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## Commander of the Iron Chariots

by Liora Sophie

The commander of nine hundred iron chariots was not known for his compassion, and when rumors reached me that he was headed in our direction, I felt compelled to protect my own.

By the time General Sisera came running toward our camp, I was ready for him. I had washed, tied my hair into a long, black braid, and dressed in a casually revealing robe. I wore gold bangles on my wrists and sapphires in my ears. I brushed a shimmer of jade green over my eyes, partly to bring out their color and partly to mask my own apprehension. I put mild colors on my cheeks and lips; I didn't want to be too obvious.

As I waited by the well to the north of our camp, it started to rain. I closed my eyes and imagined my anxiety being washed away into the Kishon River. I uncovered

the well and listened to the sound of the rain echoing as it hit the water below, so peaceful, completely unaware of any impending danger.

He was running at first, but when he saw me, he slowed down. I rose to greet him, smiling only with my eyes, keeping my face sincere. He was a contradictory embodiment of order and chaos, clean shaven with neatly cut hair, his uniform tucked perfectly into a leather belt at his waist. But his boots were covered in mud, water dripping from his hair and eyelashes.

“Ja’el.” He smiled at me, looking relieved.

“General Sisera,” I curtsied slightly, allowing him to take my hand and kiss it.

“Please come inside. Do not be afraid. A friend of King Javin is a friend to me.”

He placed a hand on my shoulder and looked into my eyes. “Thank you, kind woman.”

I nodded and led him into my tent. He removed his boots and I brought him a basin to soak his feet. I studied his handsome figure, pondering how severely beauty can mislead us if the man before me with such striking features was at the same time a ruthless tyrant. He watched me silently, relaxing into the warmth of the tent.

“My handmaid could wash your uniform,” I offered.

He looked intrigued. "What shall I wear in the meantime?"

I gave him a faux-stern look and said, "I'm sure we can find something suitable for the General." I handed him a sleeping robe and he took it, not taking his eyes off mine. I turned away as he began to undress but he said, "You don't have to look away."

All that had been implicit was now spoken aloud. I stared into his eyes, black and blazing as his iron chariots, and he stared into mine. He slowly adorned the sleeping robe I had given him and closed his eyes and breathed a sigh of relief. I gave his clothes to my handmaid to take down to the river, and we were alone.

My heart was racing as he inched closer to me. I had never imagined such tenderness could reside within a man whose reputation for violence and aggression preceded him two decades before I laid eyes on him. It baffled me that this man who was about to kiss me, looking so handsome with a few raindrops still clinging to his eyelashes, was the same man who only moments ago had left an entire battalion to die in enemy fire in order to save himself.

I put his cowardice out of my mind and closed my eyes, allowing him to cover my lips with his own. They were too soft and too sweet to belong to a tyrant. I kissed him back, let him untie my braid and run his fingers through my hair and down my back. As I felt his breath intensify, I was enthralled by my own power, surprised in spite

of myself. I was not afraid, I was there to protect. A territorial rage unfurled within me, a lioness defending her cubs. *I can do this.* I closed my eyes and let him completely lose himself in my presence. He kissed me hungrily, searching with his hands for the softness of oblivion, the sweetness of an escape. He was mine now. I had conquered him as he had conquered the west of Jordan.

Sisera lay next to me, sleepily brushing my cheek with his hand. "You are exquisite," he breathed.

"Perhaps I am inspired by a handsome warrior," I suggested.

He smiled, eyes still closed. "I'm thirsty," he said. "Would you give this tired general a drink of water?"

"Certainly, Soldier." I got up and dressed. I left the tent to fetch the water, but instead I filled a clay mug with fresh milk. I returned to the tent and he sat up and drank graciously.

"Thank you," he sighed, delirious. I covered him with the sleeping robe, and he lay back down and fell quickly asleep.

As soon as his soft snores filled the tent, the reality of who he was came rushing back. A coward who abandoned his soldiers in the field; a megalomaniac who terrorized the civilians of Naphtali and most of the north; a power-hungry villain who

tormented the innocent to show his strength. I was overwhelmed with disgust, revolted by the sight of him sleeping comfortably in my tent. I suddenly could not bear the thought of Sisera remaining in my proximity another moment.

I stepped outside and loosened one of the tent stakes. I gathered a hammer and crept back inside. I tucked his hair behind his ear, and Sisera did not stir. My heart was racing again. I knew what I had to do. I reminded myself that he deserved it, that justice would never be served as long as this man was alive. It was time for him to be stopped. I quietly counted to three and drove the stake into his temple with all of my might. He was gone.