

Jubilee Anderson

# *S*nightfall



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# **Knightfall**

**By Jubilee Anderson**

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To the Lord Jesus Christ  
Soli Deo Gloria!

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# Map



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## Prologue

“You’ll be good for Mother while I’m gone, won’t you, Nathaniel?”

Markus gently squeezed his brother’s tunicked shoulder, glancing up at Mother. A smile edged Mother’s lip, and tears glimmered in her eyes.

“You’re going to be a man, Nathan. I’m so proud of you.” Markus let out a light chuckle.

Nathaniel shrugged and averted his eyes.

Markus took a deep breath. The scent of the blooming rose garden filled his nostrils, and the wind mourned in the trees. He glanced at his family hovering around him inside the wooden gate. The grey manor loomed above them like the farewell he was about to say. At least Mother had dismissed the servants for the day. It would be an easier goodbye to not to hug all thirty of them. And he’d already said goodbye to his dear friend King Edris. *I’m not going to see everyone for a whole year. But it’s only one year. A year of fencing and hunting, and balls. Then I’ll be back. And everything will be the same...*

He clapped Nathaniel on the back.

“Well...I’m going to miss you all.”

“We’ll miss you,” Estia, Markus’s princess of a little sister, gazed up at him with her hair-swept face. Mother only smiled and dabbed a tear from her eye with her handkerchief.

Nathaniel shrugged Markus’s hand off. “You don’t have to go, you know,” He muttered so only Markus could hear.

Markus sighed. “We’ve talked about this already.”

“But—”

“But Mother needs someone to stay with her.” Markus ruffled Nathaniel’s hair.

Nathaniel scuffed the dirt with his boot. “I want to go. Why do you get all the fun?”

“It’s a good opportunity for me.”

Nathaniel clenched his fists. “Markus, it’s not fair, and you know it.”

“You ought to be happy for me. Besides, I really didn’t have a choice.”

Flames sparked in Nathaniel’s eyes. He lifted his chin. “You had a choice and you still do.”

Markus’s smile vanished. He fixed his eyes on Nathaniel’s. “You can manage. I know you can.”

Nathaniel gritted his teeth, sucking in a mouthful of air. Markus closed his eyes and took a deep breath, waiting for the outburst. Every muscle in his brother’s 13-year-old body trembled. His ears reddened. His eyes flashed.

“You’re such a beast!” Nathaniel raised his shaking fist. “All you care about is yourself!”

Markus blinked and stepped back. Nathaniel wheeled around.

“I’m...sorry. I–Wait! Nathaniel!” Markus lunged for Nathaniel’s arm, but he tore away.

He watched with a sinking heart as Nathaniel’s feet pounded across the lawn. He stormed into the house.

*Bang!*

The manor’s stone blocks rattled, and every flower petal in the garden quivered as the door slammed behind him.

Markus stared at the dark oak door and let out his breath slowly.

What had he done? This was supposed to be a happy farewell. Everyone should be here, in the garden, waving to him.

Mother's soft hand rubbed Markus's forearm, and Estia's little fingers wrapped around his waist.

"We love you, Markus." Mother smiled up at him as a tear trickled down her smooth cheek. "Even Nathaniel."

He stared at them. "I know." He paused. His gaze wandered up to the bright sun. It had shot high into the sky since he'd last looked.

"I had better leave or I won't reach Canater before the new moon like I said I would."

A pang of guilt throbbed through him as he said the words. He didn't have to go. He should stay home. But...

Mother nodded. "You ought to go say farewell to Nathaniel."

Markus fixed his gaze on the front door. Yes, he ought to say farewell. Next year, when he got home, he would make it up to Nathaniel, but for now, he could at least hug him.

At that moment, the door squealed open. A tearstained face peeked out. Nathaniel trudged across the grass and stumbled into Markus's arms. Markus wrapped him in a bear hug.

"Goodbye," Nathaniel sniffed and whispered, "Goodbye, Markus!" like an echo.

Waning sunlight beat down on the little family. They all felt it, the signal of Markus's departure. A thrill went through Markus, but everyone else felt a pang of sadness.

Markus pulled away sooner than he meant to. He hurried to his steed, Augustus, who was nipping the grass in front of the gate, and mounted.



“I will write to you!” He called.

“Yes, please do!” cried Mother. “Farewell!”

“Goodbye!” Estia waved.

“Farewell!” Nathaniel’s voice cracked.

And with one final wave, Markus spurred away. He leaned forward. Wind whipped his face, breathing life into his smiling mouth. He didn’t want to look back. He wanted to look forward. But as he neared the top of the hill, he stole one last glance at the manor.

One curly-headed figure stared back. Their gazes met. They fixed their eyes on each other. Then the crest of the hill broke his view, and Markus cantered into the wooded valley. He wouldn’t set eyes on that figure for another year.

## A Young Knight

*Chink. Chink. Chink.* Markus struck the oak doors with his gauntleted fist. A whiff of dampness wafted from the wood. Markus examined the pitted grains in the door. Like someone had taken a hammer and smashed it.

Augustus, his steed, snorted from outside the rubble gate surrounding the manor. Justice and Glory pawed at the ground with their hooves, and the knights who had accompanied Markus straightened in their saddles.

His gaze fell on the garden, and he shuddered. Ivy spiraled up the rose bushes, suffocating their flowers. Weeds choked the short grass that once carpeted the garden floor.

A twisted net of ivy stems crawled up the grey ashlar blocks that stacked the manor. The shutters were shut fast like the bars of a prison. Dark gray slate tiles overlapped the pointed roofs of the mansion.

A black cloud billowed over the afternoon sun, and a lone wind whistled through the pine leaves.

*Welcome home.*

He lifted his hand and rapped a second time. Where was the warm beam of his mother, who should have opened the door by now? Had no one heard him knock?

Markus glanced through the broken gate. The two riders stared back. They were supposed to accompany him on the first part of the assignment, but Markus wished he had gone alone. This tarrying at his family's house would be anything but short.

A heavy scrape rolled from behind the door. Markus studied the dents in the wood, his heart thumping. Was it Hadel the butler? Or what if a stranger had banished his family from the house and was inhabiting it? The door clicked.

*Creeaakkk!* A figure moved in the dim light of the open hallway. A curly head poked out.

Markus drew back. "Nathaniel?"

Nathaniel gasped and flung the double doors open. He barreled into Markus before he could open his arms. "Markus!"

Markus pried his arms out of his brother's bear hug and wrapped them around him. He breathed the crisp scent of old books that settled in Nathaniel's hair when he feasted on his library too much.

Markus pulled away and studied his younger brother.

A few fine hairs stuck out from Nathaniel's chin. The Trojan horse dangled by a chain around his neck. It had been a year since he'd seen his now fourteen-year-old brother. Things hadn't gone well at their parting months before, but maybe Nathaniel had forgotten.

Markus smiled. "You haven't changed a bit!" Unlike Markus. Markus had left for a summer of fun and returned with a load of responsibility.

"Will you be staying for once?" Nathaniel asked. Markus knew his brother had meant to tease him, but the words stung.

Why did every conversation turn out the same way? "I guess not," he replied.

Nathaniel only shrugged and stared at Augustus's empty saddle and at the two men who had ridden with Markus from Canater. "You were escorted?"

Markus dipped his head. One of the riders pulled his steed's left rein in a sharp turn to ride through the gate. "Sire. Shall we come in?"

Markus nodded again. “Take my horse to the stable.” The two riders guided the horses past Markus and around the side of the manor.

Nathaniel took a step back. “Sire? Who are you? Look. You may have secrets, but you’re still in our family, Markus.”

Not this again. The last words of Nathaniel from a year ago rang in Markus’s ears. *All you care about is yourself!* Would this conversation end like the last one? Markus braced himself.

Nathaniel swallowed, and his gaze wandered across the hills beyond the manor. “I have something to show you before we get any further with this.”

“Let me go in first and say hello to Mother and Estia—”

“Markus, please.” Nathaniel took a deep breath. “Come.” He brushed past Markus and whipped across the path that led around the manor.

Markus watched his brother’s retreating figure for an instant before hastening after him. Nathaniel kept his brisk pace and stepped onto the grass.

Markus followed him up a steep hill, his heart faltering. Why was Nathaniel acting so strangely? Weeds slapped his legs, begging him to turn around. Where were the servants who cut the grass regularly? What was going on?

He glanced at his brother’s downturned face and started in surprise. It was as gray as the manor blocks. Nathaniel’s fingers played with the Trojan horse fastened around his neck. A tear escaped his eyelid and trickled down his cheek. He brushed it away.

“What’s...wrong?” Markus waited for Nathaniel to tell him it was all a joke, to take him back to the house. They would both laugh, and the world would go back to normal.

Nathaniel didn’t answer.

They halted at the top of the hill, wind tousling their identical dark hair. Suddenly, Markus realized where they were. He could see the slab of stone that had been laid above his father's grave over the jagged grass. His heart clenched. Emotions slammed into him. He fought to control his breath. Why had Nathaniel brought him here?

Markus followed Nathaniel's gaze and fixed his eyes on the tall weeds a few feet ahead. He forced himself to take a step. Nathaniel stood, a white statue. Markus searched the grass.

And then he stopped. His heart caught in his throat. Something gray poked above the yellow stems. Something stone. A crooked crack sliced it in two. Another headstone. He took a step. He heard Nathaniel's quiet sobs behind him.

Markus bent over the stone. A single slab rested on the sunken mound. In the middle, three crude words were etched.

### ***CELESTIA DE CASTOR***

He knelt and reached out a trembling hand, tracing the cold letters with his finger. The wind whispered her name and then shrieked it. *Estia. Estia!* Markus's chest tightened. He tried to suck in air. He gripped the stone with both hands as if to pull it from the ground and bent his head over it.

*No. Not my little sister.*



Markus crushed a clump of dirt and glanced back to see it crumble in a boot print of flattened grass like his life a few minutes ago. Another tear streaked his face. He wiped it away. The wind stung his wet cheeks.

“How?” he whispered.

Nathaniel’s voice cut through the quiet. “They came... they wanted to take her to be a maid in Lord Kend’s palace.”

*Just like Charlotte.* Markus’s heart throbbed remembering his betrothed. The lovely maiden.

Nathaniel continued.

“Mother tried to talk to them and they almost... but then— ” He broke into sobs, and Markus fell silent.

As Markus passed the manor wall, he flung his hand and beat one of the grey ashlar blocks. His knuckles smarted, but he didn’t care. Who were *they*? Why had they killed her? If he’d been home, he could have stopped everything. He should have been home. He would have been home.

Nathaniel mounted the path and jerked the double doors open. They slogged into the house. Nathaniel shut the door behind them. Markus followed him down the hall, the knot in his throat rising. Where was Mother?

Markus’s boots tread across the green and brown mosaic spread across the hallway. Behind him, the roots of the tree stretched to the door, and before him, strong green branches sprouted leaves. Each family member had a branch. Markus pinpointed his branch. Right in the middle.

Something was different, though. The day after Father had been murdered, Hadel had accidentally dropped a hammer on Father’s branch. A crack ran across that tile. But now Markus noticed another crack. A crack on Estia’s branch. It couldn’t be a mistake. Someone had purposely broken it. He



fixed his gaze on it, desperately trying to keep his tears inside where they belonged.

An arm wrapped around his shoulder, and fragile hands pulled him into an embrace. Markus wrapped his arms around his mother. He sucked in his breath, but the tears spilled down his cheeks and into Mother's hair. He choked them back, burying his face in Mother's neck.

"Hello, son," Mother said. He took a deep breath and let it out. Markus lifted his head. He stared at her shriveled face. Her shawl seemed too big for her thin frame, and her hair was whiter than he remembered. He missed the scent of lemons and roses that used to hover around her. *Poor Mother. Was there anything I could have done? How could I be so selfish?*

"We were just having supper, Markus. We don't have much, but please join us."

Markus took his mother's hand and accompanied her down the hall. He stepped into the private dining room his family used when they didn't have guests. He breathed in the smell of the hundreds of meals eaten there. Red and purple tapestries of heroic deeds done by Markus's ancestors were mounted on the walls. In the center, above the mantle, a painting had been hung. A painting that had been taken down ten years ago. Father's painting.

Markus glanced at the table.

No centerpiece. No butter, silver plate, or knife. Only three bowls and three spoons. Markus stared at his hands. Why would no one explain to him exactly what happened? Why hadn't he been there to stop it?

But he chose to depart. He chose to go with Grandfather. He chose to abandon Nathaniel to support Mother and Estia alone.

Markus replayed Grandfather's words in his head. *He has risen again. He has already killed your father, Markus. Beware of him.*

He wandered to his seat at the table and rested his hands on his chair. Grandfather had been referring to Lord Kend. Those words had been spoken one day before Grandfather's death. Emil, the castle physician, publicly announced that he'd died of old age, but later he came to Markus privately. "Something in his wine was poisoned. Be careful with what you eat, Markus."

Markus glanced down at his bowl. It was barely more than warm water and a diced, shriveled-up carrot. Mother and Nathaniel would never poison him.

"We're better off than some. We get carrots for supper today." Nathaniel's eyes shone.

Carrots? What about velvety soup with noodles and tender meat, heaps of vegetables? Several courses brought by the servants...

Markus pulled his chair out. "Where are the servants?"

Mother raised her head. "We couldn't afford to keep them."

"Even Hadel?" Food taken and taxes raised. That was the only explanation. Whoever did it was a tyrant. Suddenly, Markus didn't feel hungry. He shoved his chair in.

"No one has done anything about this? Who rules this country?" He turned from the table and strode out the door, ignoring Mother and Nathaniel's stares after him.

Markus broke into the first door he saw, which happened to be the drawing room. He heard Nathaniel's hurried footfalls behind him, but he flung the door closed. He just needed to get away for a minute. He spanned the room and collapsed on the couch.

*Edris must send an army after this man. Why hasn't he done anything already?* Markus sensed Nathaniel easing the door open and tiptoeing to situate himself across from him, but he fixed his gaze on the floor. Nathaniel's voice cut the silence.

"Who do you think rules this country?"

Markus lifted a hand to his forehead and scrunched his brow. Then his eyes widened. Only one person in all his life had ever dared defy King Edris. Only one person had ever dared kill the Duke Anrew, Markus's father.

He was a noble. Black hair. Black eyes. *Lord Kend.*

When Grandfather summoned him to go on the assignment, had he foreseen this? Markus met Nathaniel's stare. "If Lord Kend did this, then I must ride to the castle to inform Edris."

Nathaniel folded and unfolded his hands in his lap. "I tried informing His Highness already. Only a few days after *you* left me again."

*I know I was selfish. You don't have to pound it into me.* "What did he say?"

"He didn't say anything," Nathaniel pronounced, and stared at the floor, fingering the Trojan horse around his neck.

"What? Edris is a fool if he allowed injustice like this."

"You call your friend a fool?"

"Lord Kend killed my sister and my father. Edris is a fool if he can't stand up for what's right!"

"King Edris is dead."

What? Markus met Nathaniel's eyes, but he envisioned Edris's face.

*"Goodbye," A younger Markus said.*

*"I will miss you, friend." Edris had embraced him with tears in his eyes, and Markus mounted his horse and cantered away.*

*My dearest friend....dead?* Markus tried to swallow the knot in his throat. Each time someone died, pieces of his heart broke off and melted away. Father. Grandfather. Estia. Now Edris. One day, his heart would be gone.

Tears threatened to pour down his cheeks, but he hardened his face. Lord Kend did this. The words echoed in his head until it ached. *The tyrant! My family... Edris. Why?* And he wasn't there to save them. Why hadn't he been home? Why had he chosen to leave? Why was he crying about a choice he could have controlled?

Markus rose from the armchair and shuffled to the bookcase beside the sofa, studying the titles. *I never asked you to come in, Nathaniel.* Markus tread down the length of the shelf and back again, trying to keep the knot in his throat from escaping. *It's my fault.*

The quarrels they got into about the situation. Nathaniel's pleas for him to cancel his trip before he rode off.

Grandfather had offered to train Markus, not Nathaniel, and the opportunity for such training was irresistible. *But training is nothing compared to family. Nothing to seeing Estia one last time. Nothing to saving her from death.*

Markus jerked his arm across the top of the bookshelf. A thud rattled on the floor.

He had to protect their family somehow. He was the head of the household. And he must defend his country and his people. Which meant he must get rid of Lord Kend. The full weight of responsibility entrenched in his mind.

Markus dusted his hands and bent to retrieve the item. He froze.

With shaking hands, Markus plucked the toy from the wood tiles and fingered the wood. He remembered its soft feel again and its ridged limbs. Its twig sword was thrust above its wooden marble head. Father had carved the figure for them, along with the other nineteen.

Tears pricked Markus' eyes. It was the wooden soldier he'd dropped that fateful night...

*"I warned you, Anrew." Lord Kend tread toward Father, hand clenching his hilt. The grown-ups seemed frozen in place. Mother gripped Father's shoulder. Young Markus squeezed his shoulders between the bars of the staircase. He clutched one of his twenty polished soldiers with one hand and the rail with the other. When would Father finish with Lord Kend so he could kiss him goodnight?*

*"Lord Kend. You know I could never do such a loathsome act to Edris himself. The king is merely a lad."*

*"But Anrew. It must be done. Edris killed my brother and stole what was rightfully mine, and he will pay for it, whether you help me or not. And I believe you have something else I need, as well..."*

*Markus leaned a little farther, but his sweaty fingers slipped off the edge. He gasped, pulling himself back onto the staircase. The wooden soldier tumbled out of his hand. It thudded on the mosaic floor. He held his breath. No one looked at him.*

*"Please, Anrew, agree!" Mother whispered frantically. But it was too late. Father paled. Lord Kend's sharp elbow moved. The sword rolled from its sheath. Lord Kend tensed. Then he drove it forward.*

Markus snapped his eyes shut and tore at his hair. Stop! Stop! He couldn't think of that. Not now, not ever. Markus thrust the wooden figure on the shelf and reached for the arm of his chair to steady himself.

He wanted to kick the chair and smash it into pieces. If he could have raced down the stairs and killed Lord Kend as he leaped out the window, none of this would have happened.

"I'll march my army," Markus said to the wall. *You won't live long, Kend. When I'm finished with this assignment, I'll kill you.*



## Backstory

Once upon a time, there was a homeschooled girl. One day, her mom read her a poem for Literature. The poem was titled *The Listeners* by Walter de la Mare. It told the story of a knight who rode up to a deserted castle and knocked on the door, but no one answered. The poem implied that there were people in the castle, but they were ghosts and could not answer the door.

A few weeks later, the girl stumbled upon the *Wingfeather Saga* by Andrew Peterson. She loved the way it impacted her when she closed the back cover of the last book. She wanted to impact her readers the same way in her story.

As a result, she killed off the main character. Because what better way to add conflict to a story than to make your protagonists suffer? To the relief of her readers (and the main character), the girl didn't keep it that way. Over nearly two years, she wrote draft after draft and went through round after round of edits, claiming each time that *this* time it was done forever!

It wasn't.

Until now. Of course, that girl is me, and the story is *Knightfall*. *Knightfall* has changed so much that it's hard to believe those two pieces of literature inspired it.

But this story isn't really about me. It's about what God can do with the dream of that thirteen-year-old girl. I'm so thankful that he has allowed me to write this story, and I pray that it is a blessing and an encouragement to you. All praise to Him!

## Acknowledgements

If you liked this book, you'll read the acknowledgements. Just kidding. But without these people, Knightfall would not exist. Please join me in giving a hand to the people who helped me from the beginning in August 2023, all the way up to Knightfall's release in May 2025.

To the many Ydubbers who brainstormed, built characters, designed, and gave feedback for Knightfall...

To the Young Writer's Workshop instructors, Brett, Kara, Anna Rose, Lauren, Josiah, Jaquelle, and Rachel...

To my alpha and beta readers (and online friends): M.Coral, Charlotte, Elizabeth, Lyla, Molly, Autumn, Hosannah, Sarah, Georgia, Kristin, and Chloe...

To my mentor Karli, and my friends Aubrey, Adalyn, Carolyn, and Bethany....

### ***Thank You!***

Piper, thanks for loving my characters as much as I do and for introducing me to the best book in the whole world (If you know, you know\*).

Caileigh, you have read Knightfall so many times that you must know it from memory now! Thank you for giving me feedback and coordinating with Piper.

To my siblings, Ezra, Naomi, Boaz, Obadiah, and Abraham, thank you! I love you all!

*\*Lord of the Rings*, obviously. If you disagree, we need to talk.

Mommy, I could not have finished Knightfall without your support. Thank you for listening to me talk about Knightfall on our dates, while we worked out, and in the car.

Daddy, thank you for caring more about my health, my soul, and our family than my success. Thank you for brainstorming crazy ideas with me and reminding me to sit up straight. 🤪 The theme in this book is from the many things you've taught us over the years.

God, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it. (Psalm 139: 1 - 6)

Thank you for giving me the hands to write and the mind to create. I would not be doing this without you. *Soli Deo Gloria!*

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## About the Author



From the age of 6, Jubilee has cherished books. Her first story was a continuation of her favorite children's book in which a rabbit grew up, turned into a fairy, and was crowned queen of the universe!

In wandering distant kingdoms, including Narnia and Middle Earth, she returned with one wish: to write an exciting tale woven with truth.

Jubilee lives deep in the heart of Texas with her family, cavalry of chickens, and brigade of pens. Grab a mug of hot chocolate (or your favorite drink) and join her at [jubileeanderson.com](http://jubileeanderson.com).

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