

An excerpt from:

Refuge

A novel by

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Chapter 1

Cain broke into a run when he left the circle of firelight, loping along the side of the river. The half moon was just rising, so its light enabled him to avoid most obstacles. But occasionally a branch whipped across his face, giving him a strong slap.

He needed that. He was angry at God.

Why couldn't he have a wife? Could only his father have one? Could only his parents marry? If this was the case, it didn't seem fair.

By the fire his father had told that story again, the one about God giving him their mother. Father always recounted a tale on the evening of the sixth day, a verbal chronicle of their time in Eden. Tonight he had related this account. Why that one?

Listening to the story, discontent had nearly crushed Cain. He longed for the type of love a man and a woman shared. Gazing into the eyes of his sister Lilith sitting across the fire, he had realized he was dissatisfied with his life. He wanted a wife of his own. He didn't know how he'd ever get one though. Apparently, only his parents could marry.

He couldn't take it anymore. Frustrated and angry, Cain had jumped up from the bonfire, running off, surprising his parents and siblings. Now he lowered his head and ran harder. The situation discouraged him.

After he had covered a great distance, he slowed to catch his breath. The pounding of running feet sounded far behind him. When Cain had jumped up from the fireside and stormed off, Abel had been holding a pile of small sleeping siblings. Though Abel had glanced up quickly, kind concern on his face, he wouldn't rise and disturb the slumbering little ones. Cain realized Lilith must be the one chasing him.

Cain peered into the distance. The moonlight illuminated Lilith; she was running fast. He considered racing on ahead. He didn't want to talk to her. Frustrated with the state of his life, he couldn't articulate his feelings.

But then he remembered her eyes by the firelight and waited for her instead.

Lilith fell. She must have tripped over something in the dark. Concerned, Cain took a step toward her. Her head reappeared.

"Cain," she called. "Wait! I'm sorry."

Sorry? Sorry for what? He waited.

She raced up to him, winded as she bent to rub her shin. "Will you forgive me?"

"What have you done?"

"I shouldn't have teased you about your beard."

That evening he had scraped the stubble from his face with one of his sharpened stone cutting tools, and Lilith had noticed, gesturing to him from across the fire.

"I wasn't mad at you," he said.

Noticing a trickle of dark blood running down Lilith's leg, Cain grasped her hand and led her toward the river. Silently, he bent to wash the wound. Caring for her and all his younger brothers and sisters was a habit. Kneeling on the earth, he bathed and inspected the injury as well as he could by the moonlight. Without speaking, Lilith watched his ministrations.

"Then what's wrong?" She broke the silence.

"I can't talk about it."

"Yes, you can. You tell me everything."

"I can't tell you about this."

"Why not?"

“It’s too confusing,” he said.

Waiting for Cain to say more, Lilith stood quietly. From long experience she had learned if she gave him time, he would unburden himself. Maybe that was why they got along so well—she knew when to be quiet. Getting him to divulge his heart required patience. He never liked to reveal his fears, worries, or insecurities. But he revealed them to her.

Motionless, she studied the top of his head, black in the moonlight—he finished tending her leg. He looked up at her but didn’t rise. When he spoke, it was from his position on the ground. Barely above a whisper, his voice sounded unsteady.

“I want a wife.”

It was as if he had punched her in the chest, the impact swift and sudden. *A wife!*

Lilith recalled the way their father gazed upon their mother and how their parents kissed. They murmured together in the night. If it was even possible for Cain to marry, she didn’t want him to have a wife. But her heart clutched—longing and despair filled his whispered confession. Even in the dark, she detected it in his eyes. She hated to see him in pain.

Lilith couldn’t speak. The thought of Cain marrying struck terror into her heart.

“I’m frustrated about it.” He looked away. “I’m mad at God.”

Answering softly, she found her voice. “Maybe God will give you a wife somehow.”

Why had she said that? The words had simply burst out; she couldn’t seem to help herself—she always encouraged him when he was downcast.

Quickly, he looked back at her. “What do you mean?”

“I don’t know.” She shrugged, swallowing hard. “Just maybe he intends to give you one.”

A confusing mix of despair and hope flitted across Cain's features. He rose, peering into her eyes in the moonlight. For a long while, he studied her face. Then, gently, he caressed her cheek, his thumb lingering as it glided slowly across her skin. Ever-so-slightly, he leaned toward her, his breath soft and warm upon her face.

Abruptly, he turned and ran off into the night, leaving her shaken.

She didn't follow him. Stunned, she stared after him before turning toward home. Far away she detected the faint glow from the fire's dying embers. Cain wanted a wife. If God gave him one, everything would change. The hopelessness of the situation hit her hard.

The intimacy would cease—the thrill of his sky-blue eyes, bright and animated when he spoke to her, such a contrast against his dusky skin and jet-black hair. This would end. No longer would he lean close, breathless with some secret to share, confiding in her alone. These would belong to another. Heartbroken, she stumbled back with her head down.

As if they'd been awaiting her return, her father and mother still sat by the burning coals in the clearing. They were alone, everyone else having gone to bed. Mutely, Lilith looked at them, anguish filling her heart; but she didn't want to speak. She couldn't tell them that she wanted Cain for herself, so she headed toward the chamber she shared with her sisters.

Silent and grief stricken, Lilith stood in the doorway of her room, staring at her parents before entering the quiet dwelling where her sisters slept. She rolled back the woven reed matting from the roof so she could see the stars. She doubted she would sleep.

Adam and Eve watched the darkened doorway for a moment after Lilith had disappeared; then they looked at one another.

"I'm glad she came back," Eve said quietly.

“You didn’t expect her to return?”

“I wasn’t sure. Cain needs a wife.”

“What does that have to do with Lilith? Do you think that’s what’s wrong?”

“Yes. He jumped up as you were recounting our first night together.”

“Well, that could have been a coincidence.”

“I was watching them both all evening. They kept looking at one another across the fire. Since Lilith was small, they’ve been able to communicate without even speaking. Their attachment has grown with every year and each decade. I think Cain should marry Lilith. I thought he might simply take her and leave.”

“But how can they marry?” Adam turned to stare at her, his face contorted with consternation. “She’s not part of his body; they’re not one flesh. The Creator made you from my side. That’s how I got my wife.”

“They will be one flesh when they’re united. Remember what it was like? We already knew we were both made from your flesh; but it truly felt like it after we lay together.”

“That’s worth considering.” Adam turned his gaze away, his eyes once more on the embers. “But why would God change his ways with our children?”

“There were no women when he made me from your side. There are women now.”

“Yes, but these women are their sisters.”

“For our sons, these are the only women there are.”

“But I’ve expected God to make them wives from their own bodies, as he made you from mine.” Adam glanced at her. “The fact that the first ten were boys, one after another, seemed to verify this.”

“But then the daughters came,” she said. “What about them? How are they to get husbands if God doesn’t have a different plan for them than he had for us? It won’t be so for their children and for their children’s children. But this is how it is for them.”

“I’m not sure about this.”

“Adam, God made their bodies to beget and bear children. At least twenty of them are physically ready to do so. God told us to be fruitful and to fill the earth, and he gave us male *and* female children. Maybe they’re to marry each other, and we’re all to multiply on the earth. It seems Cain and Lilith might be discovering this. I think it’s time.”

“I want to hear from Yahweh.” Adam’s shoulders stiffened.

“Cain may be tired of waiting.”

“Do you think they’ve discussed this?”

“No, not yet.” Eve fixed her eyes on him. “But they will. I’ve been watching them. I think they’re realizing how special they’ve always been to one another.”

“I don’t know if it’s right. I’ve been praying about this, but Yahweh remains silent. He doesn’t act. Why can’t things remain as they are?”

“How long did you wait for a wife, Adam?”

“One very long and lonely day.” Smiling, he rose and extended his hand. Taking it, she returned his smile.

“Cain is just as mature as you were when the Creator made me,” she said. “He can grow a full beard, if he would let it grow. His body looks like yours did then. Think about that.”

“I will. Let’s pray about it. Now come, lie with me.”

Cain ran along the river until he reached the cherubim on the far side; then he sat on the riverbank to rest. Watching them, he was always astounded by their size and brilliance.

They stood on the opposite bank of the Tigris within the Garden of Eden, guarding the way to the tree of life. Silent sentinels, they illuminated everything on the river's far side and cast a soft glow on this bank as well. Nearly three times his height, whenever they beat their broad wings the breeze stirred even on this side of the river. Sitting this close made Cain feel as if he were on the edge of danger—their flaming sword pointed straight at him.

Tonight they stood in a pose of readiness, as if preparing to charge into a fight. Their many eyes seemed to be fixed on something beside him. He turned and stared hard into the night-blackened shadows—nothing was there that he could see. Still, they remained poised in absolute stillness, as if waiting for the word to strike. He'd never seen them like this before. Settling onto the riverbank, he watched, wondering what they saw that he didn't. They remained motionless.

He wished he could ask the cherubim for advice; but their stern eyes made it clear this was not an option. He didn't know what to do. Lilith's words had confused him.

What had she meant? How could God give him a wife? Would he make a wife for him, as he had done for his father? If so, why was God taking so long?

The desire for a wife had been growing in Cain without his awareness. It was only as his father had told the story of holding his mother under the stars for the first time that Cain had realized how strong this desire had become. When combined with his father's words, staring at Lilith across the fire had wakened something that surprised him with its intensity.

“Maybe God will give you a wife,” Lilith had said.

Cain didn't pray as much as Abel, but he aimed his silent prayer at Yahweh:

God, why are you doing this to me? I'm a full grown man. I'm ready for a wife; I need one now! Lilith's words....

At the thought of her name, Cain's mind wandered from his prayer and lingered on Lilith—the sound of her voice, the gray-hazel tint of her eyes, her honey curls hanging down to her hips, the shape of her body. He tore his mind away; he had battled this when he was a younger man. Several times, he and some of his brothers had sneaked out to the river to watch the girls bathe. Lust for Lilith had nearly consumed him then.

Was it right for him to think this way about his sister?

If they were going to multiply and fill the earth, would they all need to marry and reproduce? Or was his mother to bear all the earth's children? His father had named her "Eve"—the mother of all the living. After one-hundred-twenty years, she had borne fifty-five offspring. That was a large number of children, but at this rate it would take a long time to fill the earth and subdue it. Vast wilderness still surrounded them on all sides.

As he and all his siblings reached adulthood, their bodies were clearly designed to beget and bear children, too. What did this mean? What were they to do? Were they to marry? How were they to do so? Was there another way? What was it?

Lilith's eyes intruded into his thoughts. He thought about bathing her bleeding leg. He had carried her around since she was a baby. Physical contact was common between the two of them; but touching her leg while talking about wanting a wife had awakened something within him. He desired her. But it was more than simply desire for her body.

He reflected on her expression when he had said that he wanted a wife. Desperation had shown in her eyes; she had inhaled sharply. Why? Was she upset about the idea of him loving another woman, even if God made her for him? Perhaps. Cain considered.

Lilith was everything he thought a woman should be. She was artistic, and she sang beautifully, inventively weaving songs through the air. Intelligent and funny, brave and adventurous, she was always loyal to him. On his carefree adventures, she was usually right beside him, choosing to accompany him in spite of Abel's warnings about getting hurt. It satisfied Cain, that she always chose him over Abel.

Once, long ago, he had sat on this very bank with her, studying the cherubim. She had come with him, rather than heeding Abel. Lilith had leaned against him as she stared across the river at the blinding radiance, her chin lifted, jutting toward the two angels in a show of courage.

"You're my favorite brother of all," she had whispered, flicking her eyes toward his for just a moment, a small smile curving her lips at the corners. "I always feel safe when you're near." Her warm arm had stolen around his back to clasp his waist and pull him closer.

His heart had raced, but he had snorted out a laugh. "As if I could fight both cherubim!"

"Still, no one else makes me feel safe. No one."

Grinning, he had reached across her bent knees to caress her far leg, his fingertip tracing whorls around her kneecap. She had leaned nearer, her breath caressing his face before she nestled her head upon his shoulder. In embrace, they had lingered there a long while.

Cain realized he didn't want another woman—he loved Lilith.

What did his love for her mean? How did he love her? His love for Lilith involved passion of some sort—wanting her to know everything about him and having no fear of revealing his true self to her. It demanded that he strive to know her as fully as he knew himself, driving him to be near her and to value her good opinion above all others. It entailed wanting to commit himself to her, to live with her alone for the rest of his life, to take her body as his own, to care for her, to beget children with her. He couldn't hide this from himself any longer.

It was an epiphany: He wanted Lilith to be his wife!

His father and mother loved each other passionately. Cain had witnessed their love his entire life. He saw their affection, often hearing them in the night as he grew up. That was one reason he had built his own sleeping chamber far up the riverbank. He was a man; he didn't want to hear this. It made his sleep restless, his dreams confusing, his thoughts more difficult to control, his discontent more acute.

Having observed mating in the animal world, he had a general idea of what physical unity between a man and a woman entailed. He had seen the physical evidence of his parents' love in the continually growing brood of siblings.

This was how he wanted Lilith. He now realized this. He longed to be her husband, to cherish her and to make her his own.

Now, what should he do about it?

Chapter 2

Satan prowled. Despising his former angelic comrades who stood watch on the river's other side, he sneered at their ready stance. He could take them both. But he hated even looking at them. They reminded him of his future crushing.

Charred and singed from his blazing fall from heaven, Satan's ashy spirit drifted nearer to Cain. Encompassing the weak boy-man, Satan's burnt arms and wings spread wide. Even in his reduced state, Satan towered over Cain, menacing as he curled his soiled, unclothed spirit about the man's body, completely enveloping him in black mist.

Formerly, Satan's spirit had blazed glorious, his wings supple and powerful—shining with the glory of heavenly radiance. He had ranked first and had orchestrated the hosts of heaven in musical praise. Now his wings were damaged, his entire form reduced from what it once was. Now, frayed and scorched, he hovered over the man.

Yet Satan was still powerful, capable of completely eradicating this puny boy of a man, if God allowed it. Satan loved to maim, debase, and ruin what God had made beautiful, provoking the humans to mar their forms and to corrupt their thoughts. Satan lured them to destruction.

Black maw stretched wide, Satan's once melodious voice screeched a horrific cackle. The stench of degradation rose from within his vile spirit—all unseen, unheard, and undetected by Cain. Satan guffawed as he considered how he would destroy this beautiful man.

Focusing on his prey, Satan watched and listened to Cain. His interactions provided significant insights into his weaknesses. Obsessed with discovering ways to harm him and all the rest, Satan sought to eradicate the humans God had created. He was now God's enemy.

Stalking the loathsome human beings, Satan maintained constant surveillance of one or the other, attempting to discern their thoughts and motives. Their words, actions, scent, flush of

cheek, or beat of heart that indicated emotion—combined, these informed him, shaping his strategies. When they spoke their considerations out loud, it was even better.

One by one, day and night, he investigated their similarities and their differences. These, he analyzed. God had designed them intricately. They were not like the animals. The humans had an inner moral guide. Though they all came from one father and one mother, each personality was unique. Because of this, the deformity of a fallen nature that had polluted them all since their parents' first sin affected each one in a different and particular way.

However, there were commonalities. A plethora of corrupt and discontent desires tempered their ability to heed that sense of right and wrong within them—their consciences. Satan and the other fallen angels had learned that this place of inner conflict was the tripping point, the area to nudge and to prod. Here, he sought the weak points. He always found them.

Manipulation, entrapment, and deception were Satan's expertise.

But God constrained him. He could only touch Adam and Eve and their family if God allowed it. And then it always seemed to be for some purpose that Satan couldn't discern. God took every malevolent action of Satan's and twisted it, shaping it for good in the humans' lives. This irked him, filling him with restless agitation. Quelling the snarl of rage that nearly burst out, he tamped down his frustration. But it simmered inside.

One of the humans would defeat him.

One day a seed of the woman, one specific offspring of Adam and Eve, would crush his head and destroy him. God had decreed it. Satan could not discern which one it might be, nor could he comprehend how this crushing would occur. The humans he observed every day called it a mystery; they didn't know either. No one did except God. He knew.

In Satan's mind, the likeliest candidate was Cain—the oldest son. Surely, it was him. Silent and unseen, Satan leaned near Cain, sniffing his reeking pheromones. They told much. Cain appeared hopeful. His cheeks flushed with expectancy; his heart thumped with passion. Satan despised them when they looked like that! Machinating over how to harm him, Satan stewed.

Since Abel's birth, Satan had whispered discouragement to Cain, prodding insecurity's inner bruise and snuffing hope when it flamed. That underpinning warped Cain's view of himself. With those wounds in place, Cain's sinful nature led him into various temptations, but Satan wanted to draw him even further in. Thoughtfully, he studied him.

This boy-man was arrogant; he relied on himself—he would be easy to break. Temptation regarding Lilith might be the trigger to Cain's fall. Satan considered ways to hurt Lilith in the process. And, what about Abel? Unlike Cain or Lilith, Abel adored God and called upon him for assistance. For this, Satan loathed him.

But his hatred of Cain was zealous. He must destroy Cain. It was imperative. He would seize every opportunity. Bitterly, Satan mulled over these facts. He had to win this battle.

The outcome held eternal implications.