

THE WIVES *of* KING DAVID, BOOK 1

MICHAL



A N O V E L

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This is a work of historical reconstruction; the appearance of certain historical figures is therefore inevitable. All other characters, however, are products of the author's imagination, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

PART I


And so it was, whenever the spirit from God was upon Saul, that David would take a harp and play it with his hand. Then Saul would become refreshed and well, and the distressing spirit would depart from him.

1 Samuel 16:23

Now Michal, Saul's daughter, loved David. And they told Saul, and the thing pleased him.

1 Samuel 18:20

1

Gibeah, 1023 BC

Michal ducked as a shard of pottery soared past her head. She took a step backward into the shadowed hall, gripping the stone wall for support.

“No! Please! Not my alabaster vase!”

Michal stiffened at her mother’s shrill voice. She crept forward and looked around the heavy wooden door into the battlefield of her mother’s spacious bedchamber.

Her father, the king of Israel, held the priceless Egyptian treasure above his head, his gaze taunting.

“Please, Saul!” Her mother rushed at him, her sheer robe drooping from one shoulder. She gripped the vase, trying to wrestle it from his grasp.

Michal’s breath caught. Had her mother lost her mind?

She had to create a diversion. Get her father out of this room. Or pull her mother away before she died trying to protect that silly pottery collection.

“Give—me—my—vase!”

Her father’s eerie laughter followed. Fabric ripped as he yanked her mother forward by her tunic. She gripped the

vase hard. Snatched it from his grasp. A guttural sound came from his throat. He heaved her across the blue tile, and the vase shattered beneath her.

Her mother's screams faded.

Silence settled over the room.

Michal cowered, fingernails digging at the mortar between the stones.

Her father sank to his knees, face cupped between both hands. Soft weeping came from the corner where her mother lay. A moment passed.

Darting a quick look at her father, Michal hurried to her mother's side. "Are you all right, Mother?" She noted a jagged cut on her mother's arm. "You're bleeding."

"My vase . . ."

Was that all she could think about? "We'll get a new vase, Mother." Never mind that the urn had been in her mother's family since the exodus, dating back several centuries.

"Guards!" Michal called out, hoping one of the cowards was within hearing distance.

Her father's piercing wail startled her, followed by deep, throaty groans as he pushed his purple-draped body up from the floor. Dark, smoldering rage burned in the abyss of his gray eyes.

Michal tugged on her mother's arm, bending to whisper in her ear. "Come, Mother. Let's go!"

Her mother clutched a pottery shard to her chest. "I cannot."

Michal gritted her teeth, wishing she could fly away like a bird. To somewhere far from Gibeah and her father's unpredictable wrath.

"I'll get Jonathan," she said. Her brother was the only person

who could control the king when he got like this. More importantly, her brother could issue the command to send for the singer.

David. The thought of him fluttered her stomach.

“Come here, Daughter.”

She stared at her father in silence, his glare pinning her feet to the floor.

“I won’t hurt you.”

She’d heard the words before, their promise disappearing like water through shifting sand. Michal held her tongue, surprised at how calm she felt. After six months of putting up with her father’s changing moods, maybe she was finally figuring out how to manage him. Though staying out of his way seemed like the wisest option.

She took one step, then whirled about and dashed to the door. On the third step, she felt her father’s grip on her forearm. “Let me go!”

He yanked her to his chest. “Do you think you can outrun a warrior, Daughter?” His fingers dug into her flesh.

“You said you wouldn’t hurt me!” With tears in her eyes, she writhed to get free. “Why, Father? Why do you do this?” She winced at the bruise he was giving her, hating him.

Her mother’s weeping grew to loud wails.

Michal felt her father’s fingers slowly release her arm.

“I shouldn’t have . . .” With a wounded look on his face, he glanced about the room. One hand lifted to his temple as he sank to the floor again. Moaning, he dug both hands into his shoulder-length hair.

Michal resisted the urge to kick him and beat him with her fists. Instead, she drew in a calming breath and rested a hand on top of her father’s head, brushing the golden crown.

“Don’t worry, Father. The harpist will come soon, and you will be well.”

When he didn’t respond, she slipped from the room, disgust and despair mingling in her heart.



Michal rushed along the cobbled stones, then stopped abruptly in front of a guard. “Joash, get Marta to help my mother. She’s hurt.” The guard hurried away, and Michal ran to the courtyard, where Jonathan sat with her brothers Abinadab and Malchishua, rubbing oil into their leather breastplates. “You must come at once, Jonathan.” She bent forward, dragging in a breath of air. “The demons are after Father again.”

Jonathan dropped the oilcloth and shield onto the stone bench and stood. “Tell me quickly, what has he done?”

Michal blurted out the scene in her mother’s chambers, her words tumbling on top of one another. Her brother’s left brow hiked up a notch, and his dark brown beard moved with the clenched muscle in his jaw.

“He’s getting worse,” she said, falling into step at Jonathan’s side. His long legs carried him faster than she could keep up. “What are we going to do?” She hated the whiny quality her voice took on when she panicked, but she was grateful that Jonathan never seemed to notice.

“Send for the singer,” Abinadab said, coming up behind them. “At least the house has some peace from the madness when he plucks those strings of his.”

“I sent for him yesterday.” Jonathan stopped at the entrance to their father’s harem. “How badly was she hurt?” he asked Michal.

“She had a cut on her arm, maybe a few bruises. I sent for Marta.”

“With that temper of his, it’s a wonder he didn’t kill her.” Abinadab scowled.

“Keep your tone respectful, Brother. He’s still our father and king.”

“He doesn’t act like a king.” Michal tensed, wishing she could retract the words.

“Maybe not, but we must still keep in mind that he is the Lord’s anointed.”

Michal sighed, feeling far older than her fifteen years. A guard emerged from her mother’s chambers, the king leaning on his arm. They stepped to the side, allowing the king to pass. His eyes held a dazed expression, as though he looked through them instead of at them.

“He’s not a good king,” Michal whispered, when their father had turned down the hall leading to his own chambers.

Jonathan’s hand on her arm made her look up at him again. “We have to trust the Lord in this, Michal.”

He walked on toward their mother’s room. His earnest expression brought a sliver of hope into her heart, but in the same moment the old doubts rose to haunt her.

“Then why has the Lord forsaken our father?” she asked, hurrying to keep up. The question had burned within her since the day their father had returned from a battle with the Amalekites, shaken to the core. He’d never spoken of it, and she was desperate to understand. “Please, Jonathan, do you know why the Most High seems to torment Father rather than help him?”

Jonathan crossed the threshold to their mother’s chambers, where Michal could see the woman resting on her couch, Marta at her side.

“The singer will ease Father’s worries,” he said. “Don’t trouble yourself with the rest.” He touched her arm. “I’ll handle things here.”

Michal nodded, relieved to be free of the whole ordeal. Grabbing up her skirts, she raced to the outside of the palace kitchens where stone steps led to the lookout area on the flat roof. *David*. If Jonathan had already sent for him, he could be coming up the hill from Bethlehem. She might be able to spot him from the rooftop.

She rounded a corner closest to the clay ovens, where scents of garlic and leeks mingled with the yeasty smells of baking bread. One sniff made her stomach growl, but she pressed a hand to her waist and grasped the rail. She raised her foot to climb the first step when the echoing sounds of her father’s screams sent her hopes plummeting.

Her sister, Merab, came up behind her, dark hair flowing beneath a blue veil, arms crossed in her arrogant older sister pose. Sometimes Michal saw glimpses of her father in her sister’s cold eyes and tight smile. She shuddered at the thought.

“There you are. Mother needs you,” Merab said.

Michal let out a sigh. “Jonathan is with her. She doesn’t need me.” She had to get away from her mother’s demands.

Merab lifted her chin. “Of course she does. It’s always you she wants.” She shifted from one foot to the other. “You best hurry—you know how she gets.”

Yes. She knew only too well.

A feeling of rebellion made her pause. Of late her mother had grown almost as unreasonable as her father, even going so far as to bring teraphim into the palace. The household gods made her shiver every time she looked at them.

Michal glanced up at the roof, then back at her sister. “I’ll

be there soon." Before Merab could protest, Michal scurried up the stone steps to the lookout place between the dual towers.

A brisk breeze whipped her head cloth behind her while she gripped the stone parapet. She bent forward, straining to see against the glare of the fading sun.

David.

She swayed to the music of his name echoing in her heart. Leaning her weary limbs against the stone tower, she released an unsteady breath. Below her, ricocheting against the granite walls of the palace, the sounds of her father's raving madness carried through the open windows.

Any moment now the harpist, straddling his father's gray donkey, would trot through the imposing gates of Gibeah, straight to her father's side.

Oh, please hurry!

The incessant pounding of her heart increased at the sound of a sudden, earsplitting scream. She clamped her hands over her ears and rocked back on her heels.

Why, God? Why does my father act this way?

Michal bit back a sob and stretched farther over the rail's edge, begging her eyes to find the object of her desire, of her desperation. Truth be told, she needed the magic of the singer's music almost as much as her father did. Maybe then her fears would subside, her anxious thoughts cease.

She rushed to the other end of the roof. Her fingers trembling, she flipped her braided hair behind her back and peered around the towers toward the hills. For a moment the beauty of the sunset calmed her tattered nerves.

Please come. Don't make us wait another day.

Her father's guttural wail coming from below reduced

her fragile peace to ashes. She raised her fists in the air and screamed.



Cushioned couches lined the south wall of the king's court where Michal reclined beside her mother and sister, her gaze fixed on the singer. Though it was long after dark, David had finally come. His sweet music wooed her, and the strings of his harp mimicked the melodic trill of a nightingale. She closed her eyes, picturing the cascading blue-green waters of En Gedi.

Tension slipped from her shoulders, and her restless fears vanished. *David*. Had she spoken his name aloud? But David's gaze was focused on her father. King Saul was no longer the crazed madman of a few hours ago. His eyes were clear, and his lips curved in a smile.

Michal's heart stirred with something akin to compassion. She could almost love the king when he was like this.

The music drifted into stillness. David's head lifted, and he glanced in her direction. Michal's breath caught when their eyes connected. His casual, dimpled smile nearly made her heart stop. Could he read her thoughts? Could he tell how her heart yearned for him? His gaze moved past her and lingered on her sister. Michal shifted in her seat, catching the blush on Merab's cheeks.

In a suspended moment, Michal glanced from Merab to David, who had turned away to face Jonathan and the king. But not soon enough to hide the look that had passed between them. A look that told her more than words could begin to say.

David—the man who had captured her heart—was in love with her sister.