

THE POMEGRANATE GATE



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Printed in Denmark

For my father,
Jonathan Daniel Kaplan



DRAMATIS PERSONAE

FROM THE MORTAL WORLD

TOBA PERES: A young woman from Rimón, known alternatively for speaking several languages and her sickly constitution.

NAFTALY CRESQUES: A young man from Rimón, the latest in a long line of tailors. A bad one. Has visions and strange dreams his father has forbidden him to discuss.

ABRAFIM CRESQUES: Naftaly's father: A tailor. Like Naftaly, he has strange dreams.

ELENA PERES/ELENA BAT BELADEN: Toba's grandmother. Has several sidelines she's used to keep the family afloat after Alasar lost his position at court.

ALASAR PERES: Toba's grandfather, a former translator for the Emir of Rimón.

PENINA PERES: Toba's mother, deceased.

THE OLD WOMAN: A beggar on the streets of Rimón, originally from Savirra. Her real name is unknown.

SALOMON MACHORRO: A fabric merchant from the town of Eliossana; changed the family name to deSantos after being forced to convert. Has three children: Isidro, Antonio, and Katarina.

MOSSE DELEÓN: Elena's brother, a banker living in Pengoa.

THE CONDE OF LOBATA: A Petgalese nobleman.

DAWID BEN ARON: A half-Mazik from Luz.

TAMAR OF LUZ: A human in Luz, friend of Marah.

FROM THE MAZIK WORLD

ASMEL B'ASMODA: Known in the Dreamworld as Adon

Sof'rim. An astronomer and minor Rimoni Adon.

BARSILAY B'DROER: Member of ha-Moh'to, originally from

Luz. At one point a medical student.

MARAH: Founder of ha-Moh'to, former envoy to mortal

Luz. Asmel's wife, Barsilay's aunt. Presumably deceased.

RAFEQ OF KATLAV: Expert on demons, member of ha-

Mah'to, currently imprisoned.

TARSES B'SHEMHAZAI: Member of ha-Moh'to, confidant of

Marah. Originally from Luz.

TSIDON B'NOEM: Also known as the red Mazik. A Rimoni

with ties to La Cacería.

RELAM B'GIDON: The illegitimate King of Rimon, has three

sons.

ODEM B'RELAM: The Crown Prince of Rimon; Asmel's

friend.

ARDÓN B'RELAM: The second-eldest prince of Rimon.

THE INFANTA ONECA: The Infanta of Rimon, cousin to the

king.

LA CACERÍA

THE CAÇADOR: Founder and head of La Cacería.

THE COURSER: The Caçador's personal aide-de-camp. One of his three main lieutenants.

THE LYMER: The Caçador's lieutenant. Commands the Hounds and Alaunts, responsible for work in Rimon and in the dreamworld.

THE PEREGRINE: The Caçador's lieutenant. Commands the Falcons, responsible for work abroad consisting mainly of espionage and assassinations.

ATALEF: A demon with Mazik magic created by Rafeq of Katlav. Currently enslaved to the Caçador.

GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATIONS

IN SEFARAD:

RIMON: City-state in southern Sefarad.

MOUNT SEBAH: The highest peak in Rimon, very near the Rimon Gate.

GUADALRAMAN: The river running through Rimon.

MERJA: Port city closest to Rimon.

ELIOSSANA: The pueblo where the Machorros live.

MELEQA: A formerly Arab city near to Rimon, fell in a siege some years prior to the conquest of Rimon.

QORBA: City near Rimon. Original home of Elena's family.

BARCINO: Northern port city in Sefarad on the Dimah Sea.

SAVIRRA: The former residence of the Old Woman, home to a massive pogrom some years prior.

MANSANAR: The capital of the northern kingdom.

OTHER LOCATIONS

PETGAL: Country that shares the peninsula with Sefarad.

PENGOA: The capital of Petgal, home of Mosse deLeón.

LABRA: University town near Pengoa.

THE DIMAH SEA (THE SEA OF TEARS): The sea that rose after the fall of Luz, between Sefarad in the west and P'ri Hadar in the east.

THE ULIMAN EMPIRE: A great multi-ethnic empire in the east, its capital is the gate city of Habush.

THE GATE CITIES

LUZ: Legendary lost city, known as the location at which Jacob saw angels climbing a ladder to and from heaven, as well as the mythical source of tekhelet dye. The former seat of the Mazik Empire.

P'RI HADAR: The great city of the east, its queen is the oldest living Mazik.

BAOBAB: The most southern gate city, notable, like Tappuah, because of its great distance to the sea. On the mortal side, an important trade hub.

KATLAV: On the south-east side of the Dimah Sea, an important center for education.

EREZ: A city to the south of the Dimah Sea. Famous for its natural beauty and for being surrounded on three sides by a steep gorge, making it a natural fortress.

TAMAR: A city to the south the Dimah Sea. In close proximity to Rimon; however the two cities are separated by the straight, so travel between them is limited in the Mazik world. An important producer of lentils.

RIMON: The great city of the west. After the fall of Luz, it suffered a series of bloody coups d'état that led to the rise of King Relam and La Cacería.

TE'ENA: Made an Island after the fall of Luz. Located roughly midway between Rimon and Zayit.

ZAYIT: North of the Dimah Sea, an important port city on the human side known in particular for its prominence in the salt trade. After the fall of Luz, Zayit became the wealthiest of all Mazik cities because of its continued trade with mortals, which was discouraged or forbidden elsewhere.

TAPPUAH: The city of the north; because of its distance

from the other gate cities, Mazik residents are relatively isolated.

ANAB: An important trade city in the Uliman empire.

HABUSH: The capital of the Uliman Empire, in the east.

Can you see what I see, friend?
The sky is like a garden bed.
The stars are flowers blooming there,
watered by a pool, the moon.

— Solomon ibn Gabirol
Trans. Raymond P. Scheindlin

Come with me, let's spend a night in the country,
my friend, you intimate of heaven's stars,
for winter's finally over—you can hear
the doves and swallows chattering.
We'll lounge beneath the pomegranate trees,
palm trees, apple trees,
everything lovely and leafy,
stroll among the vines, and look with pleasure
at all those splendid faces,
in a palace loftier than everything around it,
built of noble stones,
solid, resting on thick foundations,
with walls like towers fortified,
set upon a flat place, plains all around it
splendid to look at from within its courts.
Chambers well-constructed, all adorned with carvings,
open-work and closed-work,
paving of alabaster, paving of marble,
gates so many, I cannot even count them!

— Solomon ibn Gabirol
Trans. Raymond P. Scheindlin

CHAPTER ONE

NAFTALY WAS DREAMING again, in that strange dream-landscape where the stars whirled overhead like snow on the wind and the people he met all had square-pupiled eyes.

They were all strangers to him, the square-eyed people he dreamed of—all save one: his father. In Naftaly's dreams, his father's eyes were odd, too, though waking they were wholly ordinary. Naftaly did not know if his own dreaming face had the square-pupiled eyes as well, having never come upon a mirror in his dreams, but he assumed so. He wondered how that looked, if it made him seem strange, or handsome, or hideous. No one ever remarked on it. His eyes, awake, were the same dark brown as his father's, round-pupiled and not particularly interesting.

In this dream, he'd come across his father eating oranges while sitting on a bridge Naftaly did not recognize, spanning what he supposed was meant to be the Guadalraman. They sat on the wall together, watching a swath of people traveling from one side of the river to the other, across the bridge which was lit at intervals with lights that seemed to burn without flame. It was a busy night, Naftaly thought. Probably he was dreaming of the end of a market day, though the people had no goods. He thought his subconscious could have come up with more interesting details: bolts of cloth or jugs of oil, or perhaps some sweets.

Naftaly was a tailor, son of a tailor, son of the same, though the elder Cresqueses had been at least passably good

at their trade. The latest son was somewhat lacking in his ability to perform basic tasks, such as sewing in a straight line. His father insisted he would improve. It did not seem to matter much to the trajectory of his life that he had not done so.

Everything was very settled on that score. Naftaly would take over his father's business, and with a great deal of luck he would not run it into the ground. He would greet his neighbors every morning, all of whom knew him from early childhood as a man of limited utility, but who would bring him work, anyway, because that was what one did with one's neighbor's mostly useless son. It was already too late for him to find another trade and, truthfully, he wasn't sure he'd be any better at something else. He had few friends, because he was too acutely aware of how much he was tolerated for his father's sake, and because he did not know what to talk about with other men his age, nearly all of whom were married. He was not especially devout, nor was he keen on drinking and brothels. What he wanted, more than anything, was to be a help to his parents rather than a hindrance, but he'd failed rather spectacularly in that regard.

He would keep Shabbat and the festivals, and run his shop until he couldn't any longer, and like this he would grow old.

Very occasionally, he would think about some alternative path he might have chosen, if he'd insisted when his father had denied him the opportunity to train with someone else. He imagined himself a very good trader of oil, traveling all the way to the sea, with so much spare money that the neighbors would admire him and come to him for help—and he *would* help. In this other reality, Naftaly was the greatest philanthropist Rimmon had ever seen. Men would take his hand in thanks, and he would smile and say something like: "I'm so pleased to have been able to serve you."

He tried to quash such thoughts, but it was easy to daydream when sewing a hem in a poorly lit room. Perhaps this was why he was such a bad tailor. Better not to wonder about that.

On the bridge, Naftaly vaguely wondered where his father had gotten the oranges.

His father was slim, as was he, neither particularly tall nor particularly short; if either of them had a notable feature, it was their shared inability to grow much in the way of a beard. He offered one of the oranges to Naftaly, who took it with a nod of thanks. He did not say, *Thank you, Father*, because his father had told him long ago that one should never give up one's name in a dream.

"Not even to you?" he'd asked.

"Not to anyone," his father had said. "Never say your name, or mine, or even call me 'Father' out loud."

Naftaly didn't know if other people had these sorts of rules; if they nearly always dreamt of strangers who were never to learn their names. But occasionally when his friends or schoolmates mentioned their dreams, it seemed like theirs were different. They dreamt of pretty girls. Naftaly had never dreamt of a pretty girl.

He ate his dream-orange in silence. Finally, his father said, "They're in a state today."

"A state?" Naftaly asked. His father nodded toward the people rushing across the bridge. They did seem to be in a hurry.

"What's wrong?"

"Not sure," he said. "But something is happening, or is about to."

From the crowd on the bridge, he heard a whisper that rose up like a hiss: *La Cacería*.

"La Cacería?" Naftaly asked his father. He'd never dreamt

of a hunt before; it made no sense for anyone to be hunting in the city, in any case. Did they think a buck was about to run across the bridge?

His father dropped his dream-orange and grasped him by both shoulders. "Wake up," he said. "Wake up now."

"What? How?"

The sound of hoofbeats came loud and fast, and two men rode in overland and blocked the far end of the bridge, bringing the crowd to a halt. Both tall: one dark, one with hair that looked dark at first glance but shone red when the starlight hit it. Both were dressed in dark blue. "No one move," the red man said.

Naftaly's father grabbed hold of Naftaly's ear and twisted it. "Wake up!" he ordered.

In his bed, Naftaly sat up with a start. He reached for his ear and found it still tender, then swung his legs over the side of the bed and made his way downstairs to find his father in the kitchen pouring a cup of wine with shaking hands.

"Father," he said.

"Naftaly," his father replied. The two never spoke of their shared dreams. Abrafim Cresques, in fact, denied them so often that Naftaly had for a long time thought they were merely an invention of his own imagination.

"Father," he said. "Please."

His father set down the wine, still half-full, saying, "Don't sleep again tonight."

IN TOBA'S GRANDFATHER'S bookcase, there was a map, rolled up, that stretched from Pengoa on one end all the way to P'ri Hadar on the other. When her grandfather's students were elsewhere, when she was done with her chores and no one was around to see, she liked to unroll it on the long study

table and admire it. It had been inked by a master, with details so small you had to put your nose to it to see them all: imagined beasts at the far end of the sea; a cap of snow on Mount Sebah; impossibly tiny ships in the harbor at Merja.

That day, however, the students were there, arguing in hushed tones about the interpretation of one law or another, and how the Rambam said one thing and the Ramban another, yet Mosse deLeón has said some third thing, but possibly (or probably) they were all three wrong. Toba wasn't particularly interested in this argument, which she thought had to do with how hungry one had to be before it was permissible to eat locusts.

If you were hungry enough to be seriously considering it, Toba thought, you ought to just eat them. Fortunately, Toba had never been that hungry. She'd never seen a locust, but she'd heard them described and they sounded vile, with the creeping and the swarming and all those extraneous legs. Anyway, they weren't supposed to be arguing about this at all. They were meant to be translating some mathematical text from Arabic into Latin, but the dryness of the work seemed to be too much for them, and arguing about locusts was more amusing. "Point of clarity," one of the young men put in, "are the locusts crawling or jumping?"

They were in higher spirits than usual. Rimón had suffered for two years under a siege from the northern queen, before the Emir of Rimón had surrendered the city at the beginning of winter and gone into exile across the sea. The government had changed, and the city had held its collective breath, but so far, the only significant day-to-day difference was that they were no longer eating the dregs of months-old rationed wheat. The city had fallen back into its old rhythm. In the Muslim quarter, the call to prayer came its usual five times a day. In the Jewish quarter, the shops closed down on Friday

evenings. Except now, in the Christian quarter, a bell had been installed in the church, which rang, Toba thought, rather more than was strictly necessary. Still, the inhabitants went about their usual business of life, keeping the occasional wary eye on the workings of the new order. The Muslims had been promised immunity, and the Jews, too. The wind blew from a new direction, but still, the sun rose and set, as it had always done.

While the young men neglected their work and Toba's grandfather snoozed in his northern-style armchair (*the greatest thing ever to come out of the north*, he often said), Toba holed up in a corner with the map spread out across his personal desk. Toba traced the outline of the continents with her eyes. So many cities. There were so many cities. Where would she go, if she were to go somewhere? It was a game her grandmother had played with her since she was small. *Of course we are safe*, she would say. *But if you had to flee, where would you go?*

The north was full of barbarians, at least until you got to the lands of the Burgers. Then of course there was the issue that some king or other was expelling the Jews every few years, once they discovered that confiscating their property was a useful way to enrich the royal coffers. Petgal, in the west, had so far managed to avoid such behavior, but then you lived with the sea at your back, and that itself made Toba nervous. The south looked slightly more promising, but only just. East was surely better; with the ancient city of P'ri Hadar or the great port of Anab. Farther still were the silk road and the spice ports, where a traveling merchant might have a use for a wife who could write in five languages—even one without a womanly figure or much skill in housekeeping.

The door flew open, and the boys at the table jumped. Toba's hand flew to her throat; sometimes, when she was

surprised, she had the instinct to shout, though she never had. The man who'd burst in was Reuven haLevi, a friend of her grandfather's.

Reuven cast his eyes around the room at the frightened faces of the young men, most of them too young even to have a beard, and Toba's blinking grandfather, who was too weary even to stand up.

"What's happened?" Toba's grandfather asked in a sleepy rasp; the voice of a man who had seen many things happen, and was not about to get out of his chair for one more.

One of the boys vacated his spot at the low study table and Reuven collapsed in his place on the floor. "I can't even say, every person in the street has heard a different rumor. Either we're going to be fed to the lions or driven into the sea, I don't know."

"There aren't any lions in Sefarad," Toba pointed out from her corner.

"Well, it'll be the sea, then," the man said with a wan smile. "I was trying to get to the Nagid's to learn the truth of the matter, but half the quarter is in the streets."

The boys pushed up from the floor then, and out through the courtyard, opening the gate out onto the street, which was indeed full of people and a great deal of noise. Several of the people were weeping. All were making haste toward the house of the Nagid; a throng of people, men and women both. No children, though. Those must have been left at home, which meant that whatever was happening, it wasn't entirely safe in the streets.

Toba's grandfather said, "Toba, go find your grandmother before this grows any worse."

Elena was visiting a neighbor a few streets away; her penmanship was so fine she was often called up to write letters for people; even, sometimes, for the rabbi himself.

“Go,” he said.

Toba hastened through the door and out onto the street.

From the other direction came a woman wailing openly, her mouth agape as if it were locked that way, in a permanent howl.

Toba picked up her pace, wishing that she could move with some legitimate haste. It would be good, right now, to be able to do more than walk.

It was one of the peculiar things about Toba, and there were several: Toba could walk, but she could not run; she could talk, but she could not shout; and she could write faster—with either hand—than she could speak. If she moved at more than a brisk pace, she would find herself splayed on the ground; jumping, likewise, was impossible for her. And if she tried to raise her voice, it was as if a hand were constricting her throat, and it would be several long moments before she could breathe again. The writing was less of a trouble, though it had vexed her grandfather’s students when she was younger, particularly when she’d flaunted her talent of writing with both hands at once, a gift her grandfather had warned her to conceal.

Odd things, all of these, and then one more: while Toba slept, she could not dream.

As a child, she’d been the object of torment. The other children had conspired to make her run—by stealing her toys and then fleeing—and then laughed while she fell. Or they’d pulled her arms behind her back until she was forced to call for help, and laughed when she’d collapsed, breathless on the ground.

She hadn’t much cared for other children.

Her grandfather had taken pity on her, and so, instead of playing with the neighbors, she’d spent most of her early days assisting him, sitting in with his students. At first, they’d

been charmed by the tiny girl who learned as quickly as they did, but as she became a woman, they'd become less easy with her. Her grandfather had expected marriage proposals; for a scholar, a wife literate in five languages was a boon in free labor, but he hadn't considered that this was only for a *wealthy* scholar. For a poor one, well, he would need someone to manage a household, and Toba wasn't much good at that sort of thing. She was too quiet, too peculiar, too weak. Food often tasted poorly to her, and she ate little as a consequence. She'd been a sickly child, and now she'd become a sickly woman, more than ten years past marriageable age.

Still, she hurried as fast as her sickly legs would carry her; too fast, in fact, and she found herself sprawled on the ground. She instinctively curled in on herself, expecting to be trampled by hundreds of feet, but felt a pair of hands on her shoulders instead.

"Get up," said the voice associated with the hands. "You're going to be crushed."

Trembling, she got to her feet. A young man was in front of her blocking the path of the people who would have stepped on her; no easy feat, since he wasn't especially large himself. "Are you all right?" he asked.

She didn't recognize him, which wasn't a surprise; Toba rarely went out, and unless he trained with her grandfather Toba was unlikely to have seen him. "I'm fine," she said. "I'm going to get my grandmother," she added, though he hadn't asked that.

"Can you get there on your own?"

"I think so," she said. He nodded and was gone, and she started to cross the plaza to find her grandmother.