



The Messengers

3

Exile

Hope exists, even for the outcasts.

LILLIAN DUNCAN

Exile

The Messengers Series, Book 3

Lillian Duncan

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Dedication

This and all I do is for God's glory.

To my amazing husband, Ronny. Thanks for all your
love and support"always.

To my family and friends, your encouragement
through the years has kept me writing.

The Messenger Series

Messenger

UnCitizen

Exile

1

SO IF THE SON SETS YOU FREE, YOU WILL BE
FREE INDEED.

JOHN 8: 36 (NIV)

“I can’t believe I’m an exile in the Empty Lands.” The shock of everything that had happened in the past few hours was still mind-boggling. One minute Magdalena was a prisoner and the next her friends had helped her to escape. “I’m free. I...I never thought that would happen.” She sat in the woods surrounded by trees, bugs, and probably some wild animals. She’d never been out of the city before.

“Exiles or not, we can’t stay here. Or we won’t stay free.” Gnat’s voice brought her back to reality. “They’ll be looking for us soon. We need to do something, Marcus.”

“I know what I’m not doing. I’m not leaving without my wife.” His tone left no doubt that he wasn’t going anywhere.

But Weldon’s group wasn’t here. Where were they?

Magdalena’s stomach hurt when she thought about all the possible things that might have

happened. But God's Messenger had told Magdalena that God would never forsake her or any of His children. God had proven that during her time in prison. He'd not only protected her but blessed her by putting her in the Davis residence. *I trust you, God.* That same power would help them find the others. She closed her eyes. *Please, God, help us. Show us what to do.* Finally, Magdalena opened her eyes.

Gnat stared at her while Marcus paced one way and then the other.

"I have an idea,," Magdalena said.

"I'm glad someone does." Gnat grimaced. "Let's hear it."

Marcus stopped pacing.

"Marcus, do you know the route that Weldon and the others took to get here?"

"They were to follow the river. It's the easiest way to get them to this area."

"When the guards start looking for us, they'll assume we headed south to get away from them, right?"

He nodded. "Probably. That's what I would do. And that was actually our original plan."

"Then why don't we head back north using the river as our path. Hopefully, we'll meet them coming to find us."

He smiled. "That might work. The guards won't expect us to head toward the city. And it's a whole lot better than sitting here waiting to be found."

"Great idea." Gnat smiled and stood up. "Once we find them, we can all decide together which direction

to take.”

Marcus’s expression lifted. “Let’s get moving. The sooner we do, the sooner we’ll find them.”

“I hate to be the one to say it, but what if we never find them?” Gnat asked.

“We need to trust God.” Magdalena glanced towards heaven. “But Marcus will make that decision. I trust him to do the right thing if it comes to that.”

Marcus had willingly sacrificed the life he had to rescue her from a lifetime of misery. That had to count for something.

“I appreciate you saying that, Magdalena. I’m sure we’ll find them. God wouldn’t bring us this far and then forsake us. Let’s go find the river. It shouldn’t be too long of a walk.”

As they trudged along through the woods, Magdalena asked, “I don’t suppose anyone has any food.”

Gnat laughed. “Weldon and the others were bringing the food. But don’t worry. God will provide. He always does.”

2

The sun moved higher in the afternoon sky. The time to have been at the rendezvous spot had come and gone. Trisha, Adrianna, and Weldon were holed up in this abandoned house waiting—waiting for Weldon to die or not die.

He'd moan for a few seconds and pass out again.

Trisha held Weldon's hand and wished Magdalena or Gnat was with them. Either one was more qualified to take care of him, thanks to their medical training.

Adrianna smoothed a hand over Weldon's arm and checked his pulse for the umpteenth time.

Trisha sprang up and paced around the room.

Adrianna had taken over when Marcus was stabbed, finding a shirt in her pack, ripping it up, and winding it around Weldon's chest. The blood soaked the make-shift bandage but eventually stopped.

Trisha stared down at Weldon. He was so pale. His breathing was so shallow. But he was still breathing.

Adrianna paced the length of the room. Dressed all in black, she reminded Trisha of a caged panther she'd seen at the zoo.

Had Marcus and Gnat been successful in getting

Magdalena off the bus? Were they alive or had they been captured or killed? It was driving Trisha mad wondering. And if they'd been successful, what would they do now that the three of them weren't where they were supposed to be?

Adrianna plopped down beside her on the old wooden floor. Her face was streaked with tears. "I didn't want to kill that boy. I had no choice."

"Of course, you didn't have a choice. You did the absolutely right thing. He would have killed Weldon if you hadn't stopped him. You did what you had to do." He might have killed Weldon anyway but there wasn't a point in saying that. Yet.

They'd hidden the boy's body under some thick brush on the side of the house. Adrianna had whispered a short prayer to God for the boy's soul. Trisha didn't believe in all that but the prayer had brought tears to her eyes just the same.

Adrianna shook her head. "I know that in my mind, but my heart is heavy. I never wanted to hurt him. He was just a young boy. What was he even doing out here alone?" She went silent, her gaze distant before she focused on Weldon. "How is he?"

"Not good." Trisha dipped the extra shirt she'd brought along in the pan of water that Adrianna had fetched from the river. They'd found the pan in the house. She wiped Weldon's face. "The bleeding's stopped, thanks to you, but..."

"Yeah, I know. Do you think they managed to escape the bus?"

Trisha couldn't even imagine what Adrianna must

be feeling. "It was a good plan. So yes, I think they escaped. Don't you think so?"

"Yeah, but we're not where we're supposed to be." Adrianna shook her head. "It was stupid of us not to come up with a contingency plan. They're probably confused and have no idea what they should do. What a mess this is."

"I guess in hindsight that probably would have been a good idea. But we couldn't think of every possible situation. I sure didn't see this happening."

"They'll have to go on without us or risk getting caught. They don't have a choice." Adrianna touched her stomach.

"You really believe that Marcus will just go on his merry way and leave you? And your baby? Because I don't. And I don't even know him that well."

Adrianna grinned. "Yeah, you're probably right. I was just feeling sorry for myself for a minute."

Weldon moaned.

Trisha touched his forehead. "Weldon, are you awake?"

He mumbled something but his eyes didn't open. He fell silent once again.

"We need to come up with our own plan," Adrianna spoke in a soft tone. "Because he's sure not going anywhere right now. And the others have no idea where we are. We need to find them."

"I'm not leaving him."

"Of course not. That's not what I meant. I'm sorry if you thought I was suggesting that. But we need to do something. We can't stay here. It's not safe."

"I don't know what we should do. It's not safe for him to be here alone. And it's not really safe for either of us to travel alone. That boy proved that. And if even one of us went to the rendezvous, we're so far behind schedule that it would be almost impossible for us to catch up with them." As an afterthought, Trisha asked, "What do you mean it's not safe to stay here?"

Adrianna shook her head. "The soldiers do regular patrols of the Old City to make sure the exiles stay away because it's too close to the city. That's one of the reasons I was so surprised about that poor boy."

"How do you know that?"

Adrianna met Trisha's gaze. "Because I'm a soldier."

"You're a soldier?" That made sense. No wonder Adrianna seemed to know more about survival skills than she or Weldon. "I didn't know that. Why didn't you tell us that before?"

Adrianna shrugged. "Marcus and I were afraid you might not trust me if you knew I was a soldier. That you might think it was some sort of a trap."

"And you were probably right." Trisha conceded. Making the decision to leave NewAm was terrifying enough. But to plan it with a soldier? That wouldn't have happened. "Where did you serve?"

"I'm a Wall Watcher most of the time, but at least twice a month we search the Old City to keep it clear of exiles. Can't let those pesky exiles get too close to the city."

"Did your patrols ever find anyone?"

"Sometimes. But not very often."

“What did you do to the exiles?” Trisha wasn’t sure she wanted to know the answer. Even though she was a lawyer who’d worked for The Guardians, she’d never killed anyone. Could Adrianna say the same?

Adrianna didn’t say anything for a moment. Instead, she stared past Trisha as if she were looking at something. Finally, her gaze focused back. “It depended. If they were old, they would be executed. If they were young and healthy, they’d be sent to work to the prison factories. Basically slave labor.”

“Oh.” Trisha wasn’t surprised to hear about the prison factories. For some time, she’d had an inkling that The Guardians were using forced labor to provide for the good citizens of NewAm. So many people were simply disappearing. Family and friends were told they’d taken the S-pill, but most of the time the body was never seen.

Adrianna held up her hands as if to ward off an assault. “I never killed anyone, but it was horrible to witness just the same. It really was. It sickened me, but I didn’t have a choice. It’s one of the reasons Marcus and I decided to leave. I’ve seen too much to ever trust The Guardians. We want our baby to live in peace where we can worship God.”

“The Guardians make the choices for all of us. None of us have a choice about our service assignments, where we live, or even what we believe. They have all the power.” Trisha took a deep breath. “So we can’t stay here for very long, huh?”

“We checked this area a little over a week ago. That means they could come back in the next few days.

We're not on a strict schedule. We go when we're ordered to go. Usually every few weeks. Hopefully, we'll be long gone before they come back."

"Maybe we could make some kind of carrier for Weldon. Between us, we should be able to move him. It might be slow, but it would be better than doing nothing."

"It's a thought but I'm afraid it would reopen his wounds. I guess we'll wait here for another day or so." She shrugged. "Or as long as it takes."

"You should go without me. Find the others and tell them what happened. You're a lot...more knowledgeable than us. You probably can make it. By the time you get back, Weldon will probably be feeling better..." She looked down at Weldon, and then met Adrianna's gaze. "Or it will...you know...be over."

Adrianna nodded. "That makes sense."

The thought of being here alone with Weldon was scary. But it was the right thing to do. "Will you go right now?"

"I should have done that yesterday. I don't really see the point now since..." Adrianna shrugged. "Let's not rush it. If he's not better by tomorrow, then I'll leave to find them."

Trisha felt guilty at how relieved she was to hear that she wouldn't be alone. She put a hand on Weldon's forehead. "He's not warm so I guess that means he doesn't have any infection. Yet. That's probably a good thing."

"That's an answer to my prayers."

Trisha didn't know how to respond to that. This

whole thing about God was just plain weird. How could they believe they could pray to some invisible being? But they were sincere. “Do you think they’ll look for us when we don’t show up at our service assignments on Monday?”

“They’ll look for us inside the city, but when they don’t find us, they’ll just list us as missing, clear out our apartments and it will be as if we never existed.”

“That’s good to know.”

“But it will be a different story for Marcus and Magdalena. He helped a prisoner escape. The Guardians won’t be so forgiving with them.”

3

“Stop. I hear something.” Marcus whispered. They had walked near the river but still in the safety of the trees. They decided being on the road wasn’t a good idea, but so far they hadn’t seen any vehicles.

Magdalena listened. “I hear it.”

“It sounds as if it’s in the sky.” Marcus looked upward. “It might be a helicopter looking for us. We need to hide. Now.”

Gnat pointed at some bushes. “Over there. Under those bushes.”

A moment later they’d all crawled into the bushes.

Magdalena whispered, “How long do you think they’ll look for us?”

“Until they find us.” Gnat replied.

Magdalena couldn’t let her friends go to prison for helping her. “I don’t care what you told me, this is my fault. I should turn myself in. If I do that, then they might stop looking for the rest of you.”

“You’ll do no such thing.” Gnat grabbed her arm and glared at her. “We didn’t do all this so you could turn yourself back in. Besides, you need to trust God. He won’t forsake us. He kept me safe all those months I was preaching and hiding. I trust Him. So you can forget any idea about turning yourself in.”

"You might look meaner if you weren't wearing leaves for a hat."

Gnat grinned as she touched the leaves above her head. "It might be a new fashion trend."

"Seriously, I think it's the right thing for me to do." Magdalena didn't want them to be arrested. Prison wasn't fun at all.

Marcus called over. "Gnat's right. It's not happening. We're all in this together. No one will turn themselves in. Period. What did God's Messenger tell you? Something about trusting God, wasn't it?"

"I trust God, but this is different. I don't want anything to happen to you or the others."

Gnat put her fingers in her ears and grinned. "I'm sorry. I didn't hear anything after you said you trust God. Either you do or you don't trust God."

"I do, but—"

Marcus said, "Good. Then we're all in agreement. We'll get through this if God wants that. If He doesn't, then we'll all deal with that too. Together."

Gnat took her fingers out of her ears. "Besides, do you really believe that turning yourself in would stop them from looking for us? Marcus is just as much a criminal as we are now." Gnat brushed away a bug that had crawled on her arm. "We defied The Guardians. That's not acceptable."

"They'll want to make an example of us," Marcus said from underneath his bush. "All of us. And probably a very public spectacle."

"I don't even want to think what that might be like." Magdalena shuddered. "You're both right. But I

feel so guilty.”

“Well, stop it. We’re adults. We knew what we were doing.” Gnat gave her a hug.

The helicopter noise got louder.

Magdalena peered through the leaves. It hovered over them. She held her breath as if that would help. *Please, God. Protect us.*

The helicopter flew away.

Nobody moved for a long time.

Finally, Marcus crawled out. “Going north seems like an even better idea now.”

Gnat crawled out and dusted off her clothes. “We need to get moving. They might come back.”

Magdalena looked at Gnat and Marcus. “Anybody up for running? I’d like to put as much distance between us and that helicopter as we can.”

The three of them jogged under the protective canopy of the trees but kept the river in view. When they came to the end of the forest, they stopped.

“We won’t have the protection of those trees.” Magdalena glanced around.

Gnat looked at Marcus. “Now what? Stay by the river or walk on the highway.”

Marcus gazed at the sky, and then back at the river. “We could hide under the overpasses. But, of course, if any vehicles come, we’ll be in trouble.”

Gnat shrugged. “Not necessarily. We should be able to hear them long before we actually see them. We should have enough time to hide on the other side of the overpasses behind the walls.”

“Or even in the grass. It’s high enough to hide us.”

"Let's just pray there aren't vehicles and helicopters at the same time." Gnat frowned.

Marcus looked at Magdalena. "What do you think?"

"Let's go with the road. I think we can make better time walking on it. As long as the road doesn't veer too far from the river."

"It's starting to get dark so let's get to the first overpass and then stop for the night. If we keep travelling in the dark, we might miss them. Better to stay in one spot until it gets light."

After they got to the overpass, Magdalena took off her backpack and stretched her arms. Everything hurt. She wasn't used to this much physical exertion.

Gnat walked over and grinned. "What's wrong?"

"I'm tired and sore. Aren't you?"

"Not really. I did a lot of running lately since people were chasing me."

Magdalena shook her head. "You'll have to tell me about all of that."

"We can share stories as we sit in the dark. I want to hear what happened with both of you." Marcus told them. "But first, I'll go to the river to see if I can catch some fish."

"How?"

He pulled a stick out of his backpack. "Adrianna gave me this fishing pole. She swears I'll be able to catch fish with it."

"How does it work?"

"I unwind the string. There's a hook on the end and I throw it in the water. She says to wiggle it

around and hopefully a fish will bite it.”

“How does she know that?”

“Adrianna has survival skills. She was a soldier. She’s done her share of surviving out in the Empty Lands. It’s part of her job.” Before they could ask more, Marcus walked around the overpass toward the river.

Gnat and Magdalena tagged along.

“I didn’t know that she was a soldier,” Gnat said. “Why didn’t you tell us?”

Magdalena could barely see Gnat through the high grasses.

“We weren’t sure how everyone would react to her being a soldier, so we figured we’d tell you later. After you got to know her a little better and you could trust her.”

Magdalena caught up with them. She was breathing hard. “Well, it makes me feel better knowing that Weldon and Trisha are with a trained soldier. Just in case...you know.”

Marcus nodded. “I know.”

Magdalena made her way to the edge of the river and knelt. She scooped up water with her hands, drank several handfuls, and then washed her face.

Gnat did the same.

Marcus stood at the water’s edge, cast the line in the water, and wiggled it.

“I hope you catch something.” Magdalena was sincere. “I’m hungry.”

Gnat pointed at some distant buildings. “We could go to one of those buildings to sleep inside.”

“You both can. I’m staying on the road. I’m sure