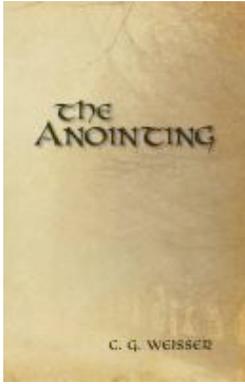


THE  
ANOINTING

C. G. WEISSER



Set at a time when kings were kings and men were men, **The Anointing** tells the story of Prince Adler Attora and his placement within the legendary mark of the anointing. Faced with corruption within the kingdom he has called home, Adler must choose to live in the lies of his past or by the truth that has the power to change his time forever.

# The Anointing

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# The Anointing

C. G. Weisser

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## Chapter 1

“Will you marry me?”

Prince Adler Attora looked into the full-length mirror in his bedroom. Everything he saw before him spoke of royalty – chiseled brow, broad shoulders, defined muscles, finely woven clothes. One day the man who stood before him would be king, king of the land of Kadoria.

“You can do this,” Adler said to himself. “Pull it together. If one day you will be king, you can surely do this.” A deep breath came in through Adler’s nostrils and filled his lungs. His chest held high, he bowed to one knee and threw his arms to the side. “Will you marry me?”

Adler held position, the breath still caught in his chest. Then in one weighty blow the air blew back out his nostrils. He rose to his feet and paced back and forth across the bedroom.

Preparation sounds for the evening’s masquerade rose from the grounds below. An afternoon breeze rolled in from the Great Sea to the west over the palace walls. His time was running short. Adler spun and faced himself in the mirror.

“You will marry me or else.”

“Oh that will do it,” a familiar voice said from behind. “Threaten her to marry you.”

Adler turned and saw his childhood friend Stuart Pembroke enter the room. Stuart’s size and build held close comparison to Adler but the similarities stopped there. Adler had brown hair and blue eyes. Stuart had darker features. His hair was black as night and his eyes of greenish haze shone only a shade or two lighter. Stuart also was far more blunt and sarcastic than Adler. At that moment a smirk crossed Stuart’s face only years of friendship could appreciate.

“Some days,” Adler said, “if your father was not high counselor to the king –”

“You would what?” Stuart asked. “Throw me out? Disclaim me? Put me in the –”

“Enough.” Adler turned away and lifted arm.

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“Indeed.” Stuart walked up next to Adler.

“What does that mean?” Adler looked again at his friend.

“If you truly want Ema to marry you, maybe you should try something a little more loving and less forceful.” Stuart moved across the room.

“I have tried and tried and cannot seem to propose in a manner that does not make me look like a fool.” Adler walked a few steps back and slouched onto his bed.

“Love can make a man play the fool, as I heard it once said. Or maybe the saying was you are a fool to be in love.” Stuart’s face turned to Adler with another sarcastic smirk.

“Ha, ha. You can laugh, but one day you too will be in love. I love Ema with everything that I am. I would relinquish all I have, even my life, if circumstance so called me to abandon it for her.”

“Then that is what you should tell her.” Stuart sat down in a chair by the blazing fireplace. “Man has relied too long upon scripts to convey what their heart wishes to say. ‘Will you marry me?’ is fine, but why not simply tell her why.”

“When I become king, Stuart, I will make you my high counselor for I know no one who has such insight as you.”

“And I shall accept such a position with great honor, my friend.”

Adler rose from the bed and walked over to the wardrobe to view his attire for the evening’s masquerade. The costume was magnificent as usual. The pants were made of a lighter golden material. Black boots sat polished to a shine. A white ruffle collared shirt with threaded gold detail along the collar and cuffs had been pressed to perfection. A mask of half black and half gold was set to be worn over his face. Yet the most exquisite of the costume was the deep purple coat with black and gold detail woven all around the edging and into each button. The whole must have taken months to complete.

His eyes lingered a moment longer on the costume, when Adler’s attention turned to the side. A small portrait of Ema Taylor rested on a nearby table. In an instant, his thoughts traveled to another place.

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Adler could still see her, Ema's face the first time they met. She was standing across the library in the school where he attended. Her delicate frame was like that of a priceless statue. One golden ringlet fell across her cheek. Her face turned to him. The moment Ema's soft blue eyes met his, the surrender of his heart had begun.

A hand rested on Adler's shoulder. His thoughts startled back.

"Do not worry," Stuart said. "Tonight will be great. She will say yes and soon enough you will be a married man."

"Yes," Adler said with a sigh of contentment, "and the happiest married man ever to live, with such a wife as Ema,"

"I must agree with you on that point. She is the kindest and most beautiful woman I have ever met by far." Stuart lifted the portrait from where it rested before Adler. "Who would have thought when the two of you met four years ago while studying abroad that she would soon be your wife?"

"Who would have thought indeed? I think least of all Ema. She thought I was just a cocky prince."

Stuart set the portrait back on the table. "Ema always did have keen insight."

"Ok, I will admit being with her has brought more perspective into my life."

"And..."

"And what?"

"And some maturity."

"Stuart."

"Alright, I am done. So what did her father say when you asked for her hand?"

Adler's thoughts quieted.

"You did ask him?" Stuart asked.

"Of course but I was actually a bit set back by his reaction."

"How so?"

"When I asked for Ema's hand Sir Taylor agreed, but I could sense reserve in his voice."

"He is probably just upset about his only daughter moving away from home and under his care."

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“I am sure you are right.” Adler’s mind played the scene out again. “But there was something in his voice –”

A knock came at the bedroom door.

“Who can that be?” Adler asked.

“I will get it.”

Stuart moved over to the bedroom door. His steps no sooner reached the doorway when Queen Mara Attora bounded her way into the room. Her voluptuous form forced Stuart back.

“My son, how are you doing this fine day?” Queen Mara asked. “What a beautiful day for a celebration, and a proposal I must say.”

Adler’s eyes closed. His head shook. When his eyes reopened, he turned and saw his mother already over on the other side of the room by the window. She turned and made her way back toward him stopping only for a moment by the mirror to adjust her hair.

A chuckle rose in Adler’s chest but he held it off. *That crazy red hair of hers. Could she make the curls position any higher on her head?*

“Tonight will be a night to remember for centuries to come,” Queen Mara said. “I have instructed the musicians as to the songs that should be played. I commanded extra lights to be set in the palace garden. Oh, you should propose in the palace garden. What a beautiful place to propose. The smell of the flowers, the romance of the night air mixed with the sweet songs of love from within the ballroom. Yes, I do believe that proposing in the garden would be best.”

“Mother, I was thinking –” Adler tried to interrupt.

“But there is also that quaint little study that overlooks the sea. Yes, I should have a fire prepared in there just in case.” Queen Mara looked over at Stuart. “We cannot risk the chance of drizzle outside and no proper place to propose.”

“No,” Stuart said, “that would be tragic.”

“I will take care of that at once.” Queen Mara made her way out the bedroom door.

Adler could hear her yelling for the servants and giving orders in regard to the additional study preparations.

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“Is someone chasing her that she has to move so fast?” Stuart asked.

“It is a wonder,” Adler said.

The queen reappeared in the doorway. “Don’t forget that the moment Ema says yes there must be an announcement from your father. What a night this will be.” She turned and her footsteps took off again down the hall.

“Yes, what a night,” Stuart said.

“Now if I can just keep my mother away long enough so that I can propose. That would be enough for me.”

“If you plan on keeping Queen Mara away, you will need more than a good proposal. You will need a movement of the palace guards.”

“Do you think my father would permit one?”

“Doubtful.”

“Too late to elope?”

“Most definitely.”

“Yes, I guess you are right.” Adler walked toward the windows.

“I apologize, Adler, but I also must take leave. There are final arrangements that still need to be taken care of, even beyond the little study that overlooks the sea, and the night is coming upon us quickly. Only a few hours remain before the masquerade begins.”

“Very well.” Adler turned back to Stuart. “Will I see you before the masquerade?”

“I will try to be here to walk with you into the ballroom, but if I do not meet you here then I will be waiting for you near the ballroom floor.” Stuart made his way to the door. “Everything will be perfect tonight. Do not worry yourself. Just take some time and enjoy this afternoon. Maybe you should take a walk around the palace grounds, clear your head a bit.”

“Getting out of this room does sound good.”

“Well, until tonight then.” Stuart walked out the door.

“Until tonight.”

Adler watched the bedroom door close. He walked back to the wardrobe and looked over his attire for the masquerade. A deep

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sigh exhaled. His shoulders relaxed. He went back over to the windows on the other side of the room and looked out the clear glass panes. Palace servants continued preparation below, yet up above the sky was clear and calm and blue.

“I think I will take that walk. Staying in here is not doing me any good.”

Adler grabbed his cloak from the wardrobe and exited the bedroom toward the palace’s main staircase down to the first floor below.

The Great Hall was positioned at the bottom of the main staircase. The hall stretched along the north side of the ballroom to the palace’s main east entrance. Adler made way from the hallway through the ballroom to the opposite side which connected to the garden area. Even beyond his mother’s raves, the thought of the garden did sound good to him for the proposal.

It was late afternoon when Adler’s feet stepped onto the garden’s stone pathway. The sun was already descending over the west wall of the palace and into the Great Sea just beyond. Long shadows cast along the landscape.

The gardeners had moved and were now working on other areas of the palace grounds. Beyond the occasional commotion from within the ballroom nearby, the sounds within the garden were a calm mix between the birds that sang by day and the awakening of that which found resonance among its many bushes and branches at nightfall. The garden really was magnificent, as if pulled straight from a painting.

Adler walked up and down the rows of flowers following the stone path to a square pond in the garden’s center. If he could not find inspiration for a proposal here than Adler was sure he never would. He sat for a time by the pond and breathed in the aroma. The scent of a fresh array of flowers in idyllic bloom filled his senses. Looking about, one flower in particular caught Adler’s eye. He stood to his feet. A closer look confirmed his thoughts.

*Perfect. Now only a few more things...*

In a short time Adler had found what he needed. He positioned the items near the area he had set aside for Ema and

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him. The proposal would be just as he wanted and what he hoped Ema had dreamed.

After completion Adler decided not to go straight back into the palace. All that awaited inside was his mother and he just wanted a few more minutes of quiet. Adler walked through the giant green maze that filled the southern part of the garden.

Back and forth he journeyed. The time was getting later. Adler was about to turn back when he heard an argument beyond one of the bush walls. Adler paused. The voices were low and stern. The one man's voice Adler did not recognize. Yet, even at such a whisper, he could distinguish the voice of the other man, his father's high counselor, Janyer Pembroke.

"Just take care of it," Janyer said.

Adler was taken back at the command. He had never heard Janyer speak with such a crude tone.

"Tonight, then?" the unknown man asked.

"Yes."

"What if he resists the offer?"

"He won't."

Part of Adler thought it might be best for him to turn around and leave before the conversation continued. Nonetheless, Adler stepped in closer.

"But what if he does resist?" the unknown man asked.

"He would be a fool to resist, considering the price of his refusal."

"She will die then. If he does not comply, she will be killed?"

"Killed?" Adler said in a low voice.

"Quiet," the unknown man said, "Did you hear something?"

The conversation ceased.

"Is anyone there? If someone is there, show yourself," the unknown man said.

Adler could hear steps coming in his direction. Adler stood motionless. He dared not even breathe too loud for fear that he would be discovered.

"I don't hear anything," Janyer said. "No one is out here and we don't have any time to waste."

The footsteps of the unknown man backed away.

“In regard to your question concerning her life,” Janyer said, “she will be affected by his choice undoubtedly but not in death – not yet. But if he does not agree, he will be disposed of tonight.”

“With everything that is planned for this evening, how will we take him without causing suspicion? Won’t people wonder when he does not show up for the masquerade?”

“No one will know what happened. He could not make the masquerade due to delicate circumstances.”

“What type of circumstances?”

“Delicate. After the fact, he will appear missing. Examining the surrounding area, they will find his bloody garments in a far off field. You see...” Janyer’s voice changed. It reminded Adler of when someone told a story or fairytale. “He will take a late night walk in the woods. No one should ever take a walk in the woods late at night, especially by himself. There are wild animals just lurking and waiting. He will sadly fall prey. The death will be mourned as a tragic loss of a simple and foolish man.”

“And her?”

“She will start her new life. Not knowing the true cause of his death, she will run to us in complete trust.”

Adler could listen no longer. He turned to leave. But as Adler went to take his first step back toward the palace, his cloak caught on one of the bushes. Adler tried to loosen his cloak but as he pulled part of the bush shook.

“Someone is there,” the unknown man said.

Adler could hear footsteps approach.

“Show yourself,” Janyer said.

Adler continued to fumble with his cloak.

“I say, show yourself.” Janyer’s voice moved closer.

Adler’s heart began to race. He grabbed the edge of his cloak and ripped it away from the bush’s grasp. The whole bush now shook. Not wasting a moment longer, Adler turned and ran through the garden maze back toward the palace.

The sound of Janyer’s voice sounded behind him. “Stop!”

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Adler's heart pounded with every step. He did not slow or turn back.

## Chapter 2

On Adler's way back through the garden doors into the ballroom, he ran into one of the decorators. A vase with flowers fell to the floor. The shattering sound echoed up to the ballroom's second story balcony and back down upon him.

"I apologize," Adler said. "It is my fault."

"No, it is my fault." The servant scrambled to the floor.

"I did not mean to..." Adler picked up a few broken pieces and loose flowers.

"No, please no." The servant took the pieces and flowers from Adler's hand and moved across the floor to pick up the rest.

Adler looked over his shoulder. He shook his head at the mess before him but took off again toward his room. Over and over Adler missed additional collision with servants as he moved up stairs and through the palace halls toward his bedroom.

Once at the bedroom door, he opened it with haste and slammed it shut behind him. Adler's heart continued to pound within his chest. Sweat covered his brow.

"Where have you been?" Stuart asked.

Startled, Adler turned and stared at Stuart. Stuart stood a few paces across the room dressed in a dark green costume, masquerade mask loose in hand.

"I was worried that you may have run off," Stuart said. "I suggested that you take a walk but not one that lasted into the celebration. Everyone is waiting on you."

Adler's hand was frozen to the doorknob. He heard Stuart speak, yet he did not comprehend a word Stuart said. "What did you say?"

"The masquerade. Proposing to Ema. Are you all right? You look awful, almost terrified." Stuart walked over to Adler.

"I'm fine." Adler moved past Stuart into the room. With all that Adler had just heard, he was not sure what was happening but neither was he sure whom he could talk to about it. Stuart was his best friend, but Janyer was Stuart's father none the less. "Let's just go to the masquerade."

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“But your attire, Adler? You are not in costume. Are you sure that everything is all right?”

“We are running late. I will change and then we can go.”

Adler made his way over to where the costume was laid out. “Have you seen Ema?”

“I believe she is here, though I have not seen her or her father yet.”

“Her father could not make it tonight. She will probably be alone. Can you go look for her and tell her that I will be right down?”

“I will go, but are you sure you are all right?”

“Just find Ema!” Adler realized his tone. He looked at Stuart. “Please, just find her for me.”

“Fine.” Stuart’s face showed lingered annoyance. “I will see you downstairs.”

“Thank you.”

Stuart said no more as he turned and left the room.

The door shut. Stuart’s steps disappeared down the hallway before Adler started to change out of his everyday clothes and into his costume. The pounding in his chest calmed a little, but his hands still trembled. “Just focus. Everything will be all right. You just need to calm down.”

Adler went over to a table that held a pitcher and washbasin. He poured water into the basin and splashed cold water against his face. “Maybe they weren’t planning to kill someone. Maybe they were talking about a criminal. But why would they want this woman to trust them? And what about the man in the woods?”

He hung up his cloak but laid the clothes that he had taken off upon a nearby chair for the servants to tend to. “Well, I am sure that father knows. I’m not going to get consumed by this. I only heard the middle of the conversation. It’s probably nothing.”

Adler put on the final touches of his costume, left the room, and made his way down to the celebration.

His thoughts continued to stay locked on the afternoon’s events as he walked through the palace corridors. Before he knew it, Adler approached the doorway to the ballroom. He was about to

take a step onto the ballroom floor when a tall figure appeared before him.

“Prince Adler.”

Adler stepped back. “Janyer.”

Janyer’s tall, thin frame stood in the doorway. The dark blue color of his costume made him appear as a shadow. “Are you all right, Prince Adler? I did not mean to startle you.”

Adler felt Janyer look into his eyes. The color of Janyer’s eyes matched Stuart’s dark green haze but the physical resemblance ended there. “No. I’m fine. Just a little anxious about this evening I guess.” Adler turned his eyes away from Janyer’s glance and moved further into the ballroom.

“Understandable. Though it was many years ago, I remember proposing to my wife –”

“Did you need me for something?” Adler did not want to chat.

“Yes, the king wishes to speak with you.”

“I will go to him at once.” Adler began to step forward.

“Don’t worry, Prince Adler.” Janyer took hold of Adler’s arm. “I am sure that she will say yes.”

“Thank you, Janyer.” Adler nodded, pulled his arm away, and made way into the ballroom toward his father.

King Desmond Attora was seated on his throne at the head of the ballroom floor. The palace rose in full décor to the king’s left, front, and back while tall glass doors leading to the palace garden lined the wall on his right.

Everything about the king spoke to Adler of wealth’s majestic prestige. His height and build, the rich brown color of his hair and eyes, the deepness of his voice, and the mannerisms with which he acted, they all seemed to claim a lofty transcendence. Adler had always wondered at his father’s appearance and tonight, encased in his usual golden masquerade costume, the king brought no less a reaction.

“There you are, Adler,” King Desmond said. “I was wondering when you were planning on joining us. You know, even though you are royalty, it is proper to arrive at least soon after the guests.”

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“I am sorry, father, I lost track of the time.”

“This is a big night for you.” King Desmond leaned closer to Adler. “Have you decided when you are going to ask her? I know your mother has been working over-time to handle every detail of this proposal herself, but thankfully she has left the actual task of asking to you.”

“Truth be told, I have not seen Ema yet tonight.” Adler looked across the ballroom floor.

“I believe that Stuart is keeping her for you near the doors that lead to the garden. Your mother’s instruction of course.”

“Of course. It really is a wonder mother has not proposed for me.” Adler knew he must leave what happened this afternoon alone for now. This moment was for Ema and him, and he refused to let that be spoiled. Adler straightened his coat. “Well, I will go to see Ema then, if you need nothing else.”

“Nothing else, son. Go ahead and see her. Just be sure to tell us when she says yes.”

“I know. Mother has already instructed me on that matter.” Adler took a quick breath in and out and then left the platform and made his way across the ballroom floor.

Adler hoped for a clear path but that was not to be. Guests stopped Adler to ask of his return from school, his future plans now that he was back in Kadoria, and to tell him of the magnificence of the masquerade. It seemed every few steps brought a new set of inquiry. Right when Adler thought he could take no more, he turned and saw her.

*Ema.*

Just as his father had said, Ema was seated by the doors that led to the palace garden. Stuart stood nearby. He made sure no one disturbed her and no doubt the queen’s garden creations.

Adler watched for a moment at a distance. Ema had not yet seen him. She stared out the garden doors. She was so beautiful. Even with all the lavish decorations all around. None held the smallest challenge to her.

The golden ringlets of Ema’s hair hung soft. The outline of her face glowed against the moonlight shining in from the night sky.

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Her hands were folded upon the lap of her pale yellow gown that contoured her slender form. How at peace she always seemed. No matter what the situation, there was always a peace and joy within her. Adler had always loved that about Ema and tonight more than ever. He found comfort in her very presence. All that had happened that afternoon somehow ceased to matter in this moment.

Adler walked over to Ema and put out his hand. "This whole night holds nothing against your beauty, my love."

Ema's eyes turned upon Adler. A smile lit her face.

Without word Stuart took leave into the ballroom.

"I am sorry I made you wait," Adler said.

Ema said nothing. She only smiled further and placed her hand in Adler's.

Adler lifted her toward him and escorted her out into the garden.

Not more than one step into the garden the sweet smell of the night air captivated the senses. Adler led Ema along the flowerbeds that flowed on either side of them like rivers. Fireflies danced among the leaves and blossoms as they passed by. When they reached the pond at the center of the garden, Adler had Ema rest on a bench. He removed his masquerade mask as Ema did hers. Then with his beloved in place he went further into the garden maze.

Earlier in the day, Adler had tucked away his tools for proposing. He returned within moments to Ema with a single red rose in his hand. Adler knelt before Ema and presented her with the rose.

"And for what have I been bestowed such a gift?" Ema asked.

Not answering her, he held one finger up to his lips. He then rose and walked back into the maze. He enjoyed the questioning smile upon her face. The whole scene seemed surreal.

After a few moments he returned again. This time with an unknown object wrapped in a white handkerchief. He laid the handkerchief beside Ema and with heart now racing knelt again on one knee. Ema went to pick up the handkerchief, but he placed his hand in-between.

"What are you up to, Adler?"

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Though nervous as a storm tossed ship, a smile could not help but cross Adler's face.

"Why did you give me this rose?" Ema asked. "And why can I not see what is inside the handkerchief?"

Adler calmed himself a bit and took Ema's hands in his. He moved his fingers over the tops of her hands and breathed deep. His eyes lifted and rested upon hers.

"I have been pondering all day over how I might tell you," Adler said. "I practiced over and over again what I might say. But nothing seemed to express the love I feel when I am near you. The man I am when I look into your eyes."

Adler paused a moment to catch his breath that seemed to struggle amid his racing heart.

"So I walked through the garden this afternoon to try and clear my head. During my walk, I came upon the rose that you hold. In that rose I found the words I wished to say."

Adler could see Ema's expression soften and a tear form in the corner of her eye.

"A rose is viewed by many as a symbol...a gift of love. One is drawn to a rose primarily by the beauty of its flower, the softness of its petals, the fragrance that tends to penetrate the soul. Yet as I looked at the rose this afternoon I saw a peculiar thing. This great rose that is to represent the beauty of love has thorns. So to accept the rose is to accept all that the rose holds, to truly accept the rose one must accept the thorns. Many have claimed to love me, but only as the rose in your hands, thornless, painless, with no risk only gain, yet you have chosen to love me unconditionally."

Adler opened up the handkerchief that was beside Ema to reveal a small pile of thorns. "I am not worthy of your love. But I love you with all I am and want nothing more than to spend the rest of my life loving you for the lifetime of love that you have already given me. Ema, will you marry me...all of me?"

Tears fell from Ema's eyes upon the petals of the rose in her hand. "Yes, Adler, I would be honored to marry you."

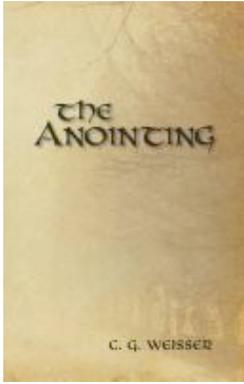
Adler placed his hand into the pile of thorns and pulled out a ring. It glimmered against the evening lights. He placed the ring on

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Ema's finger and kissed her hand. "From this day forward know this. That no matter what happens in life, whether happiness or tragedy, I will always be here for you."

"And I you."

A deep breath exhaled from Adler's lungs. Before him sat his friend, his love, and now his soon to be bride. Whatever rose and fell around him, whatever was happening with Janyer, Adler knew this truth. He would love Ema. From this breath until his last, she would be the greatest treasure of his life.



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