled stones. I couldn’t afford to stumble or fall. There was the statue of Romulus and Remus surrounded by students and businessmen, the fountain spraying water, a multitude of pigeons waiting their turns to splash beneath it. The gardens were planted with bright purple petunias, and roses were everywhere. Timisoara was called the city of roses. I’d forgotten.

With Tracie at my side, I hobbled along, trying to make the limp less visible, determined to blend into the scenery, heading purposefully in the direction of the Orthodox church at the end of the square. The wonder on my niece’s face reminded me of the way I’d felt all those years ago, discovering a whole new world.

“Oh, this is beautiful!” She drew out the syllables as we stepped into the cathedral. She’d said the same thing at every single church we’d visited.

We watched as a line of several elderly Romanian women approached a painting of the Virgin and Child that stood on an easel in the center of the church. One by one the women moved forward, bowed, and kissed the icon.

“How weird,” Tracie whispered. “They actually kiss the painting. That’s not very hygienic.”

I shrugged and gave her a wink.

“And why aren’t there any pews in this church?”

“It’s Orthodox,” I whispered. “Everyone stands.”

I actually wished a bench would magically appear before me. Pain throbbed in my left leg, and I leaned heavily on the cane.

“Aunt Bobbie, are you okay?” Tracie took my arm. “You’re trembling!”

“No worries, dear. Just a little tired.”

“Look, over there. Against the wall.”

She took my arm and I didn’t protest, just planted the cane in front of me and walked slowly toward a mahogany bench where two older women were seated. I settled beside them, and a wave of anger surged within me, taking me by surprise.

I’m thirty-nine, Lord. Isn’t that a little young to die? I mean, don’t get me wrong. I look forward to spending eternity with You, but there are so many other things I wanted to do here first . . .

Tracie

I watched Aunt Bobbie sitting beside two elderly women on a well-worn bench inside the Metropolitan Orthodox Church. The older women, with sagging, wrinkled skin, talked animatedly to each other while Bobbie leaned back, head against the wall, eyes closed, her right hand clutching a cane. Something was definitely wrong with this picture.

Bobbie was the young, cool aunt all my friends admired as we were growing up, and practically a second mother to me. She loved history, loved travel, loved to be spontaneous, loved people. And she was dying. When my mom called to tell me of Bobbie’s diagnosis, I dropped my cell phone on the floor in disbelief. And the next week I called Bobbie to say it was time for that month-long trip to Europe we’d always talked about.

My aunt had lived in Europe for ten years as a young woman. She had a mysterious career there, and I’m sure I hadn’t heard the half of it—she actually smuggled Bibles into Communist countries in the 1980s, and worked at an orphanage for deaf children in Romania. But then my father dropped dead of a heart attack at forty-two, leaving Mom to care for six children. Bobbie got the word and hopped the next plane to Atlanta, where she swooped into our lives in her flowing bright orange pantsuit, the “eternal rescuer.” That’s what Mom called her. To me, and to my five younger brothers, she was an exotic creature, all fun and adventure and generosity, taking our minds off the fact that our father had just died and placing them on the gifts she had brought to us from Europe. I’ll never forget the look in Mom’s eyes—extreme gratitude in the midst of her grief. There was nothing subtle about Aunt Bobbie, and yet she had an almost imperceptible quality of grace about her, something strong and yet comforting and cozy, something that made me want to be with her and hope and pray it would rub off on me. She never made me feel that whatever drama was going on in my life at the moment was ridiculous or unimportant.

Bobbie knew how to rough it. Once in a village in Bulgaria, when her contact didn’t show up, she dug a hole in the ground to keep the wind from slicing through her and slept outside in the freezing cold. She said it was “an awesome experience.” But another time, while I was in high school, a girlfriend invited her to take a cruise on the Mediterranean, and they stayed in the best suite on the ship. She loved that too.

“You just have to appreciate whatever comes,” she used to say to us kids. “Each day is a twenty-four-hour adventure.”

So Mom and I had decided that Bobbie needed a quaint luxury hotel in Venice, and she agreed—on the condition that she could plan our next stop, in Timisoara. The place we were staying here was definitely not luxurious. In fact, Bobbie called it a “Communist hotel.”

“You know, it’s all dark, heavy wood, oppressive, unimaginative.”

I watched her remove her slip-on Keds—always before she’d worn high-heeled boots or sandals—pull herself into the low and sagging double bed we were sharing, set her cane down, and smile at me.

“Ah, that’s better.” She made light of her earlier moment of exhaustion at the church and said, “It’s completely to be expected as a side effect of the meds.”

It did not exactly placate my fears, but she dared me with those bright blue eyes to disagree. My throat constricted, and I blinked back tears. I hopped on the bed and flicked on the little side light.

“Do you ever think about what you used to do? All those years living in Vienna and smuggling Bibles? Do you miss it?”

Bobbie loved to tell me stories of that life, but when I'd asked her this question in the past, she'd always said something like, "How could I miss that life when I have you and your brothers to fill my days and nights?"

But now she stared at me, and somehow her eyes dimmed. "I think of it every single day of my life." She quickly reached for my hand and squeezed it. "That doesn't mean I haven't been happy. Aching for one thing and enjoying something else aren't mutually exclusive."

"I suppose you're right." I made a face and focused my attention on a piece of peeling beige paint on the wall in front of me. I knew what she was referring to. My aunt was infamous for making a point from something in her life so that I could apply it to mine. "Yes, I'm loving every minute of this trip. But it still hurts so bad that Neil broke up with me. I don't know if there will ever be a single hour in any day when I don't think about him."

She sighed. "Love is painful sometimes, isn't it?"

"It sucks." Then, glancing at her, I dared to ask another question that I'd asked her loads of times before, a question to which she usually gave a silly reply. "Come on, Aunt Bobbie. Tell me for real—did you ever want to be married?"

She smiled. "Well, of course I've thought about it—still do at times. You know, people do marry even after forty!" She laughed. "Thought about it, but then I inherited a family, a large family with a lot of kids, and I didn't even have to bother with a husband."

"But you would have preferred to stay in Austria, do your work there?"

She cocked her head, rested it against the red-cushioned headboard, and closed her eyes. "Tracie, life has seasons. I entered a season of nurturing your family. It wasn't forced upon me. I chose it with gladness, and I have never regretted that choice. Another season might be coming now."

Another *season*? That's what she thought of dying? I didn't want her to enter that season. Ever.

Chapter 2

Somewhere in Iran

Hamid

Hamid was so tired of running. For two months now he'd been constantly looking over his shoulder, afraid of who might show up with a gun and pull the trigger. He shuddered as he pulled the filthy blanket around his shoulders, thinking of the news he had heard the day before, coming through the radio in little patches of static. Four killed in a bombing in his Iranian village, massacred. Was Alaleh one of them? And seven-year-old Rasa? He could not allow himself to think of it.

And the baby . . . surely the little one would be born soon. Where would Alaleh go for the birth? Could the midwife be trusted? His stomach cramped with the questions. Did Alaleh show Rasa photos of her father, remind her how much she was loved? How Hamid longed for news. How he wished he could turn back the clock, had said "No thank you" to the neighbors when they invited Rasa to their daughter's birthday party.

Little Noyemi was Rasa's friend, and Hamid and Alaleh liked the neighbors, even though they were Armenian Christians. They were good people, kind people with strange convictions, brave people who held firm to their religion in spite of the pressure from others.

And Alaleh was so ill with the pregnancy. Twice she had miscarried, and the labor and delivery with Rasa had not gone well. But this time, the doctor said, with plenty of rest, Alaleh would carry this child to term. *Agar Khoda bast*. If God willed. Hamid himself was busy at the university and worried about rumors of the government's new plan to bring in the military against the intellectuals. Preoccupied with this and Alaleh's health, he had welcomed a place where Rasa could be with other children, even for an afternoon. How could he have foreseen . . .

But one afternoon turned into a week, as the neighbors explained that they had a guest from America who wanted to tell stories to the children each day. A special club for the children. How Rasa's eyes sparkled every time she returned from the children's club! She brought little crafts she had made and told stories of the nice woman. It was only on the last day, when Hamid came to pick her up, that Rasa had presented her father with the book.

"Baba, the nice lady gave this to me. It's a good book with wonderful stories. It is for me."

Hamid took the small colorful book with the Farsi title from his daughter.

"The nice lady said it was a good book, but"—and Rasa's eyes had grown wide as she leaned into him—"but it is a dangerous book. I must not show it to anyone. Only you and Maamaan."

He knew the book, and even holding it in his hand, he felt dirty. The *Injil*, the New Testament. In their own language, Farsi. Blasphemy! He should never have let Rasa attend the club. It was brainwashing! He sat with the other parents, most of them Armenian, on the last day of the club, and heard the young American woman speaking in English and the translator beside her telling of the Christ, the prophet. Calling him God. Blasphemy!

He took Rasa's hand and led her away amidst her tears and protests. Why had he not left the book there? Instead, he had hurried out of the neighbors' house with Rasa clutching the book to her chest. It was a short walk to their home, a minute, less. But that day the religious police were on the corner of the street. Did they know of the American woman, of the children's club? Were they watching to see if any Muslims attended? Hamid saw them too late. They approached, as they always did, with authority, brandishing guns. His arm tightened around his daughter. He quietly took the book from her hands, then, feigning a cough, he bent over and slid the book onto the sidewalk behind him, near the Armenians' house where it belonged. The police searched them both, found nothing, and Hamid and Rasa fled inside their home.

Of course the police found the book eventually, and of course they came the next day to question him. He'd known they would be back. He knew the stories. Men who had disagreed politically were thrown into prison for months, years. But what would they do to a Muslim carrying a Christian book? The punishment for blasphemy was death.

There was no time to do anything but flee. Alaleh, heavy with child, her face streaked with tears, begged him, "Go now, Hamid. I will find you, no matter what happens. I'll come with our children."

Little Rasa hugged his legs, crying, "Don't leave, Baba! Don't leave! Take me with you, Baba!"

His mother cried and said, "You must leave now. Leave, Hamid, or they will kill us all."

The last kiss, passionate, terrible, the wrenching away, then hugging Alaleh to him, feeling the tightness of her belly against his . . .

He had fled on a night like this one, with the moon cupping its hand as if to catch a falling star and the sky a cobalt blue fading to black. He closed his eyes to shut out the piercing memories of their good-bye, the frenzied packing of documents, the money hidden in every piece of his clothing.

Only twice since he left had he heard Alaleh's voice, whispering, fearful, full of love. "Rasa is growing strong, beautiful, she loves her father. The baby is kicking so often at night I don't sleep!" She had said it with humor in her voice, so he wouldn't worry. But Hamid did worry. "I love you, Hamid . . ."

After two months of running, he was still far from safe. The mountain village where he now hid was barely sheltered from the perpetual gunfire down in the valley. His traveling companions, two brothers named Ashar and Merif, were intellectuals chased from their home by the government. They thought he was the same. They had all walked from Tehran to the northwestern most part of Iran. It was there they met the smuggler, Zemar, who had led them into a Kurdish village where they stayed with a family. There had been food and blankets—for a price, of course. Then they were put onto a flatbed truck, zigzagging through the mountains. When they reached a police checkpoint in the mountainous area, the truck stopped and the smuggler took them into a house, told them to dress in warm clothes, and put them on horseback. They rode through the night to the next Iranian village, always with the hope of getting a little closer to Turkey.

They left the horses then, and together they had scaled mountains and hidden in caves, scavenged for food and huddled around campfires. Sometimes they traveled with Zemar, sometimes, as was now the case, they were left to follow a crude map on their own, trusting that Zemar would indeed meet up with them at the next agreed-upon location. Together with Ashar and Merif, Hamid had killed wild rabbits and drunk from streams in the middle of the night. And always they listened, they waited, ears trained for the sound of the enemy.

Last week Hamid had been shot in the arm as they raced through the mountainous terrain, following the silent smuggler. He had escaped only by sheer determination, forcing his feet to run, ignoring the exploding pain near his shoulder. The bullet had gone straight through his arm, and the wound showed signs of infection. Now his arm throbbed with pain underneath the makeshift bandage.

Soon they would cross the mountains of northwest Iran into Turkey and travel to Van, the city near the border where refugees arrived, terrified but alive. Another smuggler was to meet them there. From Turkey Hamid would travel to Bulgaria and then on to Austria! Austria, where his cousin Jalil now lived, having gained asylum. Where there was a possibility to start a new life. And then, oh then, God be praised, yes, Khoda be praised, then he could bring Alaleh and Rasa and the baby to join him. *Agar Khoda bast.*
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The three men huddled around the fire, warming their hands, gathering the thick blankets around them as the November sky blinked down a thousand stars. The outline of the snowcapped Mount Ararat far in the distance, with the stars above shining like thousands of exclamation points, should have caused him to burst into song. He was a philosopher, and this night the perfect canvas for him to paint his words. Instead he felt a hollow aching and cold, cold fear.

What if Alaleh and Rasa were dead? Then what hope was left? Why keep running and hiding, why cling to a dream of building a better life of freedom and peace? If they had been murdered, there was no hope.

As the static on the radio grew worse, Merif reached forward and turned the dial, searching for another station with a stronger signal. Suddenly a voice came through, loud and clear.

“. . . from every nation, it is there. The cry for freedom, for hope . . ."

More static. More fiddling with the dial, the three men glancing at each other, glancing up at the stars as if they might betray them, then back to the dwindling fire and the radio.

“. . . and so there is hope in spite of the fear, in spite of the pain, in spite of the bloodshed. The words of the Savior call out 'Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take . . .'"

The static increased, the words faded into nothingness, the men grumbled. With the fire dying away and the cold rushing in to steal their breath, they huddled together for warmth and listened for some other word of their village, of their home, something to give hope.

Hamid stretched out on the hard ground, pulling the blanket over him, cupping his hands under his head for a pillow, and thought of beautiful Alaleh, of bright-eyed Rasa, of his unborn child, of the fuzzy voice from the radio saying, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

Strange words. But oh, how he longed for rest.

The next two nights Hamid happened on the same radio program, broadcast from The Netherlands but in his own tongue. The voice in the box spoke of the Bible, of Christ—*Isa al Masi*—of hope, of a Savior. Hamid’s heart swelled to hear the words, foreign words, dangerous words! Why was he drawn to them so? These were the words that had forced him to flee in the first place.

“Listen to the words! They seem to me to speak truth!” Hamid said to Ashar and Merif.

Ashar leaned in to hear the program. “Hamid! You listen to blasphemy! We are running for our lives because we are devout men who worship Khoda and believe in the power of mind and spirit. Our country sought to kill us for using our minds—what would they do if they find we not only use our minds but listen to blasphemy! They will make us die a slow and painful death. They will find our families.”

Merif produced a knife, grabbing Hamid’s left arm and jerking the radio out of his grasp. “We did not come this far to escape our enemies and incur Khoda’s wrath!” He held the knife at Hamid’s neck. “We are prepared to fight for our lives. Never listen to this again!” He let Hamid go with a hard shove to the ground.

Hamid said no more to the others as they traveled on together. Let them think he had taken their warning to heart. But in spite of their threats, in spite of his own fears, he could not get the words out of his mind.

The very next night Hamid was awakened out of his sleep by a voice. Was he dreaming? Ashar and Merif slept by the dying fire. Had the radio come on? Such a dream! Or was it a vision? The words burned in his soul. *Tonight! Tonight! Go now! Now!* He had heard the voice so clearly.

He got to his feet and, heart pumping, rushed away in the dark, stumbling on brush and roots, the radio tucked tight beneath his arm. He climbed through rough brush and shrubs, his shoes pushing the sand and dirt, climbing a little higher where there was better reception. Away from Ashar and Merif. He climbed higher and prayed to find this truth proclaimed in the middle of the night.

Finally, out of breath, he stopped and looked down from his perch high above the campsite. He was far out of hearing of his companions, even if they awoke. As he stooped down to set the radio on the ground, he saw a flicker of light by the campsite. He scrambled still higher, squinting in the darkness. Another spot of light, a sound. A gunshot. Another. Then stillness.

For a moment Hamid was too shocked to move. Gunshots! Had Ashar and Merif just been murdered? His hands trembled and perspiration broke out on his face. *You must regain composure! Breathe!* he admonished himself.

He waited all the next day, hidden in a cave with nothing but the radio as company. At last, when his canteen of water lay empty, knowing he must leave or die there, he had ventured quietly back to their campsite. The fire was still smoldering beside the two bodies. One gunshot in the head of each. Hamid turned and vomited.

He closed his eyes, backing away from the bodies, tears running down his face. He gathered up the few belongings and provisions the murderers had not taken. Did they suspect a third person in the escape party? Would they bring back dogs and find his trail? He took the hand-drawn map from his pocket. Painstakingly they had drawn it, had watched Zemar fill in the details for the next part of the journey. A two-day hike to the next village; then four days hiking to the border with the smuggler and others—would there be others who had survived?

Not freedom, not that yet, but hope. Two days. West. With a silent sob still in his throat, Hamid clutched the radio to his heart and began to walk. It was only early November, but as he made his way around the side of the mountain the air grew colder and it began to rain. He climbed and slipped on a slick rock. Two more steps and he saw that a cave opened up in the mountain. He bent down and crawled inside the small enclosure. Several bats flew out to greet him. His heart was still thumping hard as he collapsed in the back of the cave, listening.

He marveled at his escape. What strange vision had awakened him and told him to leave? He shivered now as he thought of it. The brightness, the urgency, the assurance that he must flee alone. The voice. *Tonight! Tonight! Go now!* What was this vision that had saved his life? And whose voice had given him the warning?

The answer came, barely a whisper into his soul. *Isa*. Jesus. The prophet. How he had hated that name. *Isa al Masi*. The very reason for his flight was *Isa's* book—the *Ingil*.

A prayer came to his lips. “*Isa al Masi*, I am running because of your book. My life is at risk because of you. And now I have nothing and nowhere to go. Help me, *Isa*, if you are God. Please.”

Somewhere around dawn, he fell asleep.

Alaleh

The ricochet of bullets woke Alaleh with a start. She cradled her bulging stomach protectively with one hand. She listened in the stillness and shivered. “*Rasa?*” she whispered to her daughter, who was sleeping on the mattress beside her.

The little girl stirred and gave a yawn. “Yes, *Maamaan?*”

“It’s time to go. Now. Come quickly.”

She struggled to sit up in bed, and the baby gave a sharp kick. He was ready to leave the warmth of her womb, this little one. “Not yet. Please, little child, not yet.” Alaleh closed her eyes against the pain of a contraction. *Please, little one, not tonight when all of hell has broken loose!*

She met her mother-in-law, Myriam, in the hall. “Hurry!” the older woman whispered, her face drawn with fear. Together Myriam and Alaleh held onto little *Rasa's* hands, propelling her through the hall. Once again there was a ricochet of gunfire. It sounded as if it were right outside the window.

Alaleh knelt down with a groan. Straining, Myriam pushed an old armoire aside to reveal an opening in the wall that led into a crawl space, the size of a small bedroom. “You first, Alaleh, then *Rasa*. It will be okay.” But both women knew nothing would ever be okay again. It had started on a night two months ago when Hamid had fled to protect his family from the religious police. Alaleh had known that sometime they would come back for the rest of the family. They would not believe that only Hamid was responsible for the book, no matter how her mother-in-law argued and protested.

She struggled on her back to pull herself through, her rounded stomach grazing the top of the opening. Once inside, she shifted to her knees and held out one hand for *Rasa*. Then Myriam climbed through, and together they reached out and pulled the old armoire in front of the crawl space. Weeks ago, after Hamid’s disappearance in the night, Myriam had nailed two makeshift wooden handles to the back of the armoire, precisely for this very reason. She had also insisted on stocking this crawl space with food and other supplies, in case there were a need to hide. Now, with the storm of military outside, Alaleh and Myriam held each other in silence behind the hidden door.

The shouting grew louder. They could hear the sounds of shattering china, splintering wood. Alaleh covered her daughter’s ears even as Myriam held her in a tight embrace. How long must they stay hidden? Her contractions were coming steadily, with increasing force, and twice she cried out softly.

Myriam looked at her. “No one must hear,” she whispered.

“Give me something to hold between my teeth,” Alaleh begged, her face taut with pain. She remembered *Rasa's* birth, with the midwife there, the women of the village crowded around, the feeling of community in the midst of her pain. Her daughter’s squeal after thirteen grueling hours of labor.

The joy.

But tonight she had only her daughter and mother-in-law there to help. They had planned for the possibility. The tiny heater was there, the bottles of water, the fresh sheets, the clothes. The food. But could she do it? And without making a sound? Most Iranian women were giving birth by Caesarian now. Her doctor had ordered it months ago, insisting it was imperative in case there were complications, as there had been with *Rasa*.

Myriam squeezed her hand hard. “You can do it. We will do it.”

A guttural scream came from deep within her and burst through her throat, dying in a harsh whimper as Alaleh clamped her teeth on the wooden handle of the knife. How much longer could she endure?

Outside the door everything was quiet. Had the soldiers left? Did they leave one behind, standing guard, watching for the women to return? Alaleh turned her head toward the door and raised her eyes in a silent question.

“You must not think about what is happening out there,” Myriam whispered. “You must concentrate.” She wiped Alaleh’s forehead again, dipped the rag into the bottle of water. “The baby is near. You can do it, my daughter. Wait . . . Wait . . . Now push!”

Alaleh clenched her teeth and once again pushed with all her might.

“Again, again! I see the head! It is almost over. Again, Alaleh!”

The urgency persisted, the contraction cut her in sharp pain. She groaned, waited, and pushed again. She felt the release of pressure, the mind-numbing pain give way to freedom, heard Myriam softly murmuring, “Thank you, Khoda, thank you for this beautiful boy.”

From somewhere Alaleh heard the cry of her newborn son, and then she fainted.

Rasa

Rasa watched her grandmother working frantically to stop the bleeding. The newborn baby lay swaddled by Maamaan’s side, sleeping, but her mother lay awake, eyes glazed, her breathing shallow.

Rasa knew her mother was dying. She saw the blood, she followed every whispered instruction of Maamaan-Bozorg, and still the blood flowed.

She thought back to the club she had attended at Noyemi’s house and the big white woman—Miss Beverly—with the shining face and the strange, wonderful stories. She talked about a God who healed bodies and hearts.

And the book! Miss Beverly had given her the book that had forced Baba away.

“It is a good book, but it is dangerous,” the shining woman had told her, looking straight into Rasa’s eyes. “It is truth, but many do not like it. You must be careful with this book.”

Rasa had not been afraid. She loved to read—she had learned at four and now could interpret all the swirls of the Persian alphabet for herself. She remembered the story Miss Beverly had told on the third day, a story from the *Ingil* about a woman who had been bleeding for years with no way to stop it. And then she had touched the Master, the one Miss Beverly called *Isa al Masi*, and the bleeding had stopped.

“God wants to heal our hearts and our bodies. Cry out to God, to Jesus, for healing. He loves you and forgives you,” Miss Beverly had said.

Rasa went to her mother’s side and placed her hands on Maamaan’s limp arm. “Please God, please Isa al Masi, I believe you can stop the bleeding. We cannot do it, not even Maamaan-Bozorg, who is wise and has delivered many babies. Please, please stop the bleeding, Isa al Masi.”

Her grandmother was watching her, her face haggard and mournful.

Rasa ended her prayer as Miss Beverly had. “In Jesus’ name. Amen.”