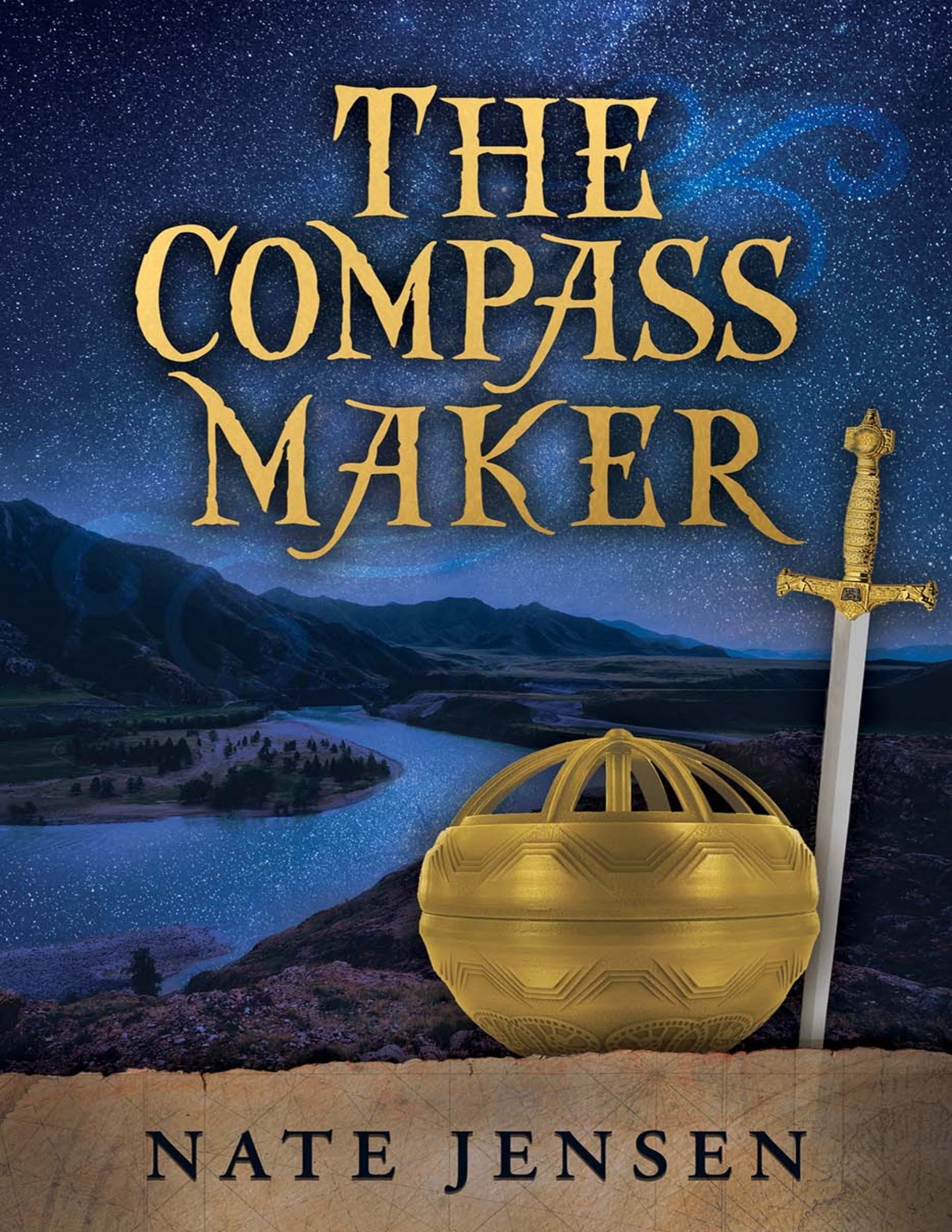


# THE COMPASS MAKER

The background of the cover features a night landscape with a winding river, mountains, and a starry sky. In the foreground, a golden globe with a grid pattern and a sword with a golden hilt and silver blade are positioned on a rocky surface.

NATE JENSEN

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# CHAPTER 1

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Ezra looked up in wonder at the house of Laban. Years of struggle and craftsmanship and honing his skills had brought him here, now. His mind went back to his early days in the metal shop with his father, working the bellows and watching him heat, bend, and hammer clumps of metal. He had learned the craft and become a master in his work. *So many years of struggle.* Musingly, he looked down at his feet and the ground underneath, as though he stood on the peak of a mountain. *This was the mountaintop.*

Ezra was a little taller than most men with dark hair pulled back, exposing a stately forehead. His earthy beard was trimmed short and well kept. His penetrating eyes looked out at the world knowingly, but also trustingly. He was a handsome man except for an unsightly scar down one side of his neck where molten metal had once splashed up and burned him badly. When dressed formally and walking tall, people said he looked like a prince.

*What a house this is!* thought Ezra. The great stone porch rose up from the ground that girded the beautiful gardens and palms around the front entrance. Pillars of sandstone rose majestically from the porch, past the great front entrance door, and beyond to the palatial roof, which now dazzled in burnt orange from the morning sun showering across it. A breeze wafted across the gardens beneath an azure sky and brought fragrant smells dancing into his nose. He breathed in heavily and approached the great porch.

Two soldiers guarded the doorway. “State your name,” one of them said curtly.

“Ezra the metalworker.” His voice was confident and eager. “Master Laban summoned me.”

The soldier who had hailed him nodded and swung the massive door open. “Laban is expecting you.” Ezra stepped through the imposing doorway and into another world. His sandaled feet were suddenly upon polished marble.

Finely crafted rugs and furniture covered the floor, and the walls were adorned by lamps, crafted animal skins, swords, shields, and clay jars from the east. He heard the door rumble closed behind him. The walls rose up to the high ceiling, sculpted and painted with battle scenes of chariots, horses, and men. Sunlight invaded the cavernous room from numerous uncovered windows. It smelled of exotic woods, rugs, and skins.

“Welcome to the house of Laban,” said a voice emerging from a side hallway. The man had a pleasant face with a carefully groomed beard, strong shoulders, and clean linens gathered tightly with a sash around his waist. “I am Zoram, the servant of Laban. Can I bring anything for your comfort before I fetch my master?”

Ezra liked this man instantly and felt at ease in his presence. “Many thanks, but no. I am well.”

The servant disappeared and before Ezra had time to again lose himself in the beauty of the ornate house, a man wearing fine robes and a gold chain around his neck entered the room, and with a commanding voice announced, “I am Laban, rabban of Jerusalem! And *you*,” he said, pointing, “are Ezra, craftsman of the finest order!”

Ezra bowed and stammered—caught off balance by this unexpected praise. “I am only at your service, master Laban.”

Laban was a youngish man with piercing green eyes and dressed in layers of expensive clothing from head to foot. He was no longer thin, but not yet fat.

“Zoram!” shouted Laban into the air, “bring me the new shield!”

Zoram reappeared moments later carrying a small shield constructed of bronze, steel, and copper, rectangular in shape and curved at both ends with four embedded jewels—one at each corner. Laban took the shield and flashed it in front of Ezra, its polished surface catching and scattering rays of sunshine from the windows. “It is fine, is it not?” Laban’s voice dripped with admiration and he didn’t take his eyes from the shield.

Ezra was startled. He knew this shield well, as he had been crafting it all the previous week, and only just sold it at market a few days previous to a stranger. And now here it was in the hands of the great Laban. “You are generous with your praise master Laban, but I am afraid this shield is not very suited for battle. It is merely a decoration.”

Laban looked squarely at Ezra now. “Of course, of course. Only a fool would take a work of art into battle. This shield will be mounted above the

doorway of my treasury. I am proud to display it!”

Ezra felt a warm—almost burning—sensation welling up within him as the words of Laban and the sight of this shield—*his shield*—began to solidify in his mind. He was in the midst of wealth and power, and for the first time in his life, felt perhaps that he belonged here.

“Walk with me,” said Laban, motioning toward the back of the house. Presently they were out the back door and gliding through a second set of gardens and into a small vineyard. The sun splashed its white rays all around as the two men meandered among palms, figs, and flowers of every variety. With the scent of herbs and fruit wafting in the air and soft, cultivated soil underfoot, Laban continued. “To the strong go the spoils of the earth, is it not so? This is my Eden and my oasis in the desert. When one has proven himself worthy as I have, none dare to molest or to take what is mine. I am truly an envy among men, am I not?”

The smallest hint of a warning voice began to sound in the back of Ezra’s mind—just the shadow of a feeling—but he dismissed it as foolishness. At that moment, Ezra realized that Laban’s servant had been walking quietly several paces behind them. He wondered at him. *How would it be to serve a man such as this?* Ezra’s thoughts snapped back and he heard himself saying in a measured tone, “Indeed, Laban, this cannot be disputed.”

“And now I want to show you something: the centerpiece of my estate and the keystone of my power in the land.” As they walked, Laban changed direction and was now heading toward the north end of the estate as Zoram followed noiselessly behind them. Soon they approached what looked like another house right next to Laban’s and to the north—a smaller and less ornate building, guarded by armed soldiers all around. As they approached, Ezra noticed there were no windows and little decoration surrounding it. *This is a fortress*, thought Ezra.

The soldiers saluted Laban as he approached but he paid them no heed. Laban stopped short of the massive wooden door checkered by metal insets, and in a commanding voice said, “Zoram.” The servant stepped forward, a key in his hand, and unlocked the impressive door. He then placed both hands on its massive wood exterior, flexed his legs, and pushed. With a grinding sound, the door swung open and Zoram entered the total darkness of the windowless building.

Ezra watched as flickering lights began to dance out through the doorway. Laban gestured and Ezra stepped inside. The light became brighter and brighter as Zoram lit lamps circumscribing an enormous room filled with the greatest accumulation of wealth Ezra had ever seen. Wood and metal boxes of gold, silver, and jewels filled the shelves from floor to ceiling. Goblets, vases of precious metals, and statues of various sizes and shapes covered a table at one end of the room. Ezra moved to the center of the space and, turning slowly around, surveyed the spectacular array of wealth and abundance. His eyes moved from top to bottom and from side to side, while his mind attempted to tally the aggregate value of what he was seeing.

“The proof of greatness!” exclaimed Laban with a voice of exultation. “A man is measured by his wealth and feared for his power. Is it not so, surely?”

“I have never seen such wealth, master Laban.” Ezra’s voice was heavy with awe. “I am impressed beyond measure. It is a wonder to behold!”

“And now something special,” said Laban, moving to the far end of the room. Hanging on the opposite wall was a small scarlet drapery—perhaps the length and height of a man’s arm—with silver ringlets at all four corners. Laban clasped the bottom corners and lifted the drapery all the way up until the ringlets could be placed on little hooks in the wall, evidently made for that very purpose. This revealed a cavity in the wall that Laban reached into, grabbed a thick wooden board, and pulled. The board slid outward, rolling on top of wheels. Upon the board sat an impressive stack of thin metal sheets held together by large rings. Taking a step closer, Ezra’s trained eye could see that he was looking at plates of brass.

His eyes widened and he drew in a breath. “Is that—”

“The record of the Jews!” announced Laban proudly. “Mine alone. Oh, how the council of elders wishes they possessed this!”

“The record of the prophets!” exclaimed Ezra in a hushed, reverent tone.

“*Prophets!*” snorted Laban derisively. “Dusty genealogies of old men long since dead and lying in graves. Legends and stories for children. Myths of a desert god and the parting of seas. Look around you! Every man shall prosper according to his genius and conquer according to his strength. The only sin is to be a fool and not pursue all the wealth and power that can be gotten in life. And yet,” said Laban, taking a step back from the plates, “as long as I possess this record, I hold the elders of the Jews in the hollow of my hand. They are *nothing* without me.”

Ezra looked fully upon Laban now as the firelight of a dozen lamps and the reflection from countless metallic treasures illuminated his face. Perhaps it was the quality of the light within this vault, or some other phenomenon amidst glittering wealth, but it seemed to him that Laban's countenance had changed. The face of this man had turned almost imperceptibly to a shade of sinister. A slight downward curl of the lip, a subtle narrowing of the eyes, like an animal eyeing its prey—transformed him in this moment and in this light to a nightmarish figure that Ezra suddenly felt an urge to flee from.

*Easy, Ezra. Easy.* He was reaching inside himself now, keeping composure, and guarding against a trickle of terror that was beginning to appear from deep within. He looked at Zoram standing there in the treasury. The servant's face revealed nothing but a readiness to serve. The treasury door had been closed behind them and as the beat of each moment began to slow down, Ezra felt increasingly caged. Trapped. Surrounded. He needed to get out *now*. Taking hold of his wits, he gripped his wandering thoughts and forced himself to say, "You truly are a man defined by your wealth, master Laban. A grand assortment of the treasures of the earth."

A flicker of ruthless scorn passed across Laban's face as he stood there, looking straight back at him. Moments passed—perhaps only a few heartbeats—and just when Ezra began to fear that Laban knew exactly what he had been thinking, the man of wealth said, "Well! Let us return to the house. I have business to discuss with you, Ezra the metalworker. Zoram!" The servant heaved the door of the treasury open again. Presently they were back outside standing in the sunshine, overlooking gardens and orchards. Ezra could breathe again, and with his inner terrors suddenly gone like the morning dew, he chided himself for being silly. In fact, he felt foolish. *Like a child having a nightmare in the middle of the day.* Ezra realized they were walking again. *These gardens are glorious!* he thought, looking from tree to tree and from plant to plant, soaking in the fragrant air. *Would that I had such an estate for myself!*

Back inside the house now, they entered a small sitting room surrounded by open windows. They were seated on giant pillows against padded walls, Ezra across from Laban with a very low table between them. He had no sooner settled himself onto the pillow when Zoram handed them each a cup of honey wine. "Bring me the sword," commanded Laban. Zoram obeyed and returned with a sword. Balancing the blade upon both hands, he extended the hilt to his master. Laban took the weapon and studied it, starting from the hilt and

ending at the tip. “This was my father’s sword,” he said, handing it across the table to Ezra.

The metalworker took the sword gingerly in his hands. Both the hilt and blade were made of forged bronze, nicked and dinged in battle, with traces of bronze disease emerging from the battle scars. He guessed the sword was thirty or forty years old. Bronze swords had been a popular choice for centuries due to their strength and resistance to rust. A good swordsmith knew that by varying the amount of tin in the copper, he could make various parts of the sword harder to suit the demands of combat. This sword, Ezra thought, had been built for battle, not decoration. The balance was good but not perfect. He wondered what adventures this weapon had seen, and what manner of deaths it had meted out. “Your father was a man of war, then?” asked Ezra, still examining the sword.

“Yes,” said Laban flatly, adding nothing more.

“A good sword. Well suited for battle.” Ezra handed the weapon carefully across the table back to its owner.

“I suppose it was good enough for a soldier,” he said, eyeing the bronze sword with little interest. “But I want you to build me a sword like the pharaohs had. I will possess the greatest sword in the world, and *you*,” he declared, pointing the bronze sword across the table at Ezra, “will build it for me! You will create a very special sword: strong and magnificent. And bronze won’t do. The blade must be constructed of the most precious steel, with a hilt of pure gold—and the workmanship of this sword must be exceedingly fine!”

Ezra considered this for a moment and then said, “An excellent choice, master Laban. Steel is stronger than bronze and holds a sharper edge longer. But,” he said, clasping his hands in thought, “the gold hilt could be difficult. Binding such a soft metal as gold to a hard metal like steel could cause problems during forging.”

Laban smiled now and pointed the sword at him again. “I have every confidence in you, metalworker. Tell me you can do it and we shall strike a bargain for a king’s ransom.”

Ezra thought for a few moments, took a breath, and then said, “I can do it. I will build you the finest sword in the world. But it will be costly.”

“Three talents of fine silver,” said Laban conclusively, his eyes sparkling. “You will be the richest craftsman in Jerusalem.”



Ezra stopped breathing for a moment; it was the only way he could prevent himself from gasping. He forced his eyes and face to remain still. He looked straight ahead, carefully, while his mind raced. *This was more money than he had ever made on a project.* This job would bring life-changing wealth to his little family. He breathed again, forcing a long pause. At last, he said, “We have a bargain. I will begin on your new sword as soon as I can obtain the materials.”

Laban smiled and stood upon his feet, visibly pleased. Ezra stood also and the two men—master and metalworker—clasped hands across the table. “You *will* build me the greatest sword in the land, Ezra. It must be perfect. It must be dazzling. And it must exceed my every expectation. *Do not disappoint me.*”

---

Laban held his father's bronze sword in his hands after the metalworker had gone. He looked down upon it and frowned. His thoughts drifted back to the day when he had returned from his first and only trade negotiation with merchants from the east. He had been proud to show his father the results of the trip, his profits from the trade, and his quality as a son. He closed his eyes and relived the scene.

*"Father, what think you of me now?" young Laban asked proudly, laying before him the trading scroll and a pouch of coins.*

*Gideon poured the coins onto the table in front of him and counted quickly with his eyes. He then examined the scroll from top to bottom, occasionally glancing at the coins. At last, he set the scroll down and looked for a long time at his son without expression. "Have you anything unusual to report about the trip?" his father asked with a guarded, somber tone.*

*"Unusual?" asked Laban nervously. "I don't understand."*

*"Were you robbed?" asked Gideon with quiet exasperation.*

*Laban's eyes darted anxiously, and his mouth began to form words but nothing came.*

*"I see no mention in the scroll of the box of pearls, nor the scepter. Were you robbed? Did you lose them?"*

*Laban hung his head and cursed, his face reddening. "This is impossible!" he muttered. "I stopped at an inn for drinks along the way. I was inside but for a short time. The cart was only briefly out of my sight, someone must have . . ." he trailed off and cursed again.*

*"I sent two soldiers with you, Laban, so this type of thing couldn't happen!" Gideon's voice had raised a level and his tone had become edged with irritation.*

*Laban brought his hands to his face and his tone became sullen. "I invited them in to have drinks with me. We were back at the cart in no time at all, I just cannot understand—"*

*Gideon silenced his son with a raise of his hand and a shake of his head. He stood up from the table and lifted his old bronze battle sword from its case against the wall. "Laban, look upon this sword, my son. It is not beautiful. It is not perfect. It is not even valuable. But it did its duty and never failed me in battle. I know I can rely upon it. I expect you to be like this sword. You may have your faults and your weaknesses, but when it comes time to do the*

*job, I expect you to do your duty without fail. I love you my son, but I am disappointed.”*

Laban's thoughts returned to the present and he found himself staring blankly at the sword still laying across his palms. With a snort and a jerk of his wrist, he tossed the sword sloppily back into its case. *I will prove my merit before the end.*

## CHAPTER 2

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“The situation with the brass plates has become alarming,” said Ishmael to the council of elders. The oldest—and some might say the wisest—of the elders sat at one end of the table at the center of the council chambers. His white hair, beard, and priestly robes gave him an air of solemn gravitas. One of five men on the chief council, he commanded the respect of his brethren. He looked upon the other four, inviting their responses.

“Laban is a threat to the plates and to the very underpinnings of this council,” said Pashur, his grave eyes sullen. Pashur’s dark hair was pulled back tightly and he had the face of a bird of prey. A thin veneer of cordiality often hid a layer of menace beneath the surface. As the head of the chief council, he sat at the opposite end of the table from Ishmael. “His possession of the plates is intolerable. We must act.”

Ganix the judge looked at Pashur pensively but said nothing. He was bald with a tightly cropped white beard and wore a ceremonial medallion around his neck announcing him to all as a judge in Jerusalem.

“I know little of these plates,” said Isaac, the youngest and richest member of the group, having inherited both his fortune and his place on the council from his merchant father.

“The plates of brass are a record of the prophets, and of our fathers, and are of inestimable worth,” said Ishmael, leaning forward again across the table, his voice beginning to rise. “Moses brought the children of Israel—our fathers—across the Red Sea on dry ground by the hand of God. The unmatched prophecies of Joseph of Egypt. Think of it! It is the priceless record, not the brass, that gives these plates their value.

“Laban is not wine from the same bottle as his father,” said Ishmael intently. “We all respected Gideon. He was a man of military might, wealth, and honor.

But Laban doesn't know his place in the order of things. He behaves like a dangerous child."

Kirvo, a creditor in Jerusalem who had the shrewd face and probing eyes of a man of money, spoke next. "We must protect the plates. Can Laban be removed from his place?"

"Let us not speak of Laban's removal," said Ganix the judge, pointing at him across the table. Though his voice was calm and even, a hint of warning lurked. "Regardless of our desires, the rabban of Jerusalem can only be removed by King Zedekiah, and the powers-that-be in both Egypt and Babylon have their eye on that post. Anyone who attempts to tamper with that power could pull down wrath upon them."

"And let us not forget that Laban is a dangerous man," said Kirvo, clasping his hands together under his chin. "I have heard rumors of killings by his garrison, ordered by Laban himself. Crossing him could be a fatal mistake."

"Elders," said Pashur, lifting a palm for silence, "the removal of Laban as rabban of Jerusalem is a last resort. Let us speak no more of it now. We must focus on obtaining the plates of brass. By honest dealings if we can, by stratagem or pressure if we must."

"But suppose we obtain the plates," ventured Isaac. "I presume that security is an utmost concern, is it not so? Where will they be safe?"

"In the temple treasury, under guard night and day," answered Ishmael. "For generations that is where they were preserved." Here he paused for effect. "Until they were stolen. Oh, they were recovered. But after the temporary theft it was decided that Gideon should keep the plates in his treasury, guarded by his garrison of fifty. And safe they remained there up to this day."

"But do we not *own* the plates?" queried Isaac. "Can we not approach Laban and ask for them back?"

"*Ownership* can be a fluid notion," said Kirvo the creditor, with a dubious tone. "There are times when possession and ownership are indistinguishable, one from another."

"The plates belong to the God of Israel," pronounced Ishmael solemnly, "and we in the council are merely stewards."

There was a long pause as the elders considered this.

At length, Pashur spoke with a conclusive tone. "Our young friend has the right notion. We will go to Laban and claim our right to the plates."

"And if he will not give them up?" asked Ganix carefully.

“The word ‘give’ is foreign to me,” interjected Kirvo. “Nobody *gives* an item of value. It must be purchased or bargained for. Laban is a man of wealth, and from what I have understood, always wants more.”

“Then let us make an exchange,” offered Isaac, gesturing with outstretched arms. “Perhaps it is time I earned my place on the council. I can offer five talents of fine silver for the plates. A hefty sum for *anything* made of mere brass.”

“A noble gesture,” stated Pashur, pleased. “So let it be done.” Pashur turned to Ishmael now, and with a supplicating gesture asked, “Ishmael, will you go with Isaac to Laban’s house and bargain for the plates?”

“We will go up,” said Ishmael, and then added to the entire group, “My brethren, we are on God’s errand now. We must not fail.”

---

The hour had grown late when the chief council of elders concluded their meeting. They had all stood and uttered their parting words as Ishmael and Isaac left the chamber together, rounded a corner, and headed down the hall of scrolls toward the outer door. They talked casually for a moment of Isaac’s father and Ishmael’s family, taking no notice of the fact that the others were not behind them. Isaac suddenly stopped and grasped Ishmael’s elbow. “Forgive me, Ishmael, I have been careless. I must have left my bag in the chamber.”

“It is good night, then,” said Ishmael with a smile. “I will see you on the morrow.”

“Good night, my friend.” Isaac turned and headed back down the hallway, chiding himself for his absentmindedness, when something made him stop suddenly. It was a sound—and a feeling. The sound was that of men talking quietly and confidentially in the distance. He could hear the elders speaking in the meeting chamber, but their tone had changed. This was odd. *The meeting had adjourned, had it not?* And now the feeling that something was not quite right touched the back of his head and slid down the hairs behind his neck, causing a tingle and a pit in his stomach.

He hesitated, contemplating his options.

A moment later he crept toward the chamber, stepping carefully and silently closer to the voices. Still around the corner, but uncomfortably close now, he

could hear well enough. Pashur was speaking.

“I must confess it is a welcome change that Ishmael is for once aligned with our purposes.”

“It is true,” said Ganix, “that his assistance in seeking the plates is fortuitous, but I don’t like it. He will ask questions and become an enormous nuisance after we have sold them.”

“Leave that to me,” said Pashur. “He is not long on this council, and perhaps not long for this world.”

“Has it come to that already?” asked Kirvo nervously.

Pashur laughed quietly. “He is an old man. Old men die.”

Isaac could hear all the men laughing softly now, attempting to stifle the sound.

“And what is the final price for the plates? Have you concluded the bargain?” asked Ganix.

“Eighty talents of fine gold,” said Pashur with excitement in his voice. “The Egyptian prince will have the plates of brass and we will have ten years’ wealth.”

“Of a truth my brothers,” said Kirvo, “I had become rather satisfied with the constant stream of money from selling off temple treasures, but this sale of the plates is something else entirely. A magnificent sum we shall have!”

Pashur’s tone grew low and threatening. “Brothers, I’m sure I need not remind you of the need for absolute secrecy. You must not speak—not even a whispered hint—of these matters to your wife, your concubine, your mistress, or your dog. A misplaced word could bring us all to ruin.”

“Of course, of course,” said Kirvo quickly.

“And what of young Isaac?” asked Ganix. “His allegiance to Ishmael is troubling. It could become a problem.”

Isaac held his breath, straining to catch every word.

Pashur spoke casually. “He will embrace us and our methods in time. A larger concern right now is Jeremiah.” Pashur’s voice became a low growl. “I will see him in prison or the grave ere long!”

“Patience, Pashur,” said Ganix. “These things can be arranged, but must be handled carefully. Planning, not passion, will best take care of the situation. I care not that some of the people think him a prophet. I can destroy him with scrolls of accusations and invented treacheries against the king before he knows anything. And if that doesn’t work, there is always the solution of last resort.”

“Indeed,” said Pashur. “Jerusalem can be a dangerous city. You never know when tragedy may strike.”

Isaac had listened while scarcely taking a breath as a wave of indignation had grown in his stomach. He admired both Ishmael and Jeremiah, and felt troubled by the callous contempt held for them by his brethren on the council. Turning quietly to leave now, he hesitated. As a barb of anger jabbed his mind, his pulse quickened and he half considered turning again, bursting into the room, and confronting them. But then, as quickly as the anger had come, a cold chill of fear gripped him, and he felt now that his only action must be to get out, and quickly. He took a deep but silent breath, closed his eyes momentarily, and with the muffled voices of the three men still hissing in his ears, started moving. Placing one foot in front of the other as softly as a cat, he made his way down the hall, out the door, and into the night.



## CHAPTER 3

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Eight hundred miles northwest of Jerusalem, across the sea, Thales stood outside the shrine of Miletos, its streaked marble columns rising up toward the sky behind him. A small crowd had gathered under the noonday sun and they were listening and asking him questions. Thales of Miletus was a young man with large, inquisitive eyes, a slender frame, and had an animated style of speaking. He wore his hair short and styled simply. Premature streaks of gray edges made him look older than he was. “I tell you that earthquakes are not caused by the anger of Zeus!” he said passionately, accenting his words with his arms. “Our planet is a flat disk floating on an infinite sea of water. When a wave hits the earth, an earthquake occurs.”

The crowd murmured at this and an older man in a red robe said, “Thales, you speak strangeness and blasphemies. Are you trying to pull down the wrath of Zeus upon us?”

“I have no quarrels with Zeus,” said Thales unconvincingly, “but we must come to understand the world around us by study and observation, not by superstition. More important than *what* we know is *how* do we know it.”

A fat, balding man with large eyes and a double chin said, “Thales, you became rich by hoarding all the olive presses and then charging a fortune for their use when we had the largest olive crop in years. You have said you knew in advance it would be a large crop. By what magic did you know this? Did Aristaeus tell you?”

Thales’s voice became confidential and eager. “Last winter I studied the weather patterns and was able to predict that we would have a plentiful olive crop. By scientific study of the earth and elements we can become the masters of our fates and the environment. Understand, my fellows, matter is alive. The earth is alive. The very stones and sand under your feet are alive. And the

originating principle of nature is a single material substance: *water*. It is science, not Zeus or Aristaeus, that moves the elements.”

The crowd murmured again.

A short, squat, middle-aged man in a dirty tunic said from the back of the group, “I have seen the power of Zeus with my own eyes. I have seen his anger and magic. Listen, all of you. I was an ore miner up in Magnesia this very year, and a wrathful storm came one night, full of thunder and lightning. I do not know what could have angered him so, but Zeus’s wrath was terrible in the skies. I watched the storm from under shelter. For two nights and two days I tell you, lightning was hurled from the heavens. Trees split in half and caught fire. A man was struck dead by a shaft of lightning, the very hair of his head burned and smoking. But the strangest thing of all was this: when next I returned to the mine, a wrathful magic had descended upon it. Bits of rock and ore were moving and jumping and clinging to metal tools!”

Thales stared at the man. “Do you speak truthfully, friend?”

“By Zeus, I speak the truth. It was the strangest magic I ever saw!”

Thales cut his way through the small throng, approached the short, dirty man, took him by the arm, and with a smile said, “Let me buy you wine and food, friend, while you tell me more about the mines of Magnesia!”

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