



Dawn of the Golden Promise- An Emerald Ballad, **Book 5**

by B.J. Hoff

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Surrounded by a profusion of late-blooming flowers and shrubs, Morgan sat breathing in the rich scents of autumn with great relish, savoring the bracing effect of the night air.

Sandemon came round the chair to face him. "Shall I stay with you, Seanchai, or would you prefer to be alone?"

Morgan shook his head, lifting a hand. "You need not wait. It is late, and I know you must be weary. I can make my own way back. I'll use the side ramp."

He was keenly aware of Sandemon's hesitation, his searching dark eyes. The man's expression was uncommonly grave, with no hint of his thoughts or his feelings.

"Have you any word for me?" Morgan made no attempt at lightness; the time had long passed when either of them felt a need to dissemble with the other. "I would not be too proud to hear any advice you might care of offer."

"No advice, Seanchai," Sandemon replied quietly. "Only the conviction that, however you decide, our Lord will be with you."

Morgan nodded, and Sandemon squeezed his friend's shoulder as he passed. He had felt the need to be alone, yet the moment Sandemon left him, he shivered slightly—not from the chill night air, but from the rush of loneliness that suddenly came swooping down on him.

Weary beyond belief and chilled by the dampness of the autumn night, Sandemon thought wistfully of the warm fires inside the house. But instead of going back inside as he was tempted to do, he sought a private place of his own, beneath a large old oak whose branches still clung bravely to the last of their bronze leaves.

He pulled his cloak more tightly about him and prepared to wait. It was a clear, sharp night, the sky sprayed with stars and frosted with moonlight. With his eyes fixed on the hunched figure in the wheelchair, he was so keenly attuned to the young giant's torment that he could almost feel the weight of the burden upon his own back.

As he stood watching, he began to pray. He prayed first that the Seanchai would be given the faith and childlike trust to make a wise decision. Although he thought he knew what that decision would be, he would not presume, but would wait until he heard it for himself.

He went on to pray for a company of the faithful who would this very night begin to gather, united in the One God, to do battle during the coming days for one of their own. Too often it seemed that even God's own people were unmindful of what their united, intercessory prayers could accomplish. Although the Holy Word and the world's history were filled with examples of lives changed, battles won, and evil vanquished by a divine power working through the prayers of a believing people, too often every other effort besides prayer was employed in a time of crisis. It was a sad but undeniable fact that only when all else had failed did hearts kneel in desperation before the throne of heaven.

Finally, he prayed for peace for the Seanchai, the peace that did indeed surpass all human understanding....

"Peace, Lord, for that troubled, searching spirit...peace for that agonizing soul. A peace that will abide, in the dark garden of his anguish, through the haunted valley of the shadow. Prince of Peace, bestow your peace upon your troubled son this night."

At first Morgan was tempted to think of this night in the garden as his darkest hour, his own Gethsemane. But such a thought seemed almost profane, somehow. To cast himself in the same light as his Savior was surely irreverent to the extreme.

And yet he could not help but think of the Son of Man, kneeling in a garden, agonizing, even sweating drops of blood, over the terrifying ordeal that awaited Him. That Man, too, had found himself alone in His garden of torment, with no one who could drink His cup of sorrow, share the suffering of His soul, or lighten the burden of His heart.

At times like this, Morgan knew, in times of momentous decision and great despair, when everything in life—even life itself—seemed to depend on the choice that is made, a man is truly, utterly alone. And yet, after those first tortured minutes of pleading for an answer, for wisdom and enlightenment, he slowly began to realize that he was not alone. This fragrant autumn garden had been transformed into a hushed and holy place. The presence of the Lord was all about him.

He could not kneel, not with his dead legs. He had often thought that, if by God's mercy he should ever regain the use of his legs, the first thing he would do would be to kneel before his Lord, in humility and thanksgiving. But for now, he could only kneel in his heart, his body hunched in the chair, his hands gripping the rungs of a garden trellis.

As he sat there, his spirit gradually quieted, growing more serene than he would have thought possible this night. The years of his life began to roll over him like an entire succession of tides. Scene after scene—his lonely boyhood, his youthful roamings, his foolish, thoughtless sins and errant ways—gradually unfurled, reminding him with startling clarity of the strange and unpredictable directions his life had taken.

Could anyone have foreseen the changes God had wrought, the surprising turns and twists...and falls...that had brought him to this place, to this night?

A mystery.

Suddenly, in one radiant, pristine moment of illumination, he knew that tonight he would not pray for a miracle, as he had earlier thought to do. The truth was that he had already been given his miracle. From a solitary vagabond, a wayfaring poet with little but the cloak on his back—a wanderer without a home, without family or means—he had been given a vast estate he had not earned, a loving wife he could never deserve, and two precious children he had not sired.

If that was not a miracle, then what was? Moreover, in the agony of his pain and humiliation, in the helplessness of his immobility, he had been bathed in infinite grace. In learning to live with his useless legs, to endure the pain that ever burned low in his spine and burned even hotter in his freedom-starved spirit, he had discovered the reality of a loving, forgiving, redeeming God.

In his weakness, he had caught a glimpse of divine power. In his anguish, he had been comforted by divine love. And in finally accepting the burden of his own cross, he had received divine peace.

If his healing, his deliverance, did not come in one sudden, brilliant flash of divine intervention, then it would come day by day, year by year, as he went on, walking with God in his spirit, if not on his legs.

By the gift of God's love and by the blessing of family and friends, he lived life, if not entirely as a whole man, at least as a fulfilled man.

He prayed that he might also live it as an unfailingly thankful man.

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