

# With an Everlasting Love

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by Kay Arthur

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## One

*“Any Jew who has not a wife is no man.” It was written in the Talmud. That settled it. The time had come for his son Joshua to take a wife. There could be no more delay. Shaddai paced the floor, saying these things aloud to himself, as he awaited Joshua’s return.*

Although the sound of his words was at times lost in his beard, anyone who observed him would have known that whatever this patriarch was saying, he meant. Determination was engraved in furrows of concern upon the aged parchment of his face.

His reasoning continued. “My son has already reached manhood. Why, a marriage contract should have been made long ago! I am old! I need grandchildren. Besides, if Joshua does not marry, then who will carry on my name? Only one son, that’s all I have...only one, my Joshua. Ah, Joshua, what a son you are!”

With that thought, Shaddai’s pacing came to an abrupt halt. Suddenly a smile illuminated his face, dispelling the clouds of determination. Thoughts of his son always brought smiles, for although Shaddai had only one child, there was no child that could equal Joshua. Even the men who sat with Shaddai at the city gates would concur. No one debated him or even raised a quizzical eyebrow when he would say, “If all the sons of Israel were mine, they could not equal my Joshua. He is my son, my only begotten son with whom I am well pleased.”

Each time he said it, no matter how often, they could only nod their heads in assent, for they, too, would have been well pleased had Joshua been their son. Impeccable in character, endowed with great wisdom, perfect in obedience, he was a son who always and only did those things which pleased his father. Oh, yes, Shaddai was a father to be envied, and he knew it!

“Maybe that is why I have been so slow to follow my Jewish traditions. I cannot choose a bride for Joshua without his consent! Why, how could I ever find a woman suitable for one such as Joshua!”

That thought started Shaddai pacing again as he mentally began a journey through the streets and families of his city. He had to find a bride for Joshua! Sensing the urgency of his plight, he paced more rapidly, halting abruptly each time the name of some young virgin would come to mind. Yet each name only brought a negative shake of the head, and the pacing would begin again. In his mind's eye, Shaddai stopped at the door of every fine family who had a virgin daughter. Yet every time he would shake his head, "No!" with such vigor that his beard would swing like a pendulum from shoulder to shoulder.

Having exhausted every suitable home in his city, Shaddai remembered how he had discussed this very problem with the men at the gate. Every one of those men would like to have the honor of having Joshua as a son-in-law. Not only would the fortunate father gain much honor for his daughter, but what a dowry he would receive also! No one in the city was wealthier than Shaddai. No one was more genuinely admired than this father and son. Their lives bore a righteousness none could question, not even those who might be jealous. Maybe this was why not one of the city fathers could recommend his daughter nor any other virgin he knew. Who could measure up to Joshua? Who could live in the home of Shaddai and bear his name and his son's sons? The problem of a bride for Joshua had been discussed often, yet even as the men considered other daughters of Israel from other cities, they could not think of a truly suitable bride. Often the men would shake their heads and say, "How could imperfection be married to perfection?"

Suddenly Shaddai's troubled reverie was broken. "Father! Father, I'm home. Where are you?"

"Here, my son, at my writing table." With that, Shaddai sat down, almost as if to relieve himself of the burden he had been carrying.

"Abba! What are those furrows on your face? What is troubling you?"

"Abba" was Joshua's term of endearment for his father, held over from childhood and used whenever he sensed his father was burdened by some concern.

Smiling, Shaddai stood to his feet and opened his arms wide to embrace his son. As Joshua's arms locked behind his father, he gave him his usual squeeze. This time, however, instead of dropping his arms to his side, Joshua stepped back an arm's length and put both hands on Shaddai's shoulders.

Looking full in his father's beloved face, he said, "Something is on your mind. What is it?" They never kept any secrets from one another, thus Joshua knew that all he need do was ask.

"It is a bride for you, my son. You must have a bride. We can delay no longer."

"Fine. I agree. Yet—"

"Where shall we ever find a woman suitable to be your bride?" his father interrupted. "I know of none!"

“Father,” the word came gently, enshrouded with peace. “Father, I have found a bride. When I tell you all about her, I know you will concur, for I know your heart as well as mine. Come. Let us have some refreshment, and I will tell you all that is on my heart.”

Father and son sat for hours in the courtyard, talking intently. Finally, when the heavens above dimmed their lights, signaling the end of another day, Shaddai gingerly rose from his seat. Stiff from sitting so long, he placed his hands upon his knees as if to unlock his joints. Then moving with caution, he slowly straightened out to his full stature.

Stretching his arms up toward the star-studded heavens, he said, “Now, my son, I have listened carefully to all your reasoning and requests. What a son you are! It is almost as if I live in your skin, for our thoughts are so much the same! Christianna was upon my heart also. There is such potential in that young woman. Yet who would see it? Who has seen it? No one! No, because of her mixed blood, Jew and Gentile, and because of her low estate, none has looked past the circumstances of her life to see the potential of that precious soul. It is all buried under the rubble of her life.”

Shaddai was filled with anticipation as he began to wax eloquent. “Ah, but let a little excavation be done. Let rubble be carried off. Let her be loved unconditionally. She shall rise as magnificent as the walls of Jerusalem. She shall blossom like the rose of Sharon. Like a lily among the thorns, so your darling shall be among the maidens.” Then, like a resounding crescendo, came his blessing. “Son, I heartily concur.”

For a brief moment the glint from the oil lamp on the table caught Joshua’s joyful smile. Shaddai could not see his son’s dark brown eyes in the darkness of the night, but he was sure they must be twinkling along with the stars in the heavens.

“And, Father, although we will break custom a little, do you concur with my betrothal plans also?”

“Yes! Yes!” Excitement rang in Shaddai’s voice. “They are perfect! Perfectly suited for the bride-to-be and for a situation such as hers. Why, if you did not woo her first, if you did not give her a sense of worth, she might never know that to you she is beloved even though others see nothing lovely about her.” Shaddai’s voice began to raise in adamancy, as he said, “She must know she is loved and precious in your sight before she ever agrees to the betrothal. When she enters into our marriage covenant, she must be convinced that this marriage had its roots in love, not in convenience or in the fleeting passion of desire.” Joshua smiled at his father’s “our.” Oh, the security of knowing you are loved first, loved unconditionally!

“It’s settled then, Father? We will have Eliezer deliver my letters to her periodically?” Joshua paused. It seemed important to him that his plans be confirmed once more, step by step.

“But, of course, Son. As you said, Christianna would never dream you could ever want her. And besides, if she did, surely the people of her city would convince her that she would never measure up to being your wife and my daughter. For although they have never seen you in that city, your reputation has preceded you. No, we shall do as you have planned. You write the

letters; Eliezer can deliver them. The journey will not be too great for him. Besides, you know how he loves to travel. Then when we are certain that Christianna is duly informed and convinced of your love, when you have thoroughly explained to her all the responsibilities of being your wife, and when we think she understands the depth of what it means to commit herself to your loving lordship, then Eliezer can present the marriage contract and tell her what price you are willing to pay for her. That marriage contract, that *ketubah*, will give her all the security she needs. I know she will not refuse.”

“But, Father, remember,” Joshua’s words were covered with concern as he sought understanding, “remember, she cannot see me until the night of our wedding. Eliezer must make all the arrangements. Christianna must be willing to marry me without seeing me. Her decision must be made on the basis of what she knows about me and of what she knows of our life together. It cannot be because of the way I look, or because of the way she feels when I touch her, or even because of what I can do for her. Her commitment must be a solid commitment to the mode of life she will live as my wife. I must—” Joshua paused, for a tremor had caught his voice. As if an unexpected chill had suddenly caused him to shake, his words came forth trembling, yet anchored in determination. “I must have a wife who will be one with me, Father. Even as we are one.”

Shaddai walked to the table where Joshua was still sitting. Then reaching down with his right hand, he turned Joshua’s face upward toward his and said, “My beloved son, I understand. One as we are one. Right now, where she is as a person, it seems impossible. But remember that with your father nothing is impossible. All things are possible with me, and so it shall be. I love you, my son, and I will show you all that you should do. Speak as I have taught you. Do nothing on your own initiative, and it shall come to pass. I know the prayer of your heart. Someday you and Christianna will be one, and the glory I have given you I will bestow on her also.”

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