

Eden
Non Grata

Volume I

A Novel

by

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*Gratitude to a fellowship of the brave and few.
Our stories are for His glory...*

Based on wisdom in Scripture, EDEN NON GRATA (Volumes I & II) is a story of crooked lives made straight by the love and power of the gospel.

Adam cannot be without Eve—and now he cannot live in Eden. The mayor's rebellious son is to marry the preacher's spirited daughter, but this proposed union under God begets a world of good versus stirring evil. Ultimately, victorious truth meant to heal two wounded hearts will pierce the lives of all around them.

Pastor Malachi Noble and his wife, Leah, want to protect their only daughter from the damage of Adam's sinful life. Joshua Thorne—wealthy but desperate, alone, and troubled following the tragic death of his wife—has lost all hope for his only son.

Even Adam and Eve's most loyal friends—Silas King and Rebekah Jordan—find themselves tempted by darkness and its destructive allies.

Before salvation is lost, the discipleship of Adam's parole officer, Dr. Solomon Judah, the corruption of Eve's nemesis, Judge Herod Stone, and treasures stored in heaven by the late Rachel Thorne will help change the lives of Adam and Eve forever.

The amazing grace and mercy of the Lord's teaching will show them a new way, a new truth, and a new life far from the paths where all is meaningless—a chasing after the wind.

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Almost Out of Time

“What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?”
Matthew 16:26

Adam Thorne sat in the courtroom, his hands and feet shackled in irons, his spirit motionless and condemned. Underneath the orange jumpsuit identifying him as a prisoner of the state, he could feel his skin flush with unrepentant rage.

The magistrate silently reviewed the file the prosecuting attorney had set before him, the details of the alleged crime filling several report pages. When he finally looked up from the documents, his face leveled a stern and emotionless gaze towards the defendant’s table. “Son,” he said to Adam, “we’re almost out of time. You’ve refused legal representation. Do you have anything to say to this court?”

A bead of sweat gave birth on the crown of Adam’s skull, snaking its way through dark hair towards the base of his neck. His fingers ached to touch many things, especially the fear of being alone.

It had been a lifetime of either running from or doing battle against fear, and he had pushed everyone away. The man in the black robes kept looking at him, his silence speaking the language of fear.

It was the fear of a child that grew into the heart of a man, a fear that would not die.

He felt like he was to be buried alive, unable to open his mouth yet willing to confess his sins. Shadows moved across all brightness of hope like a stone rolling across the entrance to truth. Adam trembled, naked in blackness so real and deep he slowly closed his eyes to remember the innocence of light.

He could see his mother, Rachel, sitting with him in a boat on the edge of Eden Lake, the Word of God in her hands. Somewhere inside the tomb of the magistrate's question was the edge of Satan's laugh piercing his courage as legions of fear trampled across his heart.

"So glad to see you back," welcomed the bottomless pit of a voice. *"I've missed you."*

Adam cursed the Serpent of Old, stumbling into the pitch dark, fingers hungry to strangle his fear to death. Instead, he could only grasp out with the flailing hands of his memory on that day his mother's body succumbed to the lake.

Demonic laughter pealed in his ears; his nostrils filled with an acrid smoke belching in the darkness like billows from an unseen furnace. Terror surged through the marrow of his bones as water began to steal the life from his mother's lungs. He always thought she could swim, but her motions were childlike and helpless.

"Damnation for one?" The buzzing of flies pricked Adam's ears. *"Or do you think you could've saved her?"* His

head fell into the captivity of such thoughts, a rattle of chains signaling his enslavement to sin. “*I have a special truth reserved just for you,*” promised the Accuser’s voice.

Adam listened to the voice of his mother begging God’s forgiveness, his hands trembling inside the chains of man. Evil began a parade of iniquities which passed through his memories – led by Silas King, his closest friend – unforgivable horrors begging for penance, whipped by thongs of flame dancing from the dark. *His downfall at the hands of Judge Stone. The fight with Eve’s father. Seeing Silas and Eve together in the cornfields. The body lying at his feet, another man’s blood staining his hands. Eve sitting under an apple tree, writing in her journal. His mother’s gravestone.* The twisted faces of Satan’s minions lined the route, cheering on the pain Adam felt inside his soul, the guilt a crescendo of music that celebrated sin’s triumph.

Each torturous sting of punishment reminded him of air bubbles exploding upon the surface of Eden Lake as his mother went under a final time. One by one they diminished, ending as ripples upon the wake that would not answer his cries for her.

He next saw his mother’s body at the funeral parlor, Rachel Thorne in eternal sleep. Inside the darkness of his fear, Adam’s father, Joshua, stood next to her casket, casting his eyes over his son with pupils of shame and violence. Adam heard a whisper of his name. *It sounded like Eve, unmistakably. Not here, he prayed.*

“Adam?” A bold voice kept repeating his name. His forehead damp, Adam came to lucidity again, hands straining against the chains locking him down, beads of sweat falling off his brow. “Are you okay?” the magistrate asked. The thunder in Adam’s heart ceased, the fear bowing to God’s footsteps.

“No.” A shudder of courage ran down the backbone of this truth. He looked straight past the man with an old wooden gavel in his hands. He wanted to say something else but a voice from the rear of the courtroom spoke first.

“Your Honor, if it pleases the bench may I approach?”

The magistrate’s face peered intently towards the voice and his features softened into a comfortable smile. Adam turned in his seat to see a middle-aged man, handsome in features and dressed in a conservative suit, standing by the rear bench of seats in the small courtroom.

“Well, Dr. Judah,” the magistrate said with a half-hearted acceptance in his tone, “the bench’s *displeasure* has never stopped you before. You have an interest in this young man’s dilemma?”

Dr. Solomon Judah walked patiently past Adam, who sat alone at the table having adamantly refused the services of a public defender in the case. “I wish to stand in advocacy of Adam, a resident of Eden where I live and practice, your Honor. There is no mercy in the balanced mind of justice without the facts,” he said, taking a place in an empty chair next to Adam, “yet God calls for the truth of what happened

to Adam and why it may be that his circumstances warrant diversion.”

The magistrate slowly turned the gavel over in his wise yet aged hands. “So instead of sending him back to the jail,” he said to Solomon, “I should find grace within the law to remand him to your facility?”

“Such a facility,” Dr. Judah informed the magistrate, placing a soft hand upon the shoulder of Adam sitting next to him, “is built to hold the flesh of those condemned by the One they reject.” As Adam’s sudden advocate for release into supervised freedom, his wisdom did not fail to understand the obvious. “It’s up to Him to deliver the terms of pardon.” When the magistrate retreated into judgmental silence, Dr. Judah closed his hands together in front of him and began to silently pray. The magistrate shut the case file and looked diligently out from the bench and into the eyes of Adam Thorne.

“Mr. Thorne, I’ll grant the request of Dr. Solomon because I know his reputation with those who’ve been offered a chance for redemption. This doesn’t free you from the charges but allows me to release you into his custody and to be remanded to his facility outside of Eden. If we meet again,” he warned with ominous yet righteous tones, “his presence will not sway the judgment upon you.” He smacked the gavel upon the bench. “This hearing is closed.”

Dr. Judah turned to look at Adam, a young man he just met but knew many things about. “You have questions,”

he said. "I understand. *But there's time*. You're not out of time."

"No," Adam replied, rattling the chains binding his wrists. "I am. *Almost*." Tears crawled from the edges of his brown eyes, freed slaves with no hope of exodus.

* * *

Eve Noble looked upon the mist shrouded waters of Eden Lake, tired blue eyes searching for hope through dawn's created light. Repeating the prayer in a humble breeze of words pushed from her lips, Eve felt them hover over the lake named for a town she'd lived in most of her life.

"God, forsake my grace and please give it to him."

She barely talked with anyone since Adam was arrested and taken from the town, shackled in handcuffs and shame. Everyone in Eden knew the details, her father even speaking of it from the pulpit of Walnut Grove Baptist Church. Eve's anger that day sat cloaked in pity over what Adam had been accused of.

Calling the incident a "tragic tear upon the cheek of God's ultimate mercy," her father assured the congregation Adam Thorne was a sinner who understood the penalty of his actions.

"We in Christ," Pastor Malachi Noble consoled those gathered in a gentle yet convicting voice, "pray for the lost sheep. We know the length of God's arm can travel into the depths of darkness that enslave those, like Adam, who are dragged off and enticed into sin."

She knew that's why she came to the lake. Eve knew there was a depth here in the water that only He could possibly walk through. *We are sinners*. Her father's preaching could not be the last word on her feelings for Adam Thorne.

Eve stepped towards the rowboat wedged onto the grassy banks. Ringed curls of red hair fell around her face as she gave the vessel a firm push, deftly entering the boat as it caught water and sloshed into motion away from the shore. Steady hands grasped the old wooden oars, piloting herself slowly out into the morning. Knowing what to do couldn't still the anticipation in her heart, for it began to gallop like the horse Adam taught her to ride so many years ago.

Eve's mind began playing tricks, a warm morning wind carrying echoes of his voice to her ears. She heard Adam confessing sins in a voice as soft as the one she heard the first time they were alone in the apple grove. Tears stung her eyes at the memory. *That was then, not now*. After rowing to the middle of the lake, Eve pulled the oars into the boat and looked down at a small wooden chest secreted out of her parents' house the evening before. A large pile of fieldstones from their land sat next to it, on top of which was a large chain and padlock taken from the barn. The bleak caw of a raven in the treetops beyond the lake's opposite shore broke the spell of her gaze upon the links of metal, married to each other in weight and strength, their ultimate purpose clear.

Only as strong as its weakest link. Eve pictured her mother, Leah Noble, the pastor's wife, hiding among the truths which were only as strong as the weakest point of sin behind them. Yet it was Rachel Thorne she wanted to be like, close to, loved by. It wasn't the reason she loved Adam—but it was one of the reasons she could. Her own mother, Eve knew, was lost.

Eve gently knelt down and opened the lid of the chest, hopelessness piercing her heart. Inside were the only things she could actually touch that Adam once held in his hands—including the ring. She scooped lengths of hair behind each ear, angry at herself for trembling. It started in her lips and continued to her fingers as she reached inside the chest, touching the timeworn red velvet box.

"You'll *never* marry Adam Thorne," she recalled her father's prophecy. The night Adam proposed was now an image crucified in her mind every time it resurrected itself. "The Lord calls to you first. Adam's not the one your heart should belong to."

Eve's breath tripped in her throat as a single tear broke from the corner of her eye and flowed through the dotting of freckles on her cheek. Her mind was like a cyclone, picking up and twisting emotions she felt for God, her father, the man she loved—and the woman she dreamt of becoming and now would be faced with deserting. A voice softly whispered inside of her:

*There will be no peace in the garden of your soul
until you give him to Me.*

The sun arched above the day's horizon as she piled the stones into the wooden chest. The only person who knew what she was doing that morning—her closest friend, Rebekah Jordan—pleaded with her the night before to at least hold back the ring. When she prayed about it, all Eve could picture was the face of Judge Herod Stone and the evil snakes of his lips curling into a covetous smile. He knew the origins of the ring and the curses upon its stone.

Inside the box was the envelope he'd given Eve before Adam's arrest, containing pictures she never wanted seen—even Rebekah did not know about them. As close as they were, she thought Eve didn't know about her own hidden shame—but Eve's journal book containing it was wedged into the bottom of the chest. Closing the lid, she wrapped the chain around the ancient box and snapped the padlock shut. Eve struggled to keep her balance while lifting the chest. She hefted it up and gave birth to a piercing cry, heaving the box into the air.

In aching silence, she watched as it bobbed on the surface—once, twice—then sank into a wake of ripples that broke the waters of Eden Lake and deep springs of her heart.