

An excerpt from
Hittite Warrior
by Joanne Williamson

"The kings came and fought, then fought the kings of Canaan... The river of Kishon swept them away..."

— *The Song of Deborah*

This story, based on an episode in the Bible's Book of Judges, took place about 200 years before the days of Saul and David, and about 1200 before the birth of Christ.

Prologue: Introducing a Hittite

I, Uriah-Tarhund, son of Arnandash the horse breeder, am a Hittite. I was born of a race of men who came down from the unknown north a thousand years ago and became the rulers of half the world. But that world has come to an end, and I can never go home again.

I was born in the Hittite province of Arzawa. My father was a kinsman of the chief of the province and raised horses in the grasslands to draw the battle chariots for which our land of Great Hatti was famed.

When I was a child, the world was as it had always been, or so I thought. We, the Hittites, lived in Great Hatti with its rocky mountains, its plains and its forests, stretching to the Black Sea of the north and the great sea of the west. We ruled the northern world; and Egypt, the accursed land, ruled the world of the south.

Other people did not matter. There were the lands of Canaan and the Amorites to the south, with their rich trading cities, divided between us and Egypt. To the east, the lands of Hurri and Mitanni sent us tribute; and sometimes traders from the great city of Babylon came to our towns and villages, but I never spoke to them.

For the nobles of Great Hatti, whose ancestors came down from the northern wilderness a thousand years ago, scorned all merchants and scribes and left such work to the dark skinned, ancient peoples of the land, who had lived there since the world began. Our women, like my mother and my sister Annitis, were kept close at home to guard them from these people; and I myself was not allowed to speak even to the elders of the ancient village where we lived. It was so wherever our fair skinned ancestors had settled and conquered... even, the story tellers said, in the far off Hindus valley.

The world was as it had always been, and it was protected by the gods. We Hittites worshipped all the gods, some of them our own, brought with us from the unknown north; many of them the gods of the people with whom we traded or who sent us tribute. We worshipped them all, and we knew that they would always keep us safe and strong.

But they did not. My story will tell of how they failed us, how disaster came upon us all, and how strangely I have survived it. It will tell of the rise and fall of nations, the fading of old glories and the birth of new. And it will tell much of that little strip of land called Canaan to the south, between us and the accursed land of Egypt, which was only a name to me when I was a child. For all the wealth and all the armies and all the glories of the nations have passed through that little land and probably always will; and the story of the kings of Canaan is the story of the world.

1: The Sea People

I begin my story with the day I was thirteen years old, the day my father told me I must give up the great horse, Labarnash.

Labarnash was the best horse we ever bred. My father had bought the mare who gave him birth from a trader who had gotten her from the lands around the southern desert. The horses there are larger, more slender, and swifter than our small stocky horses of the north; and Labarnash showed his greatness in his large, well set out eyes and longer ears, his sloping shoulders and round ribs, and his dark gold color.

He was to have been my horse, and I had named him with the titles of the old kings of Hatti, meaning "Great One." I had been in the stable when his mother had first given him birth, and it was I who first saw him stagger onto his long, wobbly legs.

My father had given me full charge of his training and promised that if I handled him well, he would give him to me for my own. So it was I who first haltered him; who first fed him grain; who cared for his hoofs, who combed his mane and tail and groomed him with my own fingers. And it was I who, a year after his birth, first harnessed him beside his mother to a light chariot and drove him out across the steppes.

But now my father had broken his promise. He saw the wonder and reproach in my eyes as I stood before him, my hand on Labarnash's neck, and he tried to make me understand.

"It is the thirteenth year of the reign of the king," he said, "and thirteen is a holy number. All loyal vassals must offer tribute, the best they have to give, and Labarnash is our best. And Uriah, there is more."

He drew me closer to him and spoke slowly, as if to give his words more weight.

"I have kept these things from your mother and sister," he said to me. "But you are a man now, and may know the truth. There is trouble in the land of Hatti. Do you remember the stories of the rebel chief, Maduwattas?"

I shivered. Every child knew the stories that were told of Maduwattas. For many years there had been a shadow across our world. Out across the western sea lived the men we called the sea people, whose great island was Crete and whose great city was Mycenae on the western mainland. They called themselves Achaeans. Their princes were sometimes sent to Hattusas, our great city, to learn the arts of chariots and horsemanship, and they had become jealous of our lands and power.

In the years when my father was a child, a Hittite traitor called Maduwattas had sold himself to Atreus, an Achaean chief, and had come raiding and burning into the province of Arzawa. Some of the old Arzawans, who hated their Hittite masters, had joined him and a time of terror had come upon the land that had never been forgotten.

"But Maduwattas has been dead for many years," I said. "And Atreus the Achaean must be a very old man."

"Their spirit is still alive," said my father. "Rumors have come to us from the north of strange tribes from over the border who are bringing terror upon the people there. And even here in the south strange sights have been seen and strange stories are being told. There are those who say that such trouble is coming upon the land as has never been seen before, and that the hand of the king is not as strong upon the country as it has been before. He did not make the holy pilgrimage this year, to lead the worship of the gods of the provinces." He stared before him a moment, then smiled and laid his hand on my shoulder. "You see why we must all prove our loyalty and our faith in this holy year."

"I understand," I said at last, though my hand tightened on the mane of Labarnash.

"Good," said my father. "Then tomorrow we will go to Haballa and find a caravan to take us to Hattusas."

"Hattusas?" I cried. "The great city?"

"Yes," said my father, pleased that my spirits had been raised. "There will be a great pilgrimage and great celebrations. If our king will not come to us, we will go to him."

And for a moment I almost forgot my grief over Labarnash in my excitement over the journey we were to make. For I had never been to Hattusas, or to any town except Haballa, for the horse fairs.

My father told the servants of our plans for the journey and gave strict orders for the guarding of our house and lands. He commanded all the men of the household to keep themselves well armed. For my mother and sister, being women, were to be left behind.

"If I were an Egyptian woman I would be allowed to go," said my sister Annitis bitterly, and my mother frowned at the name of the accursed land.

"Women in Egypt are as evil as the men," she said.

My father watched them with troubled eyes. And once, during that last night before the journey, I thought he had changed his mind. Then he shook his head as if in anger.

"I will not stay at home in fear in this holy year," he said, "because of rumors and old women's stories. There are people in Arzawa who have always hated the king of Hatti. It is they who are trying to spread fear among those of us who are loyal. Still, I could wish that Hattusas were nearer home."

I was not worried. "Nothing could happen to Mother and Annitis," I told my father. "The gods will protect us all."

And so we joined a caravan, my father and I, for the journey to the great city.

It was a journey of many days through grasslands, hills, valleys, and later the rocky mountainous lands of the north. For Hattusas lay in its mountains like the nest of a giant bird. A robbers' retreat, the Egyptians called it. My heart still beats faster as I remember the road that led to it marked, as we neared the city, by giant images in stone . . . lions for the holy goddess of Arinna, bulls for Teshub, god of thunder, god of the double axe. To reach the city, we had to ford a great river, which I did not like; for I was afraid of water.

"Will it be as big as Haballa?" I asked my father. "Will there be a fair with jugglers and fire eaters? I wish it were time for the winter festival. I would like to see that play of the god slaying the dragon again."

My father laughed.

"Once you have seen Hattusas," he said, "all others, even Haballa, will be as mud villages in your eyes."

And it was true. The first sight of the great, rock-hewn wall of the city struck awe into my heart. The gateways and buildings of solid stone were such as I had never seen before; and I was so taken up with the great sights that I forgot that we must leave Labarnash in the stables of the king until the moment was upon us; and, for the first time, I realized that I would probably never see him again.

If I had been alone, I would have thrown my arms around his proud neck and wept and kissed him. But I was not alone, and could only watch while they took him away ... Labarnash whom I had raised and come to love, and whom I had named "Great One."

When he had disappeared from sight, I turned to my father in a kind of amazement.

"I will never see him again!" I cried.

"How can you be sure?" said my father. "It is in the hands of the gods."

But I was not comforted. For the first time in my life, I had lost a thing I loved.

That night they held the celebration in honor of the thirteenth year of the reign of the king. My father and I, being related to the great families of Hattusas, were allowed a place in the hall.

I forgot my grief for a while in wonder at all I saw. All the loyal chiefs of great Hatti were there. . . our own noble kinsman, the chief of Arzawa, in fashionably braided hair, pointed shoes, tall hat with upturned brim, earrings and a cane. There were ambassadors from Egypt in pleated kilts and elaborately curled wigs. There was the Dardanian chief Paris Aleksandus, from distant Troy, whose grandfather had fought with us against the second Rameses of Egypt at the battle of Kadesh.

The young prince who would be the second Subiluliuma was with his father the king and, when they stood together on the great stone stairway, all shouted and clashed their wine cups.

"Labarnash! Labarnash!" they cried, meaning "great one." And tears came to my eyes at the thought of my own Labarnash. But my father looked strange and grim; and many there must have known in their hearts that such a sight would never again be seen in Hattusas. For, though we did not know it on that day, the glory of Great Hatti was at an end.

We did not stay long in the great city. Things had become strangely quiet in Hattusas. People spoke little, and my father said it was as if someone had muffled the sounds of the streets with a blanket. On the morning of our departure, a madman ran through the temple square shouting:

"Midas is coming! Midas is coming to destroy us all!"

But two soldiers seized him and dragged him off. I suppose he was killed and hung up by the gates of the city, like other criminals that we had seen there.

"What was he saying?" I asked my father.

"He spoke of Midas the Phrygian," he replied. "A barbarian chief, one of the sea people. There are stories that he has come into the north with his tribe and is laying waste wherever he passes, but the King has forbidden it to be told, for fear of frightening the people. Whether this is true or not, I give thanks that it is still far from Arzawa."

As we passed from the city with the returning caravan, I looked back at the great walls. I am glad I stared at them so long and remember them so well, for I never saw them again.

It was on the road back into Arzawa that we saw it. From a valley some distance away a strange smell reached us and the sight of smoke curling into the air. The master of the caravan was a Babylonian and interested only in the merchandise he was carrying toward the western sea. He would not stop or leave the road to see what the trouble was, or if there were any in need of help.

"Uriah," said my father, "you and I are men of Arzawa and cannot pass by when our brothers may be in distress."

So we left the caravan and rode our sturdy little northern horses as fast as we could toward the strange thing in the valley. Though I have seen many terrible sights since then, I still remember that one.

A village had been burned to the ground along with the land around it. Many men lay dead and dying, and some women and children; though many of these had perhaps fled or been carried off. Only one man was left unharmed, sitting dazed and staring against the stone wall of a half-destroyed hut.

"Who has done this thing?" cried my father, speaking to him as if he had been a brother, though he was only a serf, of the ancient people of the land.

"Maduwattas," replied the man. I shuddered and drew closer to my father.

"Maduwattas is dead," said my father.

"But he has come back," said the man. "And he has brought the sea people with him."

"Surely he is mad, father," I whispered, shuddering again and trying to draw him away.

But my father spoke gently to the man; and soon he began to sob and talk to him, telling him how a great line of ox carts had come into the valley, guarded by armed men in chariots, and carrying women and children and all manner of riches.

"They came from the west," said the man, "and did not speak our language, so they are surely from the sea. The armed men fell upon us and killed us all, except some of our women and children that they took away to serve them. Why did they do it? Our village was not loyal to the King of Hatti."

I knew father ought to kill the man at once for saying that, but was glad when he did not.

"The sea people," said my father softly. "Atreus is old or dead; but his sons are mighty among the Achaeans. They have come into Arzawa, as Midas the Phrygian has come into the north. Come, we will ride for home."

We did not go back to the road or rejoin the caravan, but rode across the country with all speed till we came to our own acres, and found that we had come too late. Our village too had been burned, our home and our land destroyed, and our servants slain.

My father said nothing at the sight, but threw himself from his horse and ran among the bodies and the smoking ruins, searching for some sign of my mother and my sister. I stayed on my horse, for I could not have moved.

But then my father gave a great cry and fell on his knees, and I knew what he had found. I knew that I would never see my mother and my sister Anntis again and that all the world, as I had known it, had been destroyed.

This happened in my fourteenth year. They say that four years later, Hattusas itself was destroyed. The armies came down from the north and the west and from the islands in the western sea, with giant shields and plumed helmets decorated with the tusks of boars. Wives and families followed in ox carts laden with all their possessions . . . precious iron ornaments and dainty gold and silver objects of the old style from Crete and Mycenae. None stood before them. No Dardanians from Troy came to our aid, for Troy had fought for its life and lost, near the shores of the western sea.

For three years after the destruction of our home my father and I lived on in the ruins, making a bare living with our bees and what was left of our orchards and the food we could raise. We could not fight the enemy, for there were none to join us. Those who had not been slain by the sea people were either too terrified to stand against them, or did not care who were their masters, Achaeans or Hittite nobles. We lived as servants of the conquerors, who would come to us at any time and take what they wanted, and strike us down if we did not give it to them soon enough.

One day when I was sixteen, two men drove up in a chariot to where my father and I were gathering in fruit. One was a captain of the sea people, and the other was his servant and charioteer.

"You!" said the captain to my father, as we had spoken to the serfs in the old days. "All that you harvest is confiscated for our chief in Haballa. My driver will stay with you and see that you don't shirk."

My father stood for a moment with his head bowed. Then suddenly he straightened and stared into the eyes of the captain.

"No," he said. And for the first time in three years, he seemed like my father again.

The captain was a tall man with blue eyes and a dark brown beard. His driver was short and dark and powerful. The driver seized my father from behind and held him while the captain struck him across the face, shoulders, and chest with the butt end of his spear.

"The gods destroy you, you dogs!" I shouted, and sprang upon the captain. But a blow from his spear sent me sprawling on the ground, while he finished beating my father. I cried out in agony at every blow he received, but my father made no sound.

Afterward the captain stood back and looked at us in disgust.

"They will do no work today," he said to his driver. "Come. But," he shouted at us over his shoulder, "we will be back."

My father lay on the ground where the driver had let him fall, and at first I thought he was dead. Then I heard him breathing with some difficulty, and I managed to get him into the house, though he cried out with pain at being lifted.

I stayed with him through the day and through the night, but I soon knew that he would not live. He was too badly hurt, too many bones had been broken and he was too weak and tired to fight against death.

"Don't die," I begged him. "Everything is gone. Not you, too."

But he shook his head. "You must not stay here," he said at last. "Promise me."

"Where can I go?" I asked him. "This is my home."

"Not now," he said. "It is their home now." He was silent for a time, summoning his strength. "You must go south," he said after a while.

"Where south, Father?" I asked softly, thinking that if he would keep talking, he would not die.

"To the land of Canaan. There is a town. A town called Harosheth. There is a man there."

"What man, Father?"

"A man . . . called Sisera. He will help you. For my sake."

"But what is he to you, Father? And how can I find him?"

"Promise," said my father. And, seeing that he could say no more, I gave my promise.

He did not speak again, and I saw that he was really dying. I clung to him, trying to hold him back from death, but it was no use.

He died. As the holy laws prescribed, I burned his body on a great pyre and mourned him for thirteen days; though there was no Old Woman to come from the village and say the magic rites over his body, nor had I oil or a silver jar in which to lay his bones, nor beer or wine to quench his funeral fire. But no man was ever better mourned.

And when the thirteen days were up, I made my way to Haballa and prepared myself for the long journey into the land of Canaan.

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