



Until the Mountains Fall

CITIES OF REFUGE #3

by Connilyn Cossette

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QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH CONNILYN COSSETTE

1. What can you tell us about the main characters in *Until the Mountains Fall*?

Rivkah is the daughter of Amitai, who is the head Levitical priest in charge of administration of Kedesh, the City of Refuge. Rivkah lost her mother a few years before the book opens, and she kind of got lost in the shuffle during that time. She's been holding on to a lot of hurt and bitterness, so when she is told that she must marry the brother of her husband who passed away unexpectedly, she rebels against the demand. The fact that the person she has to marry is the boy who has pestered and teased her since childhood makes her even more determined to find a way out of the unwanted marriage and to follow her own path instead.

Malakhi is the youngest son of Darek and Moriyah (from *A Light on the Hill*). He's loved Rivkah from afar since he was fourteen but honorably said nothing when she was betrothed to and married his older brother, Gidal. When tragedy strikes and Gidal is killed, Malakhi must fulfill the law of levirate marriage and marry the girl he's always wanted but who cannot forgive his youthful mistakes. When Rivkah's reckless decisions change everything, Malakhi will have to deal with not only grief over his brother but a deeply wounded heart as well. He is deeply loyal and fiercely protective of those he loves, but both those characteristics will be tested as he and Rivkah find their way to one another on a very rocky road.

2. What was your inspiration for this story?

This book is a twist on the Prodigal Son parable told by Jesus, but instead of a son walking away from his home, it is a daughter who rebels against an arranged marriage and foolishly chooses to make her own way. As I wrote the CITIES OF REFUGE series, I began to see these cities as a place of safety, tended to by the "pastors" of the day (the Levites), and places where sinners were embraced, taught the Word, and cared for until the death of the High Priest set them free (just like Jesus), which is a really great foreshadowing for the mission of the church. Since I once was a Prodigal Daughter who turned my back on my spiritual heritage and my parents' wise counsel for a short while, I was inspired to write the story of a young woman who recklessly chooses her own path and finds herself metaphorically—and literally—"eating with the pigs." While the details of my prodigal journey are not the same as Rivkah's, the spirit of her rebellion, transformation, and return home certainly is.

3. What do you want readers to take away from *Until the Mountains Fall*?

My hope is that Rivkah and Malakhi's story is a good reminder to readers about the vastness of God's love for his children. No matter the failings of our human fathers or other people we love, we have a heavenly Father who went so far as to offer up his only son as payment for our debts because he desires for us to be with him for all eternity. Our Father knows that in our human brokenness we will make wrong choices, we will wander at times, and we will be reckless with the grace and blessings we've been given, but instead of turning his back on us, he waits with his eyes on the empty road, his patience never failing, and his arms open wide for us when we return home where we belong. *Until the Mountains Fall* can also be a reminder that no matter the hurts we

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harbor or the bitterness we've clung to, he can and will mend our hearts if we ask, and he will use even those painful experiences and the consequences of our poor decisions to mature us and to teach us more about himself. Both Rivkah and Malakhi have much to learn about themselves and about the God they profess, and hopefully their journeys will inspire readers to dig deeper into the Word in order to better understand our gracious and merciful Father.

4. What were some of your unique challenges while writing this book?

One of the techniques a novelist employs when writing a good story is to create empathy for the main characters from the start. No one wants to read a book about someone they don't like or empathize with (well, maybe some people do, but I certainly don't). But since this was a prodigal story and Rivkah makes some fairly foolish and selfish decisions in the first part of *Until the Mountains Fall*, it was a bit of a challenge to display her lack of maturity and unkind tendencies while still finding ways to show readers that she is worth rooting for. But although it took some extra effort, it was so much fun to watch her transform and grow that the struggle I dealt with in the first chapters was really worth it and this story became one of my favorite writing experiences. There also is a very distinct shift between Part 1 and Part 2 in the book, so rediscovering my characters and weaving together the changes within their personalities after a period of maturation and separation was an interesting challenge, but one that I hope readers will find satisfying and inspiring.

5. What can we expect from the final book of the CITIES OF REFUGE series?

Like Flames in the Night, Book 4 in this series, will be a continuation of the story of Moriyah and Darek's family with Tirzah, their youngest, as the heroine. Readers will meet Tirzah as a child in *Until the Mountains Fall* and will also get a glimpse of her as a spirited and adventurous teen. *Like Flames in the Night* takes place during the end of the eight-year period in which Israel was subjugated under the Arameans, and Tirzah will have a part to play in the liberation of her people and the Land promised to Abraham's descendants. Liyam, the hero of the story, has a connection to Tirzah's family (although I'm not disclosing what that connection might be . . .) that will put him in a place of choosing between exacting vengeance on the man who killed his daughter and rescuing a woman who refuses to leave her spy mission until it is complete. I'm hoping that readers will find *Like Flames in the Night* to be an exciting and satisfying conclusion to the series. I certainly have had a fun time writing it, but I admit I also shed a few bittersweet tears as the final chapter ended!