

## Hannah's Heart - Chapter Four

The Longing for Peace December 8, 2019



Karen James' car entered the driveway with a sigh. It was late. She hadn't had time to plan a meal this morning and no money to go buy something quick. John's 'I'm too sick' call-out at the Store had kept her two hours longer than she wanted, but it didn't seem to matter why anymore... Just that she was coming home past supper time.

She was sure her husband hadn't taken the time to do anything about it, either.

The smell of macaroni and cheese met her at the door, and the pot simmering on the stove signaled hot dogs cooking. Poor kid. As if she didn't already do most of my jobs around here.

"Hanna! Is that stuff ready yet?" Mike's voice came barreling out the window. "I've got a phone conference in ten minutes." He came busting through the office door the same time that Karen entered the kitchen—and the look on his face told her everything she'd feared.

Yes, there would be Mike to pay for her tardiness ...



The adults' argument had opened dozens of doors in the spirit world, and it had taken a true battle to bring safety back into the house.

"Thank you, my friends." Kamali thudded his fist once against his chest, his days of warfare coming back to the surface. "The King is calling her to His Garden, and I must go."

He turned to Aylward. "He has appointed Rustom, Thrythwig, and Kimble to stand guard over the house with you. I don't believe the Enemy will attempt another attack while they are here. All portals have been closed now and covered in His blood—Adonai has assigned a small contingent around the yard perimeter, as well."

He turned his gaze to the east, two blocks down from where they stood. There, in a tiny bedroom filled with shelves crammed every which way with books, an elderly woman sat bent over a small corner desk. She held her hands folded together at her forehead and spoke intensely in a language only the angels understood. A brilliant glow surrounded her, and angels were rapidly filling bowls with the spoken prayers and traveling, swift as lightning, straight up to the Throne Room.

"She has covered us well, Kamali," a massive angel replied. "There will be no lack. He will see to it."

Each of the four Warriors slid their swords into intricately crafted scabbards at their sides, folded their arms, and took up positions of watchfulness as Kamali slipped into Hanna's room.



Hanna could hear the quiet click of the numbers changing on her alarm clock again.

"I think it's safe to go back to bed, now, Squirt. I heard Dad go back in his office, and Mom's going to be coming upstairs soon. You don't want to be in here if she goes to check on you—you'll hurt her feelings."

She gave him a quick squeeze and pushed a little on his back.

"It's okay. Really. They aren't mad at you ..."

Evan's little body heaved one last, shuddering sigh.

"Okay, Hanna."

He swung his legs off the side of her bed and padded softly to the bedroom door.

“I wish they’d stop yelling, Hanna. Don’t you?”

She didn’t dare let any of the hot words that came boiling up in her mouth spill out, so she just smiled at him and nodded at the door again. With another sigh, he left, closing it with a squeaky ‘click.’



The quick tap, tap of her mother’s work shoes marched up the stairs. Hannah heard Evan’s bedroom door creaking open, and after a few moments, shut again. She knew her mother was hesitating, knowing that the children had heard them arguing. How could they help it in this house? Suddenly, like a little child, Hanna wanted her to check in on her, too. Wanted to connect again somehow.

But Mom never did anymore.

Nor did she tonight.

Hanna wasn’t sure if her mother had just stopped caring? Her heart told her she hadn’t. Or if she was just ... what? Not willing to even try to talk to her about the changes in their lives? Too afraid to look in Hanna’s eyes and see the stored-up anger in them? Whatever the case was, the squeak of a floorboard announced that Mom had made her decision, and the tap, tap, tap went in the direction of her parent’s bedroom.

Hanna relaxed her shoulders back into place and lay down. They’d been sitting in the near dark while their parents fought, with only the nightlight glowing under the door to see by.

She lay facing the thin, golden strip of light, exhausted by the tensions of yet another day. And fell asleep.



Safe in her bedroom, Karen carefully unfolded the crumpled flyer she’d rescued from the office trashcan and smoothed it out on her lap. Her mother had given it to her, and she’d stuck it into her handful of mail as they’d talked, forgetting what she had done. Mike had found it lying between the grocery store ads and the electric bill and had flown into the air over it after supper.

“Your mother just never gives up, does she?” he’d blasted her. “I’ve told her, and I’ve told you—there’s no need to keep filling these kid’s heads with stories about a God who could care less about them when the going gets rough, and you need some real help.”

Tears were forming in her eyes as they’d appealed to him to stop.

*Please.*

*Just stop.*

It wasn’t like she hadn’t had her heart raked over these same coals a hundred times before.

He was just so bitter. And angry. Always so angry.

Yes, she was still crushed that God allowed her children to die. She’d cut herself off from Him, too, living in a suffocating void of apathy for months now. Years, really. Her heart still carried the barely covered-over scars from the two miscarriages, not to mention the horror of losing Keith.

Newly married, they’d expected to have children one after another. Karen’s sisters all had large families, new babies born on a regular schedule. Hanna had raised their hopes by coming before their first year together was out.

Waiting for five long years after Hanna was born had dashed them again—but the Lord had finally blessed them with Evan.

The next child came quickly but barely made it to three months in her womb. Mike had been the only one she’d told.

But she knew.

Every day she knew.

Hanna had just been entering First Grade at the time, and Karen had tried to relieve some of her pain by volunteering to read to her classmates every Friday afternoon. Still just a baby himself, Evan tagged along, sitting

quietly by her side as she read, playing with a variety of toys she kept tucked in her purse for that purpose. After the story, the children doted on him, lugging him around, nearly too heavy for most of them, but proud as peacocks that he cooed and giggled with their attentions.

Waiting another three years for the hope of their next child had made her anxious; losing that child after a difficult, five-month pregnancy had driven her nearly to despair. Her heart torn again, she withdrew inside herself even farther, now working for a local day-care where she could salve her broken heart holding other people's babies. Evan had been in his own class, compliant again with his mother's choices, content to romp and play with the other preschoolers.

Karen had virtually given up hope by the time Keith was conceived. The loss of the first two babies hadn't touched Mike's heart like it had hers; there had been nothing yet for him to see, to experience, to miss once they were gone. He had been rising in his company at the time, and now he was truly making progress—and his attention was being eaten up in places other than his home.

Within the year after the second baby died, Mike hit the financial jackpot, and they'd moved into an expensive, restored antebellum home in Jackson, Tennessee situated on a parcel of four acres, just beyond where the railroad crossed the tall viaduct over Market Street. Both were driving new cars and spoiled by the turn of events in their lives; Karen began wearing the latest fashions and dressing their children like magazine models.

As their income increased, so had the attention of certain well-placed men in the church hierarchy. The couple had been invited to join more and more of the programs and church-life functions. For Karen, a place with those elite singers in the Choir, and a supervisory role in the Children's Ministry. For Mike, a prized place among the Deacons.

Life was good. The ugly past was being compensated. God was smiling on them now, so they must be doing something right. The news of her pregnancy swept through the church, everyone congratulating them and promising to pray.

"Look at all you're doing for the Lord, Mike," Emmett Finch had roared in his ear one day. Head of the Board of Finances, he'd been standing in the massive vestibule of the building with the young couple, listening to Mike voice worries about this newest child on the way.

"Look at all the time you two youngin's are putting in here at the church. Don't worry, Man. You're getting your reward for all the hard work you've been doing for the Lord God Almighty!"

The day the baby had been born, and the heart-wrenching news of his illness made known, the church had placed Baby Keith on the prayer chain. News of his progress was always first on the list of Announcements Pastor made before the sermon every Sunday. But the weeks dragged on. Prayers didn't seem to be accomplishing anything, and some had started whispering that there must be some hidden sin in Karen or Mike's life, or God wouldn't be ignoring them this way.

*Did you know she'd lost two babies already? Maybe there was trouble somewhere. Maybe there was trouble between them. Oh! You don't suppose there's anything funny going on between Karen and the choirmaster, do you? I've heard ...* And the whisperings grew more furtive. And the distance between the young couple and the popular congregants wider.

The day Keith died, Pastor Davenport had called the hospital from his church office in Tennessee and offered a long, formal prayer for God's help. But Mike's heart had already been sealed against God and His apparent lack of concern and was untouched by the flowery phrases and the rise and fall of the intonation droning on and on over his speakerphone. He eventually lay the phone on the care-worn, waiting room seat he and his wife had taken refuge on and walked away.

Karen had simply stared down at her hands, clenched around a white lace handkerchief someone had thrust at her, and tuned out the monotone of Davenport's voice, counting the scuff marks on the vinyl floor to keep her mind occupied with anything but what was before her.

The God she had known as a child had been slowly becoming a distant stranger. She realized she didn't know Who He was anymore, now. Not at all.

And the God that her husband had begun to worship had been cruel.

Again.



The sound of Mike moving around the downstairs rooms brought Karen's attention back to the paper in her hand. She wasn't ready to throw it away yet. She'd been having some pleasant talks over tea with her mother lately, and the pair had been slowly reconnecting. And although she wasn't in any way prepared to forgive God and talk to Him again at this point, she did feel the children would benefit from the good people at her old church, here in town. She had fond memories of many of them. Some had even come to the house when they had first moved back. Mostly friends of Mom's, to be sure. All of her close friends had married and moved to larger cities, just as she had.

But these older saints had watched her grow up from a baby, taught her in Sunday School, sang in the choir with her, come to her wedding, and gathered around the whole family when Dad died.

These were good people. Simple people. Most of them were living on Social Security, without a penny extra to their names, but it didn't seem to matter to them. They all acted as though somehow there was some reserve of treasure they dipped in to meet their needs. Some hidden bank account that never ran dry. You never heard a peep from them about not having this or that, even though they all dressed straight out of Walmart and the Goodwill Store—that was easy to tell.

**She'd forgotten how to live like that.**

Simple. As though there was no one in the world you needed to impress with yourself.

No, she wasn't ready to dismiss these dear old souls she had grown up with, just because of what had happened down in Tennessee.

A pang of homesickness stirred in her belly, and she hugged the flyer to herself, wondering how she was going to pave the way for this.

