

THE CARPENTER

On Friday, April 6, in the
Year 30 A.D., outside the
North Gate of Jerusalem,
a Judaeen named Jesus was
crucified under sentence
of Pontius Pilate, the
Roman governor. This is
a story of the times.

He awoke to the murmur of voices. The door of his
Friday Night

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and
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THE CARPENTER

FRIDAY NIGHT

He awoke to the murmur of voices. The door of his chamber was open. His eyes, sleepily alert, searched the room, ~~and then~~ A distant star hung in the window. The city was strangely silent. Blood-flecked with its sinful sacrifice, he thought grandly, as Saul. Jerusalem was crouched in a corner of the world, tongue-less with shame. He was glad he was not Jerusalem. Jerusalem was in trouble. It had killed another prophet. Just as the Nazarene had said last week. Only last week? Like a million years ago.

Jerusalem would have to pay for killing another prophet. Rabbi Gamaliel told the story of some small boys of Bethel mauled by she-bears for laughing at a prophet. If that was what they got for laughing at old bald-head Elisha, what would happen to those who killed a wonder-working prophet as Jesus? Much worse. They would get it.

John Mark nodded with satisfaction. He tried his feet, rubbing the toes over each other. A small

pain. Still a little swollen. Uncle Demmy said he would ^{be} fine by morning. His cheek smarted under the unguent covering the bruises sustained when he had leapt the parapet to bamboozle the whole Roman army. To the growl and gasp and roar of the crowd. A Maccabean patriot to be sung of in the canticles. John Mark proudly braced his chest and breathed hard. He also ached all over.

But nothing to the big ache that would happen to Jerusalem. He had overheard Uncle Demmy say last night that this was the first Jewish prophet to die by crucifixion. Jerusalem would ~~pay~~ ^{pay} for it. Saul too, with the rest of them. Not that Saul had killed a prophet, but he had not minded. That was bad. He had not minded. Well, to tell the truth, he was sorry for poor old Saul. He hoped he would get away. He hoped old Judas and old Simon and old Philip and the others would get away.

He heard footsteps approach. He sneaked a look. She entered with Janus, talking. He feigned sleep but it got to him and drowsily he drifted in and out.

"Jews always write their biographies. I would have liked to see your Carpenter write his own biography," Janus said.

"Others will, never fear."

"Who? Your cousin Nicodemus?"

"Demmy could well do it. He is a compassionate man with an inquiring turn of mind. I grant you not the ideal alliance of virtues suited to a seat among

the Seventy-One, considering that Annas prefers cold, conservative men on his Sanhedrin. It makes simpler his duty of ensuring our obligations to the high priestly families."

"Do not assault those obligations, my dear. You married one and received the benefits."

"At any rate, the story of the Carpenter should be told by those who knew him best. By one of his disciples."

"Come on, girl," Janus chided. "Those unlettered fishermen?"

"He was unlettered too, but who would believe it? Scholarship is ~~■~~ Jewish as ~~■■■■~~ matzoth, my Roman barbarian."

Janus laughed. "Yes, you are born storytellers."

They stood by his bed. He surfaced briefly and sneaked another look. Nothing to see.

"They ought to get the story from John Mark," ^{amused} Janus said, ~~■■■■~~. "He is the only one who knows both sides of it."

They laughed gently together. She bent over. He hardly felt the kiss on his forehead as his drowsing mind idled over the exciting new idea. Who would write the Nazarene's story? Who would do it best? Maybe old Philip? Or old John? The Passionate Poet, old Philip called him. Simon Peter was not the one for it; the Bethsaida bull was not for writing. Nor Philip's friend, Matthew

although as Herod's old tax collector he was used to writing. He felt warm and brown on both sides. He would lay here for a year until next Nissan, Passover month.

Janus was a nice fellow to say he knew both sides of the story. It was true. He knew the Nazarene's side from what he had been told by Judas and the others. He knew the Temple side from Uncle Demmy. He could work closely with old Philip for the wilderness side. Such a book would make him historian as well as patriot. Uncle Demmy said these were the two most important jobs for a Jew.

He could not, however, start the book tomorrow. That was for sure. But maybe day-after-tomorrow? Tomorrow Philip would be too difficult to talk to; he would be all hollow-eyed, huddled into a punishment-corner, waiting for what he called the Full Story. Much as he liked nice old Philip, he was forced to cross over and agree with old Thomas.

Old Thomas pointed out that even if a fellow returned to life after death, as had Lazarus at Bethany, it could be that he had not been really dead. Thomas had pointed out that people pronounced dead had come back to life before. Back from what he called, a koma. That was Greek, like Saul. But, said Thomas, nobody came back to life after being killed. To be killed was very final, said Thomas. So, day-after-tomorrow, they would see. John Mark would be at the spicing, bet your hayk and sagum.

He grinned drowsily. No matter how early in the morning. He had got used to early waking. He had woken early to beat priests, police and Roman soldiers, the keley in studded sandals.

He yawned prodigiously, drifting off ~~xxx~~ again.
Whata wild night and morning it had been! Imagine!
One old linen cloak coming so close to croaking him!

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THE CARPENTER

BOOK 1

Chapter 1

One of the raiders, a Roman soldier by the brush of the studs at his wristguard, grabbed for him as he bolted the burrow on the edge of open ground where he had been lurking. To watch the Nazarene in stealth. But he tore away from the raider, leaving his cloak of fine Egyptian linen in the clutch of the whoreson.. His cloak with the woven monogram. In the hands of a Roman kelev. He ran out of the grove. He was not worried about the cloak.

Then he was thrashing deep into the undergrowth, brambles whipping his legs, vines clutching at his chest and shoulders. He lunged wildly, a caught rabbit spun halfway around by one obstinate vine. Mumbling with fear, he plunged his arms into the growth, got it around his wrists and into his fists and jerked it out at the roots. The tough vine wealed his flesh and the roots kicked dirt into his face. He blinked angrily and plunged forward again. He broke out of the brush and into the avenue of trees.

The trees rushing at him out of the dark, took a good look at him and quickly fell back when they saw

whom he was. They eased their shoulders in a well known gesture and he veered, racy as a swift, in among them. He was a good runner and ~~had~~^{had} done all his training in the olive grove and he grunted his satisfaction that the trees had recognized him. He had practised his obstacle run among them, twisting and cutting among the rocks and roots, which were not unlike the obstacles on the parapet atop the Joppa Wall. Where, come tomorrow, he would meet the challenge of Saul. If he lived until tomorrow after tonight.

His panic quieted as he ran in a soft silence over the springy leaf-covered earth of the friendly grove. No sword-clanks here. No foreign ~~oaths~~ oaths. No smell of spy. He caught a foot in a shallow irrigation ditch, stumbled and clambered up, face aching where he had scraped the ditch. The night lightened ahead of him, yeasty in mist and pale stars. He was approaching the end of the grove. He breathed through his mouth in a loosening as he approached the zone of most danger.

He broke from the trees, gravelly Gethsemane dirt spinning loudly underneath his sandals. The dried tears on his cheeks were like saltlicks, smarting fiercely in the cool Spring night in the wind of his flight. He was very exposed on the open flank of the hillock, and his egress from the wood to open ground had been uncautiously noisy, even tumultuous, and they almost caught him.

But Quartus, who commanded the Company which held the extended line on the edge of Gethsamane, facing the city, with a growl stayed his squadman's hand. Quartus, who was full of pride in the glittering record of the first ^{if} cohort of the Legion of Ravens, was also puking^{mad} at this police work. That the job to bring in a wild Nazarene should have been wished on his beloved First Captain, made Quartus angry indeed.

"Let the Abram go," he growled at the squadman who was setting himself for the thrust.

Obediently the squadman shifted his grip on the weapon, the flexors of his upper arm ceased to quiver, and John Mark was not skewered.

He fled safely down the tilt of the Mount of Olives. Between the rocks, the Kedron gurgled. He leaped the brook in a flurry of limbs and ^b barked his shin. The pain made him whimper. He was instantly outraged. Was this a way to be a hero tomorrow? A brief contact with a single Satan-^K~~Kelev~~ to cause you to lose your horn? How then, tomorrow, when he would be confronted by

a whole troop of Roman devil-dogs? All snapping at his heels. Baying for his blood. Yet here he was, now, bleating like a lamb the flock had left behind.

He stopped abruptly. He set his jaw. Searching in the dark, he found a solidly planted rock that would not roll under his attack. Gritting his teeth, he drew back his foot and smote the rock. His shin yelled indignantly. He hopped and grimaced but his fortitude was restored. He breathed in strongly, filling his chest and nodding in triumph. Bring on the old Joppa Wall.

Suddenly, he threw back his head. A light skidded off the corner of his eye. He swung a glance up the hill and saw torches issuing from the trees. Off again he pounded, labouring up the slope to Jerusalem.

He had to get quickly into the city. His mother had to be warned. And Uncle Nicodemus. They had to make for the wilderness. Or even Bethany. Anywhere, but out of Jerusalem. He would enter the city through the Shepherd's Gate.

It was his favourite gate. The most lightly guarded. Fine for pranks that played havoc with the head-count of sheep by the officials and tax collectors exposed to the shrewd, wily Hebrew herdsmen. It was not like the Joppa Gate, with which, by morning he would have a terrifying concern. That was a hard gate. He would make

for the softer Shepherd's Gate. But then he noted with a frown of dismay that the captors also were making for the Shepherd's Gate.

The Shepherd's Gate? He shook his head. Lord God of Hosts, but what a bad joke! Putting aside the tablet-breaking perils he ran by taking Jehovah's name in vain, and putting aside his mother's present predicament, and then, what a poor pilgrim of a joke! The kind of joke that only a very bad Hebrew story-teller would tell, before he sent it wandering through the meaner bazaars of the Gentiles looking for someone to laugh. For ^{the Shepherd's Gate} was the Nazarene's most favoured gate.

Had not he, once, standing on the mount of Olives and looking across the Kedron, declared that his sheep knew his voice and would follow him through the Shepherd's Gate?

That had been a morning in the late spring, last year, and an undulating flow of woolly white backs had been pouring up the hill and through the Gate, past the fortress of Antonia and through the court of the Gentiles to the sheep market. And, John Mark, twelve and headful of dreams of intrigue and conquest, had heard a hidden meaning in the words:

My sheep know my voice; they will come when I call.

For what else could the Nazarene have meant but that at his shout, the wandering peoples of Israel, gathered as they were gathering now for the Passover season, would pour into the city behind him and turn their swords on the Roman?

That was what he had believed a year ago. And had believed less than an hour ago. But now, the whole thing had crashed. Now the Romans would be leading him! The shorn sheep! Leading him through the Shepherd's Gate. Violently John Mark shook his head.

He threw himself into the tall grass beside the road. A platoon of soldiers hurried down the road from the city, breastplates jangling and their rough Latin sounding queer and more foreign than ever to him. He looked up after they had passed.

He was near enough to the gate to see that the guard-post had been doubled. He guessed that the soldiers who had just passed were reinforcements for the arresting party, in case any of the Nazarene's men tried to rescue him. John Mark knew how it would be. Now after the party had entered the gates, the gates would be locked and barred and the double guards mounted. Nobody could leave or enter Jerusalem. This simple matter of regaining his house in David Street had now taken on dangerous complications. All of a sudden it had happened. The road ^{winding} ~~which would~~ past his feet and ~~went~~ between the turrets yonder and ~~marched~~ into the city, was a road full of danger; if they caught him trying to get in, the least he could expect would be a scourging. And yet, he had to warn his mother. She was in peril. The Shepherd's Gate was still the best gamble. A double guard here meant that the other gates would be even heavier armed tripled or even quadrupled. He breathed angrily through

his nostrils and eyed the gate.

John Mark fought back the urge to rush crazily into the perilous road. To escape into the city, where a street was not a cold grey rope knotting itself around your throat, but streets that were familiar, warmed by names, and brown cobbles, and yellow lamplight, and sidewalks broomed clean daily.

One of the watch called from the turret and wheels whirred on the road. The boy hugged the ground as the light army vehicle flew by. He saw the silhouette of the helmet, and the upraised arm in salute to the guard as the Roman officer drove into the city. Then he heard the footbeats. He scudded behind a thick bush. Nearer drew the torches of the raiding party coming from Gethsamane. His heart in his mouth, he watched them march abreast of his hiding place.

Ahead of the soldiers, walked the gang from the Temple -- the High Priest's mobsters, with fearsome faces and brutal cudgels. These were they who kept a semblance of order in the shrill courtyard of the Gentiles, or hurled the first stones at blasphemers.

Behind the noisy temple mob, the Roman soldiers marched in an arrogant silence; only the clank of their body-pieces told as they passed.

Somewhere at the centre, the Nazarene marched.

He tried to see the Nazarene's head against the light of the stars but the Roman soldiers hemmed him around. They were heavily armed. Shoulder harness creaked.

The boy shuddered, hunched his head between his shoulders and pressed the back of his hand to his mouth. He was city kid enough to know a hanging - squad.

Chapter 2

His young face was hardset as he watched the Temple spies prowling along in the wake of the soldiers. He hated the spies beyond all telling. They had been after the Nazarene for a long time. They had listened bellied down in the dust of the wilderness, hung from the trees in the Olive groves to catch him in sedition, set questions to trap him for the priests.

He wondered if Judas, the Ishcariot, was among them. No, he thought. Judas would have chosen his place in the march carefully; he would not care to be picked off by any of the Nazarene's band lurking on the fringes of the column. He would be especially careful of Simon Peter.

Strong, swift Simon would gaff him, given the chance. The Ishcariot would/^{among}walk the soldiers where he would be safer. And as he thought of it, a new idea entered John Mark's head.

John Mark slipped forward to the edge of the road. He felt around in the dark, found the weapon he needed. Carefully, he came erect in the shadows. He indulged in the luxury of a shivery grin as he noted how carefully each spy kept apart from his fellow. Dog often ate dog among the High Priest's spies.

The rearmost spy was passing and he seemed undersized and skinny. The boy slipped from the shadow and got behind the enemy. But the man must have seen him from the corner of his eye, for he turned with a grunt of surprise. John Mark's hand, holding the flat stone, hit with force on the man's head.

The spy wore a greasy cloak of some rough material. Swiftly, he worked the cloak off the inert man. Then he wrapped it about himself and put up the hood to shield his face. He straightened and broke into a fast trot to catch up with the others before they should pass through the gates. He wished he had his own cloak. This one smelled of spy.

Chapter 3

But the cloak at that moment was hung on the arm of a Captain of Legionnaires who was regarding it with ironic amusement. He shook it a little, so the silken finish shimmered in the light of the brazier.

"And this was all you recovered besides -- him?"

The Roman officer removed his eyes from the cloak and looked into the crafty face of the High Priest, Annas. He wondered if he had detected a note of sarcasm in the man's tone. If the note had been there, it would confirm certain suspicions he held. But he knew he would see nothing in that face.

"Doubtless, your son-in-law, Caiaphas, will be satisfied with just -- him," the Captain dryly returned.

Annas smiled gently. His face was like new parchment, unwithered, yellow as butter. His eyes were black, hard and bright as the enamel insets in his amulet. He was tall, taller in the jewelled hat, and spare. Janus Aurelius also had an idea that only his quickness could save his own neck. He could not tell, exactly, why he thought so.

"My son-in-law is not famous for his imagination," Annas murmured. He held out his hand deprecatingly.

"Doubtless the Governor, the highly esteemed Pontius Pilate, knew this, and that is why the arrest of the Nazarene, the investigation and all the attendant power for these were vested in me, last year's

High Priest, by His Excellency, and not in Caiaphas who is the new High Priest."

The Roman's pale face betrayed him in the flush that rose to his cheeks. His palm itched to slap back the sneer he was sure he ~~and~~ now detected in the Hebrew's voice. But he rode his temper under. Galling as it was, he had been assigned by the Governor to carry out this old reprobate's directions. Current high priest or not, Annas' skill and craft were high; he possessed some big friends in Rome. Caiaphas was a figurehead. Janus Aurelius thought he must watch the old High Priest carefully.

Annas saw the anger on the Captain's face. He was too clever to blunder into immediately mollifying and so alarming the quarry. But he must not forget that Janus was still First Captain; and first captains had been appointed provincial governors before. One day he might be sitting in the office Pilate now occupied.

"I know of course that you represent the Governor in this affair," he said. "I strive to make my actions fit the pattern I believe His Excellency would most desire."

Janus said coolly: "So?"

"I agree with you that his loutish followers are of no consequence," Annas said smoothly and quickly. "I did not expect an officer of the Imperial Army to concern himself overmuch with the apprehension of a few touts and foolish fisherman. I am however happy that the Governor agrees that if the things we have

heard about this leader of theirs could be proven, then it would be a clear case of -- treason against Caesar."

The sly old flag waver.

"Now, of course, you possess the evidence," Janus said with bland innocence.

Annas' smile was the ugliest moment the Captain had known this night.

"The Nazarene has never spared his tongue," the High Priest said softly. "Many of my -- of the populace have heard him."

The slight catch in Annas' words had not escaped the Captain. "Such delicacy is unnecessary, High Priest. The fact that a number of these hearers may have been Temple spies does not lessen the offence."

Annas' eyes remained hard and bright but Janus had detected the tiniest flutter of a finger. Of course, false witnesses. Mentally, he shrugged. It mean nothing to him that ^{the} High Priest was shaping another god-maker for the Cross. They had never amounted to anything, but their extermination was a service to Caesar and with that, he had no quarrel. What he was trying to get at was Annas' purpose with one Janus Aurelius.

"I would share your humour if my concern began and ended with the arrest of the Nazarene," the High Priest said harshly, "Unfortunately, it does not."

Janus met the High Priest's glare. His mind idled easily, waiting for the priest to go on. Annas was brimming with the situation. He must talk, or burst.

"His words have not been confined to the rabble!" Annas raved suddenly. "The seed has fallen among some of our most influential people -- the fools! It must be pulled out at the roots! It is time to be alarmed, First Captain, when you know that a member of our own Council has been secretly visiting the Nazarene, accepting his teachings by stealth, by night! Such lunatic doctrines as a man must be born twice over before Jehovah will accept his sacrifice!"

Calmly Janus met the angry eyes. So a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin had gone over to the Nazarene? Bad, but surely that had nothing to do with him, a Roman. That was a problem for Annas and the Jews. Could he be mistaken and this assignment was a mere accident?

He asked: "Your spies have brought you --?"

"Nothing," the priest said icily. "My men do not penetrate into homes of wealth. The houses of the wealthy. Indeed, you have done better than any of them."

"What do you mean, High Priest?" Janus asked in a dangerously quiet voice. Yet he knew he ought not to have expected less. The Temple would know about him and Mary Mark.

Annas gestured towards him, his face malevolent: "That cloak, Captain! That piece of fine linen which you recovered from Gethsamane! It was never worn by one of his rabble! It was spun for one of gentle birth -- to be worn in rooms of silken curtains Turkish carpets! One who dwells in the Upper City, in the houses of wealth, inside the Water Gate!"

The fingers hooked like delicate talons, he reached a veined hand for the cloak. He took it from the captain's hand and held it up to the light.

"Bring me the wearer of this cloak!" he cried, his voice spilling over with triumph. "Find him and we will crucify the wretch and his family, in loyalty to Caesar and for a warning to Israel!"

For a moment, Janus regarded the hate-filled face of the priest. Then he shrugged and looked away.

"My men are not magicians, High Priest," he said quietly. "The population of Jerusalem ^{has} ~~xxx~~ trebled since the pilgrims commenced arriving for your Paschal season. Seeking an unknown stranger in Jerusalem during the days of unleavened bread is as difficult as swimming the Tiber with your hands tied. You know that."

A peculiar sound coming from the High Priest brought back the officer's glance to him. Janus almost recoiled from the man. An unholy glee had spread all over the yellow face. With his unwrinkled skin, Janus saw a resemblance to an infant spawned out of horror. The hand holding the cloak shook as if palsied.

"It will not be as difficult as you imagine, First Captain!" he cried in a high voice. "All tongues cry out at treason against Caesar -- and -- this -- this garment has spoken! Here -- here -- look!"

Under the hem of the cloak, there was a letter embroidered, worked in blue thread. Janus was annoyed at himself that he had not noticed it before. But he had not examined the cloak at all from the time it had been thrust into his hand. He could not even recall which of his men had given it to him.

"Not much to go on," he grumbled shortly.

The priest's scant eyebrow shot up. He spat the words at the soldier.

"I admit the letters do not give as a complete description of whom we seek. It does not say he had red hair, as is yours, nor your noble bearing, nor shoulders and thighs as your god, Jupiter, nor your ~~rules~~ rules of breeding which have come to truth in your ~~features~~ face. But, when the peace of the Emperor is concerned, then I submit, First Captain, there is something to go on!"

Janus looked steadily into the mocking eyes. The High Priest's spies would know the First Captain, a Roman officer, was seeing a Jewish woman. Annas, so utterly Jewish, in religion and pride, would resent what he saw as an insult to his people. For some strong reason, the High Priest was risking the capable anger of a First Captain. Clearly, then, the crafty High Priest possessed a couple of hidden weapons. And until the hidden arsenal was exposed, Janus thought he would see to his ^{own} ~~own~~ defenses. And so far as he could see, his first line of defence was to do his duty as a soldier. The schemers of the temple would find no weakness there. He was now certain that the assignment was no accident. So he would find the cloak's owner. He would find the fool and throw him to the temple wolves.

Janus finished his fast thoughts and nodded curtly to the High Priest.

He returned to the fortress of Antonia. He stood for a moment on the steps and looked back down into the court of the Gentiles. Many of the ^{poorer} ~~poorer~~ pilgrims ⁱⁿ ~~in~~ Jerusalem for the Passover, had taken up residence in the court. They looked like overblown roses, settled around their cooking fires with the

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the form of Ansen's
face ~~was not~~ yet gone was

firelight glowing on their vari-coloured robes. A stroke of luck, it was, that his search would be among the upper classes, and not these. Otherwise, the old proverb of the camel and the needle's eye would be appropriate. He went to his rooms and sent for Quartus.

Quartus was squat and powerful and had almost been flung to the lions in the circus at Rome when he was seventeen -- for knocking an inkeeper on the head and unlimbering his purse. He had been saved for posterity by Janus who had seen the promise in the salty young hoodlum and drafted him into the Ravens. He had turned into a fine legionnaire. He killed without passion, like a machine. He also loved Janus with the fierce devotion of a wolfhound. Alone, they were nearer intimates than master and man. He freshened the dreary round of duties which fell to a First Captain in the army of occupation in Jerusalem.

His muscular forearm glistened with perspiration when he saluted the officer.

"What have you been doing?" Janus asked out of curiosity.

Quartus grinned and smoothed down his forearm with a huge hand. "Beating up a few disciples of the Nazarene. They booed at us while we were taking him in."

Janus settled back on the couch, hands clasped behind his head. "Did you arrest any of them?"

The low forehead of Quartus broken into a series of corrugations that betokened his surprise. "Me?" He

thumbed his chest. "Arrest them? What's this? Has the army become temple police?"

Janus dismissed it with a flick of his fingers. "No matter. He wouldn't be among that lot."

The captain ignored the puzzle on the soldier's face. His eyes were withdrawn as he thought. He spoke:

"Annas is the world's sharpest priest. His spies are everywhere -- like his omnipresent God. Yet, he has not been able to secure the evidence he must have to pull in any of the Nazarene's superior friends. I'm beginning to suspect he's using the governor; that Friend Annas has no evidence, not even against the Nazarene."

Quartus protested in an indignant voice. "Then why -- ?"

"Why was the army brought in? I'll tell you, ^{sweaty} Quartus. Even if Annas' spies have failed him, the priest knows human nature. Our sharp priest knows the power of suggestion. He knows that the instant it is known that the arrest was made by the army, even those Hebrews who had been laughing at his priests -- you know the story is that the Nazarene has been confounding the priests with passages taken from their own book of Laws -- well, Annas knows that even those who had been laughing will commence to re-examine this fellow's words with greater care. And you know that they will do?"

Janus sat up and reached for his officer's rod. He flicked it back and forth while he talked, staring at the tip. "They will, my dear, nobbly-kneed Quartus, bring to Annas, or his son-in-law, Caiaphas, the tiniest word, a disjointed phrase, anything they ~~heard~~ heard him say and which they consider capable of supporting the slightest construction of sedition. You know why?"

A grin broke the heavy features. "So the peace of Rome will be kept," Quartus glibly intoned.

"So, pax Romana," Janus repeated. His face tightened. "They have waxed fat and secure on it. No Hebrews are drafted into the army. The roads are kept broad and brigand-free for their trade. Life is fine for them."

He turned a pair of dark brown eyes on Quartus' face. "But there is a bigger why, my ugly friend. Reply to this one. Why me? Why chose me for the dirty?"

Quartus pulled his eyebrows fiercely together. Janus' eyes roved unsmilingly over the homely face. Then the officer burst into a quiet laugh, brought his feet from the couch and stood. He placed a hand on the soldier's shoulder.

"Never mind, Quartus. We have a few things to do before we see the answer to that one. There's a rich, and, I believe, young Hebrew somewhere in this city tonight who left a fine linen cloak behind when he ran

from Gethsamane. We must find him before morning -- even if it takes the entire First Cohort and the tearing down of the city, stone by stone."

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Chapter 4

His nose ached with the cold. The muscles at the back of his legs ached with the pavement. He was walking through a street of inns and open storefronts, the warming braziers in the doorways surrounded by voluble but pocket-poor pilgrims who told stories of their travels. Spring nights in the mountain city of Jerusalem were chilly. Story-telling in payment for the comfort of a fire in the wind's lee, drew, the canny innkeepers knew, a brisk trade in wine bought by the hometowners to reward the pilgrims for providing the evening's entertainment. But John Mark, hurrying through the colonnades, had no desire to hear of racing stables, and washing machines in lively Antioch, nor of the ten miles of gardens and terraced temples filled with sinful priestesses in the groves of Daphne, nor Spain or Egypt, Greece or Persia -- or anything whatever of politics. He wanted to be home with his mother.

So he was experiencing a smouldering wrath each time he was forced from the pavement; forced into the cutting wind blowing through the streets to avoid some larger story-swopping group. He would like to be a giant, with a giant strength and giant arms, and gather the city walls in his great crushing arms and crush them to his chest; and he would bet that bits and pieces of every nation and country would pop out of Jerusalem tonight.

He grinned at the thought of offering this piece of what Rabbi Gamaliel called original thinking, to the Rabbi, within the hearing of Saul, when next he sat in the class. He doubted that the mocking show-off Roman-Jew Saul could offer a better thought. Crusty Master Gamaliel would be pleased at the lad from David Street.

Then, remembering Saul, he felt hollow as a drum. For Saul and the Committee would be waiting for him by the Joppa Gate in the dark of the morning. The jeering Saul, reminding him how he had boasted that the Nazarene would lead the revolution. Saul would use words with the grace and bite of whips. Teacher Gamaliel said he was very gifted with words and phrases. Saul and the Committee would know by morning of the ignoble arrest. The fall of John Mark's hero, the Nazarene. "Nothing good ever emerged from that hole, Nazareth," Saul once said.

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But John Mark promised ^{that} ~~that~~ jeer or not he would ^{be at} ~~be at~~ the Jonpa Gate ^{to} ~~to~~ show them. Even if his bones turned to water, he would ^{be at the} ~~be at the~~ wall.

He left the street of inns and turned into a wealthier neighbourhood. He had slipped away from the column after ^Nentering the city. Now he was on a course which would steer him clear of the Temple and bring him into David Street, to the big house where his mother waited alone. He was hurrying to her, ^{for the} ~~for the~~ night's work of the spies would hardly be over with the arrest of the Nazarene. ^{Judas} would have told them in whose house ^{had} ~~had~~ the Nazarene given his supper. Then, they would be after her.

Sweating with fear, he broke into a stumbling run. He had to get her out of the house quickly. She would not have known that the Nazarene had been arrested. She would be waiting inside the house, her brow unworried and the light at the back of her eyes, a serene hazel. She would smile at him as he entered the house -- smile, unaware of the jaws of the trap closing on her. He blinked a film out of his eyes, looked up and saw he was in David Street. He made the last few yards in a rush and crouched at the steps.

A light burnt ^{ed} ~~ed~~ behind the glass above the door of the narrow entrance hall; higher, there was another, in his mother's room. He must get her out quickly, then, together, they could run and hide until the terror was over. The spare old priest, with his

multitude of spies would soon be reaching out for them. Heart beating fast, he turned his head for a final look at the street. Everything seemed quiet, nobody from the Temple lurking. He levered himself up by his arms and did a fast roll ^{over} [redacted] the rail to the landing. The door was not locked. He frowned; he must talk to her about it. Those times were over. From now on, he must take care of her. Alternately nodding and pouting to himself, he eased the door open and slipped inside.

The hall had coloured tiles and there were polished benches set against the walls. A flight of stairs mounted at the end of the hall to the landing of the upper floor. Incoming guests sat on the benches and had their feet washed by the servants before ascending to the guest chamber. The Nazarene and his band had sat there tonight and he had peered down at the familiar bearded faces from the head of the stairs. He remembered them and again the anger sharpened. [redacted] He slapped the bench and it clattered against the wall. Chest heaving, he glared [redacted] as it jerked woodenly.

"Is that you, John? John?" She was awake.

The bench still chattered worriedly at the blow until it regained its balance and was suddenly quiet. It looked accusingly back at him. ^{He} [redacted] aimed his hand again and then he heard the sound at the head of the

stair and he held back the blow and flashed a guilty glance upward. She was looking down, one hand rested lightly on the carved knob of the rail and the other held her hair off her face. The smile caught at him. Small amused wrinkles like butterflys' wings appeared at the long ends of her eyes. She was straight as a young cedar, the best mother in the whole world who had ^{NOT} been afraid to help the Carpenter. But making like the head of the house, he must look back stonily at her.

"Johnny," she said moving down the stairs, "what is it?"

She was not like some mothers he knew. She looked at you and knew you had something to tell and she made it easy for you. Never a word about why he was so late out, or anything. He was an inch taller than her, too tall for his age, she sometimes said sharply when she saw him with the older Saul, ~~the~~ ~~Greenhorn~~. Then sometimes she said it softly, when she said he would be as tall as his father had been. He could not remember his father at all since he had died before he could know him. Soon after he was out of swaddling. He was raised by his mother and Cousin Demmy and the Capernaum aunts.

Her forehead was level with his eyes and he liked the way the hair roots sprung cleanly from her brow and he guessed no mother could be nicer.

"They have arrested the Nazarene!" he blurted.

She was unnaturally still. And he could not understand it until he realised that for some moments she had stopped breathing; and then she was saying quite calmly:

"We must send for cousin Demmy. He will know what to do and what the priests are doing to -- him. Demmy will know how to help him."

Her words switched his mind to cousin Demmy and inwardly he groaned. Holy Moses, but the trouble that knowing the Nazarene had brought

"I said they have arrested him!"

"Yes, yes, I heard you, John. That is why we must go to Cousin Demmy. He will know how to help him."

"But -- its you we must think of now Mother! And Cousin Demmy cannot help you!"

For suddenly, he saw, plainly as if it had been written out for him, that Annas' would know through spies that Cousin Nicodemus had been his [REDACTED] that night to the Nazarene's camp on the mount of Olives. Demmy would have no [REDACTED] pull now with the temple people.

He remembered the day, not long after the visit to the Nazarene's camp, the day in the Sanhedrin, when Annas had declared that the Nazarene's party should be suppressed and he condemned as a token of good intent to the Romans. Cousin Demmy had pointed out that,

under Hebrew law, the Nazarene could not be condemned except at a proper trial.

He had gone to the Sanhedrin with his mother to listen to the debate, being very proud of the young lawyer Nicodemus, who ^{was} ~~was~~ their kinsman. And he had felt her hand tighten cosily on his arm as Cousin Demmy, cool and distinguished even although he was the youngest among the bearded lawyers, spoke with force and more sense than Saul. And he looked up at her, at her face when she pressed his arm and had seen the proud light at the back of her eyes. But just then, unaccountably, the light went out.

A swift look around and he found the cause. He saw the hate in the eyes of Annas as the priest slowly rose and glared down at Cousin Nicodemus.

"Are you too one of the Galileans who follow this carpenter, Jesus?" Annas asked softly.

But, O, full of venom. The brow of Cousin Demmy's face gone wan, and the room afraid. His mother's hand tight on him and her breath pinching her nostrils.

And then it had come. It had come, breaking a silence that was about to pounce on you. The powerful burst of laughter from that same Roman captain whose frequent visits to their house Cousin Demmy disapproved.

"By the gods, High Priest," he chuckled, "no such orator as Nicodemus could have come out of the ignorant Galileans!"

O, then, Annas lashed to pieces with fury but not daring to pit himself against the power from Rome. For Janus was First Captain to the garrison at Jerusalem, second only to the chiliarch who commanded, and was that day representing the governor Pontius Pilate, at the Sanhedrin. And Annas had abruptly gathered his robes about him, stalked from the dais and swept out of the room, his wrath wriggling behind him and something to laugh at.

He was clutching her arms and by the pain in his fingers he knew he was hurting her. She was looking steadily at him and he flushed with shame as he released her. She looked away and, then back at him, but not at his face but at her finger tip lightly brushing his shoulder.

"Your cloak, Johnny? Where is your linen cloak? Where did you get this shabby thing?"

Perhaps she couldn't smell spy. He could smell it. On the cloak. You had to know the smell.

He had to get her away. But, O, sweet Sarah, where in Jewry would she be safe from the Temple wolves? Not even at Cousin Demmy's house; for he too

must be on the list and would ^{also} [redacted] soon need saving.
[redacted] And the Roman officer would not save ^{Cousin} [redacted]
Demmy either, since she would not be there to smile her
thanks to him, as she had that day in the Sanhedrin.

O, he knew all about that. John Mark had eyes in
his [redacted] head.

And just about then, when the idea had almost
stolen past him, he discovered it.

Janus Aurelius could do it. He was First Captain,
second only to the commander of the garrison and kin to
the governor. There was power enough in him to scare
off a High Priest. Without an instant's delay, he
would seek his mother's friend, the First Captain,
Janus Aurelius.

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BOOK 2

Chapter 4

The old soldier who was concessionnaire for the officers' tavern in Fort Antonia, filled the goblets again. Silently, he sucked in his mouth while the wine ran out of the goatskin bag. He cut the flow with two fingers when the goblets were filled, whipped the bag to upright without spilling a drop. He walked away, hips rolling under the apron strings.

Max Seneca whispered maliciously: "The old rooster is gaining weight on inactivity and lees." He bent his face to the goblet to draw off the bead. He looked up again, smacking his lips. "Rich as a Jew by now, that fat Roman is."

Guiseppe Zellini grinned wolfishly. He had not drunken so much for a long time now. The grin changed to a snarl. "Stinking rich, all these Jews are," he said viciously. "Rich and mean! Hear they

only offered thirty pieces of silver for the fellow.
Silver, not gold."

Max Seneca gave him a long, slow look; said idly:
"But old Pilate will get a skinful. The ^{Jews} will not
be stingy with him."

"Well, he gave them what they asked for -- a First
Captain to do a dirty little job."

"Should have been yours had not Pilate taken it
away and give it to the First," Seneca jeered.

They both believed Janus Aurelius too big for his
boots and their mutual hatred and satisfaction made
them now into strange bedfellows. Guiseppe Zellini
was at the foot of the echelon, a beefy, roaring
middleaged man who had taken half a lifetime to push
up from the ranks. Arrived at the officer class, he
was now puzzled and bedevilled with a baffling inferior-
ity, although he still preserved the roar. "He looks
like a steer in the first weeks of being a steer," Max
Seneca once described him.

Maximus Seneca was second Captain in the Cohort.
If Janus was kicked off the ladder, he would be next
man up. So it made him very pleased to learn that
Janus was worried; and he was buying several drinks
for Guiseppe. Guiseppe was also very pleased and proud
to sit at the table with him and to call him Max when
he wished. Max nastily said a few words.

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Guiseppe said: "Personally, Max, I dont think he does. He wants to be a general." Personally, he though he did, but Max should know he was not a yessing man.

"To spit in your eye," Max growled. "Dont generals like Jewish women?"

Guiseppe recalled that Jewish women were haughty. He had been hoping for some time, believing it would rid him of bafflement. A look of pain and longing appeared incongruously on the brutal face, softened the ugly visage for a moment before the scowl returned.

"After they become generals," he muttered bad humouredly.

Max Seneca chuckled. "You've ^{been plucked,} ~~XXXXXX~~ you old crucifier! They have ^{chucked} ~~bounded~~ you from the punishment squad!"

Guiseppe was a whale at scourgings. His artistry in dislocating arm-sockets at one pull had been the talk of barrack-rooms from Rome to the Red Sea. He worked his lower jaw, eyes gleaming under the beetling brows.

"That bloody bastard, Pilate!"

Max Seneca chuckled. "Hey, its no skin off your nose. You may get pushed up a rung."

Guiseppe hoped his shrug had the airy nonchalance that shrugs had when they were given by Max and the other officers. He moved away from the point.

"Guess they'll put ^{up} the Nazarene," he said.

"Away up," Max said cheerfully, "They'll use the nails."

"Wish it were the ropes. The Nazarene is a clever chap."

Max shook his head. "Nails are better. Ropes take too long."

"That's what I mean," Guiseppe said with a ~~grim~~ grin. Max drank some wine, leaned over and spewed some from the side of his mouth. It splattered near a foot of Guiseppe but Guiseppe didn't say anything. He drew in his foot after Max had straightened.

Max said: "Town's too full of Isaacs, in for the Passover. Seething by Saturday-Sunday. Would be foolish to tie up thirty-forty ^{soldiers} ~~men~~ standing around waiting for him to die. Nails are quicker."

"You talk like a First already." Guiseppe growled. "I say the rope. I would like to hear him talk while he is up on the cross. He's a clever Nazarene."

Guiseppe was an expert on crucifixions.

Max shrugged. "Clever? They took him like a chicken."

He lifted a finger at the barman. Guiseppe saw the finger and he tingled happily. ~~Wine~~ Wine gurgled out of the goatskin in a way to remember tomorrow and all the other thirsty tomorrows.

"Listen to this one!" Guiseppe trumpeted

happily. Then he would have bitten it off, but Max had strung a pair of lazily keen eyes on his face.

He went on unhappily: "Er - well - one day a couple of high Isaacs cornered the Nazarene by the fortress walls. I - I - was behind the wall - by arrangement with the Isaacs. You know how it is, Max, not that I like spying - ha ha. Anyway, the Isaacs said to him: 'Look, Leader, we know you to be fearless -- and sincere. Not like those false alarms who appear every now and then. All of us here in Jerusalem are ready to rise whenever you say. But since you are sent by our God to lead us, why should we pay our taxes to Caesar? Surely you could use the money to send the message ^{to the} Jews scattered all over the Empire!'"

Max leaned forward interestedly. Guiseppe warmed to his story, his beady eyes glistened.

"You know what the clever Nazarene did? You know what he did? Listen. First, he took a penny from one of them. Wouldn't even use his own money, see? He would answer them in their own coin - ha ha. He took this penny and said: 'Whose head do you see on this penny? Mine? Or Caesar's?'"

Max nodded gravely. "They saw his head of course. He's a clever Nazarene."

"They did not!" Guiseppe said, angry at Max for ridiculing him. "They saw Caesar's head. They said: 'Caesar's head. We see Caesar's head.' And he said:

"Well, give it to Caesar. It's his.' Just like that. Isn't he clever? 'Give it to Caesar. It's his!'"

Max dropped his head upon his forearm, elbows resting on the table. He leered up at Guiseppe through a fan of his spread fingers. "They'll use the nails. He cant be clever with the nails."

"That's what I said!" Guiseppe cried. "He'd talk a lot if they used the ropes. We put up a fellow once, at Capua, with the ropes, and he was alive for six days until we lit a slow fire under him --"

He stopped, roved the tip of his tongue briefly over his lips. "Which reminds me. I'm going to roast Barabbas."

"Who's Barabbas?" Max asked curiously.

"Another of their politicians who ^{would} free them of Rome - ha ha."

Max said slowly, disgustedly: "Alright, pig. Now talk."

Guiseppe's brow contracted, alternately rose and fell like signals. His mouth went slack in astonishment.

Max said coldly: "You've had all the liquor you will get out of me tonight. Now I want to hear. What's going on at the Temple? Why is Janus worried?"

Guiseppe's brows settled and his eyes grew cunning. He shrugged his fat neck lower inside his collar and spread his hands on the table. He had

broad hands and thick fingers. Max glared at him.

"You are closer to the Temple than fleas to a dog, Guiseppe. You pickup blood money from the priests, trapping a few lousy seditioners. You are their man for scourgings and crucifixions. Yet, Annas fixes it tonight with the governor so the First Captain is assigned to him. Why?

Guiseppe bared his teeth, snarled in his throat like an animal. The big hands closed slowly, lifted, rammed down on the table.

"Listen -- you --!" roared Guiseppe.

Max leaned nearer to him. ~~XXXXXXX~~ His eyes held no passion in them as he looked into Guiseppe's, only a bright curiosity.

"Talk -- or I'll have you broken, you peasant. For a Roman officer, you're too close to the Temple. You even know how much they arranged to pay for the Nazarene. You ought to be back in the ranks where you could mix with their mobsters to your pig's heart content."

Guiseppe often had it happen in bad dreams. He was too old for anything like that to happen to him. He had tried too hard. He felt he could cry.

He dug his fingernails into the table and spoke woodenly.

"Annas wants to get at Janus - and Nicodemus. He'll do so through the girl. She's a cousin to Nicodemus. Annas knows the Nazarene had the passover

supper at her house with his fellows. I went there with some of my men, but they had already left for Gethsamane. When I returned to the Temple, Annas told me to stay out of it. He had a plan -- for Janus."

Max laughed silently, looking at him. Guiseppe, a little lost by the loss of the fine time he had been having, blinked and moved his heavy shoulders.

"Fool," Max said softly. "Annas is a fool. He wont be able to work it. Janus is too close to the governor."

Guiseppe moved again. "He will work it," he muttered.

"How will he work it?"

Scowling unhappily, Guiseppe told him in detail.

Max lifted his finger and the old soldier shuffled forward on fallen arches. Max said: "Drink hearty, friend Guiseppe. Then you will go over to see old Annas. You and I should not sit idly by when we could be helping that smart old priest to work it."

The wine ran and lapped into the goblets.

"A toast," Max Seneca murmured,, squinting into the ~~XXXXXX~~ cup. "A toast to a Jew. To the poor, cave dwelling Nazarene preacher whose neck I will use to step up to First."

Then he flung the goblet away from him ~~to~~ to crash ~~into~~ into a corner. ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~

Chapter 5

Quartus assembled the pick of the cohort in the courtyard before the chambers. He reported the assembling to Janus in his chambers. The Captain stepped outside the door and acknowledged the salute with a lift of his arm. His eyes swept over their faces, illumined by the light of several torches set in sconces around the walls. Finally, he nodded.

"Excellent, Quartus." His voice was firm and brisk. "You could not have picked better men if ~~you~~ you ^{had} gone through Caesar's praetorian guard."

Erect as they were, their heads went higher. He knew that with the commendation he had spoken, he had put together a machine; one of superb efficiency. The flames from the torches leaned away from the wind

and flickered a hard burnish in the metal pieces on shoulders and chests. The flame painted a red lacquer on the faces of the men at rigid attention so they looked like tools stacked for use.

Janus wondered whether, in view of the peculiar duties he was sending them on, he should be less formal with them; be a little more familiar while he gave his orders. But as quickly he decided against it. It was a tough system that had produced this tough core ~~that~~^{he} had sectioned off for swift work tonight. It would do the system no good to unbend.

He tilted his head back. His eyes ~~XXXXXX~~^{were} unsheathed swords under the peak of his helmet.

"Your mission tonight is to find a man -- a Hebrew," he said. "I want him found tonight."

He paused. A queer feeling of unease had momentarily passed over him. He strove to anchor his mind. His eyes, dark and piercing beside the highbridged nose, flickered along the line of faces. In a lull of the wind, the flames burnt straight up and down and the half-darkened faces were once more nut-brown and human. He found himself endeavouring to make a personal issue of it, between his eyes and theirs. Then he saw, with an awkward blush, for he should have known, that none of the rounded pupils were looking back at him. All were fixed at a point above his head. Good soldiers, he thought, a little proud, a little nettled, good, wooden soldiers.

But he knew that for all their appearance of brown stone statues, his words had sunk home. A cold wind would be blowing behind the doors of Israel on this night of warm hearths and welcome. And all because of an unscrupulous priest and an ambitious First Captain who was watching his footing lest he slip again.

He remembered the day in the Sanhedrin. He had been moved by impulse. And, impulse, to his profession and breeding, was a foolish quality. He should have withdrawn into the shell of disdain that was by tradition the Roman role. The conquerors' role. Rather than have blundered like an emotional plebeian between Nicodemus and the High Priest. But a woman had looked pleadingly towards him and he had shrugged off the Roman toga. He had sprung, defenceless as a mouse, among the big cat priests.

A deed, by the gods that was worthy of the rawest novice.

It seemed to him, now, that Pilate must have been told about it since his return to Jerusalem from Caesarea; and that putting a First Captain at the beck and call of the Temple was by way of punishment.

But he would see the governor. Right early. With Pilate's reputed contempt for the Jews, it was strange that his own kin should be -- yes, humiliated was the word -- before -- these -- these -- robed tradesman.

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Mutely, Janus uncorked his anger. He had wanted nothing of them. Yet his career was at stake because of this people of a - a - muscled intellect. Who. could conceive no other gods but a single, unseen deity. To whom they daily grovelled behind the locked doors of their synagogues. Whose omnipotence lay only in his power to bow their necks for the heels of various conquerors. Yet, well to remember that humbled in arms, these defeated people saddled wealth in every city of the world. Other nations bled and endured. The Jews were never required ^{by Rome} to be soldiers. What was the mystery of this strange, absurd yet ineffaceble ~~Race~~ ^{dislocating} who through their ~~XXXXXXXX~~ scriptures claimed roots at the beginning of man?

He wheeled abruptly, destroying the picture of the woman that suddenly entered his mind. "Quartus!" he rapped over his shoulder, "take over!"

Quartus swivelled his shoulder in a stiff-armed salute until Janus had re-entered his quarters. Then he turned to face the squad.

Quartus, who had been a notable thief before his twelfth birthday, had been well schooled in the art of face-reading in places where failures were swiftly compensated. He had unerringly noted Janus' hesitation in choosing the manner he should adopt with the men. Taking his cue from the abrupt handing over of the squad, Quartus had no hesitation. He would have liked to have known what sudden thought had mottled his chief's face with anger. One thing

he knew: there could be no failure tonight.

He relaxed his shoulders, brought the javelin around and grounded the butt. He folded his arms about the shaft and placed a cheek against the weapon and

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grinned like a fallen angel.

"Alright, rabble, gather around," he murmured dreamily. The man grinned and broke ranks. Still dreamily smiling, Quartus said:

"An initial was stitched into the hem of this mysterious Hebrew's cloak. Must stand for something. So, the chief wants you gutter spawn to bring in every Abraham you can find whose handle corresponds with the initial."

He paused, and his nose seemed to sharpen. "But -- and pay close attention, you scum of the Ravens -- we have reason to believe the Issac we are seeking, is a lily. One of the world's gentleman. Wealthy as sin. Keeps talented women, one of whom may have sewn the evidence into the cloak by which we shall crucify him. So, my dear ruffians, you should confine your search to the better class Jacobs. Some of them are as snooty as the senators back home. Those, you may kick in the face, since you are working for the Temple tonight. Moreover, although to look at yourselves you wouldn't believe it, you are the Roman conquerors."

He looked around at their grinning faces and he lost his smile.

"One more thing. My pal, Janus, the First Captain back there, he says to tell you ^{that} the galleys are always open to careless legionnaires. So, he says to tell you, you should find this Hebrew."

Chapter 6

Pilate was beautifully bonhomie and his face misty with goodwill, as if to be ^{visited} ~~summoned~~ in his palace, at this late hour~~x~~ by an impatient First Captain, was a pleasure and delight.

"Janus!" he cried delightedly. He turned aside the formal salute with a wave that was in part a benediction.

"My dear Janus!"

He repeated the name in an affectionate lower register, giving Janus the outrageous feeling that those fat hands were stroking him.

"How awful of me -- not seeing you since we arrived from Caesarea -- dear Jan!"

Jan was the familiar name from Rome. It rang strangely on Janus' ear, ~~stirring memories of~~
~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ in this palace of an eastern

potentate occupied now by a Roman governor, stirring memories of other days in the capital.

He slipped the chinstrap and placed the helmet under his arm as the heavy curtains settled behind the governor and he walked into the room. Pilate touched his shoulder in a paternal gesture, went past him to the couch at one end of the room and bent over the cushions. Turning around and sinking down, he indicated where Janus should sit. He looked up and met the captain's eyes and smiled at him.

"And with what great affairs of state will you now harass your poor governor?"

So. No asking after my health, or how I am enjoying my new post ⁱⁿ ~~to~~ Jerusalem. He knows why I have come to see him.

Pilate had heaped the cushions into a soft throne. Janus was engaged in a struggle to maintain his dignity, perched on this unmanly throne. He felt like a pigeon, stuffed and mounted. He wondered if this caprice of Pilate, placing him on an absurdly highpile of cushions, was altogether unstudied. He planted his feet firmly on the ground, his soldierly form erect.

"I have pursued your orders, sir, concerning the Temple," he reported. "As they were rather, unusual, and urgent, I acted at once, resolving to take an early opportunity of seeing you to find whether ^{there} ~~were~~ any angles you wished to instruct me about -- personally."

Pilate rubbed hands together and smiled again, looking down at his well kept fingers. "Ah, yes, the arrest of that fellow -- I have forgotten his name. Our friends at the Temple seemed very keen to apprehend him. I learn you succeeded ^{very} well, yes?"

Janus thought the eyes regarding him were soft where the heavy lids shadowed them, hardening towards the centres. Gratification at his success in capturing the prisoner was all about the face; but at the centres of the eyes, it came to a full stop. There, calculation began. Janus allowed a discreet smile ~~to~~ appear on his lips.

"Guiseppe Zellini, our captain, ^{on attachment to} ~~at~~ the Temple, would have done as well, sir," he ventured.

Pilate delicately patted back a yawn. "Perhaps he would, perhaps not. Difficult to tell these things, Jan. The point is, you've succeeded. I'm immensely relieved."

His eyes dropped thoughtfully to the floor. Janus stole a look at his face. When you looked long and carefully enough, you could see the ruthless lines in the fleshy face, deep, from the base of his nose, downward, past the corners of his nose. A careless glance would easily slide over the bland mask. Every inflection of his modulated voice, each motion of womanly grace, disproved the rumours of his grim rule in Judea. But Janus thought that if

you made a blade of your eye and probed beneath these appearances, you picked up the hard undertones, the feline lust for power, the appalling destruction of which the man was capable.

"Jan? How old are you?" Pilate asked suddenly.

Janus rose. He knew that the whimsy which had made the governor perch him on a high pile of cushions, like a stuffed bird to shoot arrows at, was now passed. Now he was once more the Procurator's protege, his wife's nephew.

"I was born the year of the snowfall. There has been no snow in Rome for thirty-one years," Janus said with a grin.

But then he saw the hard lights ~~glint~~ glint in Pilate's eyes and his mind circled warily again.

"Really!" Pilate cried warmly. "Just thirty-one -- my boy, you've done well indeed! First Captain at thirty-one -- why, you may be chiliarch of the Twelfth Legion of Ravens well before you ^{are} ~~XX~~ forty, commanding the whole of Jeusalem!"

That his uncle-in-law could put all of his unblushing soul into his most deceitful speeches, Janus knew very well. He shrugged uncertainly at the compliment.

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"Your aunt and I ~~am~~ proud of you, Janus. It will mean a great deal to the family if the promise in you proceeds on its logical course and you go to the Senate. I was a junior officer, at your age; very

junior indeed. Mark my word, you will end a Senator."

"You are a magnificent old rogue. In two breaths you ^{have} ~~XXXXXX~~ kicked me upstairs from First Captain to chiliarch to a Senator of Rome. But I don't believe you."

That was what Janus would have liked to say. But he said it only in his mind. From his lips, he murmured: "I hope I will justify your confidence, sir."

Pilate leaned forward and tapped him on the knee. "You will, my boy, you will. It depends of course solely on yourself. But on your record, I believe I'm justified. A soldier ~~XXXXXX~~ has but to obey his orders, with all the intelligence at his command."

"No matter how distasteful they are~~XX~~, sir?"

He would have bitten off his tongue to undo it, but it was already said. He asked himself what had come over him. Was his tour of duty in this dusty town, away from his own kind, cast in with some barbaric Hebrews and such barrackroom aristocrats as Maximus Seneca, doing something to him? This ^{kind of} ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ impulsiveness had already landed him in trouble.

The eyes boring into him in his heated imagination, were two agates set in plush. They seemed to be telling him he was crowding his dice. That he was flirting with danger.

Pilate lowered his gaze to his exquisite nails, laughed silently while he inspected them.

"The man of intelligence knows that a physic, momentarily distasteful to the tongue, nonetheless assures a purifying of the bowels and many more years of health in which to enjoy thousands of tasteful moments, eh my boy?"

Janus felt the sweat tingle his scalp as he fought to keep his composure. He smiled at the governor's little joke but his facial muscles ~~were~~ were stiff. He hoped the smile did not appear as ghastly as it felt. Pilate turned a solemn countenance up to him, regarding him from the sides of his eyes.

"Old Annas rates you high -- indeed, as highly as I do. Getting hold of this newest prophet before the Passover season commences, is very important to Annas and me. You know that at each Passover we usually reinforce the garrison against any disorders. And at that time also, I must leave my beloved Caesarea to be here in case these Jew need lessons in behaviour. I must say that your aunt does not care for these trips at all."

Janus had an idea how expressive his redoubtable aunt Claudia would be if she did not care for these trips at all. He repressed a grin; he felt better that he had thought of grinning.

"Lately, now, some of my detractors at home, in Rome, have been reached by some of my enemies

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in Judea. There has been some talk that my administration has been unnecessarily harsh. Mind you, I am not complaining. Your Aunt Claudia says I should complain more. But it is the lot of us poor public servants. You are sent to govern. You govern. Then, they blame you for governing. Perhaps, they even recall you -- and I do not know, my dear boy, whether you ^{have} ~~we~~ ever seen a provincial governor in retirement. I don't mean the clever ones who have laid aside their pension. I mean the others. Pitiable cases. Very pitiable cases."

Pilate played with situations like a cat with a mouse until he was ready to gobble it. Pilate was bending backward trying for goodwill; he must have received a scare from Rome. Janus wondered if he should tell him that Annas had no evidence against the propnet. He decided to be silent. If it went too far, then he would speak. He had a fleeting impression that he did not know what too far meant.

"I take it, then, that Annas especially requested me, sir?"

It was a slow nod, watching Janus all the time. "Especially. He told me you had impressed him while you represented the chiliarch in Sanhedrin last year."

There it was. Annas had not forgotten. Annas had bided his time until the stars were propitious. If he failed the assignment, he had no doubt what Pilate would do. He would be sacrificed to the Temple surely

as were those lambs whose slit gullets reddened the altar of burnt offerings each morning when the Hebrews sounded their gongs.

He thought of the queer mission on which he had sent his men tonight. As if he had seen the thought passing through the centurion's head, Pilate asked:

"What of this discarded cloak? Have you discovered the owner?"

The Temple was moving with admirable speed. He was elated to find that, far from perturbing him, the question had the effect of a quaff of wine. Annas evidently meant business. Very well. He could also show a turn of speed. He had done so through that welter of intrigues and pitfalls known as an army career.

Pilate was giving him a searching look. Janus had not moved since he had spoken the question. He frowned a little on Janus, but quickly regained his expression.

"Come, my boy, why the pre-occupation? Are you having some difficulty there?"

"No, sir. Not yet. My men are seeking him now."

There was a lilt in his reply. He could foresee now how far Pilate intended to go. Very well. He was not in the mood to be burnt this week and he would so show Annas -- Pilate, too.

But the Governor was looking strangely at him.

"What - did - you - say?"

Janus returned a quizzical stare. "I said we are still seeking him."

Pilate dropped his eyes for an instant, then lifted them again. He nodded. "Put your best men on to it. We must have - er, him before morning." He patted back a yawn. "Spare nobody, scour the city. Spare nobody, sweet Janus."

Janus gave the horse ^{its} ~~its~~ head when he left Herod's palace. The army trap flew through the streets, dancing around corners and whipping down the straights with only a touch on the reins for guidance. The wheels beat a frantic rhythm on the cobbles.

At the corner where the theatre stood, a right-hand turn would take him past the Temple to the Fortress Antonia. He bore down on the left rein and wheeled the horse towards David Street.

Chapter 4

A handful of dates scooped out of ^a dish in passing and shoved into his mouth so his cheeks bulged and his jaws worked in slow rhythm as it sought room for his molars. John Mark proceeded at a fast walk along the passage to the door, slipped his feet into sandals lying there, eased the door open and peered into the street. Her hand rested a parting touch on his shoulder and she whispered something before the latch clicked shut behind him. But he did not stay to listen, for he was a Quarry.

When you are a Quarry, your ears prick back and forth and your eyes slew left and right --

not for familiar sounds and sights, but for those moves from the hunters which will reveal them. He dropped lightly from the top of the steps straight to the pavement. It was a deep drop, but he handled it well -- as befitted a man who would early tomorrow morning be taking the Order of the Wall. He crouched in the recess beside the steps while he looped the thongs of the sandals. His mind went ahead a few hours when he would be bucking the worst yet that Saul had laid for him. Saul, the toughie from Tarsus, was founder and president of the Order of the Wall. He made the rules. In the dark of the morning, by the ^{Joppa} ~~Gate~~ Gate, a rope you knew for fear would be coiling and uncoiling in your belly. Then, although you could not see him, you would know the crooked smile was on his lips, and that his eyes were wetly shining as he listened for the break in your voice. But most of all you could not keep your eyes from It.

John Mark forced his mind back to the present. At the moment he had trouble enough. He must seek captain Janus at the fortress of Antonia, or the reputation of his ~~mother~~ mother, perhaps her life, would be forfeit. Terror would fall on her from the Temple. Janus must protect her from the priests. He knew that place of horror outside the city wall where the two rough pyramids of stones stood close to the post with its shackles and ominous stains.

Women had be^{en} stoned to death before.

He had not changed from the nondescript cloak ~~he~~ he had taken from the spy. In such a garment, passers-by would believe him to be a bedless tramp and ignore him. David Street was saved from gloom by the light diffused on it from the "pilgrim lamps" brightly burning behind the front windows. The houses were large in David Street, of fluted columns and marble steps and inlays of rare woods. On this street dwelt brokers whose names opened accounts from Jerusalem to the Great Sea; Sadducees whose rote opposed their logic as did their righteousness their avarice; the Pharasaic lawdogs. A wealthy street. The boy wrinkled his nose in disgust.

He was a mere hundred yards from his house, nearing the mouth of an alley between the buildings, when he heard the tramp of feet. Marching feet. He halted with his back hard against the wall, listening intently. The sounds were approaching.

He whirled and darted into the alley, running hard. He saw a darker patch of shadow on his left and hurtled into it. He knew it well; a paved courtyard in which chairmen waiting for fares were allowed to rest their litters. He dived into the haven - and his flying body hit into a ye^{ll}lding mass which immediately grew rough hands to close on his throat and check the startled yell.

"Quiet or you die!" came the [REDACTED] whisper.

John Mark went limp. He waited, while the marching soldiers passed in David Street and the sound of their progress died away. He waited until the hand was removed from his throat. For ^{by} now ~~he~~ he knew ^{to whom} the voice belonged.

"You big bullying fisherman!" he yelled, wrestling in the grip.

He heard the soft ejaculations and the brush of clothing as the men let go of their tension. Light from an uncovered lantern flashed on his face. He slapped angrily at the light.

"By the Powers!" exclaimed Simon Peter. "Its the Coxswain, lads!"

John Mark struggled some more. Somebody cuffed the side of his head.

"Stop struggling!" a stern voice said. "What are you doing on the street? Why aren't you at home with your mother?"

A rumble of street-door authority in this one; this would be Matthew, he thought. A one-time tax-collector for the Temple. The question made him furious.

"What home? What mother? I'll have neither, when the priests find out that we had your scurvy bunch at the house tonight -- ugh!"

There were mouth-bruising callouses in the palm suddenly clamped over his mouth. The hand

and the voice at his ear roughly demanding silence would belong to James, the big and fair-haired. With John, his brother, and their father, he had served on an oar as ^aGalilean fisherman before joining up with the Nazarene.

with them,

John Mark, furious ~~with them~~ knew them all; half-wild, wind-whipped rough ~~men~~ fellows who hardly washed before they ate. The earnest ones like old Phillip, eager to believe anything; Thomas, the Capernaum hardhead ^{who} ~~man~~ accepted only what he saw; Peter, strong, boisterous, quick and fierce, who had cuffed him years ago when first he had pushed and wheedled his way through the crowd to the Nazarene, but then had abruptly about-wheeled and approved his presence with a: "Right, Coxswain, you stay around." From that day, he was "The Coxswain" to the rough fisherman and the others who walked with the Nazarene. Oh, he knew them all and had been properly fooled -- until tonight.

He worked his mouth open under the pressure of James Boanerges' hand and sunk his teeth into it. At the man's yelp, he wrenched his shoulder free and ducked the blow he sensed, rather than saw, coming, lowered his head and charged through the ring of men.

He pelted back up the alley to David Street and paused at the corner when he was sure there would be no pursuit.

"You are ignorant!" he shrilled. "Go back to your pens! You to judge the twelve tribes of Israel -- ^{ahhgg!} You, the light of the world -- then I am blind!"

He remembered something else he had heard the Nazarene say. "Didn't the Nazarene say you should have no fear?" ^{he yelled.} "That troops of angels would be called down to help you? Then why dont you go into Old Annas and remind the Nazarene of his promise? Why do you skulk here while the old fox ^{bites at} your leader? Answer -- you galls --!"

He backed on his heels as he saw a shape move ^e forward behind an angry bellow. He yelled a final insult before he turned and ran. He slowed after awhile, feeling better than he had felt since he had run from Gethsamane. Take that, he thought, tossing the thought back over his shoulder. Then he closed his mind to it. He resolutely closed his mind to it and stubbornly ^{also} ~~would~~ not think of anything concerning Annas' palace.

Instead, he ran his mind down the Hallel, testing if he had correctly memorized it. The words were part of the rules in the game of the Wall devised by Saul. Within a few hours, he would need all his brain and sinews to confound

Saul and outwit the sentries on duty ~~at~~ ~~the~~ the
Joppa
~~Gate~~ Gate.

Suddenly a high scream shattered his thoughts.

He was opposite Cousin Demmy's house and the
scream had come from there. A party of soldiers
issued from the door. He turned and bolted the way
he had come.

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Chapter 5

Stephen Mark was a false holy man. A shaggy dog on the outside, bounding straight and lovably along; nosing at no strange doorways; but once he stepped indoors at David Street, Stephen was a curly wolf. The temptation to blow to pieces the reputation for saintliness which his aunts and female cousins of Capernaum would not allow to be buried with him, was strong in his young widow, Mary. She resisted the temptation and saw the humour in the situation.

Stephen had been more than twice her age when they wed. For all of their short life together, he ^{had} been ^amartinet in the home. She rose at his bidding, ate, uncomplainingly, the mess of leeks and musht that coasted past his hardened palate smooth as butter but wrung tears from her with its pungency. ^{He}

~~the~~

would shoot up one sparse eyebrow at her hairstyle, or clutch his beard at her decollete; he had struck down her efforts at conversation and so nurtured her inhibitions that when finally they wrapped him in expensive brocades and laid him in the family tomb, she was quite lost.

The family mistook it for mourning and took quite kindly to her. The aunts at Jerusalem and Capernaum thought of this and that and agreed that their young kinsman, Nicodemus would make a good husband for dear Mary. And even when, in defiance of tradition and The Family, Mary had put down a well turned foot on the idea of marrying that personable, and really likeable, young councillor, Nicodemus, the family was yet smugly content that, indeed, Stephen's was still a holy memory to his widow. The truth was that for Mary, enough was enough.

But, a morning came when one of the Capernaum aunts, on a visit to her mourning in-law, unexpectedly pushed open a door -- and recoiled in horror.

There, before a bust of Stephen on a cabinet, was Mary, a wrap about her night-robe, posturing and declaiming:

"Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend into heaven, thou art there. Make my bed in hell and thou art there -- "

When Mary broke off and whirled at the strangled cry behind her, the Capernaum aunt was already fleeing the house of blasphemy. Mary had glanced down at the floor, a thoughtful smile playing about her mouth. Then, carefully, she picked up Stephen and pulling out the bottom drawer of the cabinet, buried him deep behind her shifts. That day, she took young John and a lunch basket to the trees beyond the brook where she hitched her skirt and taught the boy how to knock off ground doves from cover.

An hour must have passed since she had locked the door behind him. He had been very serious, almost severe, about the door being kept locked. It should be opened only at his special rap, John had told her -- a double and a single rap. Mind, listen for that rap. He had been deadly serious, no matter that he had invested it with a boy's love for dramatics. There was a wry pride in the smile with which she acknowledged that it was quick of him to understand so readily the sort of fire his mother had been playing with.

But she was frightened. Pacing the floor, her arms hugging her body tightly, she halted at a sound outside in David Street. She ran across the room to

the half closed blinds. A platoon of soldiers was tramping up the terraced slope of the street. They gave her a spell of acute worry, but a moment's reflection convinced her that no marching legionnaires, crumping over the cobble on nail-studded sandals, could surprise and capture John Mark. She watched them melt into the darker end of the street and was turning away from the window when she saw something else which held her still. It was a shadow detaching itself from the deeper shadows of the wall across the street. ^{It} ~~then~~ turned into a ^{figure} ~~figure~~, a man, a soldier whose bronze helmet and shoulder pieces glittered once before he passed out of her line of vision somewhere immediately below the window. Holding her robe close about her, she ran out of the room, down the stairs to the door.

The chain at the door was a little difficult because of her trembling fingers, but she had it undone soon after he had whispered her name through the closed panels. He relocked the door himself and turned to face her. He said:

"You heard?"

His fists ~~rested~~ rested on his hips and the bracelets at his wrists arrogantly pronounced his rank. Her eyes moved slowly up the brown and sinewy forearms, past the short-sleeved jerkin and lifted to his face. They looked at each other.

"Yes, Janus," she said calmly. "I heard."

They looked at each other, guardedly, while the seconds fell away. Nearing a full minute, Janus shrugged, opened his fists and dropped them at his side.

"I am not blaming you," Mary said quietly as before.

He frowned and stared hard at her. "Not blaming me for what?"

She turned and moved away. "For not letting me know he would be arrested tonight. You are right, I would have warned him."

He was at her side in a stride when they entered the intimate little room into which she led him. It was her work and favourite room and there were sewing baskets and bits of materials pegged out on easels or strewn on chairs, and paint pots with camel's hair brushes stuck in them. He had removed his helmet when he entered the room, tore it savagely from his head. His face was pale under the rumpled hair. He turned her roughly to him.

"You little fool -- do you realise the risk you would have taken? The Temple is going all the way this time! Even now, you are not out of danger!"

She waited, unflinching, until he became aware of the strength of his grip on her wrist. He released her quickly, mumbling a confused apology.

"I am not worried about myself, Janus," she said gently.

He jerked his head back in ^a short laugh, empty of humour. "Go on. Be brave. Say you would do it again."

"No." She shook her head. "Not if I knew I would endanger ~~xxx~~ -- others."

He said sourly: "Like your precious cousin?"

"You are entirely right. He is my cousin and he is precious."

"Dont be a fool," he snapped. "Nicodemus might have been tolerant -- up to a point. But are you forgetting he ^{is} ~~is~~ a member of the Sanhedrin? Where do you think he stands now since -- when was it? Two days ago? -- since that crazy Nazarene had his crew throw the money changers from the Temple? Do you think it is love for your god which will make old Annas hound this Jesus to the cross?"

He succeeded in frightening her. Her hands leaped to her cheeks, her widened eyes searched his face in horror.

"The -- cross? But -- but -- Annas has no power to do this!"

He stepped abruptly away from her and fiddled with one of the brushes in the porcelain pot. His eyes were moody as he raised the brush and watched the paint flow from the bristles back into the pot, cut, and plop again in ever lengthening falls. He

spoke rapidly.

"He is charged with sedition, not with a breach of any religious law. Annas has arranged it so he will be sentenced by a Roman court. Under our law, his associates at the time the felony was committed will be equally guilty. That may come to mean -- anyone."

She understood him. It was so clear and simple. The panic of a moment ago was forgotten. Forward, now, there awaited two, perhaps three, lives to untangle. To place in safety away from her own.

"Where is John?" she asked suddenly.

It took a little while for Janus' mind to clear. "John? O, I haven't seen him. Why?"

But she had gone past him. "They have lodged him in the fortress?"

Janus opened his mouth stupidly. "Wha --?" Then he shouted angrily: "Whom are you talking about?"

Mary wrinkled her forehead. "Jesus, of course. I asked you quite distinctly whether he was lodged in Antonia. There is no need to shout."

Janus shook his head wearily. Women really were. They were. "I took him to Annas' palace. Governor's orders," he said shortly.

Her head went back. The shock of it drained her face of colour and made her fumble for words. "You -- you -- no, no!" She pressed her fingers to her lips.

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He nodded gloomily. "I took in your Prophet. He threatened to queer old Annas' revenue by scaring off his money changers. But it was the wrong time to do it -- while the Governor's in Jerusalem for the Passover and when my gentle uncle needs the goodwill of the Temple. So I am put in to save the Republic."

Her eyes were hurt. She shook her head bewilderedly. "But -- you!"

He dropped the levity from his tone and spoke quietly to her: "I had hardly ever even seen the Nazarene. You cannot expect me to feel as you do. I love you, Mary. You know that. I would spare you any pain, but I am a soldier. I made it as easy as I could for your prophet even to allowing his disciples to escape after one of them had used his sword on a fellow from the Temple."

She stared at him, dazed, as if what he told her was beyond her comprehension.

Janus spoke sharply, "Pull yourself together, Mary. Its all over and done with."

"All over and done with!"

So it is, he thought. That part of it, anyway. And please be sensible, Mary.

"So it is; and I am not altogether sorry. The dangers you have been courting from those scheming priests, by your association with those reckless fools, have been of some concern to me. Be thankful you are safely out of it."

He had recovered to the extent that she smiled and reached for his hand on the paint brush. Gently, she disengaged his hold and replaced the brush in the pot.

"You will be getting red daubs all over your uniform if you continue playing with this thing," she said. She cleared a place on the couch for both of them. "Sit down, Janus. Its all over and done and I am thankful I am safe."

He looked at her suspiciously. "I dont like your tone," he growled as he sat. "You didn't mean what you said. What do you really mean?"

She laughed lightly. "Tell me again you love me. Tell me of wonderful Rome and the places you will take me when we are married. Tell me of the Circus and the forests of marble columns in the Forum, the music, dancing, the beautiful women --" she broke off, her eyes sombre. She said contritely: "Forgive me, Janus. Or rather, forgive me this mood -- I -- I --" she stopped and bit her lip.

"What is it, Mary?" he asked gently.

Her eyes were starred with tears but he knew she would not permit them to well over. She was gallant and lovely and he desired her. But she was also understanding and she knew what his career meant to him and his family. She knew how unwise ~~it would~~ it would be for him to marry a Jewess without permission from Rome. It would break his promotion and cast him

out to some obscure post for disappointment and squalor to break his heart.

A generation ago, his family had been caught up in one of those maelstroms of intrigues, which, from time to time, in Imperial courts, sucked down to oblivion one college of nobles and spewed up another. His, had managed to save themselves at the edge; but their withdrawal to firm ground was not yet accomplished.

There were members of ~~his family~~ his family still engaged in a hasty backward scramble.

"They all had supper here tonight," Mary said quietly. "Before it was ended, one of them -- Judas; the youngest one, with the fair hair, you remember him? Very ^{restless,} ^{nice.} He used to take John to hunt coneys whenever the band was in Jerusalem. It's strange, Janus, very strange. Strange it ^{should} ~~should~~ be Judas. Anyway, he left and, soon after, Jesus and the others ^{went also} ~~also~~ went. But scarcely ten minutes later, Judas returned with some soldiers, commanded by that horrible Gui - Gui --"

"Guiseppe Zellini?" Janus said, leaning forward, his eyes keen on her face.

"Yes, Guiseppe Zellini. Of course, they weren't here. But Judas knew -- knew where they have been sleeping each night since the Temple assumed open hostility. How - why - how did you come to -to --?"

She left the question hanging but Janus did not enlighten her. His eyes had hardened in thought.

He was thinking of Zellini; officially. Zellini was the centurion assigned to the Temple by the garrison commander. He was trying to recall something about Guiseppe Zellini.

"... Then John returned and told me. He thinks we are in for trouble, so he left to look for you. Where is he?" she asked sharply.

Janus came out of his ^{reverie} ~~brown study~~. "Eh? What's that? Where is he?"

"John -- my son," Mary said impatiently. "Where is he? Why isn't he with you?"

Janus stared blankly at her. "Why should he be with me?"

"He left to find you. I thought he had found you."

He shook his head, absently rose. "No -- I drove here from the Governor's. I left the vehicle at the corner as usual. Too hard on the animals and the woodwork to negotiate your peculiar street of steps."

It was not "as usual" at all. He had come in furtively, not "as usual." O, Janus you too! You are a Roman and it seems that among the pagans, pride comes before love. As for me, I would go with you to the furthest corner of the world, even to -- what was the name of that cold island which Janus had said was being discussed in Rome as the next place to conquer?

"Some fool with more wealth than sense was with Jesus in the garden tonight. He left a cloak in our hands when he ran away. None of the disciples would have afforded such a cloak. Anyway, to make conversation, I told Annas, showed him the cloak. The old fellow seemed to pounce on it. I have no idea why he is so anxious but the joke has been turned back on me. It seems the only role I have in Jerusalem for the foreseeable future is to find the fellow to whom the cloak belongs." He thought awhile. "Him, or my neck. Annas is calling down heavy forces." He looked seriously at her. "Listen, tonight, keep your doors locked. I am sending Quartus to stay here. He will see you are not annoyed by the search parties."

Britannia, she thought triumphantly. That was the name of the dreary little island Rome was getting ready to subdue. Janus had told her about it. Said he could be sent there with the colonising army. She was sorry for Janus. She knew he loved her but he was a soldier, a pagan soldier. Should she trust him?

"Please send John back to me. He will be at the fortress, most likely. Wherever the excitement is."

Quartus or no, she had to ^{contact} ~~contact~~ Nicodemus. Under the Jewish law, Jesus would be examined by the Sanhedrin.

Chapter 6

They squatted in the same rough circle on the cobbles, in the chair-court where John Mark had left them. Simon Peter's sword rested ^{on} his ^{knees} and he gripped the hilt in both hands until his knuckles whitened. The lantern ~~was on~~ on the ground flickered.

"The people will say he has failed them," Thomas said flatly.

Simon Peter snorted. Thomas ~~had~~ shrugged and went on.

"They will say that within a week, he has failed them. They will say that only a week ago, they ~~crossed~~ ^{greet} ~~him~~ the Kedron to ~~him~~ him, and led the hosannas as they returned, with him riding the donkey into the city. And yet, within a week, he has

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failed them."

Simon Peter moved nervously. He too could see small hope of help from the people. "Well, then. Whatever. But what? Will we leave him there, on the hook like a fish? Do you want us to leave him there on the hook like a fish?"

Thomas drew his cloak about him and calmly spat on the cobbles. "They will say he came in under false pretences. They will say he ~~led~~ led them to think he would take Jerusalem from the Romans and that now he has changed. That three-four days later, he changed his mind. Told them instead that they should pay taxes to Caesar. That day before yesterday, he told them instead that our God, the God of us, the Chosen People, the special people, loved all men alike, Roman or Jew. And above all, only yesterday, he predicted to them that Jerusalem would be destroyed! Jerusalem, the holy city of the nation! What will be left for Israel if Jerusalem is destroyed? They will say all these things. And they will be speaking the truth."

Peter's big body jerked and the hilt of the sword rattled at the mouth of the scabbard. "Should I ram this sword down your throat?"

"I am only telling you what the Zealots and everybody else besides us will say," Thomas replied, unshaken.

"You want me to pin your gills?"

"I am telling you the Zealots wont help."

"Judas ^{is a} ~~is a~~ Zealot. That's why he did what he did."

Philip asked quietly: "What do you think, Simon?"

You think the Zealots will help?"

"How do I know whether they will help?" Peter shouted back at him. "I say there is a chance! I say we should take the chance!"

"A chance such as a snowball might have in hell," Thomas said grimly. "Your brother, Andrew, has shown better sense. By now he is burning the road back to Bethsaida."

Peter turned furiously on him. "Why aren't you on your way too?" he shouted. "Why don't you scuttle to Capernaum? You are a Capernaum man. That makes you another quitter. You'd say Put up the sword, like he did tonight, wouldn't you?"

Big John reared backward, twisted his head to one side and yelled down at the ground: "Shut up! Shut up! You make my head ache!"

They had approached the plan for a rescue, with resentment, driven there by Simon Peter's passion for action. The plan, as a consequence, was untidy.

"It is a lousy plan. A plan without a plan. It makes my head ache too, Johnny," James said to his brother. He said it in a naked voice. Old Philip watched him.

"You have a better plan, James?" Simon Peter quarrelled. "You have a better one?"

Matthew glanced at old Philip and then he watched Simon Peter. The old antagonists, Matthew thought. Peter, James and John. And yet so often together.

Close to Jesus. More friends than pupils to the rabbi.

But at it, whenever, hammer and tongs. The Master with his frequent ~~THE~~ ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ quiet humour at the goings-on in the band had ^{brothers, James and John,} named them the Thunderers. Now they will smoke up; then they will frame up; then they will roar and beat at each other with words, snarling and flailing. Jesus had kept them fairly ^areasonable for the three years the band had been together. But now that the priests had got him, the bad thing was rising in them, Matthew thought.

"Stop being children," Matthew said harshly. "If I know the Temple, whatever we do must be done quickly."

Philip caught his eye and winked. "Little children," Philip wheezed. The ascension through the heat and dust of the lake plains, to the chillier Jerusalem nights had awakened his asthma. "Little children -- he always called us that, young as he was. He was a real Rabbi, young as he was. Little children, love one another ---"

Thomas stared at Philip. Stared hard, the pupils of his eyes widening. "Good God!" he ejaculated softly. "Already we speak of him as in the past -- as if he was dead."

"Shut up I say!" John howled at the ground in a strangled voice, his head going from side to side. "Shut! shut! shut! up! up! up!"

"Simon?" Matthew called calmly, as if he had never heard of trouble, "Simon Peter? Who will go into Annas' palace? John? James here? Me?"

Simon looked at him thinking: Or old Philip

with his asthma, or that fool Thomas, or me, Simon Peter. Six of us left. Five are on the roads running away from Jerusalem. One is rich with his blood money and skulking somewhere out of our reach. Six of us left and all of us wanting to run away too -- excepting, perhaps, old Philip whom his asthma will kill soon anyway; and perhaps this Matthew who could not return to Galilee since he would be in reach of Herod -- and Herod would not forget how he had absconded his services as a good revenue runner to join the Nazarene's party.

"Ask James," Simon Peter returned mockingly. "James the Thunderer has a better plan."

A brushing of their clothing when the brothers inched forward. Matthew stirred uneasily. He wished he sat beside old Phil. He would have poked old Phil in the side telling him to be ready for trouble, and old Phil would have found something to say which would break the tension now building. Skulking in the shadow as they were, he could only guess that the clear, grey light in James' eyes was getting clearer, opening like windows from which the shutters were being torn. And the same thing would be happening to John, his brother, too.

Philip on his part heard the whisper of the clothing and knew the brothers' violence was being awakened against Peter. He guessed that James would go for Peter. And that would make John spring for-

ward from his haunches too, going for Peter or whoever got in the way. For the brothers were like that. And then Matthew would be going forward too, reaching for John. And it was not that Matthew had more love for Peter, but because Matthew had been a government man and knew the lunacy of civil strife. Expecially when your weakness was exposed. By that, he meant that the band was already halfway broken up. Then there would be four of them at each other's throat, leaving Thomas and himself. And Thomas and himself would be no good for what was to be done before morning; for one, funny Thomas, was only a good joker, and the other, himself, too old and afraid.

"James is the right man," Philip said loudly. "I agree with you, Simon. James or John is the man to go. But the question is: Which one will she let in?"

Old Philip moved his head closer to the lantern, at an angle where his eyes would show sly and leery, and devoutly hoped that God would forgive him a small untruth. Matthew saw him, and a grim smile touched his lips as he sat back on his haunches. Old Phil was in there alright. Old Phil was in there. He watched John's head swing towards Old Phil, followed more slowly by his brother's and Simon's. He sensed the quick searching of their minds and their puzzle.

"She? Who is that you are talking about, Phil?" Matthew asked loudly.

Philip chuckled knowingly and again did a quick prayer for turning a half-truth into full-truth. But all in Your service, he reminded Jehovah. "Leah, that black-eyed beauty from Antioch who answers the door at Annas' palace. You know how James and John as good Galilean fishermen usually visit the fish market the moment we arrive any place, looking for old acquaintances from the province. Well, they found this friend of old Zebedee, their dad, ha ha... I hear now that Leah met them there and has been calling at the market twice a day since we returned to Jerusalem. I know it couldn't be old Zeb she comes to see, so I guess it must be James or Johnny." He paused and chuckled.

Simon swore rudely. "Slip your killick and get on with it. What are you saying?"

Philip cocked a mildly innocent eye in Simon's direction. "You figured that while we were making contact with the Zealots you would endeavour to find out what's going on at Annas' palace right? Now, who can get you into Annas' palace? But Leah could get these two in and they would get you in." He turned his head quickly to the brothers, James and John.

"You know too much and pretend not to know," countered James softly.

Philip learnt, a little late, that he had succeeded in turning the brothers' anger to himself. He hoped that Matthew would see that he had turned the anger of the brothers to himself.

"He's a lonely man tonight." Matthew said suddenly. "Jesus of Nazareth must be the loneliest man in Jerusalem tonight."

Philip was glad that Matthew had been sharp. Matthew was making conversation.

John turned on Matthew. "Shut your trap -- you Herodian leech!" He sprang to his feet. "I will do it -- do you hear? I will go! He will not be alone among that slimy crew! I - I will go into the palace!"

Thomas threw a nervous glance over his shoulder to the mouth of the tiny court. "You will bring down the soldiers on us with your yelling," he complained worriedly.

Simon Peter stood up. He unbuckled his sword. "We will go together," he told John.

Philip gingerly accepted the sword. He did not like weapons. Across the light of the lantern, his eyes sought Matthew's. With a jerky gesture, he passed the weapon to James.

Thomas scrubbed his jaw with a dry palm. "That's right, Simon. Dont take it with you. Malchus might recognize it as the one which nibbled his ear in the Garden tonight."

James put the sword inside the belt at his waist and turned a light pair of eyes on Thomas. "If you cant say anything important, go count your toes. One may be missing."

Thomas shook his head and looked at Matthew. "Matthew," he said, "I am as popular as a revenue runner. We ought to be off by ourselves some other place."

Simon Peter stood. "Everybody know what to do."

"Pray," said James soberly.

"And hide," Matthew said.

"We'll meet again, here, before morning,"

Simon said.

They all stood, Philip last of all for his chest ached. They looked at each quickly, furtively, and looked away again.

Matthew said suddenly: "If any would come after me, let him take up his cross and walk out of the city with me."

Matthew did not know why this had come out. It was not as before when he had stirred John for old Phil. So many of Jesus' words were coming out tonight. As if he was already dead, as Thomas had said. He shivered.

Philip held up his hand and said: "Please, Matthew," then let it fall uselessly at his side. A single loud sob escaped from John. He bent far over, cutting off his breath and straightened again

with a sigh.

"Cant someone bring me Judas?" he groaned, his palms turned upward. "Cant someone give Judas to me?"

James reached around behind Matthew and rested his hand on his brother's shoulder. Suddenly Simon Peter whirled and slipped to the entrance of the court and Matthew swiftly ducked the lantern beneath his cloak. They heard Simon chuckle. They showed the light again.

"Its alright, lads" Peter said. "It's the Coxswain. Good God, Cox, aint you tired of this same old game?"

Chapter 7

The grip on his shoulder was unnecessary, for John Mark walked quietly enough up to the group. However, his feet did drag a little and his face was sullen. Thomas grinned and said: "I dont believe my eyes. Let me see if its really he."

He punched him lightly in the stomach. The boy licked his lips and said: "You'd better dim that lantern. There are soldiers in David Street."

John Boanerges asked quickly: "Why are they searching for us in this neighbourhood? Dont they know none of us could be living in this posh district?"

"It's not -- " John Mark stopped. He added sullenly: "You'd better dim that light."

"Do as the Cox says, lad," Simon Peter broke in. "He's talking sense. James, you go to the corner and see where they're heading. If they turn in here, we'll scatter and make a run for it."

James slipped from the courtyard. Peter said: "Alright, Cox. Now tell us why you've come back. Where were you heading for when you pushed off so fast?"

"I was going to Fortress Antonia," the boy grumbled.

"Antonia?" they exclaimed.

John Mark had bolted in panic when he saw the soldiers at his cousin Nicodemus' house. He had made a scrambling run up the street, feeling like a beetle which had strayed into a barnyard of fowls. He could not escape the line of hard Roman beaks that were closing in on him. Then he had remembered his one time friends. The birth of an idea came. But he had to play it carefully.

Simon Peter shook ~~xx~~ his head. "I can't cope with you, Cox, Honest, I can't. I'm just an ignorant fisherman. If I'm so scared to go into Annas' palace, likely I'd die of fright if I had to pass Antonia. Why were you going to the Fortress?"

"I was -- " John Mark began.

Matthew took the lantern from under his cloak and suddenly poured its brilliance on John Mark's

face. The boy blinked and became angry. Then, remembering that his plans called not for anger, but for a seeming reluctance, he scowled suspiciously and glowered around at them from under his lowered eyelids. Matthew replaced the lantern under his cloak and Phillip laughed silently under cover of the dark. He thought he saw through the tax-collector's nimble mind.

"I was -- what?" prompted John.

The boy spoke slowly after a short pause. "I was going to see the First Captain, Janus Aurelius."

A lapping and a gurgling in a nearby aqueduct marked the puzzled silence.

Then: "Hey --: He would turn us all in!" Thomas cried in mock alarm. "He's going to finish the job for his friend Judas!"

"Bend a knot in that long tongue of yours," Simon Peter told him rudely. Gently, he asked the boy: "What for? Why were you going to ~~XXX~~ Janus Aurelius?"

"She -- why should I tell you?" John Mark cried. He hoped it had sounded resentful enough.

"Because your mother has been patron and friend to us and we ^{do not} ~~XXXX~~ aim to see a wooden headed boy bring ~~XX~~ trouble on her," Peter said. "Now, talk. She -- what?"

"She -- my mother thinks he will help," John Mark said reluctantly.

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"And so she sends you -- a boy," Matthew remarked dryly. "A small hammer with which to crack the walls of Rome."

"A small hammer, but, by God, she has taken up a hammer," John Boanerges grated.

"Why did not she go herself?" Simon Peter asked.

"O, big and stupid Galilean!" flashed John Mark. "Can a lone women walk the streets of Jerusalem after dark? Is she a harlot from the theatres of Antioch?"

Once, Simon Peter would have soundly cracked John Mark's head for his rudeness. Between them, it had always been the large mastiff and the playful puppy, ever since the day when the Nazarene had rebuked him for switching at the boy who was attempting to slip through their legs as the brotherhood formed the customary ring that kept the crowd's press from him. But tonight was a bitter night. He was not himself. The Nazarene had said he, Peter, should be the leader if anything happened to him. But, was he any good as a leader? A minnow of a leader he was, now that a kingfish was required! A leader with a loused up mind that could not think smart, involved. He was made to haul nets. That was all. An ignorant fisherman.

"Cox," Philip said behind a wheezing chuckle, "he said that he could not cope with you tonight. Tell me, though, your mother knows the First Captain well?"

John grunted. The fish-stand kept by his father's friend was also a good clearing house for gossip. "Both she and Nicodemus, her cousin, are his friends. But I don't see any help coming from that quarter."

"Blow it to hell!" swore Peter. "I'll take help from any quarter, John ~~Thunder~~ Thunder. Cox, we'll get your mother through to the fortress. Maybe -- maybe she can help."

~~hid his triumph.~~

John Mark ~~hid his triumph.~~ They could not see how his eyes shone. "Who will take her through?" he queried quickly.

"Beggars are not choosers, my grubby little friend," Thomas said.

Philip

"I want ~~Philip~~ to take her," John Mark said defiantly. "Philip must take her."

Philip

"You'll get your ~~Philip~~," Simon said curtly.

Philip

~~Philip~~ gave another wheeze ~~Philip~~. "But

Philip

it shall not be ~~Philip~~," he said dryly. "Anyone can hear me coming a mile away. I strongly recommend my friend Matthew to you, John Mark. He's entirely trustworthy."

"Yes, John Mark," Thomas put in. "You ask old Herod about his Matthew. He'll give you letters."

"For God's sake -- stop hauling your bilge!"

said

John ~~Philip~~ at Thomas. "Let's do what we have to. Matthew can take her -- he won't be missed. ~~Philip~~"

Matthew moved forward to the boy. "I won't be missed. John is right," he said. "Maybe the Zealots would not listen to an old government man

telling them to rescue a prisoner from the authorities, but I can pretty well get his mother to Antonia without being seen by the soldiers."

"Be off then," John growled unrepentantly.

John Mark was twisting his head about in angry indecision. He had hoped old ~~Philip~~ Philip would have been chosen. He could have handled old ~~Philip~~ Philip. But this Matthew was an unknown quantity. He smelled of Law and the Temple, no matter that he was now one of the Twelve. He was not old ~~Philip~~ Philip. Old ~~Philip~~ Philip would do what he was told when they reached Antonia. Suppose this one would not?

But he had no time for protest for Matthew had taken his arm and was urging him out of the court. He slouched along behind Matthew, thinking sullenly he had been a fool to come to them. Nevertheless, he grunted a grudging admiration for the way Matthew moved like a ghost. If, tomorrow morning on the Wall, he could be a ghost like Matthew, that is, until it was time to spring up and set all the garrison on the Wall by the ears, and set all the priests welcoming the new day with their brass horns by the ears, and set all the chairmen and the hucksters down below by the ears, and put his life into the keeping of muscles and lungs and the good use of his brain when required -- if he could be a ghost until that moment, as Matthew the smart tax collector was, then he would well be on the way

to beating the sneering Saul.

Right at this moment, crossing, the pavement
before Ben-Rasha's house, who kept plump cats and
was rumoured to eat them, ~~the cat was seen to~~

~~He was not~~ right at this moment, by the stoop of bald, old Ben-Rasha's house, there was nothing he wanted more than to best that sneering Saul.

No. He shook his head angrily. He bulged his cheeks with air ~~he blew it out~~, blew it out like a grampus and shook his head again. Must not think about Saul. Tomorrow is a million years away. Must think about mother.

And another thing. How would he break the news to his mother that Janus was not what they'd hoped? For, despite the light at their backs as they issued from Demmy's house, ~~he~~ he had recognized Quartus had led the raiding party ~~to Demmy's house.~~ to Demmy's house.

~~XX~~

Chapter 3

Annas was taking it badly. The interrogation was not going as well as he expected. He had met stubborn prisoners before. It was easy to understand that men who openly opposed a government, could never be weaklings. Particularly a government with enough scope to arrange for your finality. And right now, his government had such scope.

It was true that under Roman law, Pontius Pilate ruled all of Judea. But Pontius Pilate had overreached himself; and, for the present at least, he was forced to allow a lot of scope to the wily old priest.

While he glared at the stubborn prisoner, Annas docketed in his head some of the reasons why he was allowed such scope. Pilate had marched his cohorts through the city with their standards flying in contempt of the injunction against graven images in Jerusalem. And Rome heard. Pilate had forcefully drawn on the Temple treasury for the upkeep of his magnificent palace, when he should have kept within the allowance granted by the Senate. And Rome heard. Pilate had pushed Jerusalem near to rebellion, when, instead of punishing the fanatical Zealots only, he had turned an insensate outburst of fury against the whole city. Rome took official cognizance of the complaints and rapped the unlucky governor across the knuckles with a stiff note of censure.

Pilate discovered then that the rich and influential expatriate Jews who lived in Rome still regarded Jerusalem as their spiritual home. He was therefore allowing the Temple a lot of scope until he could regain favour at home.

None of this was hidden matter. So Annas had no doubt that this prisoner knew his power. Now he passed his bony hand over his tight lips and wondered

whether it was a congenital stupidity which made his prisoner so silent and serene. He nodded. Sometimes God made the stupid ones like that. Sometimes, He ~~set~~ ~~may have~~ a luminosity just under their skins so their faces glowed. But -- no. These eyes resting directly on him seemed to be full of -- pity. It was without logic to think so, but it -- seemed so. It battered at his mind. You -- pitying -- me? The blood rushed into his head.

His lips whitened as they thinned and the cords at his neck stretched tautly until, startingly, his head swayed.

"You fool," the High Priest said. ^{His} ~~the~~ dislike flecked lightly at the man in his grisly sanctimonious thoughts he was likening to a sacrificial lamb, ~~announced~~ "You should have remained among the fisherman at Galilee. You should not have come to Jerusalem. You should have stayed with your disciples. Where are they now?"

If he had replied, humbly, Annas believed he would have ordered that his wrists be untied. The slender frame, flanked by a couple of burly temple guards and the officer, Malchus, seemed incapable of such resistance as was suggested by the bound hands. But the prisoner did not reply.

Annas wanted to laugh. For a moment, he craved wildly for the unbounded opening of the

mouth and the filmy exudation of moisture to slick the eyeballs which he noticed was what happened to other men when they laughed. But all he succeeded in obtaining was a sideways twitching of his mobile, sensitive mouth and he knew his eyes were dry.

I remember they told me he spoke to butts of water and they became full of wine, he thought.
And that at a word from him, swine leapt over a cliff, he thought. And that he walked on the sea.
And, that, at Bethany, a body commencing to pus was given back life by him.

Such a man could not be stupid. Even if those he fooled were bumpkins of low intelligence, such a man could not be stupid. He was cunning. What he did was to prey on gullibility.

Annas leaned forward on his elbows and stared unwinkingly at the prisoner.

"Tell me," he said softly, "something of your doctrine. I know almost nothing of your doctrine -- or is it a secret doctrine, only for your disciples -- Teacher?"

The title had slipped out of him. He had not meant to call this young upstart by any such title. But he dismissed his annoyance when he ~~observed~~ ^{observed} how the men grinned at what they believed was his ~~mockery~~ ^{mockery}.

And perhaps it was just as well. For the Nazarene seemed to be contemplating a reply.

"Hidden, High Priest? No, not hidden."

The firm quiet voice held a quality unfamiliar to Annas. The quality was not ~~so~~ commanding; ~~it~~ it led. Annas found himself leaning forward on his chair, almost as if he would go to the man. It made him terribly uneasy and deepened his anger. His face hardened.

"I spoke openly to all the world, in the market place, on the caravan roads, on mountain tops, in boats on the water, in all the synagogues by which I passed, in your great Temple, here, in Jerusalem. Wherever Jews have gathered, they have heard my words. These are your witnesses, High Priest. Call your witnesses and ask them."

The blow from Malchus landed on his mouth and his head jerked under it.

"You dare to speak thus to the High Priest?" Malchus cried in rage at him.

Jesus turned and looked at Malchus. Annas waited, the unlikely smile twisting his thin lips. Now Malchus will really hit him.

But as the seconds drew out, a puzzled frown narrowed the High Priest's eyes.

I have seen prisoners bluster or cringe when Malchus gave it to them. This one does neither. And my big, hard Malchus, who wields the stoutest hand that ever sweated on the butt of a scourge, is discomfited. The oaf is shuffling his feet.

"Look at me, Nazarene!" the High Priest snarled.

Why must the fool look at Malchus? Has he not heard of the power in me? That to ignore me is to flirt with his tomb? As if he is troubled at my servant's lapse, but I am a beast whose moods he knew. Who told him his eyes could afford to be gentle? When I am about to destroy him, he hopes to move me to pity?

He remembered, O, decades ago, when he had been a young priest and ordered to his first sacrifice. He had lain awake most of the night, prickly with apprehension, worrying whether his hands would be true on the knife. He had risen in the grey of the morning and had gone shakily forth, moving through the ancient ceremonials with the other scores of priests; listening to the chant from the pinnacle of the Temple which announced that morning had come, that the sky was lit up as far as Hebron and then he was into his duties, searching the lamb for blemishes and giving it a drink from the golden cup; slipping its head through the ring of gold with its eyes turned westward; waiting for the signal from the silver trumpets when he would use the knife.

He remembered how he had the animal's gullet under his hand and the knife held for the upthrust, when --

By reason of some vagrant wind the ~~xxxx~~^{alter} flames had leaned from vertical and in the new light, the eyes of the sacrifice looked gently at him. The blade, already on its way, trembled and slowed.

But even as it slowed, he had remembered the duty he owed to the priesthood behind him and the millions of Israel who required the blood, and the knife went in. It went in, unyieldingly, nearly ruining the throat in his thoroughness.

He leaped to his feet. His mouth was implacable, the nose pinched. He swayed on his feet. His eyes were painfully wide.

"Take him out and whip him, Malchus!" he whispered hoarsely. "Scourge him just short of ribbons!"

A servant entered the room and bobbed nervously until Annas turned to him.

"The spy called the Rodent, Highness. He has come in."

The fool Judas. All this was his doing. The fool had weakened. Had refused to bear a false

witness against the Nazarene. He had even given back the thirty pieces of silver they had paid him to betray the Nazarene. Thrown it to the ground in front of the whole council. The idiot had not known it was expedient that one man should die and not all the Jews in Jerusalem, as they would, if the Romans became sufficiently disgusted with their endless plotting and scheming against the rulers. Massacres of Jews were as common in history as the death of kings. Very well. He would, as he used to, depend on his own well paid spies.

Annas wiped the wet from his lips with the back of his hand. It took him a little time to remember that he had been impatiently enquiring for the Rodent since some hours ago. He dropped back to his seat and nodded.

Chapter 9

Matthew had moved in front and his mother had fallen in behind Matthew, walking soft as a deer, as if she did this every night, and it had made him proud. Proud of the way she turned her head for the similar quick look with which Matthew and he swept the street, and of how she walked, on her heels, not silly as how some women would have done it, walking forward on their toes, not knowing that the surest way to stumble and make a noise was to try walking on your toes when you needed silence. She was a mother to be proud of; and after this she could go coney-hunting with him anytime. Anytime at all she wanted to.

They made good progress through the dark streets and they took precautions against surprises, Matthew putting out his hand behind him to touch his mother's hand, and she in turn reaching behind for her son's hand and then they stood still; listening. A small wind had come up and it played tricks with dead twigs scratching along the pavement. In the broken walls, crickets shrilled. ^{Their} ~~XXXXX~~ feet whispered over the cobbles. Matthew had chosen a good road to Antonia and there was nothing to worry about. John ^{Joppa} Mark returned to weaving his plans for the ~~XXXXX~~ Gate.

It kept coming back to him. How he could beat Saul. He would mount to the Wall as Saul had done, under cover of the before-dawn dark. But there, all resemblance between them would end. From there, he would show them. He would not rise to his feet until the sun was scorching Hebron. He would make them sweat down there, fearing for him. On top of the Wall, he would tweak Caesar's nose and make the sneering Saul sweat with fear for him. They would look up at him and know he might be killed any moment; and it would sweat the sneer off of Saul. He would be eyeing his pursuers, but he would keep one eye open to see old Saul sweating. He stumbled into his mother.

"Hold up, clumsy," came Matthew's gruff whisper. "There's your Antonia."

And beyond Antonia was the gate. He would not be going into Antonia. If Matthew chose to think he was going into Antonia then Matthew was a bigger fool than Phillip. He commenced to think fast on how he would handle the business of getting his mother through the city gate and out of Jerusalem.

The end of the narrow lane, in which they stood, opened into a wider street. Peering around Matthew's shoulder, she could see the lighted area where the fortress steps descended into the Court of Gentiles. She had never been into this section of the Temple area before. A faint reflection from the torches on the steps of the fortress touched the mouth of the lane. She drew back into the shadow at the gentle insistence of Matthew.

"The soldiers of Rome are touchy, lady. They dont mind you staring at them when they march past in cohorts with banners flying. But if they catch you slyly peeking at them when they are only two or three of them, they will reckon you are contemplating slipping a blade between their ribs -- and rightly so," he ended dryly.

"Between the fourth and fifth rib," a voice said with relish. "That's where they die easy. You just

- push it in."

Startled, Mary turned, ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ looked around
saw nobody.
but ~~XX~~

"Heh, heh, two inches inward at the back of
the neck. They kick amusingly before they are still."

Her gown flew out as she whirled at the new
voice ~~XXXXXX~~. Matthew's hand at her elbow stead-
ied her. She frowned, angry ~~XX~~ ~~XXXXXX~~ that the
panic had been hers alone, for John Mark had not
moved a muscle.

"Three. Three inches for some and two for
others. Three for fat Pilate with his well covered
neck. Two for the tiger's whelp, Janus Aurelius."

It was too much ~~XXXX~~. The voices were
disembodied; they seemed to come out of the ground.
"Wh - who is there?" she whispered.

"Heh, heh," the cackle came again. "We are
Legion, lady. Legion --"

"Be quiet!" Matthew ~~XXXXXX~~ ^{said} in a stern
whisper.

Mary swallowed carefully. Beside her, she
heard her son calmly talking.

"What about Janus Aurelius? Has he passed
John Mark
here?" ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ was asking.

Mary tightened her lips. She had heard about
these crazy jokers who called themselves Legion.
With the passing of her alarm, her maternal instinct
was again uppermost and it disturbed her to discover

that John Mark seemed quite at ease in a noisome passage ~~age~~ skirt^{ING} the despised court^{OF} Gentiles. And in the middle of the night. She had failed with the boy, somehow, some^{where}. She could almost see the Capernaum aunts shrugging as they accepted her failure. Stephen's widow would be just the sort of widow who would make Stephen's son be at home in a nasty alley with all sorts of nasty people. We had said it all along, hadn't we?

"What about Janus?" John Mark asked again, an edge of anger in his voice this time.

"Heh, heh, what about Janus?" a voice mimicked him.

Her eyes found them at last. They squatted in the corners and two or three crawled about on all fours reaching out ~~hands~~ hands to her frock, altogether under ten of them she thought. They had come without sound, like spiders. She felt sick at them and wished she could put her heel to them like spiders.

"Parveyors of filth," John Mark said quietly contemptuous, "answer me."

Mary looked and listened, a little dazed at it all. Surely she could not be standing in this ugly place and this could not be her son employing the language of chair-men with an ease she had associated only with chair-man.

"Twelve years old and with all his teeth? How come?" came from ^{THE} ground in mocking wonder.

"Thirteen. You count like a Sabbath Shepherd."

"But you haven't yet finished the year. There is still the Joppa Wall," the Legion chuckled real evilly. "Now who will

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answer the young Lord for nothing? You, Demas Legion?
Naaman Legion? You, Joshua Legion? Jehu Legion?
John Legion? Abram Legion?"

A chorus of cackles answered. Mary felt a stir from Matthew at her side. Something tinkled on the rough stones and there was a scurry among the Legions. Soon they settled back. Matthew spoke.

"There is a companion to that one -- when you have answered the young master."

"My thumb has gone over the inscription," the voice she now recognized as the leader said from the ground, "and I swear by all the oaths that this coin is from the land of King Herod."

"Your thumb speaks a straighter language than your tongue, Legion," Matthew said curtly. "Yes, I am Matthew, formerly of Herod's service. Now that you've had your laugh, tell us what we want to know."

"King Herod?" echoed one of those on the ground.

"Now who would have access to the treasury of King Herod?"

"Perhaps the keeper of the treasury."

"Or his assistant."

"Or the assistant to the assistant."

"Or one of the tax gatherers."

"The tax gatherers of the ~~synagogues~~ ~~synagogues~~?"

"Perhaps of the toll-gates on the caravan roads."

"This one smells of -- fish," the leader said.

[illegible]

Matthew chuckled and Mary realised with astonishment that he was really amused.

"Yes, we know each other Ben. I am Matthew, once tax-gatherer from the fishermen who fished in Herod's waters. I was there the day the Master cured you, but now it seems that seven greater devils have entered into you."

"And now the tax-gatherer of Galilee runs like a cat with a burning brand attached under his tail," Ben said heatlessly.

John Mark broke in with an impatient exclamation. "But what about Janus? I want to hear about Janus Aurelius!"

Ben Legion looked up at the boy. He said carelessly: "Perhaps the young Lord could be told, Demas Legion."

One of the shadows detached itself from the wall and crawled quickly forward. Before the boy could draw away, he had clutched his cloak and was jerking it gently.

"Perhaps the Lord of Rome is gone into the High Priest, young Lord. Perhaps Lord Janus is not well paid as a soldier and sells smuggled goods to the High Priest. Such as the fine linen of the fine cloak you are wearing now. Such a fine material as the fine cloak you have on would fetch a good price from the High Priest. Perhaps Lord Janus will procure even an unblemished lamb. -- like you, so the

High Priest could wrap the unblemished lamb inside this fine linen cloak and ready him for the sacrifice, eh young Lord? Perhaps --

John Mark wrenched himself away. "Let go -- ape!"
you ~~XXXXXX~~

Matthew stepped forward. "Look here --!" but gone,
he stopped when he saw they were ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~
disappeared up the innumerable narrow openings which roped in and out between the buildings.

Mary rubbed her temples with her fingers. The bruise of her fingers against the skin made sense to her. Nothing else did. Matthew cleared his throat, to know
roughly, demanding something. John Mark shuffled his feet and said: "Well, then," and stopped.

Matthew said: "Janus is gone to the High Priest's palace." He aimed the statement at John Mark.

The boy said: "No," ~~X~~ stubbornly, as if he would turn the point away.

"No," he said again, his voice quicker, "one cannot believe what the Legions say. One knows they are liars. Janus is in the fortress."

Matthew raised his eyebrows and bit the end of his long mustache. He had come to a conclusion. He said: "Well, you say Janus is in the fortress, what now?"

John Mark talked to himself under his breath. They had conspired to hurt him. It should all have mounted so quickly, so smoothly. He would have

told them he was going into the fortress to see Janus and then persuaded Phillip, it should have been Phillip, not to wait here for him but to push on out of the city since to wait here would be dangerous for his mother. And not to wait outside the walls either, but to push on to Bethany. Bethany was close and safe. He would have promised to bring Janus after them with a light carriage of some sort, but he would not have brought along Janus. He would have turned back into the city, sure now that his mother was safe and that all he would need to do was to think of the Wall and the morning, and now that very clever old tax collector, Matthew was waiting to trip him up. He hated them.

He hated them all, the Legions who ~~had~~ talked too much, Matthew, who spoke too sideways, his mother who ^{stood} ~~was standing there~~ too quietly. ~~Matthew was waiting to trip him up.~~

"Go on! get out of the city! Take her to Bethany, I tell you! Take her to Bethany ----- they are after her!" He was howling it at Matthew; flailing his hands and hopping from foot to foot.

He heard his mother's gasp.

Matthew said quietly: "Nobody's going to Bethany."

"John, are you out of your mind?" ~~His mother~~

It hadn't been her idea to come to Antonia. John Mark had rushed breathlessly into the house

telling her the band was hoping she would go to see Janus and ask his help. That they had sent Matthew to guide her. She hadn't thought it useful or even worthwhile, knowing what was Janus' stand, but she had gone on what slim hope there was. Now, it was evident it had been John's idea alone.

"How will it help the Master if we go to Bethany?" Matthew asked.

"Must I care what happens to the Nazarene?" John flashed in reply. "Take her to Bethany! They will get her as they got the Nazarene if you don't take her away!"

"You shut up now!" Matthew said sharply. And his mother said, ^{so no good was left in} ~~so no good was left in~~ him, "I am ashamed of you."

He gulped and swallowed and tried to look at her. But he could not look at anybody. Not at Matthew or anyone. His eyes kept straying. ^{Uneasy} ~~He must tether his tell-tale eyes.~~ eyes. ^{It} ~~He~~ had seemed so easy at first. He had felt so smart and sure. But now it was awful. She had put up the wall of glass between them which she did whenever he was untruthful or disobedient. She was behind the wall and he could see her but

not go to her until she had removed the ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ glass wall.

"I - I didn't want Janus to find you at the house," he said ^{at last.} "He's after us. They have gone to Cousin Demmy's already."

She was still away from him, behind her wall. She would never ever have anything to do with him. He could talk or not and there would be no answer, he knew it.

"You little idiot," Mary said softly. "Janus had been to see me already. The soldiers went to Demmy's and frightened one of the maids and that was all. Nobody has been arrested."

John Mark jumped. He was angry again.

"Wh - why didn't you tell me? Wh - but Quartus, his own Quartus, led the soldiers to Demmy's!"

"Of course, John. Janus wants to see that Demmy is alright. They are friends. Have you forgotten the day in the Sanhedrin?"

O, he was a fool. O, yes, he was a fool. O, he had remembered nothing except how to be a fool.

O, earth, open and ~~wide~~ close around me that I should be a fool before this clever Matthew. And the monstrous Peter will hear about it and his

laughter will roar up out of his belly. And the
buffoon Thomas will give one of his hollow ones.
XX
And the peculiar bent-upward look from old Philip
XX
will dwindle me to the smallness of a mouse. He ran.

He ran from the passage into the court and out of their sight. And Mary and Matthew knew they would see no more of him until his confusion had settled ~~down upon him~~ and

he was alright again.

Matthew said reassuringly: "He will be alright. He knows the city."

"I know," she said as quietly.

They commenced the return to David Street. Mary was weary in mind and body. Everything seemed to be slipping away from her. She wondered if Jesus was still being questioned. She had heard that prisoners were sometimes questioned all night. What had he said in the past that they now ~~xxx~~ could use against him? He had never been afraid to talk. Nicodemus had once said that Jerusalem would be better for it if the scribes would write down some of the things Jesus said and place them in every household. Janus Aurelius had not agreed. "Jews are compulsive writers," Janus laughed. "They write about everything. Love and death, doves and crocodiles."
~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~

Janus said no man was quite that important, and if a man had a quarter of that importance, other men would notice it and make him an emperor. Had they made this carpenter of Nazarene an emperor? Janus asked. And Nicodemus had been forced to confess that he hadn't been made an emperor and they had all laughed; Demmy, ruefully, when he saw how her laughter was for Janus and Janus' for her.

To think of Demmy was good. Better, sometimes, even, than thinking on Janus. She knew that in the eyes of Stephen's aunts, she was hardly a cut above

a camp follower. Demmy had not condemned her for falling in love with a Roman soldier. He knew and honestly accepted it that life with his cousin had succeeded in making almost ~~her~~ her a misanthrope. And though Demmy did not know this, she, who knew that Janus would never take her for his wife, considered it absolutely right to be burnt by the flame rather than be smothered ⁱⁿ ~~by~~ dead ashes. The rich dead ashes of Stephen. Old bones in a beautiful white sepulchre. The Nazarene had said it that way once.

She tried in a swift glance to see the profile of the man beside her. It was too dark to see. He walked with his head down, setting a swifter pace than they had made on the out journey. She wondered what he was thinking now, with his beloved Master in such a terrible predicament. She felt guilty for allowing her thoughts to stray ~~to~~ to her own affairs.

How did the Nazarene become so important to me? Mary asked herself. It had begun simply enough, during a winter in Capernaum. She had gone with Stephen to spend a fortnight with the Family -- those redoubtable maiden aunts, Rachel, Ruth and Rhoda. She had gone to the handsome synagogue built on the lake whose blue water by a trick of distance seemed to ^{wash} ~~reach~~ the foot of the snow-covered Mount Hermon. She could see their faces now, blued and veined with age but utterly unfeeble around the mouths. The flesh at the mouths was hard and wrinkled like heated wax put out to cool, covered by a film of fine down, and

Rachel's had a large black mole at one corner which Mary thought marked her as the oldest of the formidable sisters and the main destroyer of those at whom the sisters aimed their hatchets.

The service was over and they were standing in the colonnade; the sisters, Stephen and she. And she had asked them who was the young man who had given the sermon. In the manner of the provinces, when there was no Rabbi especially attached to the synagogue, a male worshipper read from the Prophets and expounded the theme.

Rachel, at the question, put forth a snort that, by itself, spoke volumes. But the other sisters had fixed Rachel with their piercing black eyes and their beaklike mouths drawn tight, silently commanding her to go ahead and bring the two visitors up to date.

Only Rachel's thin lips moved when she spoke; the rest of her face was immobile, like an old animal's.

"That -- Carpenter! He says the most horrid lies about his betters! It makes one afraid to sleep lest he eggs ~~the~~ the ruffians into murdering us in our beds! He calls us hypocrites, whitened sepulchres full of dead bones, blind, robbers of widows and orphans, stiff-necked -- anything which comes to his tongue!"

Stephen had dutifully scowled across the colonnade at the personable young man who at that moment emerged. He had the forehead of a dreamer and ^{a resolute} ~~mouth~~ mouth. He stood by a pillar, talking to a group of soberly dressed men and women around them.

"I hope he has the wisdom to stay away from Jerusalem with that kind of talk," Stephen said, scowling.

But Mary had looked with interest on the stranger who had spoken so eloquently. Words which exactly described The Family as she saw them.

"But he is going!" the sisters spat rapidly ~~in~~ in unison, their bony frames trembling in their eagerness to acquaint Stephen with the terrible news.

"He is supposed to be a worker of miracles. You know how gullible the lower orders are. I daresay they support him well for the so-called miracles, but he is looking farther afield. No doubt he believes he will earn more in Jerusalem."

"But I thought you said he was a carpenter. Doesn't he work at his trade?"

"Trade?" Rachel echoed, staring incredulously into the face of her nephew. "No -- he does not. He spends his days reading the books of the Prophets for his fisherman friends, then puts the queerest interpretation on what he reads. I believe he twists it," she ended in a whisper. She brought her face nearer her nephew's, the other two sisters leaning forward with her. The three old faces with the identical traps for mouths made Mary fancy that soon they would commence snipping pieces from Nephew Stephen's jowls.

"Twists - it?" Stephen asked puzzledly.

"Twists it." The three old heads nodded in unison.

Stephen cleared his throat. "But - twists - it?"

"He twists it," they declared.

Stephen swallowed. "Twists what?" he managed at last.

Ruth and Rhoda pulled back their heads and stood erect, their chins well in. Rachel gave her head a little shake.

"Blasphemy!" she said, her sharp face tightening for the word. "Blasphemy -- sets himself up!"

"Up?" Stephen said. Mary wanted to hit him.

"Dear boy, I knew you would be horrified,"

Rachel said fondly. "But he does. He did. We were in ^{Nazareth} ~~XXXXXXXX~~ last month for the cool weather, when who comes striding into the village at the head of the motley ~~XXXXX~~ which goes around with him, but this ferocious young man. Walked right into the synagogue and without a by your leave, reads a passage to these simple villagers -- you know the passage dear Stephen. I know you know the books very well indeed, thanks to your dear, dead father -- the passage about the acceptable year. Then he calmly closes the book, looks around on all our faces, everyone of us, and says that this is the acceptable year and that he is the -- the Messiah!"

Stephen's splutter was the only sound in the shocked silence.

"Why -why - I - I !" Stephen pulled himself together. "What did they say to that?"

The three sisters clasped their fingers and

stared down at them. Mary thought if things with beaks could smile, then the sisters were smiling.

"Well -- you know the laws of our people about good women. And even though we say it ourselves, we are good women," Rachel simpered. She looked up again, her beady eyes shiny. "We spoke to the men of the village and they went after him. They caught him and took to the edge of a precipice to throw him down for his blasphemy -- but he escaped." Her voice rose. "How he did, we do not know -- as gentle bred persons we did not go, you understand, for I hear it can be horrible -- but he escaped, for there he is!"

Mary looked, across at the group, looked to Jesus.

Later that year, he came to Jerusalem. Stephen had died quite suddenly and she was in mourning. She did not know how John, her son, [REDACTED] discovered the Nazarene. John collected friends like pebbles on a shore. All sizes and shapes and stripes. At John's persuasion, plus her own intriguing memories of the fine shock this unconventional stranger had given the detested Capernaum aunts, she had gone with him to hear the Nazarene preach outside the

city. And then a strange thing happened.

She remembered she had been standing on the outskirts of the crowd. The Nazarene, as was his custom she afterwards learnt, had been passing up and down through the crowd after his sermon. Suddenly the people before her had parted and there he stood, looking at her. She could not recall having any emotions when their eyes met. It was as if everything, time, emotions, her surroundings, ~~WERE~~ suspended.

"Is this your mother, John?" the Nazarene asked.
 "In mourning?"

The boy beside her said something. She remembered now how she had looked at his hands running the tassels of his robes through his fingers and thinking what ^{good} hands he had. Strong, wide, firm. The hands of a maker. Hands of carpenter. Then the Nazarene had spoken directly at her.

"You must let the dead bury their dead," he said gently, strangely.

There was nothing she could do now. Please be sensible, Mary. That was what Janus had said. Janus was right. A friend goes away and there is a sense of loss; as one missed a favourite chair from a corner, a piece of tapestry from a wall, But not this.

is light. My yoke and my burden will bring peace, not pain."

She had accepted the Nazarene's yoke as if it had been made by his own carpenter's hand for her. So she had remained serene through it all and poor Janus had been unable to understand her serenity. Unable to understand that the paths which had led them both, one a Jewess, the other a Roman soldier, to the same road, had nothing to do with either of their wills, but was ^{as} fated as love. It was ^{knowing this} ~~that~~ that made you so free. ^{So} you could mount ^{up with} ~~the~~ wings as eagles.

Then, if so, why are you running around all panicky inside, panicky as poor John Mark running the streets tonight? Eh? Perhaps you weren't as free as you thought?

"Will you take me to my cousin, Nicodemus?" she asked suddenly.

Matthew had been very quiet. He halted at her words. "I don't get the principle," he said.

She smiled a little at his Galilean talk. "There is no -- principle, Matthew. I want to go to my cousin's. You know the way --- at any rate, I can show you."

He resumed his walk. He had been very quiet. He said: "Tell me, the cloak your son had on tonight. Is it his?"

Of course. There it was. That preposterous garment.

She had put it down to his boyish need for some

kind of disguise in the brigand-soldiers game he had been playing tonight.

She said quickly: "No, it was not. Why do you ask?"

And why was she uneasy and relating her disturbed state to the challenge of the Legion concerning Janus and a cloak and John Mark's furious reaction? He had been quite suddenly angry with the crazy men. Rudely called them apes.

Matthew was hurrying her now. He seemed anxious to get her to Nicodemus' house.

Chapter 10

Max Seneca looked around the room. His eyes were withdrawn and haughty. They skidded indifferently off the secretive Hebrew faces. The faces were tucked in around the mouths and around the bases of the noses and climbed ^{steeply} ~~XXXXXX~~ up the cheek bones and went down again into shadowed, restless eyes. Max Seneca ~~did not~~ ~~XXXXXX~~ like Hebrew faces.

A few Greeks glittered their eyes on him, indifferent as his. He should know they were citizens of Rome, like him, even if they were here for a Passover. He hated Greeks. They assumed too big. He would like to have a Greek to himself one day. He would.

"Is your ^{Hebrew} friend here?" he asked Guiseppe like

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an insult.

Guiseppe Zellini squinted around the room through a thin smoke from the brazier that warmed it. Guiseppe had a sense of wellbeing. He was among Jews. At the fortress, he was Guiseppe the Butt, the Bore, the Crude, the locum tenens Gentleman. Among the Jews, he was Somebody. He grinned and rubbed a hand down his forearm. He nodded here and nodded there.

Here and there, a few burnoused heads moved faintly. Guiseppe caught everyone of them and could have reeled off their names and ancestries. He was very much at home.

"Jew lover, I asked if your friend was in here?"

A couple of temple guards were in the room as a warning to the people in the High Priest's palace to observe the rules of decorum. Some of them had been waiting for many hours. And now this matter of the arrest of a mad Nazarene would further delay their hope of gaining audience with the High Priest. It could be understood they could lose their decorum.

Guiseppe beamed and nodded across the room again. He also beckoned with his finger. He also trumpeted happily: "'Skull' -- come over here!"

One of the temple guards marched across the room and saluted him. His face was skull-like, very bony and white.

"'Skull', where can I find Cap'n Malchus?"

The guard saluted ~~again~~ and turned on his heels. ~~He~~ He was very smart. Max discovered he hated him and it made him happy. He looked at the pleased Guiseppe as they fell in behind the Jewish guard.

"By all the seven gods!" he swore. "You even know their nick-names!"

Guiseppe scowled. A while ago he hadn't felt hunted. Now looking at the wax-fruit face of Max Seneca, he was being driven again. He itched to break things. He wanted to take that ~~face~~ ~~face~~ and press it to pulp. He could do it easy too with his big hands. He could take that face in his two hands and uproot that tongue which swore fashionable oaths by the - the - seven gods --

"March properly before this rabble, you clumsy fool!" Max snarled in a whisper.

Guiseppe jerked himself out of the shambling walk into which his thoughts had led him and fell into step behind Max, his head held proudly erect.

Malchus had just left the High Priest and was issuing several new orders to a hastily assembled patrol. They were to hurry, he told them. The quarry was no longer a fat, sitting duck, but a sly little fox who knew every dodge, Malchus told

them. Then he went in from the courtyard to his quarters where, he had been told, his friend Guiseppe awaited him.

"You know the second, Malchus?" Guiseppe said jovially. "Comes after the First."

Malchus saluted Max Seneca respectfully. The Roman didn't move a muscle. Malchus hastily shifted his eyes back to Guiseppe.

"Well, what's the news?" Max Seneca barked. "Have they picked her up?"

Malchus stubbornly locked his eyes with Guiseppe's. The flush on his face which Max Seneca's insult had brought on, was fading now, but his eyes were angry. Guiseppe cleared his throat unhappily. His eyes pleaded with Malchus. He forced a laugh on a bottom note.

"Speak freely to the Second, friend Malchus. He knows about us here."

A fat hog belly-flopping in his wallow, Max thought of his man, Guiseppe. A fat hog, home at last.

Malchus turned abruptly to face Max Seneca. His shoulder screened Guiseppe, cutting him out of their company. His eyes burned their hate on the officer of the occupying power, the hated alien. The smile on the Roman creased out, slowly, unsure.

"We are no longer interested in the woman," Malchus said. "The cloak belongs to her son. We are trying to find the boy. The High Priest had

thought the initials were hers."

Max Seneca's eyebrow lifted. "Where does this leave Janus Aurelius?" he demanded.

Malchus shrugged. Max looked around Malchus for Guiseppe. "Show yourself, you fat fool. What about Janus? Will this leave him in the clear?"

Guiseppe shifted abediently from behind the Hebrew officer's shoulder. "I didn't know about this," he said tonelessly.

Max did not scream but he nearly did. He said to Malchus: "How did you know about the boy?"

"Our man who had been on the lookout for her in the Garden has only just come in. We had no evidence, except Judas' that the band had been plotting together in her house under the guise of holding a Passover, so we hoped she would go with them to the Garden. But our man was struck down outside the city -- by a thief, we presumed. He it was who told us that the cloak your First Captain brought in was seized from the boy's shoulder. He saw the boy in the garden. Gethsamane."

"But how will that affect Janus?" Max snapped irritably.

"That is not my concern," Malchus said coldly. He also conveyed contempt. "I carry out the orders of the High Priest." He shrugged and added: "Perhaps goes as a sounding-board. he ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ after the boy, ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ Pluck him and mark who sing. He knows the woman loves her son. Janus loves the woman."

Max Seneca wheeled away. Guiseppe stared after him. The tunic lay flat along Max's back. The studs

in his footgear hit the tiles in small explosions. Guiseppe looked unhappily back at Malchus. The Hebrew's face was a closed book. Guiseppe moved off in a shambling walk behind the **S**econd.

They came out of the palace and Max headed towards the fortress. He took choppy short-tempered strides that warned Guiseppe into silence. Max had absorbed the liquor into his system now. He had used up all the hilarity. Now, all that he was capable of, Janus would know soon enough. His hate was uncoiling and crawling towards Janus and it would pass under or over every abstacle until it reached him. Max felt strong and well able. His brain was clear and the blood sang high.

They took the short pass through the court of Gentiles. Max smiled and aimed down for the stray cooking pots which had spilled over from the rows of pilgrims' camps into the alley left open between them. He strode deliberately on an earthenware bowl and splintered it. He saw something else down there and his eyes sparkled with fun. He brought down the iron-studded sandals and the fingers yielded under them. The body of the careless sleeper arched, flopped, a long howl of anguish. Max showed all his teeth. His eyes gleamed when he saw how the now alerted campers hurriedly pulled arms and legs out of his way.

Guiseppe, stepping more carefully behind him, pondered how soon before one of their patrols would

one morning discover Max Seneca in the gutter with
a knife in his back.

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Chapter 11

John Mark braked abruptly. He did it by throwing his shoulders back and digging his heels against the edges of the cobbles. He could do it fine. It sent a jar up through his body and burst it against his skull. The better you did it, the harder the burst. He looked back over his shoulder. He was clear of the Temple area now.

He had no more ideas for the night. Now that everything was alright with her, all he had to do was keep out of people's way. If he kept out of people's way, he would not make such a fool of him-

self. Whenever he did anything for grown-ups, he made a fool of himself. It was because they never seemed to think ahead as he did. They were peculiar.

He walked on, turning into streets at whim. He felt very free and untrammelled. He heard a patrol of soldiers approaching long before they came in sight and would have ducked out instinctively. But he remembered in time that he had heard they weren't after his family at all. He stuck his thumbs into ~~his waist~~ his waist ^{-band} and swaggered a little as they ~~came~~ neared. He whistled thinly under his breath a tune he didn't recognize, he was so wary. But they passed and didn't look at him. He whistled louder when they were past. He thought pityingly on Saul. Here he was, John Mark, out here, risking footpads and ignoring Roman patrols, while Saul cowered in his bed, doubtless with the covers drawn over his head. He suspected that Saul was a coward.

The soldiers disappeared around a corner and he was alone on the street again. He felt as dangerous as a Bedouin bandit. He almost felt the pull of the sash ^{at} ~~his~~ his waist weighted with the gleaming blades. He almost felt the brush of the tribal burnouse at the back of his neck. He was a marauding Bedouin. A silver of a yell escaped from his throat before he could control it. He looked around quickly, alarmed at the quantity of dangerous things inside him. He must be careful. He stoned a cat

until it went over a wall.

Then he remembered what he would have to do in the morning and he tried ^{going over} ~~repeating~~ the words of the psalm. With the Roman soldiers all around him on the wall, he would have to shout the words of the great national psalms so loud that the Committee down in the courtyard, could hear them.

He went on again, his head carefully empty for a time. Then the night and the silence got into him again. Sometimes he was the great lion-hunter, stalking among the ~~rocks~~ rocks. Then, unaccountably, he slipped into the part of the hunted, coughing and grunting ~~grunting~~ like the great cats. It was very intense and he had to stop to breathe.

A puff of wind came out of a side street and lifted the hairs at the nape of his neck. The night smelled of rain. He looked up past the flat roofs of the houses and saw there was a bit of overcast. He stopped and searched the sky keenly, hopeful and fearful at once, that more clouds would gather and a rainstorm would break over the city. It would be wonderful to arrive at the Wall, later, soaked to the skin and just let drop the information, barely in the hearing of Saul, that he had walked the streets all night through the same driving rainstorm which had made Saul and his Committee duck their heads under the sheets. What their staring eyes would say! What their gaping mouths would declare! He bet Saul would be moved. He bet even Saul would

be moved by that.

Or by this.

Another patrol was coming down the street. One in Straight Street, one in Sinai Street, another in Tiberius Way, one by the public baths, this was the fifth. He would tell them off on his fingers to Saul, looking into his eyes, that he had met with five patrols during the night. Plus of course, Ben Legion. How had the Legions known of the Joppa Wall? They seemed to know everything. He guessed because they were so many.

The patrol had been searching for hours without success. They had forced their way into several likely looking houses, putting their questions with fists and elbows and knees but the owner of the cloak had eluded them. The section of the city with which they had *BEEN* charged, had been worked through. Now they were on their way back to barrack to report failure to Quartus. Each of the four fervently hoped that another of the patrols would bring better news. None of them had forgotten how Quartus had joked of the galleys.

They swung alongside the Hebrew boy and the patrol corporal who led them reached for him.

"Halt, men," he growled. "Let's have a look at this brave young Isaac who doesn't take off for the woods when he sees us coming."

As he talked, he was roughly turning the boy

to him, waiting for one of the men to uncover the lantern.

John Mark made his face stony. He wanted the light to find him that way when it flashed on his face. He blinked once when it came on, then stared steadily at the beam.

"Well -- I'll be hung up!" exclaimed the corporal. "Boy -- what are you doing out here?"

A husky voice soldier asked: "Who is he?"

The man with the lantern chuckled. "Young John Mark -- the young colt from the paddock where Janus has been casting his loop."

They all laughed except the corporal; and the man with the husky voice leaned his face nearer to him and said eagerly: "Tell me, boy, you ever there when he comes casting his loop?"

"No. I'll bet you never. I bet they put you out like the cat, little Jacob," the one with the lantern said.

A short one stomped when he laughed. He turned right about, stomping, his knees going high and the whooping like a sick cough.

"She has a sister, young Jacob? Then I could come looping too. Marry the wench and be brother-in-law to a first captain. Get into good company, away from these cobble-busters."

John Mark was infuriated.

"We are not Jacobs, we are Israelites! The chosen name Jehovah gave to his chosen people!"

With a howl of delight, the short soldier drew out of the ring, hopping about like a rooster. He burrowed his head between his companions again and talked in John Mark's face. There was beef and wine thick on his breath. The roughest of men were among those who drew garrison duty in such outposts as Jerusalem. Rude citizens from the purlieus of the Tiber who would volunteer to do extra duty at crucifixions for the sake of the few coins from sales of the criminals' clothes.

John Mark's fury rose to boiling point. The rough latin voices struggling over the Hebrew words assaulted even more his national outrage. Tears stung his eyes. Not surprisingly, he exploded.

"Pig-eating idolaters!"

"Alright --- done!" rapped the corporal giving his head a half turn.

"Now, come on you," he said to John Mark.

"What are you doing out here?"

He was hating again. He had hated all adults awhile ago back in the alley. And he hadn't felt good and sure of himself again until he had broken away from them and was alone. Then everything had gone straight and sweet as he liked it. He had occupied his own thoughts and used streets at whim.

"Hey!" the short one whispered strongly. "You ask old Janus if he has room for an old army friend, right?"

"I said stop shovelling the dirt, soldier!" the

corporal said again. The short one knew that ~~that~~ the bastard non com was not fooling. ~~He went back to the~~ He went back to the edge of the ring and whistled softly through his teeth.

"What are you doing on the streets alone, at this hour?" the corporal said.

John Mark did not like to lie. He had told lies before. He could count the times for he remembered them. They made him sick inside, as if himself inside wanted to come out of himself and look back at himself. He had to fight himself at those times, for it would made him sicker to look back at himself. He thought it out slowly, counting the cost. But he had to be free of the soldiers. It could never be sweet again if he was not free of them. And in any case, it was alright lying to the Romans. It was not like really bearing false witness against anyone. "God on Sinai was no fool." Old Gamaliel sometimes said it.

The smell of leather and staleness, ~~that~~ ~~that~~. He had liked the smell of Peter and the others. They smelled of salt wind and sea.

"I was going for my uncle. My mother is not well."

"Where are the servants? Why didn't she send one of them?"

"Stupid Roman! Dont you know our customs? Aren't the servants at Passover?"

He received a clout for that.

later, another passed. Nothing else moved. The hand was taken from his mouth and he worked his lips and spat.

"Those were the spies from the Temple, young ^{your} lord. They want nice linen cloak too," Ben Legion told him.

"How - how ---?"

"How did they know? Simple. One of them, very famous, very, very, famous. He is called The Rodent. He saw you in Gethsemane. With Divine justic, he was the same one you hit with the stone and ~~took~~ ^{took} his cloak. He recovered and returned into the city and told the old devil, Annas. The High Priest knew then that the initial on the cloak was yours. How do we know all this? Simple. We have spies who spy on the spies of the old Master spy, Annas. We are of the Zealots, you know. And sometimes of the Sicarii, and of whatever is going, even, sometimes. of the Sanhedrin, heh, heh, although I am beginning to suspect they would be all ashamed to think that we think so." He laughed softly and sanely.

"Did you know the Nazarene?" John Mark asked angrily. "Did he know you?"

"We know him vey well, indeed, boy, and he knows us. His father is Joseph, a carpenter in Nazareth. His mother is Mary, also of Nazareth. Good head on her shoulders. Five boys she has. He is her first. Fine lady. The boy went wrong."

"Must be his father," Demas Legion said.

"We Jews have always had trouble with our Josephs."

"True," Ben Legion said. "We followed Jacob's boy, another Joseph, to Egypt to buy corn and got ourselves sold into slavery. Took us awhile to get out."

"Heh, heh, heh," they ~~crackled~~ crackled heatlessly.

"You dont like the Nazarene," John Mark said accusingly.

"We were for the Nazarene once," ^{Ben} said shortly. "Didn't you hear Herod's ex-jackal, Matthew, say so tonight? But the Nazarene is foolish. It is expedient that he dies. Once he even said so himself. So he uses palm branches to fight swords."

He had heard words something like these before. It had been the commencement of the breaking up of things. He knew it now. These were words which frightened him and hurt. And not just words. These

were the matters he had not wanted to remember since he stumbled out of Gethsamane.

"Devil Annas has decreed that since you're too young to crucify, the spies should find you and stage an -- accident. They've been to your house ~~as a needle.~~ as a needle."

It went into him clean and fast ~~as a needle.~~

~~And~~ And only when he breathed did he know the pain was there. His mouth wooded over, his tongue was a tree. The words had to force a way out. ~~Ben Legion answered the two~~ Ben Legion answered the two words.

"Your mother? Your mother is safe. She has not gone back to your house. She is at your uncle, Nicodemus. / Dont forget though that Nicodemus is the night blooming camomile whom Annas wants to pluck."

Well, alright. She was alright. He would go to her at Cousin Demmy's. So these Legion even knew all about how he had got Cousin Demmy to visit the Nazarene that night? Well, alright. Old Annas had found out too. Well, ~~exactly~~ alright. And now that he knew the spies were after him, he would show them. He was not afraid, even if he ~~found~~ it difficult to swallow. His knees were shaking. But even when he ran the foot-races at school, which he had won every season the time he came in ~~except~~ except ~~second~~ second because Saul had put up a boy to jostle him on the bend, his knees always shook just before the start.

"You are brave, boy?"

It was funny that just two hours ago he had thought Ben Legion and his companions fools and half-

witted; but now they were taking him in charge. Although the others hadn't said anything, he knew all of them had him in charge. It was much as when he was younger and in a crowd with his mother. She never had to say anything but you felt she had you in charge. Something coming out of her and building itself around you so that no harm could come to you.

It wouldn't be like this on the Wall, in the morning. The sun would be up and you would see what you were fighting and how to duck and run and turn back in your tracks and go again, swiftly and you would not be sweating so much as ^{would} those down there on the ground ~~XXXXX~~ be sweating for you. Tonight you saw shadows; and ordinary street-corners yielded ~~the~~ hands at ~~fingers~~ your ankles.

"We are taking you to the only place Annas and his spies will not look for you. Simon Peter and the one called John Boanerges are there. They will look after you. The palace of high priest Annas."

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Chapter 12

Nicodemus could understand hard grief, the kind which, out of fury, fired its own clay, walled up the openings and stayed inside. He would have understood, if not comforted by, the kind which took no shape but turned willingly like water into any friendly hand ready to cup it. But while he had expected anguish at the predicament of the Nazarene, to his astonishment, Mary was unaccountably unclouded, calm, almost tranquil. In a queer sense, exalted. The condition was offkey; she was not a vestal, sequestered from reality. No, indeed. She was a vibrant capable woman who, post the ineffable cousin Stephen, had raised her son strong and well, making her own life, unafraid of the inevitable talk which followed a Jewish lady under court from a

Roman officer. What had caused her to sally into what he could only think of as gross unreality? To land in a country alien to her intelligence; so fragile underfoot that it abdicated the strong ^{advocat ed} law of Moses and instead the weakness of loving your ~~enemies~~ enemies and praying for your oppressors. He shook his head.

"I dont know what was your hope in him, Mary. I truly try to, but I dont. Messiah? If he is, we shall know, shant we?"

An odd light appeared in her eyes. Amused? Wary? What?

"When?"

"My dear?"

"When shall we know?"

He was not usually a wavering man, although he took time to make up his mind. He was the kind that liked to search a matter from both ends and in the middle. Too much so, he conceded. Perhaps that had been the trouble with his suit. Cousin Stephen had lost no time waffling.

He took her hands, smiling tenderly.

"Our abstract historians, my little heathen, the first Isaiah as well as the two unknown poets of the Exile whom we call the 'other' Isaiahs, speak of the Messiah in several ways. The Isaiahs say he will come as a prince and as a pauper, as a child and as the creator, as a shadow and as a shining diadem, as a warrior and as a peacemaker,

as a leader and as a servant, as God-in-heaven and God-with-us, take your choice. So you see, dear Mary, if it is not easily come to. The choices are as far apart as north and south. You ask, when shall we know? The answer, forgive me, is, We shall know when."

"You are as cryptic as a priest, deep Demmy."

"I hope you can see why the priests have to be cryptic. They are our on going historians, the cryptic historians, of the order of Melchizedek, incidentally the order from which will come the Messiah. The institution survives because of its secrets, and woe to any member who would open those secrets to the world. Old Jeremiah, probably the most ridiculed and threatened of our abstract historians, whose final whereabouts not even our tireless scribes have been able to trace, was hounded precisely because he set out to dismantle the esoterics which our holy men had skilfully wrapped around our religion." He looked away thoughtfully. "Your Jesus is the same."

"But Jeremiah was six hundred years ago, Demmy! These are times of new outlook."

He returned his gaze to her.

"Have you forgotten, Ye must be born again? The words of the Oracles, whether of yesterday or today, are still cryptic. Isaiah, the poet, the second of our three-headed Isaiahs, care-

fully, prophetically if you like, wrote it down for us although prophecy was not his discipline. He recognized the difficulty of the when. So he enjoined us to learn the waiting game. As did Lord David before him, and as did Jeremiah and others. All recommend to us the value, indeed, the necessity of patience. Learning to wait for the wings of intellect and insight, that will cause us to mount up as eagles.

"Did I have a hope in your Jesus? You ask? Why did I go to see him? Even to take a few risks in his cause? For whatever reasons I suppose one can find in a mind that is curious. Mine was whatever is created in a curious mind. I have not, perhaps I cannot, categorise the cause. It could have been that he merely intrigued me. Whatever it was, I admired his courage in putting forward a new theory in a society dangerously opposed to new theories. He should be a Greek; you know how absolutely devoted they are to new theories. I am - sorry for him, my dear, but you see my dilemma. I am myself. Nicodemus. Born to think and act a certain way until I die. Unless, of course I become born again."

Her laughter was infectious as ever. "Dont look so worried, Demmy, please, for having struck the truth. And, do, stop explaining yourself. I

have not come to ask you to get into trouble with old Annas again. As to what hope I had in him? None unfulfilled. I did not believe, as my Johnny did, that he would be coming to Jerusalem with an army at his back. His hands weren't built for swords. They were made to heal the sick; to comfort the unhappy, to - to raise the dead, according to some pretty reliable witnesses. He was a presence that stirred, and the world of the Temple ~~was~~ ~~was~~ ~~was~~ agitated out of the status in quo and never forgave him. They finished him off. In a way I cannot explain, I have become -- different, because I have known him." She added softly: "And served him."

Demmy looked down at the floor and thought of the colt and the upper room she had loaned the Nazarene. Serving him was the worse you could do to a jealous Temple. He said slowly: "To tell the truth, that was why I went with John Mark that night to see him. I had heard of these miraculous healings he has been performing all over the country. And when this theory of his came to my hearing --" he looked up at her "--- the one about everlasting life, it made me curious to see whether the fellow had discovered some method of at least prolonging life. I must confess he disappointed me."

She laughed with what seemed to be real amusement. "Why, Demmy! That sounds as if you had hoped

to bottle some of whatever he had and get in early on the trade! You are a lawyer by profession but a tradesman at heart! How Janus would love to hear this! He says we are a nation of tradespeople -- even to our priests who change moneys for prilgrims into Temple currency and sell lambs for the sacrifice in the courts."

He looked a trifle annoyed. "Here,, let me take your cloak now. Sit down, Mary, you must be tired."

"No - yes, Demmy, thanks. But I am not tired, not really."

She smiled; not brightly, with an effort, but with thanks and to say that she liked him. He took the cloak from her shoulders and folded the folds in symmetry and went across the room and draped it over the stand. He returned, his face expressionless. He stopped before her, his hands clasped ~~in front of~~ at his back. She had always thought his head distinguished. Like the heads on those busts of Roman senators -- carved for them by the Greek artists and looking outrageously like Grecian heads.

"My solemn Demmy," she said, smiling up at him, "you look, standing there, like the soul of rectitude. I know you are dying to ask me where I am coming from and with whom did I come and why have I come."

It did not confuse him. He was never confused by her. Mary suspected that he knew her more than she knew herself. Sometimes she thought that this was probably why she had never been in love with him.

The man whom she loved must leave her secrets lying where they were, ~~undisturbed~~ undisturbed. Then in her own time and way, she would portion them out to him, and watch him discover her. Love withers and dies in the cold, pure air of great knowledge.

"Yes," he said, smiling gently. "From where, why and with whom?"

She told him.

"Yet you did not come to me at first?" he chided her gently. "I am your only ^{kinsman} ~~kinsman~~ in Jerusalem, Mary."

Her eyes went past his head. "I did not think it a moment to seek - ^{kinsmen} ~~kinsmen~~, Demmy. I thought it a moment to seek powerful friends."

"I also have some power," he reminded her.

"Only the High Priests among our people possess the power to do what I want done."

"You mean, to release - him?"

"So," she agreed in sudden brusqueness. "Would ~~you have~~ ^{you have} been able to persuade him?"

It is expedient that one man dies instead of a nation. The ^{rationale} ~~rationale~~ of men who are called to be High Priests. Absolutely necessary to ~~the~~ the job.

"No, I dont think so."

"So, you see."

Did
" ~~see~~ you, too -- see?"

"I know. I failed there too. Neither would Janus ~~try to have him released~~ try to have him released."

"Janus is Rome, Mary. Rome. Do you understand

what that means?"

"I am in love with him, my cousin. Do you understand? You get the principle -- as Matthew would say?"

The room was big and masculine, of wide ~~wide~~ ^{hide} covered couches and dull-polished tables, suggesting a large-handedness she found restful. Stephen's room had never been like this. The scrubbed floor was always too well scrubbed, and the shiny bits had gleamed to the point where they repelled you. After Nicodemus had come close to her Stephen, ~~she could not have thought~~ and she would no doubt have thought she was in love with him had she not met Janus. Where Stephen had been self-indulgent and mean, Demmy was a thoughtful, honest man. She could fit none of these neat labels to Janus.

"Annas gave orders for the whipping a hour or two ago."

She covered her face with her hands. "But it is dreadful, Demmy," she whispered.

"It is done to ^{nearly} ~~all~~ all prisoners of the Temple. We ~~are~~ ^{are} in the Sanhedrin, ~~and I have ordered it done in cases which~~ require that kind of punishment."

Most of the time, she thought of men as children, noisy, often grubby, sometimes trying, children. And when the iron in them showed, for any purpose, it shook her a little to remember they weren't children. She pulled her hands from her face and stared at him.

"What are you going to do to him?" she questioned

harshly. "Let me hear it from you. I have heard it from Janus, the Roman, but I want to hear it from you, a fellow Hebrew and one of the Sanhedrin. Are you going to murder him for the truth?"

His face lost its immobility and descended into decidedly stern lines. He has ascended the bench, she said to herself cruelly. He will pass judgement now.

"Men aren't murdered for the truth, Mary," he said gently. "They die so their beliefs may die with them or grow out of them. It is the ultimate test of truth. A seed must be put into the ground before a tree will grow out of it."

"And you are one of the willing farmers," she said, but not really bitter.

"If his beliefs are contrary to the law which I have sworn to uphold and if I am called in to give judgement, I shall judge according to the law, Mary."

"Spoken like a man, Demmy." Her mood had returned and now she teased him. "Janus on one side and you on the other, it is a ^{triumph} ~~triumph~~ for law and order. All the way. Tell me, if I had been brought before the judgement seat, would you judge according to the law?"

She had hurt him.

"Don't break the rules, Mary. I am playing fair."

"Do you think Janus would? I mean, judge

according to the law."

Hold on, Demmy. Right here, I am not sure if I ~~am~~ truly jest~~ing~~.

He took a turn about the room. He returned to her.

"I understand Annas. Good or bad, the things he is upholding are the things settled by thousands of years of trial before his time. From Abram down to us. We naturally think we know more than the ancients. Some laugh at their precepts as old fashioned. We are the great Just Nows. The know-it-all Recents. Were there not men like Annas -- permanent, immovable -- the world would go to pieces. You will therefore understand the pain it causes him to know that I, a ruler among the people, displayed an interest in the Nazarene's doctrine. Whether I believed or not was beside the point. I had gone."

And whether he believed, not even he was sure. It had seemed at first just another of the new sects which sprang up faster than thorns in a society as religious as the Hebrews'. To receive what I have to offer, you must be born again. And he had left the shelter where they stayed at nights on the Mount of Olives, to which the excited young John Mark had led him, unsure whether to laugh or be angry. Mary Mark said a question but he was elsewhere.

That had been the strength of the man. He made you unsure. What followed in you would be the measure of his whack. There had been no time to measure the whack of the new doctrine on the lawyer, Nicodemus.

Except for an uncharacteristic buffo committed in
'Annas' Council that ~~###~~ could not be truly categorised
as a whack. Not really. Merely marginally lunatic.

"I said, did you believe, Demmy?"

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He shook his head irritably. "That is not the point, I tell you." That answer did not seem the right one. He threw himself down on a couch.

But this was an inept way out of it, instead of arguments specially using the perfectly feasible ~~arguments specially~~ trained and ready in your head for just these situations. It reminded him of the biggest failure in his life -- when he had left the cave of the Nazarene with his tail between his legs. All the fine arguments he could have used to bury that silly allegory with which the Nazarene had routed him! You must be born again.

Instead, he had been quite as stupid. Can I enter my mother's womb again?

The unsureness had stayed. For he had gone into the Sanhedrin and attempted to justify Jesus and had only been saved from disgrace by the oblique humour of a Roman soldier who had, no doubt, been laughing up his sleeve.

"Where is Janus now?"

"I think we can be sure he is somewhere manfully doing his duty. I believe there is some scare on about a rich Jerusalemite who was in the Garden and who ran away, the wise fellow, leaving his cloak behind.

"They have the cloak now, but Janus secretly thinks the search is hopeless."

"Janus has several rich friends," he said sulkily.

"He only has to search among his friend^s."

"I, among them," she met him. "Say it. He is like me. Janus has no regard for a religion that could breed such men as your Annas and my late Stephen."

Nicodemus looked quickly up at her. Was she putting in a needle cleverly? No. There had been aloes there. The fellow Jesus was redoubtably capable at erecting saluting ~~stands~~ ^{stands} at every conceivable vantage for putting your motives under scrutiny. Self scrutiny. A process that made you climb all over yourself in confusion. And also could elicit some pretty damning conclusions. Conclusions warranted to make you fall foul of the Temple, the Roman conquerors, or even, he had heard, of your familial authority and obligations. If a story going the rounds was true. It was being said the Nazarene had declared that to become a member of his sect, one of the requirements, besides the preposterous second-birth, was that one should hate one's own family; hate your mother, your father, sister, brother, the lot. Yet even here it was not exceptionally lunatic if one pursued the logic that being born again carried the probability of new fresh parents. Therefore, first priority: one must begin demolishing the stale old ties. To put on the livery of discontent. An army so clad wore its wages. The triumph was in the challenge.

Nicodemus caught himself up. Where was this crazy thinking leading him? Time to go. He chuckled secretly. Annas would have the devil's own time interrogating that prisoner. But, come now. Think on

other things. On Mary, the woman Thou almost gave me. lovely Neck of the ~~XXXX~~ grace of the bent bow. How does one think? Nicodemus is a thinker. A thinker in the law. Not in matters of life and love. Mouth enticing as sin. Law is not life nor love. The law kills. God, ^I ~~love~~ her. Eye for an eye. The law is vengeful. And this, of course, Lawyer Nicodemus, is blasphemy. The law was given by Jehovah through Moses to the Chosen Children of Israel. The law is just. Not kind. Not merciful. The law is just.

He spoke quietly. "Religion does not breed men. Men breed their religions. Then they direct their curses at it when they stumble against it. The Nazarene will not be murdered for his truth, as you put it, but for his untimeliness. He went too far and came up against his ^{own} ~~own~~ religion. A wiser man would have backed, and waited. He wanted to tear down the Temple, the same Temple in which he was allowed to preach his doctrines. Annas is annoyed."

"Do you really believe what you are saying?
Do you, Cousin?"

"I do not wait to believe what I say. I say
it first, ~~then~~ ^{then} ~~I am~~ ^{I am} believe. ~~I~~ obedient to my vocation."

"Demmy," she said slowly, groping, "you are --
you are dishonest."

"So is everyone who thinks," he said coldly.
He rose. "So is he. He sets you the impossible
and say, 'Here is my standard. Do this, and every-
thing is yours. Love your enemies.'"

"A teacher's task is to set standards, Demmy.
Ours, to reach for them."
and stared at a

He turned ~~the wall~~ wall, turned quickly,
guiltily back to face her, mindful of his manners.

"I am not satisfied that is right. Very well
put but not necessarily right. I am not satisfied
with being told ~~that~~ ^{that} my grasp of God depends on
nothing more tangible than an abstract of water
and spirit. He must do better than that, if he has
ambitions to take the place of Moses. Moses brought
us the commandments in stone. He told us when to
wash and when to make love. He was a leader who led.
Do you wonder that a strong man such as Annas pre-
fers the God of Moses?"

"So Annas would slaughter those prophets ^{with whom} ~~he~~ he
disagrees ~~with~~" she murmured.

He shrugged. "That is a hazard of the game."

"How full of Annases is our history and how dearly have we paid!"

"I hear he had a cousin, one John, a baptist, with similar ambitions. Seems it runs in the family. Herod cut off his head and gave it to his harlot on a silver dish after she charmed him in a dance. The Nazarene should have been warned that he could lose his life."

"Demmy, you are cruel -- and horrible!"

"As I must be to live in this jungle! I must keep my head to keep my head -- or it will go to the priests for a keepsake! As you should do, were you not so reckless! You risk your neck as you do your reputation! You not only choose to allow these men your house for their Passover tonight -- although you are aware the Temple believes they plot with the Zealots to start a rebellion in the city -- but you wander through the streets with this Matthew, and then come here, alone! Is there no sense in that pretty head of yours? Dont you know what they say about you already? You - and Janus? Whatever --!"

But she never knew whatever. She had never seen him so worked up. He held his emotions on leash. A knock came at the door. He hesitated, then walked slowly towards it, his head bowed. His shoulders looked hollow. He spoke in a low voice to whoever was at the door. He closed the door and turned. The bridge of his nose was shiny. There was a ring of white around his pupils. He reached down and gripped her shoulders and lifted

her to her feet. Where is John?" he whispered hoarsely. "Where is he?"

His fear was contagious. She was jolted aware of John. That the terror of the streets had touched him. On this bad night.

"What have they done to him?"

"Nothing - nothing - but I must know where he is!"

"I - I - dont know!" she stammered a reply, her mind feverish.

His fingers eased their pressure on her shoulders; still firmly held but composing. He said steadily: "You must stay here."

I will go to David Street ~~XXXXXX~~. You must not worry."

"But he is not at David Street! I dont know where he is! Tell me, is there something wrong?"

The ring around his eyes widened.

"Not at --!"

They stood apart ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~. Calm simultaneously flowed into them.

He said quietly, "One of my men who had been at Annas has just brought me a report. Annas' spies have been given orders to - to get hold of John. They have discovered that he was in the Garden with the Nazarene. They have his cloak."

She learnt all about it at that moment; the queer

words of the mad folk who called themselves Legion; Matthew's questions concerning the cloak. She told Nicodemus. He was busy before she was through. He was out of the room and quickly back dressed for the street.

"You must wait here, Mary. My men and I will

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find him before they can get to him."

She could see him now. He was a lonely little boy, tall for his age, taller than she, but still, a boy, walking in the dark, ashamed, unaware of his danger. Her lips were dry. She moistened them with the tip of her tongue.

"You must, Demmy," she whispered. "You must, O, you must!"

Nicodemus remembered some words from Annas about Jesus.

"Like the people of Abel and Beth-maacah, who, to satisfy King David, threw Sheba's head over the wall, we of the Temple will throw heads over the wall until Caesar is satisfied. Mark well what I say, Nicodemus. We will spare nobody to satisfy Caesar. It will be worth the trouble."

John Mark's head, a young scion of the Jerusalem aristocracy, would be worth Annas' trouble.

Chapter 13

The word was spread with studied furtiveness that the captive would go to Caiaphas. Sometimes those who spread the word also gave the route he would go by. He would be marched by Simeon's Tomb, they said.

But it was said to you as if it came from a pot of gold. Jealously doled. And so that you could not help knowing the esteem in which you were held by the Temple. You had to know you were extraordinarily entrusted. Bespoke because you were a good Jew. You would not have qualified to be told the secret movement of the important prisoner, had you not been of the select.

You had to be elected by the eyes. ~~the strong~~

~~eyes that felt for your love~~

Those who spread the word would look you up and down and sideways, eyes licking delicately, carefully along your face to see that you were a good one. And if they were satisfied, then the heads dropped somewhere lower than your shoulder and they spoke it to you up from under their armpits. It made you feel one of the privilege, the way they gave you the word.

There were two reasons why the word was spread. One reason was to test your qualification to be ~~as a~~ recruited ~~as a~~ false witness. If you listened as it it was no concern of yours and went back to nibbling on your religious diet of Passover cheese, or went back to stroking your bread, or back to whatever you had been doing, they were satisfied and moved away from you. But if you took it with your eyes going hot, and making strangled sounds in your throat, then it was known that something had gone home. And, thereafter, the mark was on you. In fact, you were off the jury, for your verdict would be clearly unfavourable. And this led to plot an ambush for the second reason: to ~~the Friends of the Felon~~ the Friends of the Felon.

The Rodent was clever. Annas was advised by his chief spy that if the word was carefully spread, the Nazarene's friends almost certainly would endeavour a rescue. He proposed to Annas that the

Temple police set ~~an~~ an ambush; ~~the~~ a once-and-for-all wipe-out of the Nazarene's people. The idea of such a wholesale massacre of Jehovah's enemies appealed to Annas.

The brazier sputtered in the room and there were sneezes and coughs. A few old male pilgrims spoke the psalms of the Hallel over and over as if they spun cocoons for their isolation. The guards around the antechamber rested their backs against the walls and had no emotion at the spies slipping about the big room, dropping their poisoned baits of information. The two Roman officers crashed across the room and the guards winked at Guiseppe and noted the concern on his face. They ignored Max Seneca.

Simon Peter and John had the mark put on them because, John, when the voice spoke at his ear, could not hold back his groan. The eye of the spy going over his face, wrinkled and brightened. Peter caught the suspicion which flared in the man's eye. He nudged John to be quiet and when the man moved away ~~to alert others~~ to alert others, they ~~exited~~ quickly exited ~~as~~ as they could.

It was crazy! Going to Annas' palace because they believed Annas would not look for him there!

They told him not to worry about it. They were in charge. Even there, they said, inside Annas' palace, under the beautiful Jewish noses of the Temple police, and the monkey noses of the foreign Roman Occupiers, even there, they were in charge. Sin, they said, was in charge everywhere. And was not each Legion a sin? They guffawed straight into the face of John Mark when they said it.

They told him to take off his ~~shoes~~ sandals because the best sandal would slap just when you ~~didn't~~ didn't want it to and he could see how silently they travelled for they never wore sandals. He would have protested, but one of the Legions simply grabbed one foot and then the other, and the sandals were off.

He was barefooted on the stones and he curled his toes around their coldness and was very angry at them for a moment. But afterwards, the warmth of his toes warmed the stones too. He settled his back to the wall and he felt very comfortable.

But it was very lonely and uneasy to be in the alley at night with the Legions and barefooted. He had meant to take them off in the morning, when he was on the wall, for he would need the feel of his bare feet on the stones when he flew along. It would give him speed and confidence to keep just ahead of the guards and make Saul sweat in fear for him. But, here in the alley, it was different.

He felt naked now without the sandals and he had become aware again of the spy smell in the cloak and so it was as if he had on nothing of his own. And he had never managed to be brave when he was naked. Once he had gone to the public baths with the class and they had been put into the common room for undressing, and, long after all the other boys had taken off their clothes, Saul had found him in the corner with almost everything on. He could remember it now. O, he was remembering it very, very, now.

How Saul had looked at him, quizzically first, entered until knowledge ~~entered~~ his eyes and his twisted lips had thinned ~~into a~~ into a ~~laugh~~ laugh and he had ~~beckoned~~ the Little ~~Sanhedrin~~ as he called the Committee.

He had not been able to do much about fighting back, for he had been too busy trying to hold his clothes onto his body while they tore at them. And, afterwards, when they leapt away howling triumphantly ~~as~~ as they dangled the torn clothing at him, he had not fought back either. For he was naked, and something had gone out of him.

"Get up," Ben Legion said.

He was being guided out of the alley by a hand at the back of his neck. His eyes were accustomed now to the dark. He saw how the Legions surrounded him. There was no crazy chatter now. ~~They~~ They travelled silently. There was something about them which reminded him of the

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stories he had heard from Cousin Demmy about the wolves when they hunted sheep on cold nights. The memory made him shudder. But after a while he found with pride that he was moving as silently as they, stopping when they stopped, becoming a shadow at the base of a wall when they did, and even snarling silently in his throat when he found they had stopped to allow some other sinister shadow by. And he didn't even need Ben Legion's whisper at his ear to tell him the shadow was a spy. He was a wolf himself now and he could smell spy.

The hand was still clamped on the back of his neck. He railed silently at the hand and ~~endeavoured~~ endeavoured to knock the grip off ~~it~~ but it only became firmer and shook him like a puppy. It told him he was not yet good enough to be on his own and he should be guided by the pack. John Mark muttered vexedly to himself and he was shaken again. They waited while Ben Legion went up ahead. There were much stoppings while Ben went up ahead to see, since the streets got wider as they nearer the palace.

There was no shaking the grip. He sullenly gave himself up to it. He told himself it was their affair if they were caught. They would be properly sorry when they saw him caught by the spies. Who were they not to accept him

when they could see he knew how to go about it? Wasn't he crossing these wider cobbles, an inch at a time, face down to the dirty ~~stones~~^{wet stones} doing it with fingers and toes and body arced upward so his clothes wouldn't swish over the cobbles? And even though all his muscles cried to make a quick run of it, instead of this slinking, inch by inch, wasn't he doing it? O, this lousy hand at his neck!

Very well. They could go on doing all the thinking for him. More trouble to them.

He was very glad he had no thinking to do. His thinking was at an end. Peter and Matthew and James and the rest of them would have to do some powerful thinking if they hoped to stay ahead of the priests. As for the plan the Legions had for him, he would see to that. Putting him with the ignorant Peter and the crazy John indeed! When, at this very moment, the soldiers may be hunting them!

Which made him think of the soldiers. It was funny he had not seen any soldiers lately. Only a few spies. And it was making him angry again. It would have been nice in a shuddery sort of way to know that soldiers of Rome had been hunting you.

He knew they had not ~~been hunting him for they had~~^{been hunting him for they had} caught him and let him go. He wished they had marched him to Antonia with their studded sandals crashing

back and forth of him and their javelins clicking in the rests at their belts. Perhaps, someone would have seen him. Then, tomorrow, when the sneering Saul looked up at the Wall and saw he was

Little Sanhedrin to lead the not there, and turned to his ~~secretary~~ laughter at his cowardice, someone standing near would say, "O, John Mark ~~cannot~~ be here today. Didn't you hear? He is in Antonia arrested by the Roman soldiers."

skulking from some Instead, ~~secretary~~ stinking spies.

They came to the wide street, the one Ben had gone ahead to scout. Ben was lying motionless on his belly, peering left and right into the street. John Mark ~~he~~ knew the place: where three thoroughfares emptied into a huge concourse in front of the theatre. It was big enough to take a Governor's escort wheeling into it and he remembered he had more than once seen the horses curving and prancing in it when King Herod visited the city and they held an entertainment for him in the theatre. Cousin Demmy had said --- was it yesterday? -- that King Herod would be in for the Passover. Mother had looked back at him, a half smile, like a boy with a secret, playing on her mouth. Cousin Demmy had said the Nazarene had better be warned not to show his face inside the city ~~until~~ until Herod ~~was~~ left. She smiled still, wordlessly until Cousin Demmy snorted and walked out. And then she had turned to look at him with the look she always shared with him, and they had both burst into laughter. For what would Cousin Demmy have said had he known the Nazarene would that night be holding his Passover supper right there in their house on David Street!

O, but it had seemed like fun then. Only after-

wards did it turn into gall and wormwood. He shook his head hard, no use thinking of it. Head down, he went out into the concourse, inching along like the Legions.

It was a concourse used to crowds. Flares lit and shadowed the whole vast empty arena. His palms worked over each flagstone, fingers gripping the edges, knees pushing against the pitted surface. He would never again stand in the concourse without being proud to tell everyone how well he knew this place they stood in. If he had time, he would have stayed to chisel his initials in the center flagstone and show it to Saul afterwards. Afterwards when he was telling them the story and their eyes were showing the whites which was their way of laughing at him. Then he forgot all this to watch how Ben did it.

They would scurry, swiftly, for a ^{few} ~~few~~ yards, then flop motionless to their bellies; then up again, bent double so they were like ~~great hounds loose in the concourse, run swiftly and down once more.~~ ~~great hounds loose in the concourse, run swiftly and down once more.~~ Motionless. Darker stains on the floor of the great concourse.

~~They were almost~~ They were almost across when they saw ^a ~~a~~ squad of Temple police enter from one of the streets.

They did the rest of the way in a swift but noiseless wriggle ~~and took cover~~ and took cover in the first available place, a small chair-court. It turned out to be a trap.

There was no way out of the court but the way they had entered. John Mark felt the grip eased at his neck. They must have thought he would not risk anything. That he would, like them, take his chance at being caught by some heavy-footed Temple police. Or be caught in Annas' palace. Imagine, taking him to Annas' palace! He grinned to himself and worked his toes around for a good grip on the floor of the court. Then he leapt for the entrance.

He dodged a clutching hand by throwing himself feet forward into a ~~skid~~ skid which took him under it, twisted away from another, a precise timing whipping his cloak past the fingers and almost made the street. ^{But Ben Legion} ~~skid~~ catapulted from the crouch into which he had fallen to watch the oncoming squad. Ben got him about the waist. Down they went, with Ben rolling sideways.

Ben was up in a moment and scurrying back into the court, pulling John Mark along like a sack. He flung him to the others. But they had been seen.

"Ho, there!" one of the policemen cried.

"Ho, there!" shouted another.

"Ho, there!" whispered Ben.

The clatter of feet on the concourse, approaching the court.

"Come out and be identified!"

"Come in and be identified!" whispered Ben.

John Mark could almost see the knocked knees
and bow/^{legs}under the skirts of the short tunics,

elbows back and the short thrusting swords held at the ready, the skin of their faces taut and shiny with cruelty. For the first time, he was really scared. He saw the squad enter the court. And he saw them die.

He heard the Legions laugh. They ^{laughed} ~~laughed~~ softly, and, from the ground, like ^{apparitions,} ~~apparitions,~~ they worked the blades they had snatched out of their clothing. They struck upward, from the ground, and their soft laughter sounded peculiar underneath the babbling shriek which each ^{temple policeman} ~~made~~ as he received the blade. The Legions allowed them to live while they stood, holding their undersides and shrieking. Then they finished them off when their knees gave way and they slid to the ground. John Mark fainted.

Chapter 14

The new matter took hold of them in a way that was good. They poked it and prodded it and found it was difficult but they believed that by a quick, hard slash they could cut through it. James had already reported failure with the Zealots.

"We will get no help from the Zealots," James told them swiftly. "They are out of it. They say they mounted the wrong horse when they sounded off for the Nazarene. They are going back to Barabbas. So we will have to do it ourselves and I for one say, glory be to God our guts will be showing soon."

"Amen," his brother, John, said, ~~mouth shaking with~~ his ~~passion~~ passion.

Thomas looked around, his brow creased into ladders of hilarity. "One fanfare, please, men, then all say after me: 'Hail to the brothers of the glorious guts!'"

Peter said ~~that was the way to do it~~ "Who knows this Simeon's Tomb well? We need a Jerusalem man."

"I know the route ~~to the tomb~~," John said. "All we need is one quick rush and we can get him away from them. That's all we need. One quick rush ---"

"Into eternity," Matthew said, "unless we plan well."

John leaped up, his face working he glared at Matthew. "Who let him in?" he cried, pitched thin and off key. "Who let in a turncoat tax collector to be a pox on me? Take him off ~~me~~ ~~there~~ --!"

His brother flung an arm around his shoulder. Matthew turned to Simon Peter.

"Simon," he said angrily, "rule against this fool. Or rule for him, but rule."

"Nobody rules for me!" John shouted.

"And who rules here anyway?" Thomas snapped. "Who says Simon has a right to rule?"

"Rule, Simon Peter!" Matthew stormed to his feet. "Rule, or by God --!"

James whipped his jaw around in a snarl at Matthew. "We say there'll be no rule, tax collector!"

Peter slapped his hands to the wall at his back and heaved to his feet. He was taller than

average and broad in the chest to suit. He was ready for violence. It was written all over him. The brothers John and James shouldered together. They felt that together they could break him and they were willing to try. Peter, the powerful lake fisherman, rough, strong, courageous.

"Thou art Peter," old Phillip said distinctly. The funny words jumped at them. A peculiar familiarity about the words worried them.

Old Phillip, who had sat unmoved, said from the ground again: "Sit down, Simon. Matthew is right. Thou art Peter. Does nobody remember?"

Thomas bowed his face into his hands. Phillip did not look at them. He looked into the light from the lantern and his face was old in the light. His lips moved.

"Thou art Peter, the Rock. And upon this Rock I will build ... Is it that we can forget so soon?"

He rose as he ended, stepped to the entrance of the court and stood there with his back to them. Their minds staggered after old Phillip, up the road of understanding. Harsh-living men who journeyed over desert and sea, greeted with curses, sent away with stones, but fed in the wilderness. Shamefacedly they remembered how they had been fed in the wilderness, with food and with courage. They avoided each other's eyes.

Thomas took his hands from his face. He looked up at John and his eyes burned painfully in his head.

"We could use that 'Amen' now, John," he whispered hoarsely. "Say it again, Johnny Thunder."

They turned their heads away from each other, nobody sought his neighbour's face. Then John sat down and afterwards his brother sat too. Simon Peter moved away from the wall.

"Get up, Johnny," he commanded. "You know the way. You will guide us to this Simeon's Tomb."

It was a strong walk from David Street to Simeon's Tomb. Much of it lay through streets bounding the Temple area and they made it longer by choosing a route which would take them around the area. They went in single file, keeping close to the sides of the street, halting at the slightest sound, their heads twitching nervously.

They were not afraid. But it was a long walk and there was time for thinking; and the matter that before had taken so good a hold of them, was not so good now. ~~Heard~~ recalled it was ~~remembered~~ in each head that there was but a single sword among them. As an assault party Thomas thought they weren't worth spit.

wooden
A loose awning over a sweetmeat stall somewhere up the street flapped loudly and they froze to the wall. It flapped again and they got it. let go of
Each ~~held his~~ his breath very quietly and ~~held~~

old Philip saw some humour in how they halted, cockatoo
~~up on their toes for a bolt, and chuckled.~~
 up on their toes for a bolt, and chuckled.

"Simon," he said, "if your Cox ever saw us tonight, we would never live it down."

Matthew said: "We should keep our eyes open for the boy. We may reach him before the Temple does."

"O, plug your whistle!" John snapped irritably. "Hasn't his mother the whole garrison at Antonia to draw on if she wants to find him?"

Peter had been peering around the angle of the doorway into which they had ^{jumped} ~~run~~ for cover. He drew in his head.

"Dont malign the woman," he said. "She did us a good turn tonight."

"Yes. She took the cave-dwellers into her fine house and gave us a fine room to eat the fine supper which our Judas had prepared for us," John jeered.

"That the scriptures might not be fulfilled," Thomas murmured. "We ate and were un-merry. Yet, tomorrow we die."

"Listen to our jovial Job," James grunted.

This must be how it is to be young, Philip thought. Weep one minute, laugh the next. Block the channels of memory with anything, no matter how unseemly. He drew a breath deep and his chest ached. Suddenly Philip had no pity. These young men needed to be hit.

"I wonder how our Lord, Jesus, knew she would

take us in?" he asked innocently.

"He knows people," Thomas said.

"Aye. He knew us too," Philip said quietly.

"He said we would run away from him if ever the Temple got him."

They stopped. But old Philip walked slowly on.

"God strike you," James said softly to his back.

Come one way or another and this is over, I will take this old body to the sulphur springs at the bitter sea. Wrap my old body in the sulphur mud and hope for a miracle. It is said in our legends that Sarah, the aged wife of the Patriarch, Abraham, bathed in the Dead Sea before she conceived Isaac. A miracle is due poor old Philip.

"How far away is the Tomb?" Matthew asked.

Nobody answered and they continued behind old Philip.

Chapter 15

The old soldier who ran the tavern for officers was ~~Seneca~~ nearly asleep on his feet. But he knew Maximus Seneca and so he hurried over with a new skinful when Max hoisted another finger. Guiseppe Zellini clasped his fingers over his belly and looked pleasedly at the new wine. It gurgled beautifully into the goblets. The night was good again.

"Your man turned out to be a fool after all, Stupid," Max said.

Guiseppe nodded three times, very fast. He was anxious to agree with Max.

Max said: "You know why he is a fool? You

Guiseppe shook his head, looking at him. "No, Max, I don't know why."

He thought it was alright to call Max, Max. Max was drinking with him again because it had turned out alright.

"Because he wanted to start a revolution on a shoestring. That's why. Nobody likes to start anything on a shoestring. He's cheap."

The wine was good, no taste of lees at all. Guiseppe thought how, whenever he came in alone, his wine always tasted of lees. It was good to come in here with Max. Especially as how Max would be First Captain now.

"No swords, no spears, no nothing," Max said. "And yet he wants to start a revolution. So what does he get? He gets put up. Ha, ha --- how do you like that, Guiseppe? He gets put up!"

"He gets put up high!" Guiseppe trumpeted happily at the ~~wax-fruit~~ ^{laughing} wax-fruit face. "He's going out in the morning --- going out and up!"

"And who will be out there to put him up?" Max asked jovially. "Who will be out there nailing ^{ing} him up?"

Guiseppe sat back on the wooden form and held up his goblet in a mock toast. "The First," ~~he said~~ ^{he said}. "The bloody First Captain."

Max's eyes blazed out of the wax-fruit face.

"Say, the former First," he whispered venomously. "I will be the First. And you, you fat

ex-crucifier, you will get pushed up a rung."

It made a grand noise in Guiseppe's head.

I will get pushed up a rung.

Guiseppe looked coyly down at his thick fingers, happiness swelling inside him. It was good, very good. He dived for the goblet and drained it at a quaff. Max Seneca watched him, his lips curled in ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ a sneer.

"You, going up a rung! You fat hog."

Guiseppe grinned at him. "How did you work it, Max," he breathed. "How did you?"

Max grinned and leaned back, admiration for himself running out of him.

"Easy. I went to the ^{Commander} ~~XXXX~~ and pointed out to him that everyone knew that the woman had had the Nazarene at her house last night and that since the cloak was a rich one, it must belong to somebody in her household. But that our Janus could not be expected to prosecute the matter too stoutly, since. And I stopped there. Just --- since. See? Then I shrugged and said Janus is the governor's nephew and perhaps the wisest course would be to tell the governor so he could speak with his erring nephew. I hinted that, done that way, the governor couldn't be mad at anyone in Fort Antonia for hauling his nephew over the coals. The poor chief swallowed it, hook, line and sinker. He didn't know that old Annas is after Janus, nor that old Pont Pilate will hand him over to save his

own fat carcass."

Guiseppe goggled at him. "You had 'em!" he breathed hoarsely. "You had 'em all!"

Max gave a short, barking chuckle. The heavy lids ascended his eyes and he looked slyly at the barman. The old soldier hurried over with a new skinful, his broad hips jerking and flat feet slapping the floor.

"You need a whipping to put some speed into you," Max told him softly.

"And you reckon Janus wont find the boy, Max?" Guiseppe asked.

"I think he will not, he's a gentleman," Max scoffed.

Pilate sent for Janus Aurelius and awaited him in a bare ante-room. Janus noted in a brief scrutiny that now no couchful of heaping cushions awaited his comfort. The room was rinsed clean as a whistle and it crossed his mind that the draught of physic his uncle had spoken of, was about to be handed to him. He saluted stiffly. Nothing showed on his face.

But his uncle's fleshy face hardened and his mouth was arrogant and punishing. The lines of cruelty extended down and away from his nostrils; made his nose pinched. The pupils of his eyes were pinpoints directed at the First Captain. He met Janus standing.

His face was that of a man ready to rave. He did not rave. His words were round and soft as

fruit. As poisoned fruit.

"You poor fool," he said.

Janus had seen legionnaires being whipped; big, strong fellows throbbing with the lust of life and passion and a certain rough-hewed pride, taking the lash on their backs without flinching; and dying only in their eyes. He felt now as he supposed they must have felt.

Pilate's fat and feline body did a strange movement under his robes.

"Your lusts lead you to this. Your stupid lust for a Jewish woman has led you into betraying your trust."

His mind said, Wait, Janus, wait and learn. Said it sternly to the wildness rising inside him.

"I gave you the strongest hint possible to-night. Annas told me of you and the Jewess and that he was sure you would do nothing. ~~xxxxxx~~ So did your Commander. I doubted them. I laid down a specific thing for you to do. When you told me tonight that your men were seeking him not her, but him --- I took it for your soldierly caution. But, I went further. I told you, specifically, to scour the city and spare nobody. Now, I learn from your commanding officer that you have not arrested her -- even although the High Priest himself showed you her family initials stitched into the cloak. Do you know what this means?"

Wait, Janus. Quiet down, man. But she couldn't have been in the Garden? She was reckless, but not that reckless?

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"It is no use your pleading, now it has been discovered that it was her son who wore the cloak that ~~you~~ you are freed of responsibility. Your duty was to arrest her. You have not done so. I suppose you know the penalty."

----C.

Pilate's tongue crept out and licked furtively ^{hiding.} along his lips, as if ~~he was about to speak~~

"You will be broken," he said softly. "You will be broken and sent back to Rome. Its either you or me for the Temple, and I will protect myself. There is just one chance. It is for you to find the boy before Annas' men get to him. Its either you or me and I have no intention of letting those Hebrew swine get the better of me!" I am genuinely sorry it had to be you, but you are to blame. I wash my hands." He made the motions of a ritual wash, his soft palms slithering.

When you returned to Rome in disgrace, they took you up the Appian Way. They made you walk all the way from the time you entered the gate. No horseback for the broken officer. You walked between double ranks of legionnaires flanking you; alone except for the stray curs who seemed to know you were now one of them, slipping between the legs of the soldiers and yelping at your heels. The manacles at your wrists rubbed sore with the ~~xxxx~~ yanking

the soldiers gave to them, and the leg irons
jangled on the paving stones. Everybody turned
out to see you march in, for it was an event, for
officers were seldom brought in that way. And it
was such an occasion, that even the ladies turned
out on the balconies to see you, and some laughed
every time you stumbled because of the leg irons,
and others were sorry for you. Which was worse.
For you would begin to be sorry for yourself and
show it; and the rabble who liked nothing better
than to see you ^{being sorry} ~~being sorry~~ for yourself, bent
backwards, their bellies high and ugly and shaking
with laughter. Your irons went clank clank over
the stones as you dragged yourself along and mostly
by this time, you were in tatters, for the rabble
had followed their cuns and had slipped their dirty
talons between the ranks and were pulling at your
clothes. But when you got near to the Forum
Romanum, the soldiers tightened their ranks again,
and you could hold up your head, if the gut was
still in you. Then, if you were lucky, they
executed you.

But sometimes you weren't lucky and they turned
you free and you had to learn to live with it.

Pilate said softly: "I see you're coming to
 your senses. Go, Janus. You haven't much time."

Chapter 16

They went out from the chair-court like great lizards, their bodies clinging to the ground, and Ben Legion found the mouth of the passage they had been heading for when the Temple police had seen them. ~~They~~ ^{They} turned ^{into} ~~it~~ it. They had him by the ^{after} neck again and he was hauled in ~~them~~ like a short length of rope. They halted in the passage and then they sent him up the line, hand to hand, until Ben Legion's hand closed over him at the head of the line.

Ben Legion took him and raised his face from off the cobbles and shook him into consciousness.

and was dizzy at first but strength crept up his legs and into his arms and he shook his head to clear his brain.

Ben Legion said, "Now you are one of us for sure, boy. We can never let you go again. You have witnessed us in our special sin tonight."

He was not sure what special sin meant. But he was sure Ben meant no good. He knew generally of sin, from his studies in the sacred books at school. It was a sin to disobey any of the commandments in the Moses Tablets. That was clear. But it was not exactly that. Not only that. It required more thought.

"In our own business, we are scholarly as your Gamaliel, boy. See how we killed the spirit first, while the police were on their feet, then finished the bodies as they crumpled? That's our special gift, boy."

John Mark stubbornly kept his mind clean of Ben. He was thinking that in his experience, you could behave quite good and yet think wrong things at the same time. It was a kind of bravery, though, risking getting your throat cut by an angry Jehovah. For behaving quite good and yet thinking wrong things. Lots of times, in the sacred books, whole nations got their throats cut by an angry Jehovah, even though they were brave and believed they were doing right. As could happen in the morning.

In the morning, when in the teeth of death he scrambled to the top of the Joppa Wall, and had all those faces staring up at him and being fearful for him, he would be doing a good thing, a brave thing for all Israel, yet a wrong thing too. For it was wrong to cause pain to his mother. That was clear. So it would be a sin. He would be breaking the Fifth of the Great Mosaic Tablets.

"Up, let us see if your strength has returned, boy."

He scrambled upright at Ben's command, still thinking about sin. Other people had spoken about sin. He had heard Annas, in the Temple. At whose memory he could spit. He spat and Ben Legion chuckled. The memory was not felicitous. Felicitous was a word he had got from Ben-Rasha. Everything was felicitous or not felicitous to Ben-Rasha. Saul was often also not felicitous although he had moments. Saul was a very good hunter. He enjoyed having a Quarry. Saul said his mother was living in sin; he knew that was a lie. When Saul said it, his eyeballs rolled upward until they hid under his eyelids and the fellows in the Little Sanhedrin laughed and nodded all around. He was never certain whether they grinned because of the things Saul could do with his eyeballs, or whether because of Saul's story. So, afterwards, he asked Judas, when the band was in Jerusalem for a feast-day and they had gone together coney-hunting. And except for one

silly remark, Judas had shrugged aside the question, too busy, he supposed, knocking rocks so as to flush out the little rabbits for them to sling stones at. But surely the Nazarene had approved of his mother? Why, otherwise, had the Nazarene chosen the upper room at his house for the Passover supper? And had chosen their unbroken colt for his ride into the city? Indeed chosen both ~~Mother~~ and foal, although he rode only the wild-eyed kicker who had strangely become gentle as a ~~gazelle~~. What had this to do with Judas' folly about his Master preferring "the company of sinners to saints, since our minds aren't made up?" Judas had a way of using phrases which nobody understood, his eyes gazing like a man lost.

His mind jumped to the coming of Janus. The coming of Janus into their lives had been good for his mother. She began laughing more, and was more often in the sun, sharing his games, and nicer to the Aunts when they visited from Capernaum. On the other hand, he could spit when he remembered the stupidity of Saul and Judas.

"Spit on your own foot, half-of-a-fool," growled Ben Legion.

A thought occurred to John Mark. He asked quickly.

"If Jesus likes the company of sinners, why are you not of his disciples?"

Everybody stopped chuckling then and he could

hear the crickets in the wall, such was the silence. He did not like the silence. A silence among the Legions was up to no good. His head felt heavy, and also as if a wicked torturer was pressing a hot iron to the top of his skull. He once had a loose tooth wired, and Uncle Demmy had to hold him down on the stool for the doctor to wire it to the next sound one. Same feeling.

"Heh heh." Finally, from one of the Legions. "Maybe the Nazarene likes sinners but not sin. Dont you know, you whelp of the wealthy, that each of us Legions is a nasty, creeping, crawling after-dark sin? Ask your kinsman, Nicodemus. He is an after-dark man like us. Goes calling by night to ask crazy questions because he is a Phârisee and believes in the oral law as well as the written law. Likes to hear it from the mouth. The Sadducee aristocrats oppose this of course, but all this you know, coming as you do from the scholarly Nicodemus and a pupil of the esteemed Gamaliel. With your friend, Saul, tough leader of the Little Sanhedrin, eh?"

John Mark was aghast that they should know all these things. He resolved not to say a word. Tell a lie to these night ones and they would know instantly. Safer to be dumb as a sheep.

A grimmer-voiced Legion took up the tale.

"So you must gather, John Mark, that there are no sinners in the Sanhedrin. Not among the

dirty in it, and was therefore sinful. Judas should have gone back to the Zealots and left the stupid fisherman to stew. Then he ^{John Mark might} ~~have~~ have gone with him. But he had to hate Judas for he had brought the Temple into it. He was sorry for Judas but he could not be with him. He was sure that when it was all over, Judas would be back, wanting to be friends again. He, John Mark, would have to be firm and say no. He was finished with the Nazarene's men. He was finished with the Zealots too. Adults needed looking after every turn of the way. They screeched too much and flew blind like the bats above his head now, beating their wings against the wall. He was too busy about his own business to be looking after them. Because of them, he was here working for nothing tonight and wearing himself out.

No, he said earnestly, fanning at a flying bat, I am finished with the fisherman.

If the Legions had been less given to crawling through filthy alleys, he may have given them the benefit of his friendship, but, as it was ^{he was} against them too. In fact, he was alone. Even although he was being dragged along by the ~~XXXXXX~~ Crawlers. In fact, if he really wanted to, he could fox them right now. He felt very cunning and grinned in the dark. His bruised ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ face pained.

They could not know that he only went with them because it suited his purpose until he was ready for the Wall. The Legions knew all the

secret places and he could hide with them until the time came. Then he would show them whether they could hold him. He was no heavy-footed police. In the morning, after he was through with the Wall, he would collect his mother and have Janus give them safe conduct out of the city. He would be safe from the ^{priests} ~~people~~ in daylight. The Temple had not dared to touch the Nazarene in daylight. Not even that day when he had entered the city with all the people hailing him as the Messiah.

O, not to remember the stupidities of that day when the Nazarene had come! O, to flop along eternally, as a turtle, as he was doing now. To hide in the dark. To burrow forever in this stinking spy's cloak and not even to raise your head for food.

What a run he had made that morning! Swallow on your shame and just remember what a run you had made the morning you woke and learnt from your mother that the Nazarene had returned to Jerusalem. Was waiting just outside the city while he sent to borrow their splendid ^{ass and foal.} ~~horses~~ Other times, the Nazarene had come in afoot. Why wasn't he coming in afoot now?

Because Judas had been right, you said. And you were out of bed and out of the house and flashing your heels like a racing goat across the Kedron and up to Olivet.

A thousand years from now, when he was recovered from his shame, he would tell it all to his mother. Even if he only looked at her, she would understand. She was like that. But he would tell it all to her until he was empty and could come out of the dark.

Then, if the Nazarene is still at Jerusalem (they could be living at - at Capernaum, perhaps, by that time, out of the reach of the Temple), I will quit school for the day and go out to the cave near the Bethany road where they always stayed when they were at Jerusalem. That is the place to which I took Cousin Demmy that night when I thought he would have made a good officer for the army which Judas and I thought the Nazarene would soon be forming. The place where the fishermen named me Coxswain, and made me sit with them while the Nazarene talked. And ^{by} then my nostril will be ^{what} free of the smell of ~~what~~ has happened in Jerusalem.

The Nazarene had talked of the ^{people} ~~kingdom~~ he would gather for his army and the kingdom he would form. And I believed ^dhim. All of us believed him. We believed him and the fishermen shouted that they would die for him and I shouted too.

But sometimes the things he said about his

kingdom were not very plain and then Judas would sit silent and unmoving while the others talked among themselves and quarrelled about what he meant. And I would sit and think how Saul would turn green with envy when he saw me marching in with the Nazarene's army; and wait until afterwards when Judas would tell me what the Nazarene meant. It was the time the Nazarene and his followers had departed on the long journey and did not return to Jerusalem until long afterwards.

"We will come back with a big army, Coxswain," Judas said to him on the last day when they went to small rabbits. nunt ~~XXXXXX~~ Judas collected food for the band and he only bought when he could not hunt. He was a coney great hunter and he could knock a ~~XXXXXX~~ from under a rock better even than Cousin Demmy.

You remember the morning they came back, Mother?

She would remember and perhaps he would not have to tell her.

But he would remember for a thousand years how he had raced through the city and out of the gate and down the road then up and across the viaduct, running out there on the stony track with wonder wide in his head at the multitude of people running along

with him. He had been a little frightened at the
 of
 multitude ~~xx~~ people, all taller than he, and he
 running close to the ground with the mountainous
 bodies heaving and swaying around him, elbows bruising
 his ribs and his chest, the ends of robes whipping
 across his face.

The run slowed to a walk when they reached the
 steep of the hill. They slowed at the whisper of
 song. A whisper which strengthened ~~the~~ ~~the~~ ~~the~~
~~the~~ to a
 storm. They had sung the great national songs of
 king David from the Book of Psalms, and he had looked
 up into the faces around him, the bearded ones
 and the smooth ones all broken up in passion. And
 he had walked with his face turned up, looking into
 the faces, and stumbled into a bearded Zealot. He
 recognized the man, Hakuk, a friend of Judas. And
 Hakuk bellowed a laugh as he straightened the boy
 and pushed a branch of olive into his hand and
 shouted above the din:

"Sing, lad! Or burst your throat with howling
 if like me you have no voice!"

He remembered how he had gaped foolishly at
 Hakuk and had thought it ^{queer} ~~strange~~ that he had never
 noticed before that one of Hakuk's eyes was brown
 and the other blue and Hakuk had slapped him on the
 back and muttered soberly:

"Aye, come along lad. He said that his new
 kingdom will be of such children as you. No doubt
 he meant it will take time to kill all the Romans,

and the old ones like me may not be here to see the finish. You will be grown up by then, citizens of the new kingdom."

The crowd came between them at the moment. And he had gone on, waving the branch with the rest of them and singing as loudly as he could, bobbing about like a small boat on the waves, roughed by a thoughtless shoulder then saved from falling underfoot by a helping hand, moving up the hill in the wildness and quite losing himself in the widespread noise until, near the crest of the hill, the din and movement was abruptly stilled. He found himself remembering how in the kitchen the cooks used to clamp the lid over a bubbling pot. Such was the sudden stillness.

He did not halt. He used his small body to advantage, worming through to the head of the multitude. And then he had seen the Nazarene.

This time of the year, the yellow buttercups came up at the sides of the road and the shoots of new grass were tender and very green. There was no wind, and the leaves on the trees were steady as houses. He could ^{remember} ~~remember~~ too that the old hay in the depleted stacks, no longer fresh mown, ^{was} ~~was~~ yellow and sweetly mouldy and after you

had rolled in it, it clung to your clothes and your hair and the girls stood still while you picked the hay out of their hair and from down the backs of their frocks and you felt how warm they were; and their eyes when they looked at you were very dry and their faces serious and you yourself hot, then cold, then hot and cold again and you left there quickly. And Saul would look at you leaving there quickly and would say something to one of the bigger girls and back her head would go until you saw ~~the~~ all of her throat and out the laughter would come to flush hotly through you and make your knees stumble with anger.

He remembered the bright sunlight and the and the grass ~~and the~~ smell of the sun in old cut hay and he felt crawly inside at Ben Legion and the others who crawled on the slimy stones like lizards at the bottom of a well and took him along with them. But he bit back his anger and went stubbornly along with them, thinking with satisfaction that he could leave them anytime he wanted. Anytime at all. He had it all worked out now and they couldn't catch him as before. He would bound up and be away before that crawly hand on the back of his neck knew what it was about. Meanwhile, it wasn't bad to be a Quarry. Later, when he went to the Wall, he would even be a bigger Quarry. He wondered how Judas was feeling, now that he was a Quarry too.

Judas.

He had not seen Judas at first, that morning. of the yellow buttercups.

He had stood there at the head of the multitude when suddenly they halted ~~XXXXXXXX~~ near the crest of the hill.

Had stood there bursting with pride at the way the band had worked it. He could have told the gaping faces around him that Simon Peter would have made the familiar gesture, closing the Twelve around the Nazarene to keep the press of the crowd from him.

It was through such a circle he had slipped the day when Simon Peter had cuffed him on the head and the quiet voice had rebuked the rough fisherman.

But this morning there was nothing but pride in him when big Simon made the gesture and the band closed in around the Nazarene. But the Nazarene stood on higher ground than they and he was plainly in sight of the crowd. And he had heard the whispers around him: Its him --- the one with the uncut beard. And from the doubtful ones: He's too young to be a Messiah: And from some women of Capernaum who giggled and spoke louder so that the Jerusalem women would know they knew the family well: He's the best looking of Mary's son. And another smoothed her gown and said, "And the brightest too. He was reading and arguing before ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ his Bar-mitzvah. They couldnt keep him a carpenter."

But not even they could be as proud as he, for

if he was boastful, he could have turned to them all and say Look, he wears the blue cloak my mother sent him -- the blue linen that is ^a brother to the one I wear.

The Nazarene had not looked at them. His eyes were roaming about over their heads. There was nothing there to see but the towers and the domes of Jerusalem and he had been a little peeved that the Nazarene would not look at them so that he could wave at him and show all these around that he knew him best of all. But since the Nazarene would not look at him so that he could wave to him, he had commenced searching the band anxiously with his eye, noping that one of them would notice him so he could wave at him.

His hand was held halfway up, ready to wave the instant he caught an eye, but he had caught no eye and after awhile his hand commenced making tiny little gestures as if he was lying among the buttercups at the side of the road, hunting butterflies; and still, awfully, none looked his way and then like an earthquake he discovered what his hand was doing and shame flushed him to the roots of his hair and crawled about his scalp as he drew back the hand and hid it away inside his cloak. He looked away, swallowing his bitter hurt; and then he had seen Judas.

Judas was not in the circle about the Nazarene. He had drawn aside and his eyes were fixed

on the Nazarene's face. John Mark forgot his shame. Excitement flared up inside him. He knew now why the Nazarene was looking at the city. He was looking for the softest spots where he could throw his army. Judas had said it. No doubt there was an army at his back, over the brow of the hill. He looked quickly back at Judas and saw that the Zealot, Hakuk, who had given him the branch to wave had gone over to Judas' side. Swiftly, John Mark broke from the crowd and darted to the pair.

He was there in time to hear Hakuk say: "Well ---?" the question is his voice. "Will he ---?"

And Judas shrugged and said nothing but stared at the Nazarene's face.

Hakuk asked again, impatiently this time: "Will he?"

Still nothing from Judas. And didn't he see who stood by his side?

So he must tug at his elbow and say angrily: "Has the Ishcariot lost his tongue?"

And Hakuk whirled at the sound of his voice and drew back an arm as if to cuff him but Judas halted him with a sharp word.

Then, "Hello, Cox," he said in the voice which always seemed to hold a note in it, brittle as a piece of slate. And he had known times when the slate cracked and he wanted to go quickly as when he was introduced to a stranger. But now there was no crack. "Hello, Cox, see we're back

as I told you."

Eagerly he had begun with the questions.

"Where did you go? Where did you travel?
Through all of Galilee, I'll bet!"

The smile of Judas with many teeth to it, the quick look at the Zealot standing grim and silent.

"Galilee, boy?" and a hand roughing his hair.
"Galilee? That's a Sabbath Day's journey! What would you say if I told you we went clear to the borders of Tyre and Sidon!"

Your mouth agape like a whiting caught in a net, while all the names you had heard in school rose in your head and shook themselves free of dust and still you could hardly reckon the cities and the towns they had passed through for a hundred and more miles lay between Jerusalem and the border country. By the time you had wakened your mind to speak again, you could see that he had gone away from you again although he stood beside you.

For his eyes had returned to the Nazarene whose hands were now upheld.

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Chapter 17

John Mark knew they were near the Temple when they halted. For he could hear the tiny gongs, which marked the hours, going off like a stick ran along the iron grid of a window which they sometimes used to do at Ben-Rasha's house ~~when~~ ^{whenever} Saul said, Let's disturb Ben-Rasha who must be mingling with his Phoenicians. He never knew what Saul meant, although the older boys laughed. But it was fun to see old Ben-Rasha's head in the red skull cap pop

from the window and issue curses at them. And Saul could curse him back. Saul did it with many Greek words which lifted and struck like things alive and they made old Ben-Rasha pop back quickly. Saul was a champion. A big champion. But he would beat him in the morning. He felt ~~it~~^{it} struggle and stand up in his belly: He would beat him in the morning.

They were near the Temple for he could smell it. There was a smell for the Temple and a smell for school and a smell for his house. Take him into any of these blindfolded and he would know where he was. Now he was near the Temple. He did not like to be near the Temple. The mad crawlers had crawled their way through the alleys and the filthy passages and their crazy minds had brought them right back to the Temple. He fought to be off his elbows and knees and to whirl back the way they had come.

"Place a knee in the small of his back, Demas Legion," Ben's voice said calmly. "The young lord is determined to be roasted on a Roman spit."

They had him. They had him fixed like the slabs of fish-meat skewered to the boards in Johnny Bonnerges's father's fish-shop / ^{in Capernaum.} The bony knee of Demas Legion held him firmly to the ground. He turned his face sideways so his nose would not rub on the stones and spit. He told them some of the words he had got off Saul.

Ben Legion chuckled. "You never learnt those from old Gamaliel, young lord. I was schooled by

old Gamaliel."

One of his men matched his chuckle. "You never went to school in your life, Ben Legion. You were schooled under a bridge."

"Put it up, Abram Legion," Ben grumbled. "You were forsaken at birth."

"Put it up all of you," Demas Legion said. "My knee is out to forsake me because of this wicked boy under it. He will not be still."

Ben Legion bent nearer the boy. "Be still, young lord, or I will tie you with ropes. You ever been tied with ropes?"

"I was tied with ropes once, by the Temple police," Demas Legion chuckled again. "Nearly sawed ^{me} ~~xxx~~ in two."

"The Romans do it sometimes -- saw you in two with ropes. Leather ropes. Saw it done once at Philippi. They put the dry leather around you, tight until it almost cuts into the flesh. Then they wet it, and wet it. The man cried something awful as the rope shrank and went in and what was in came out."

They couldn't make him vomit. He hadn't vomitted back there in the alley when they did what they did to the Temple police.

"You will make the lad sick, Joshua Legion," Ben Legion said gruffly. "Put it up. What's keeping ^{that} filthy Legion?"

"Perhaps he cant find Peter in Annas's house,"

Abram Legion said. "Or perhaps Peter will not come for his little friend."

"Perhaps he ^{has} ~~xxx~~ forsook him," Demas said above him.

"Yes, they forsook even their son of god," Abram Legion said.

"No, their son of god forsook them," Demas Legion demurred. "He went with the Romans. He wants to wear the purple with the Romans. This son of god wants to go up higher."

Abram Legion chuckled. "He will go up high all right."

"How high up do they go?" Joshua Legion asked. "Anybody ever measured it?"

"I never measured it but I hear the law is ten feet up," Abram Legion said.

"To the crosspiece? Or to the top?"

"To where they put your nameplate, you duncie. At the top where they nail your lamented name and the amount of money you stole."

"If its sedition, they put the things you said."

"It must be fun to be crucified," Joshua Legion whispered dreamily.

"Better fun to watch it," Abram Legion said happily.

"But think what you could do to your crucifier's head when he bends to see that the foot ropes are holding taut," Joshua Legion pointed out.

Ben Legion slapped his palm hard to the stones.

"Put it up, all of you!" he roared suddenly.

He could put them all out of his mind. He felt the sickness in his belly again and he locked his lips together. He could put them all out of his mind by remembering other things.

He could remember as yesterday the Nazarene standing on the hill and his hands uplifted over them. As Judas, he had turned his head and watched the Nazarene.

The hum of talk went down so you could hear the whirr of the swallows' wings dipping into the valley. He could hear the pounding of his own heart. And when he heard the creak of leather, loud as anything, he twisted his head and saw it was the leather band which Hakuk wore to support his water bottle creaking every time the fat Zealot breathed. He could smell of the leather and he felt sharply the thought of Hakuk's leather belt descending on his shoulder. Then he stopped that thinking with a discomfitted grin as he remembered he was not Hakuk's son and turned back to watch the Nazarene. He was sure now the Nazarene would speak. The boy leaned forward from his hips, his eyes shining and something ready to open in him.

"Jerusalem," the Nazarene had said. And John

Mark almost cried aloud. For he had never heard
 Suddenly it seemed that
 the name of his city so purely before, the gutters
 ran with clean spring water, the houses were scrubbed
 till they shone, and all the priests were gentle.

"Jerusalem," the Nazarene said again, "I have
 bared my bosom for you, so often."

O, the aching glory of it. O, the bugles to it.
 Such a tongue as not even Cousin Demmy possessed.
 Such a tongue as nobody possessed. Not stale old
 words as My friends or My people --- nor the ugly,
Fellow citizens, which the Zealots always used.
 None of the rusty old words which the bazaar talkers
 used at their rusty old meetings.

Saul was very good with words. It was said that
 someday he would be a scribe. Maybe after he had
 beaten Saul at the Wall tomorrow, he would try to
 beat him as a scribe. His face seriously set, John
 Mark nodded emphatically.

Ben Legion's rough demand for silence quieted
 his companions. John Mark turned his head and
 rubbed his mouth hard on the sleeve of the cloak.
 Demas Legion's knee squeezed a little warning for
 him to be still. He wondered why they waited so
 long. He thought about too many things when he
 was forced to be still. He had found out that the

best way to avoid thinking was to run very fast.

Like that morning outside the city.

Even before he heard the grunt from Hakuk and had seen the man stalk away from Judas' side, he had sensed something was wrong. In the crowd, John Mark had found several boys he knew, and was leading them in shouting the popular Nationalist slogan: "Hail to the son of David!" The slogan, although traditional to Hebrew history which awaited the coming of the Messiah, also held an undersong for the grand movement which the Zealots, the political party which Judas had joined, were organising. John Mark had heard of it from Judas. Judas, with a cheerful chuckle, pointed out to John Mark that if the Nazarene was accepted as the son of David, then, as a chip of the old block, he would not only be a man after God's own heart, as was read from the scrolls in the synagogues, but would combine the qualities of mighty warrior and great king and be "twice the size of the colossus at Rhodes." Such a man would have all Israel following him in the Zealots' revolt against Rome. A multitude of ideas had been crowding into his mind that morning so he had hardly heard the words of the Nazarene, He had been thinking that when the Nazarene gave

the word and the army commenced the move on Jerusalem, he would ask Judas to remind the Nazarene that once he had said that of such as John Mark, the youthful, would be the new kingdom.

Then he will beckon me forward and I will march at the head of Nimrod, our own unbroken colt from our stable, so wild that even I was not yet allowed to ride him. But the Nazarene mounted him and he was gentle as a dove, ears unpointed, flanks quiet, face satisfied as if he had just finished eating from a mound of hay taller than the Joppa Gate. And this reminds me that I will say to the Nazarene that the Joppa Gate is softer to breach because ^{the} centurion who guards it is always in wine and so it is softer to breach. And although this will not be always ~~always~~ true, yet I must have him to pass through the Joppa Gate, for that way he must pass the school, so I will see the green in Saul's face when I march by with the Nazarene army.

But with the truly amazing and wonderful idea rioting in his mind, he had turned to Judas and Hakuk to inform them of his plan. And then as he saw what passed between their eyes, the disappointment, and anger, he had known for sure. The Nazarene would not fight. He had missed the words but it was plain in the eyes of Judas and Hakuk. There was no army hidden beyond the brow of the hill.

A little sob had broken from him before he could hold it back. He turned away from there,

walking stiff-legged until he was clear of the crowd, then broke into a wild run and disappeared into the yellow sunlight.

A darker shadow was the Legion returning into the passage. Unerringly, he brushed past the others and flopped down beside Ben Legion. He was breathless. But he mumbled it swiftly enough.

"They are removing the Nazarene to Caiaphas' palace. They figure the Nazarene's men will try to rescue him on the way and then they will wipe them out."

"Where is the big fisherman, Simon?" Ben Legion asked quickly.

"He is gone. I hear they tried to get the Zealots to help them rescue the Nazarene, but the Zealots will have nothing to do with it. So they will try it by themselves."

There were moments of silence. Then Ben Legion laughed softly in the darkness.

"Brothers," he said, "tonight, I promise you, you shall whet your blades as never you have whetted them before. Listen."

John Mark heard too. He heard it with his boy's mind trying to run away from the impending horror. He remembered the work those same blades

had done in the alley.

"And what of the young lord to whom I kneel although he is beneath me?" Demas Legion asked dryly.

"Why, Demas Legion, bring him along," Ben said. "There is too much promise in the lad not to teach him all we can."

Demas leered broken-toothed at him. "We are ~~young, master, fled. Tonight belongs to Sin. We~~ all you have, little lord," he said. "Herod beheaded the cousin, the Baptist, in Fortress Machaerus, across Yam Hamelach, the Sea of Salt, near where the Baptist baptized the Nazarene. The Dead Sea, appropriate, is it not, young master? And now Annas has the Nazarene like a fly in ointment. Goodness is gone, young master. Fled. Tonight belongs to Sin. We are all you have."

Chapter 18

Nicodemus had put down thick Egyptian carpets on the tiles along his corridors and there were small pots of palms all through the house like sentinels. Janus Aurelius, striding the corridor, could not hear the sound of his own footfall and, being angry straight through, he wanted to hear his foot hit the tiles and feel the jarrings right up inside his head. And the potted palms offended him with their sheen of domesticity, put there no doubt by an end of cloth dipped in oil and rubbed on the leaves. There was a line of light at the bottom of a closed door at the end of the corridor

and he strode on towards it, his face cold and set.

He pushed through the heavy door as if it was not there and she did not know now he had found her, but she seemed glad to see him.

"Janus -- Janus, O Janus, you have come to help me!" she cried, running towards him.

Nicodemus had not returned and she was alone in the house and had begun to fear for her sanity. For pictures had begun to come alive in her mind. She had begun to see in her mind the broken body of her son. She knew the brutality of the Temple guards. She had seen it at work in the court of the Gentiles, where their rule was absolute. But now Janus had come and he was a mighty man. His helmet off, his hair was rumpled, on end, like John's. She ~~was glad to see him.~~ was glad to see him.

"Janus --- O Janus - I - I ---"

Mary Mark halted her rush. She had been running across the room, scared as a fawn at the ugly pictures she was leaving behind and wanting to bring up against his hard body and have his arms firmly around her. But the eyes regarding her from underneath the peak of the metal cap were the eyes of a stranger.

"Wh - what is the matter with you, Janus? You - look so strange - your eyes ---!"

"Where is he?" the stranger barked.

"Nicodemus? He - he is out with his men ---!"

Surprise and questions were in her eyes.

"I mean the boy! Where is he?"

The man was bellowing as if he was on the parade

ground. He had never treated her like this before.

The eyes were blazing out of a face like stone.

Was this the ^{red-haired} ~~man's~~ temper she had heard of?
Among the Romans?

~~Then~~ ^{anger} Then it was time it met with the
black-haired ~~man~~ of the Jews. He was daring to
use a whip on her. Her palms tingled to slap his
face.

"Are you drunk?" she asked in quick hope.

She had never seen him drunk. But she had
seen Roman soldiers drunk during their heathen
festivals and they were worse brusque than Janus
was now. They ^{overturned} ~~toppled~~ carts and broke windows
and howled sad songs in high tenors. And then they
wept. When they were in their cups they wept, for
they remembered Rome and how Rome had forgotten
them. Pushed them out into the provinces which
the gods forgot, and forgotten them. But she
could see that he was not drunk.

"You are like all your race," he said
through his teeth. "Very clever."

Her eyes opened wide until he could see the
whites and then she slapped his face.

Somehow, so swiftly she hardly saw him move,
he had imprisoned her wrists.

"That was clever too," he said bleakly,
"your pretence."

He would expect her to ^{struggle} ~~fight~~ or to plead
now that he hurt ~~her~~ her wrists. But she would not

give him that satisfaction. She would stand there in that awkward position until he saw how ridiculous he looked holding her wrists, and then release her, he would, blushing like a fool. O, she would humble him at every move.

"You would use anyone for your own ends, wouldn't you ---Jewess?"

You fool. You will come back, humbler.

A dislike for his arrogance had dragged itself up, reluctantly, from a corner of her mind. The same corner of her mind where lurked the awareness of the differences between them, racial and religious. Rome ruled the Jews and Jerusalem, even though the priests in the temple were allowed to keep the religion and its traditions. Now and again, Rome found it useful to remind the Jews that it ruled.

She stared at his white face, stone set. The hot retort was on her lips. But, no, she said. I cannot afford a contest. I want John. I want my son. The rest can wait. Jewess? that was childish. For he loves the Jewess, this pagan worshipper of numerous ridiculous gods. Janus, please help me! There must be a reason for your strange behaviour.

Something masked his face. His grip opened.

"You knew all along what the priests were after, but you would not warn me, ~~Would~~ you? How do you know? Perhaps I could have found a way out

for all of us. I have some influence. But you preferred to have me kicked to Rome, stripped, beheaded, anything, so long as your son was safe."

She was coming apart. She felt all of her falling apart. She had to hold on.

"But it will not be so. Stop shaking your head and hear me. I shall find him. Then you and your tribe can sing psalms for him, if I know old Annas."

She was dead. Yet he kept on killing her. Couldn't he see she was dead?

Her head moved weakly. "Janus," she said wearily, "I never know until ---"

His thin lips twitched with contempt. "Save your case for the Sanhedrin. Your cousin, Nicodemus will argue it for you. I suppose he is hiding the boy tonight, so he can get him out of the city tomorrow. Tell him its hopeless. There are double guards at the gates looking out for him. I shall have him before morning."

She put her hands up and touched her face like a child; took them down again and stared at her fingers. She looked up at him. This was a stranger. The mouth was too thin and the nostrils flared and the eyes were knives. She stared and shook her head, her lips working. The tears were welling up now and they blurred her sight.

"Janus --- O Janus -- dont you see -- I - I ---"

She couldn't stop them from filling up and

overpouring down her cheeks.

He laughed without mirth, his lips away from his teeth.

"Your history books recall another Jewess. Delilah. Remember her? Except, my dear, that you wont take me to the shearers. I will find your lost lamb and hand him over to Shepherd Annas."

She waited for him to go. A cold wind blew through the ashes inside of her.

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Chapter 199

He was quite lost. They had gone around corners and through passages and up and down stairs, heedless of caution, in a manner they had never displayed before. There was no talking among them now. Ben Legion, roving ahead like a driving wind, hurried them on with clucks of his tongue. Demas Legion had let go of the boy's neck but kept firm hold of his hand. John Mark was glad they were walking upright now.

He knew why they had come upright; Ben Legion had said that by now the priests would have called

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off the search for him while they disposed of the other matter. John Mark knew what the other matter was. It was what Ben Legion had laughed about back there. But he would be stone dead before he would make them know he was sick.

He was bruised and beginning to be weary; but he would be stone dead before he would make Demas Legion know he was tired. He would be stone dead but he would show them. He pumped along in a laboured trot that kept him close to Demas Legion's long lope.

He knew Simeon's Tomb. It was an old brick tomb in a narrow street with a rounded top and two gnarled old almonds which almost met over the roof. He would be up in the almonds lying out on a branch. All Ben Legion's men would be up there lying along the branches. Ben Legion said they would be up there until the Temple police had finished off the Nazarene's men. Then they would drop down among the Temple police. Finish them off.

There was an empty place in his head and a small pain somewhere in his bowels that made his knees wobble as he pushed on behind Demas. He stumbled and Demas kept him upright. He kept his lips stubbornly shut. He would be stone dead before he made them know he was dog-tired.

He squeezed his eyes shut for an instant

and shook his head to free it of such matters. He should not be thinking about stone dead. He remembered when his uncle, his father's brother, died in Capernaum and he had gone down there with his mother for the funeral. He had wandered into the room where the spicers were working on his uncle simply because he was forbidden to go in there. He had gone in silently, ~~like~~ like a cat, and he had been there for several minutes in a corner near the foot of the bier before one of the spicers saw him -- a man with his jaws so sunken he had been thinking how wonderful it would be to have jaws like those to fill with air and then to slap them suddenly so it ~~made~~ like a ram's horn which the shepherds used over on Olivet in the evenings.

But minutes before they discovered him and shooed him from the room, he had seen them turning over and over on the slab, the stone thing which had been his uncle. Poking it, and kneading it, and singing hymns to it, the room full of pungency from the herbs crushed in their fists and shreds of the herbs clinging to the hairs at their wrists and all the way up their forearms to the elbows under their rolled sleeves; and he had thought what a stupid thing it was to pour oils on a stone person such as his uncle had become, and to sing to it. And ever afterwards, stone was to him, a symbol of death.

Listen again. He had seen crosses too. He was not supposed to see crosses, for his mother had warned him never, never to use the Ganesh Gate. But because she had warned him, he had gone one day with Saul and the boys from the school because a great thief was to be put up outside the gate on the hillock called Golgotha. And moreover Saul had challenged him he couldn't go and watch it without being sick.

He had been sick. He had run from there sick all through. He had run with his stomach heaving all the way to David Street and had tumbled into her arms with the sickness making him a nasty little green monkey. And she had tightened her mouth while she cleansed him and he had promised never, never to go again.

But he had been quite young then. He would never be sick at it again. Even if he had to watch -- watch some he knew being put up, he would not be sick again. He guessed he wouldn't go all the same.

No, he whispered, I wouldn't go all the same.

"I am an urbane man," Thomas said calmly,

responding to John Boanerges' bitter imprecation.

"I must talk. I say the matter cannot succeed."

Another false alarm had halted them. Nobody fought to move on again. Johnny Thunder hunched his back into the angle of the wall and shook his head like an animal in pain. His brother, James, shifted his position so he was closer to him. Philip wheezed anxiously. He could not see Matthew's face in the dark, and feeling alone, he felt useless. He would be of no use here. His chest ached and the phlegm plugged his throat. He would be useless when the time came.

"Simon," Philip said desperately, "Simon, let us go over it again."

Simon Peter turned his shaggy head. His heel and the back of his head were close against the wall, sort of fixed there. As if he needed to have his back close to a wall. He spoke carefully, his voice low. Old Philip wondered if the strong timber had turned to sawdust. Was Peter, the rock, crumbling?

"We wait by the Tomb where they must thin out to pass. When they thin out, we rush 'em. Jimmy Thunder and me, we grab the Master and make a run for it." He stopped, a part of the wall again.

"Then -- what?" Thomas asked, an odd triumph in his voice.

"Then we keep them engaged as long as we

can," Matthew said.

"Right!" Thomas exclaimed. "Three of us against that mob -- Phil is out. My God, three of us can keep them off your heels only as long as it takes them to climb over us!"

"Two of us," John said, "the revenue man and me. Nobody climbs over a louse. They squelch you."

"Why cant you keep them off long enough?" James demanded.

Thomas is talking sense, old Phillip thought. Doubtful Thomas is talking sense. He pulled his cloak closer about him. The wind, chuting through the narrow street, was chill. It was dark and the only sounds were their voices and the hard scurry of dried almond leaves in the gutter. Thomas was talking sense but a man could talk sense and yet not be right. The Temple guards would go through them like reapers through a wheat field. Up to that point, Thomas was right.

But after that, he is wrong. I am older than any of them. My bones tell me I wont be long with them now. On the heights, and in chill weatner, my bones tell me with tongues as hot knives. But yet, this is how old Phillip thinks:

--- that even the brave and young bull,
Simon Peter, who like me and his brother,
Andrew, are from Bethsaida...

--- even this Jimmy Thunder, all leather

and with the endurance of a building;

--- aye, and his brother, the passionate John,
with a scope for love too big for his frame;

--- or my Matthew, with the cunning of a fox
and entitled to every right to life for the
attention he pays to it;

--- or poor Thomas himself, concealing the
pain behind his buffoonery;

--- and those others, scattered on this Night
of Scattering, my friend Bartholomew, the other
James and Thaddeus and the other Simon, and
Andrew, Simon's brother....

--- I would put them all on the ^{altar} ~~table~~, without
pity, if it would save that One in Annas' hands.
I would whip them with words and anoint them with
words and slip them forward until they lay on the
altarstone, if they could be taken instead.

He took his hands from the wall and pushed
them inside the cloak for warmth.

But it will not be so. In my bones, I
know it will not be so. Yet, Thomas is right,
and then wrong. We must keep on trying. I dont KNOW
why.

"It is the best plan we can find and it
might succeed," Philip said quietly. He
added dryly: "And, dear Matthew, I'll be there
with this old hulk which I carry around, help-
ing to turn the point of a spear."

Simon Peter stepped out of the recess and

down into the street. "Then we will go to the Tomb, [REDACTED]" he said.

He was up among the branches of the almond now. Around him, the Legions had disposed themselves among the branches. There was a quiet, deep as a pool. They had him and he would have to stay there and watch them kill. Once he had stirred and instantly the hand of Demas had rubbed along the nape of his neck, softly caressingly, but with something at the tip of the fingers which told him that the first sound from him would be the last for sometime.

They had changed character with the approach of action and now there was no joking among them. He thought of his mother and Cousin Demmy and he even thought of Saul, longingly; longing for the darkness to open and let in the good light of day to wipe out the nightmare which had trapped him. But nothing came and he sat in a lower crotch of the almond with Demas perched above him. Like a dark vulture who had a talon fastened in his neck. There was a scuffling and a whispering. Demas fingers tightened warningly. John Mark strained his sight past his feet to the roof of the old tomb some ^{distance beneath} [REDACTED] him. There were

shapes moving down there, shapes that whispered and shuffled about, then the silence of the tomb closed in again. He knew what they were and the terror moved through his limbs until he was flacid with fear.

Those shapes on the roof underneath were the Temple police. Whom the Legion had said would ambush the Nazarene's men. He could reach down with his toes and touch them. He felt everything slipping away.

His weight hung almost entirely from the [REDACTED] hand of the raca, Demas Legion.

It was the wheeze of old Philip which told the boy when the Nazarene's men neared the tomb. He blinked the sweat out of his eyes. He could see them, edging down the street. The Legions were ghosts in the tree. There was nothing alive up here, save Demas Legion's fingers. He felt the fingers working around his ear. The fingers made a suggestion of a twist. One of these days, when he grew up, he would pull that [REDACTED] raca apart like a beetle.

The narrow street made a right angled turn a few yards down so he ~~xxx~~ only learnt of the approach of the Temple guards and their prisoner when the light from their torches stained the opposite wall. As the glow rose, he could, from his vantage point in the tree above the roof, see all the antagonists; the

Temple police on the roof, the Nazarene's fellows kitting over the cobbles unaware of the peril above them, the long shadows of the approaching escort party. The scenes moved around in his head until he had them solved. When the Nazarene's men got close enough, the police on the roof would drop down on them and put them to the sword, Peter, old Philip, Johnny Thunder, all of them his friends. He could see them now, ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ ~~swords~~ as he had seen the constables ~~in~~ in the alley. Climbing the blades, hands clawing at the steel, until their cries ended. And then Ben Legion's men would drop down among the police and it would be the turn of the Temple people to scream and claw at themselves.

John Mark gave his head a tight shake. As his friend Simon Peter would say, if he were here, and not down there,
/"Spill your wind, Cox. Slow down."

The light of the torches spread down ~~into~~ the wall into the street as the escort neared. And he heard ~~XX~~ a new commotion which at first he could not identify until he listened keenly and indentified the crack of whips. The guards were whipping their prisoner. Whipping him. Whipping the Nazarene who could have been like King David, Warrior and King, had he not, unaccountably, changed his mind that

morning on the hill outside Jerusalem. The Nazarene whom he had loved, fiercely, against Saul and the rest. And at whose side he had hoped to march when he entered the city as King. Now they would whip, and, in the morning, crucify. That was how it was done. He had heard it from the Greek-Hebrew boy, Saul, the Roman-Jew Saul who boasted of citizenship with the conquerors; Saul, soon, Satan willing, already past his bar-mitzvah, to be a full fledged Pharisee. John Mark spat silently sideways for bad luck.

A movement on the roof beneath him caused him to crane a look. The police ambushers were off their knees, into a crouch, ready to drop on the Nazarene's men. The glow on the wall became the jailers' lamps as the head of the column came around the corner.

Poor innocent Galilean fishermen, unfamiliar with the ways of Jerusalem. My poor countryboy friends, unused to big-city ways. I should have taught them how a Quarry ran. Now the police swords will begin to butcher. Now, now, NOW!

"NO! NO! NO!"

The high wall caused a shock-instant of absolutely no movement before the street erupted. Everything happened at once. John Mark never knew how he got away from Demas Legion. But he was out of the tree,

a wild leap to the roof, buffeted by the bodies in struggle, and he was off the roof into the street running madly through the uproar of bodies, blows and bellows.

Ben Legion's crazies were first in the fray.

They dropped with wolflike howls from the tree to the roof among the police. The attack from such an unexpected quarter /from which they never recovered.

For the Legions were already at work wiping them out.

Meanwhile, the melee on the roof from an unknown source flung the two parties on the ground, the Nazarene's disciples and the Temple escort, into complete confusion. Befuddled as they were, each group thought of ambush and sought escape rather than resistance.

Each side took to its heels. The escort hustled their prisoner into a side street; Peter and his companions abandoned hope of a rescue. But nobody flew faster than John Mark.

He flew as his feet hit the street. Like the wind he was, head down, elbows raking his ribs. Like a champion charioteer at the Circus in Rome, he showed clean heels to all.

Chapter 20

A shepherd on the hill outside the city looked up and counted the hours by the wheel of the stars. One fell and showered. He muttered a good luck incantation. He reckoned it was three hours before daylight. He hunched down by the small fire again and busied his head with the Spring troubles of the flock.

John Mark never knew nights were so long. Nights used to be a matter of falling asleep and

waking up again. A ^{thing} ~~moment~~ of closing your eyes and opening them again. But this night was endless. As if there never would be another day. And he was having trouble with his eyelids.

No matter how he tried to keep them propped open, they kept falling down. He blinked them fast, but all that did was to get them wetter and heavier and then, just when he wasn't watching, they fell and stuck like glue. He stumbled into a stoop and stubbed his toe and hopped about, wideawake with the pain.

The boy dropped to the pavement and caressed the aching toe. He sucked in air through his teeth. He waited for the pains to stop shooting. Then he rose and went gingerly on again. But the stubbed toe had brought him wideawake. He looked cautiously about.

He was doubly a Quarry now. Not only were the spies after him, but the Legions also. If any of the Legions lived, he was sure they would be after him for queering their game awhile ago. He hoped, roundly and strongly, that none of them lived. They knew every incut and loop of the city and they could surround him anytime, anytime at all. He must watch it like an eagle, like a fox, bending his eyesight around every corner, shooting it ahead into every opening. Ready to whip about in a lightning change of direction or to plummet onward, swifter than the wind.

He breathed hard from the intensity of his thoughts. He rubbed the back of his neck and opened the collar of the cloak to let out some of the heat gathered under it. He still didn't like this cloak. He looked down at it and hated it. He wondered who had his own blue cloak of linen, brother to the one his mother had made for the Nazarene.

No use to worry about that now. There were other things. He must elude the Temple. Tonight. For in the morning there was Saul and the Wall. He had to be at the Wall, even if they killed him afterwards. He had to be at the Wall.

He shook his head at the thought of killing. He must find a way to keep off such thoughts. He looked around and discovered he was in familiar territory again. He was in the street of Inns. He had an idea and walked on with his eyes searching. Presently, he found what he wanted.

There was a line of light issuing from a doorway further along the street. He went to it, cautiously. It was an ancient building and in daylight, its exterior would be unwelcoming. But, tonight, there was a light and inside, he knew, there would be warmth and company and a chance to hide from his pursuers. Cautiously, he shifted an edge of the heavy goatskin curtains.

He found what he expected. The company of

pilgrims inside was poor but not so poor that they could not buy the cups of wine which entitled them to sit around the braziers and listen to the storytellers. There were perhaps twenty or thirty squatting on the floor and some of the older men had their long noses buried in thick-skinned Syrian oranges and some of the women were bent over their sewing, needling at long tears acquired on the road. And he could see how long a trail to Jerusalem some of them had taken, because there were the felt cloaks which were only worn by the shepherds in Turkey, and a scarlet tarbush from Egypt, and the loose, blue coat of some poor Greeks; and nobody who looked like a spy from the Temple.

Quietly, John Mark moved the curtain and slipped inside, head half-bent, eyes and mouth narrowed speculatively and edged over to the crowd.

He sat down beside an old woman who ate wheat and cakes and dried meat from a bowl on her knees, shaking the olive oil from the pieces of meat each time she took them up, and he tried to listen to the story teller and not let his eyes stray to her fingers nor let his tongue rove his lips as the scent of the food reminded him how hungry he was, until with a grunt she shifted the bowl from her knees, offering it to him.

And he could not control the eagerness with which he reached for it.

The story teller was an apprentice; for his beard was young and scraggy and he tried to bolster his story with big gestures that were too big for his story of a little Armenian girl and a sheep which sang; and almost everybody was eating or talking.

And John Mark could see that the innkeeper was becoming anxious --- a big boned, dark faced man with malevolent eyes -- lest the pilgrims become impatient and go to another inn. And after a quick look around, he fixed the malevolent eyes on the master of the story-teller troupe -- a high shouldered man dressed like a Greek with a heavy mane of hair and a magnificent beard and finely cut lips.

John Mark ate fast, his eyes darting quickly around the room, taking in everything and listening to the voices raised now so you couldn't hear the braziers sputtering or even hear the apprentice story-teller who had begun to stutter. Then the woman peered into the bowl, grunted and removed it from his reach.

"Young heatnen," the old woman muttered, peering at him from her beady black eyes, "young Jerusalem heathen. You stuff like a pig."

John Mark's face flushed with shame. Then he remembered his role and the nondescript cloak

he wore and he dropped his eyes and recited like one of the beggar waifs of the streets: "My mother is dead, my father is dead, you are my mother and father."

"Like a pig," the old woman muttered again but the bowl came back within his reach. He ate on, slower this time, for he knew he had her, and looked with interest as the Greek beckoned his stuttering apprentice back into the troupe and himself rose to his feet and stepped into the centre of the circle, his hands ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ ^{outstretched} and his eloquent eyes commanding silence.

"Hear ye that hath ears to hear," he spoke the formula as he walked to the centre, and the voices went down in deference to the master.

"A story that has never been told. A story of the re-appearance on earth of Father Moses and the great prophet, Elijah."

Then there was a settling of bodies into comfort, a rapt silence in the room and some of the malevolence died out of the innkeeper's eyes. John Mark's jaws slowed and stopped, his eyes narrowed on the Greek-Hebrew's face.

"Four men went up into a mountain, alone, to pray. And the dawn rose and evening fell ~~for~~ ^{for} six days while they prayed. And on the seventh day, while they prayed on this mountain, one of them was transfigured. His form was changed into that of an angel, his robes became white as snow, and

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the sun entered his face. And the three ----"

John Mark rubbed his belly gently and grinned while the Greek talked. He was full and warm again and there were no spies about. And the Greek could tell it! Really, he could tell it! One would have imagined it had never been told before. If one had not heard it with one's own ears from one's own friend, Simon Peter. But the Greek could not tell it like Simon Peter. He listened to the Greek.

"---and then a cloud descended on the mountain and from it, stepped Father Moses and the great prophet, Elijah and talked with the one who shone like the sun ---"

The boy's clear laughter belled up in the room and all heads turned to him.

"O Greek, you lie poorly," laughed John Mark, "for you could not have been there, No lazy Greek would climb a mountain except ---!"

The innkeeper's wrathful bellow cut him off. Eyes gleaming, the big boned man was leaping towards him. John Mark was appalled at what he had done. He swept to his feet with a grunt of alarm. He whirled and dived for the door, burst through the skin curtains inches ahead of the innkeeper and sprinted into the street. The oaths from the angry man followed him until he had outdistanced them.

He slowed to a walk, angry at himself. He had obtained shelter and food and had done himself out of them because of his swift tongue. And maybe

because of a full belly too. He could have stayed there and quietly enjoyed it if the Greek had not reminded him of another Greek, Saul, and made him make a fool of himself. He loosened the band at his waist for more comfort, thought some more, and shrugged. He had obtained a portion of what he had sought in the inn --- food. Now he quite desperately wanted the rest of it, sleep. He did not doubt that he could do the Wall tomorrow, even without sleep; but he had heard adults observe that a man was stronger after a sound sleep; and he had to use his head if he wanted to beat Saul in the morning. So he would think it out as a big man and do what a big man would. But he must sleep somewhere near the Wall so he would have time to be awake and be there before daylight. The street of Inns had been promising, for it was quite near; but he had spoilt that one. He could not even take a chance on another inn for fear some pilgrim straying from the last, would come upon him in there and denounce him as an interferer. And then he had it and commenced walking faster. But his heart was in his mouth.

For the place of safety he had thought of, was, the Wall.

Chapter 21

Philip ~~was~~ was thirsty. He would have liked a drink of water. But he had the bad idea that the bitterness in his mouth would befoul the water. He looked around the dim chair court. So this was the ugly end, he thought. The broken sobs from Simon Peter.

He thought how like whipped dogs they had slunk back to kennel, and, like dogs, they whined. He was unsparing of all, including himself. He heard John moan again and he closed his fist.

Philip ~~was~~ had only just returned to the court. He had been unable to run as fast as the others when the alarm came, and he had heard the strange

sounds of battle on the roof of the tomb. He had just learnt from Matthew, the ^{meaning} ~~the~~ of the sound

"The trap was set for us," Matthew whispered. "Lucky for us the Legions had their own ideas. They wiped out the police."

"But why should they save us?"

"They didn't," Matthew told him grimly. "That was young John Mark. From what Ben Legion very courteously told me --- he waylaid me while I took my roundabout course to get here --- they wouldn't have minded had the police first wiped us out."

Phillip allowed the silence to run through his mind. Then he drew a deep breath which hurt his chest and said at last: "Tell me about --- the Master."

He felt Matthew stir and he reached out and touched his shoulder.

"We - we went there --- Caiaphas' palace. I don't know why. They had him in the courtyard of the palace. More than a score of them were there --- police and soldiers, Roman soldiers. One of their centurions, named Guiseppe -- he is their crucifier -- he was - hitting him. Simon got in among the servants. I believe he must have made some protest, because one of the servants said he was a friend of the prisoner."

He stopped and Phillip said gently, insistently, "Yes?"

"Simon denied it," Matthew said rapidly.

"Everything, Matthew," gently, insisting.

Matthew nodded. He spoke quietly.

"Simon denied it. Swore it was not so.

Swore that he had never been with us. Never been with the Master. He was shouting, you know. The Master heard and turned and looked at him."

"That's all he did?"

"That's all he did. Just looked at him. But, Philip, ~~it was enough~~ it was enough. We - we -- we went away. Left him."

Philip groaned. He said, "Matthew, are we the best apostles he could find in all Judea?"

Simon Peter was inconsolable. Philip had tried. They were sorry he did it ~~where~~ where they could all hear him. Philip turned his head towards the corner of the court where Simon Peter sobbed alone.

"You know, Matthew," he said in a queer voice, "I have never heard him cry before."

"Put it down in your book, Phil. It's an event," Matthew said dryly.

Philip ~~he~~ drew up his knees and rested his elbows on them but his elbows slipped when his knees suddenly flagged and he didn't fight his

weariness anymore. He leaned his back to the wall and allowed his hands to trail on the ground beside him. Somebody groaned behind him and he knew that was Johnny Thunder and the mumble would be from James, comforting him. Thomas was behaving well. He would not groan, nor cry, and by his silence acknowledged that this was no time for argument. But it was not in Thomas to groan nor to cry. He would wait like one of the ancient Stoics. Thomas needed to know. The Greek wise man, Socrates, had put it that "Virtue is knowledge." But somehow Socrates had not seemed so wise lately. Not since Jesus had come into his life and declared that Virtue was Faith.

Philip signed. He looked up into the square of sky. The stars were undimmed. There were some more hours before morning. He understood Matthew to say they were beating him in the courtyard. They would have him to themselves for some more hours before the Sanhedrin met. He looked up again into the square of stars.

O, God, where is the miracle? Let drop a single star and wipe them out in a burning.

Matthew heard the groan. He wasn't used to

Philip
 comforting. He couldn't comfort old ~~xxxxxxx~~
 And old Phil wouldn't want a hand on his shoulder.
 But he could do with a column to lean on.

"If any man would come after me, let him
 take up his cross and follow me," Matthew said
 for the second time that night.

Philip
~~xxxxxxx~~ bent over and fumbled with the laces
 of his sandals. He took them off and slapped them
 together. Then he relaced them and sat back again.

"Need a new pair," he grunted. "These aren't
 comfortable for running."

"He needn't have come, to Jerusalem," Matthew
 said. "He knew it would happen."

"We asked him to stay away. Remember? But
 he was set on it."

"Phil?" low, almost a whisper. "I am going
 to ask you something."

And after awhile.

"Phil? What is this kingdom of the spirit?"

Philip
~~xxxxxxx~~ said slowly: "I am not sure if I
 know."

"Who knows? Do you think Simon knows?"

"Maybe. I believe so. I believe Simon
 knows."

"Do you think he would tell me if I asked
 him?"

"Maybe. Perhaps he cannot tell it. I
 believe that when you know, it seems you cannot

tell it. It is sort of locked up inside of you.
A kind of secret."

"Then if you cannot tell it, how can you
teach it, as he said we should?"

"I believe he meant you should teach men to
pray for it."

"And when they have got it?"

Slower. "I believe that is when they are
born again. I believe that is what he meant."

And another silence. And a star fell, trail-
ing light until the darkness filled in again. A
dog barked and a thick-fleshed almond leaf fell
into a puddle with a plop. Yet it was not an
ordinary night. The great personal happenings
ensured it.

Altogether, taking everything it is a night
like no other night, Philip ~~xxxxx~~ said.

Matthew said softly, "That Johnny Thunder.
Have you talked with him?"

"Talked with him? Why, man, naturally."

"We -ll. What I mean is - I mean - he's a
funny fellow. Moody. Full of a funny passion
that saws him into queer patterns, if you see
what I mean. Sometimes, its almost as if he's
touched, the things he says. You know. And
yet ---"

Philip
~~xxxxx~~ wheezed a tortured breath out of his
chest. He looked around the court. They were

all there, each wrapped in his own cloak of brooding. Tomorrow, this court would be a hive of live chairmen, wheeling and squawking and breaking into brawls as they jostled for the best fares. But tonight, it was a tomb of grief. Matthew fingered around on the cobbles and found a pair of pebbles. He picked them up and rattled them together like dice.

"You remember the time we camped in the cave of the grey foxes? By Dabereth, up near the sea of Chinnereth? When we talked about the kingdom? You remember, Phil?"

Philip
~~xxxxxx~~ remembered it fine. Very clearly. The pain was also very clearly brought to his chest as he drew sharply on his breath. It was by Chinnereth that he had known the young Teacher was doomed. Knew it as a blow on the head. Sickeningly aware that Jesus knew it too and had accepted the knowledge.

Matthew spoke softly so the others would not hear. "John Thunder was seated by himself a little way off in the cave. You know how he is. Moody. I went over to him. Why? I don't know. We aren't exactly heart to heart friends, would you say, ~~xxxxxx~~ Philip? But this day. Was as if something took hold of me. I sat down beside him.

"He was writing with his finger in the dust on the floor of the cave. He had gotten the habit from the Master. You know. He'd do it sometimes

, when he was thinking. You following me, ^{Philip} ~~XXXXX~~?"

Every inch of the way, Matthew. What did you
stumble upon, my foxy friend?

"Yes, Matthew. Continue."

"There he was, writing and rubbing out, writing and rubbing out everytime with a brush of his hand. The same ^{figure} ~~XXXXX~~ in the dust, everytime. Then one time he left it there and turned full to me. There were his eyes, burning out of two holes in that brown face of his. Like coals at the bottom of a stove."

Matthew paused. In the dark, he stroked his uncombed beard with the back of one hand. ^{Philip} ~~XXXXX~~ waited silently. Matthew continued softly.

"Aye, Phil. The eyes burning into me with a light I have never seen ---- save in the Master's. He whispered hoarsely at me, shaking with excitement ^{like} ~~XXXX~~ a Bedouin who has turned up a ^{cache} ~~XXXX~~ of nuggets. 'The Kingdom of Heaven is here! Here! The Second Coming --- its here already! Here is the chariot in which comes the Christ of whom our father spoke!' And he pointed me at what he had marked ~~XXXXXX~~ in the dust and only then did I recognize it."

Philip granted. "What was it?"

"A cross," Matthew said tonelessly. "The ^{altar} ~~XXXX~~ horrible Roman ~~XXXX~~ on which our conquerors sometimes place their well beloved citizens of

the second class. That was the chariot his poor dark mind had fashioned for the Master. ~~A~~ A cross."

Philip recalled another journey. He could have told poor, puzzled Matthew why it was not ^{come} peculiar that such a revelation should ~~have~~ from John. He could tell Matthew how John's mind had a way of pushing out into the deep, and hook into some boundless truth, some incredible insight, and bring it into familiar waters. A very gifted fisherman. Fisher of man.

Philip recalled the journey.

It happened at Bethany. They had left Cana in the early Spring, soon as the roads were fit to travel, walking in the cool of the days. Sometimes they fell in with caravans of merchants or pilgrims, sometimes along little used trails scratched in forbidding ~~and~~ sand fastnesses, but safe enough from the robber bands which skulked away between the rocks at the approach of the brawny Simon Peter, and the brothers James and

John, and the other ear-strengthened giants of Galilee. And the Master had been so full of life and vigour. Ever talking. Ever explaining. Ever illustrating from the great fund of stories in his head. He could hear him now as it if had been yesterday:

"Listen! A sower went out to sow!"

And you heard the wild music of the words, like the wind in the trees, like the sea among the rocks at Galilee.

Hunkered down in the dark court of Jerusalem this evil night, listening to the unsettling sobs from Simon Peter, Philip turned his mind to the sunlit days of their pilgrimages, the high lark's singing, and the voice of the Nazarene ringing from hilltop to hollow as they marched, teaching them the new thing. And brown cakes turning in hot ashes in the velvet evenings, the sudden flood of wellbeing when sandals were taken off, the quiet voice of the Master telling them of the power within, teaching them the new way to God that required no money for buying sacrificial rams, or goats or doves. Free. without price. Simply go within. I am. I am.

And on and on they had gone. Walking, he now recalled, through Nazareth and Nain and Bethabara, through Sychar and the cities of Samaria, past Lydda and Bethel and Jericho, preaching and healing through the territory of Galilee, until, as

, homing pigeons, they had turned their faces to the white roofs of Jerusalem. But at his beloved Bethany, the Nazarene had paused. And there with- in a stone's thrown of the Temple, he had yielded up himself to the priests.

He had recalled a dead man from the tomb.

And so given to the priests the ultimate, most dangerous account of himself as an enemy of the Temple.

Lazarus Lazarus

And in those terrible moments before the tomb, when they wheeled wildly between terror and insanity, Philip had heard John cry the great truth.

"He is God in the Flesh, come down ^{to} ~~XX~~ us!"

His eyes closed, and queerly gaunt, John had made the whispered cry through clenched teeth, as in a fit, the encompassing fact, loud in Philip's ear as a thunderclap. And with blanched cheeks, Philip had stumbled away, fumbling blindly before him until he found a tree and sank at its roots.

Philip

~~XXXXXXXX~~ wrapped his arms about his knees, pushed the sounds of the court from his mind and gave himself over to thought. Remembering how John had mumbled on, caught up in his trance, unable to stop, his eyes burning, his body shaking.

If God was Spirit, as the Nazarene had taught them, life, as he called it, then Spirit had entered into them at birth. They had been born with it. It lighteth every man that cometh into this world, John had whispered that morning outside Lazarus' tomb. But if a second coming, a borning again, as the Nazarene had termed it, was necessary for obtaining the kingdom, then the Nazarene must die so his spirit could live in them. God become flesh, to dwell among us, John had said. And flesh died.

The Nazarene had said at Chinnereth that he was the lamb for sacrifice, the expedient victim, the Shepherd who died for his sheep. He would die, so The Word, as John had called it, could be born again in them.

In the beginning was the Word.

John had whispered the absolute, his face stiff as a gourd, unseeing eyes, clutching his walking staff so tightly his knuckles shone white.

"I dont get the principle of it," Matthew said worriedly. "A cross. Why? I wouldn't ask the others. They're young. But you'll understand, Phil. Why? Why the cross? That John broods so!"

"You're a young man too, Matt, and night is a

bad time to worry," Philip said gently. "Everything looks black. Wait until the sun comes up."

"Will it ever be the same again? Isn't this a night like no other night?"

Philip waited a long time before he spoke. The Nazarene had once warned them against telling their thoughts too freely. Do not cast your pearls before swine, he had said, instantly presenting a word-picture before their eyes in the way only he could.

But he must tell it to Matthew. Soon they would all be scattered to the four winds. He had no doubt of it. The Temple would see that they were hounded out of Jerusalem. And Matthew would be travelling alone. Matthew would want to travel with him, but, priests or no priests, he did not see himself taking to the roads with a chest ready to cave in at any moment. He would stay in Jerusalem. But because Matthew seemed so unsure, his old trade as Herod's tax collector being constant in the maledictions sometimes levelled at him, he would victual Matthew for a lonesome road in whatever way he could.

"That is downright stupid, Matthew," he said sharply. "Grieving for a Master is understandable. I expect that even crusty old Gamaliel will have disciples grieving for him when he goes. But in our case, there is a difference."

were
 "You ~~XXX~~ ready to collapse with the rest of us awhile ago," Matthew said hard.

"Then more stupid me," snapped Philip. "You asked me earlier about the kingdom of the Spirit. I said I was not sure if I knew. I will tell you what I do know. I know that there is a spirit in every man. A spirit of fulfilment which has to be fulfilled. As a musician or a cobbler, as a priest of Jehovah or a cleaner of stables. And this individual spirit of accomplishment, is, God, within us."

"How do you get to that?" Matthew demanded.

"The Master told us this, remember? God is in the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of heaven is within us. Remember? The Master taught us this. When we manifest these accomplishments, the kingdom has come to us. His will is being done on earth as it is being done in heaven. But we need the bread of faith to believe this is so. To believe in ourselves. And we need it daily, each hour."

and I could go on and tell you, friend Matthew, that only when we sanctify ourselves will this faith be abundant. Sanctify ourselves, as the Master declared he had done, at Passover in the upper room of our little friend's house. And we cannot sanctify ourselves, make ourselves holy and clean and pure as the lamb when it is

prayed over by the priests before the sacrifice,
we cannot do so, until we have learnt how to for-
give. The spirit flourishes only when we forgive.
Where there is no forgiveness, the spirit is choked
and there is no access to God.

Philip went back on his heels and tried to squeeze some air into his tired old chest. It was the final miracle. Philip the Poor Fisherman had become Philip the Preacher. He smiled a little sadly at his joke. He did not think he would make a good priest. He needed gentling. With a little flurry of its own, his mind went back to a few days ago when he had watched the Nazarene gentle the bucking, unbroken colt they had liberated from the Roman city of Jerusalem, as the fiercely patriotic Judas had grimly joked, although it had come from their friend, Mary Mark. He remembered how the frightened beast had been gentled after the Master sat on its back. Spoken quietly to the trembling animal. And then, not so much as a toss of the head at the people crowding around. Not so much as swishing a tail at the wild shouting and the branches waved in its face as it bore him whom they believed to be the incoming King of the Jews. And he remembered the thought that had flashed in his mind. So would
he gentle all your wild, spurious spirits.

"Isn't that the prayer he taught us that morning on the mountain?"

Philip jerked up his head. He had quite

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Philip was absorbed. There was much for which he was still searching and maybe Herod's old tax collector had it somewhere in his bag.

"We are poor wheat, hard to grow," old Philip said. His fellow townsman, Simon Peter, was a blunt fellow. Philip liked to think he was subtle. Between them, the two Bethsaida fellows ought to be able to keep this mixed bunch together. Somehow. Philip admitted to himself that he was sometimes very trying. He liked to ask questions, the answers to which he already knew. But that way, he reckoned he strengthened his knowledge and belief. "Wheat of the first day, instant feed for the wild sparrows, friend Matthew."

"And the Rabbi is wheat of the third day?" Matthew asked.

Jehovah-Jireh! Aye, the sharp tax collector.

"It is a powerful thought, Matthew. It could be the answer. The Master did speak more than once about what would happen on the third day."

Matthew looked slyly sideways at Philip. "Will you wait to see whether the wheat springs, old man?"

Philip breathed heavily. There.

"I am for waiting," he said firmly.

Long after he thought it was ended, Philip heard the sound.

It is alright with me, friend Matthew.
Many in Israel are weeping tonight. You, John,
Simon, me, many.

He did not move to comfort the man. Matthew would not want him to. He ~~XXXX~~^{said}, "Do you think they will catch the boy?"

Matthew rasped his throat. "Poor young devil. He hasn't a chance."

"It is always pitiful when one so young has to die."

"His mother is a good woman."

"God be merciful to her."

"Aye."

Matthew said after a silence: "I cannot remember all the words. Someone ~~should~~ have written them down. Do you remember?"

Philip said, "Remember? What words?"

"The prayer he taught us. The prayer of the Master. Remind me of them and I will write them down when we get out of this."

Philip shook his head. It was strange that while he could remember, there was so much he did not understand. But the tax collector who could not remember seemed ready to understand. To believe is to understand, Philip thought. When you believed, you understood even if you were ^aunaware that you did. It was like knowing without knowing. Like knowing when you came to the best

water for a particular fish. And if that was fisherman's philosophy, well, he was from Bethsaida.

"I will give you my recollection."

Matthew sat very still, his retentive mind absorbedly on Philip.

"It goes like this: Our Father in the heavens, your name must be being hallowed. Your kingdom must be being restored. Your will must be being done both in heaven and upon the earth. Give us today, our bread for the morrow. And forgive us our faults as we forgive those offending us. For you would not lead us into temptation but deliver us from its evil. That, dear Matthew, is as much as I remember."

Someone was breathing deeply in sleep. Philip approved. Sleep would be good for him too. He was weary. They were all weary.

So weary. Gethsamane. John's story about Gethsamane last night. After the arrest.

"I heard him praying in the Garden. Before the soldiers came," John had said.

Philip had given him a dubious eye.

"Yes?"

"I have never heard him pray like that before."

"Yes?"

"He was very tense. He seemed uncertain, not like before."

"I thought you said you and Peter and your brother were asleep."

"Yes. But before I fell asleep. I have never heard him so uncertain."

"On, go to. You were all half-asleep. We were all weary."

"True, old man. But I heard him. He was uncertain."

"We were all weary."

Come unto me all ye weary and I will give you rest. He tried to remember where they were when the Nazarene had spoken those words. It was in one of the towns near to his own Capernaum. He had liked going to the Master's house at Capernaum. Seeing him sit at his own table. Strange it was, then, after having known him only in the nomadic life on the road. He was wryly amused at a story Matthew had once told him. It was soon after the great concourse on Olivet when Jesus delivered what they now knew to be the definitive word on his mission.

Matthew said that soon after they came down from the mountain, they were in Capernaum when a lawyer came forward offering his services for the campaign. He said he would go anywhere the Master chose to travel, no doubt expecting there would be rich pickings when the Master came into his kingdom. But the Nazarene, with that piercing look, said to the unlucky shelumiel, "Foxes have holes, the birds

their roosts, but the son of man has nowhere to lay his head."

Philip remembered how he had chuckled at Matthew's story but had commented that the Rabbi was not wholly truthful, considering he had his comfortable home in Capernaum. And Matthew had turned that sly face on him and said, "You a shelumiel too, Philip? The Rabbi was aiming his words at the luckless lawyer. Even the thieving old fox has a hole it calls its home, the free-flying bird has a roost it calls its home, but that lawyer, that swindler son of man, was so busy hunting for easy marks he had no time for a home."

But Matthew was not in ^{his} story-telling mood tonight. Now as he spoke, the agony was in his voice.

"Couldn't he have been stopped?"

"Who?"

"Judas!"

Philip recalled the scene at Passover table. Jesus had known, when Judas left the table. The disciples had thought he was gone to buy food for next day when the shops would be closed.

"The Master knew. He did not stop him."

"I mean us, man! One of us could have stopped him!"

Philip said to himself that he was not the

quickest man to understand. Not like Matthew and the others. Sometimes he kept asking questions long after others had turned away. But once he understood, he never forgot.

"Can the fish straighten the hook? The last hook, the big one, at the end of the troll? Can he straighten every hook in the sea if he is destined to be food for the world?"

Matthew said, "He and I have something in common. We are the only ones not connected with the fishing trade."

"Neither was I directly."

"True. There's something else. He was the only Nazarene."

"Do you know he is not really a Nazarene?"

Matthew looked at him with sharp interest.

"I did not."

"He was born in Bethlehem."

"Who told you that?"

"John. He spoke with John a lot."

"Why did John tell you that?"

Old Philip allowed a small malicious smile.

"Because I ask foolish questions. I have an enquiring mind."

"Then why did he allow people to think he was a Nazarene?"

"So that serious seekers will ask questions,"

Philip retorted. "My friend, Nathanael, whom I brought

to him, said nothing good could come out of Nazareth."

"I remember he was very amused at it."

"Said there was nothing false about Nathanael."

"He had that gentle irony. Always seemed amused at our foolishness. Like the names he gave us."

"Simon the Rock."

"Instead of Simon the Rock-head."

"Thomas the Twin."

"That, I thought was particularly good. He said that Thomas had just two sides to his character, yes and no. Had no perhaps, as others."

^{"Then these were}
The sons of Thunder. Of course, he meant the sons of Mistress Thunder."

They laughed softly, remembering the formidable lady, mother of James and John.

Matthew held down his head. After awhile, he said, "Of course, none of that matters now."

"No," Philip said.

Chapter

She knew, from the look on Nicodemus' face, that they had not found John. He was very tired. His feet and sandals were dusty in the lamplight. His usually immaculate robes were dishevelled. He must have scoured the city. He stood awkwardly. Poor Demmy.

"He has not been picked up by the Temple. We are sure. My men have been into Annas' and Caiaphas'. He is safe, wherever he is."

Her mind opened on the word. Safe? And the soldiers after him? She caught her breath. Dear God! Demmy does not know that the soldiers

are after my son too. And John might see Janus on the street, or his man, Quartus, and run headlong into them for he would believe he was safe with them. Dear God!

"Mary --- Mary, you are hurting yourself needlessly. I tell you the lad will be alright!"

When she spoke, it was in a whisper. "Demmy, the soldiers are seeking him too! Janus is seeking him for the Temple! He will find him and deliver him to Annas!"

He looked at her oddly. "Come, Mary, you are beside yourself. Here, lie down and rest, my dear. I promise you I will have John here before morning."

She clutched his hand. "No no no Demmy, I am ^{not} mad! I tell you Janus will deliver him to the Temple! He told me so!"

"Pull yourself together. You are talking nonsense."

She stared wildly at him. Then, gradually, her eyes quieted and she walked to a couch and sat down. She waited until she was sure he would understand that her composure had returned.

Then she told him. He believe her.

"But --- Janus! It is incredible!"

"Remember you told me he was Rome," she said stonily. "It is not incredible."

He picked up his cloak and began to put it on.

"Then we must find him before they do," he said grimly. "My God, I never knew this city was such a rat's nest --- there are more holes in it than in a beggar's robe! But we will go into every one of them. My men know them all ---"

"Demmy," she interrupted him, "I have an idea."

He straightened and faced her, shrugging on the cloak. He fumbled at the catch, impatient at the delay.

"Speaking of rat's nest, there is a band of - gentlemen from whom not even the clever John could long hide. Let us get them to help us find him."

"Who are they?" he asked quickly.

"I dont know, really --- but you've heard of them. They call themselves Legion. I --"

"Wait a minute!" Demmy said sharply.

"Funny you should have mentioned them. I was stopped by their band on my way here. I know them fairly well. Funny thing is - funny now that I think of it, they seemed to know that I was looking for John. Yes --- they know! For they made some crazy joke --- you know the story of King Saul and David. They said -- wait, I have it: 'Saul has slain his thousands, so John must slay his ten thousands.'"

She felt excited. Her mind hurried back-

ward to her first encounter with the Legion, when, out of their seemingly crazy talk, Matthew had pieced something together. There could be a clue in whatever they had said." Her mind came swiftly forward again to the present. At last, here was something to do for her son, rather than just standing aside and letting Demmy try it alone.

Nicodemus was turning to go. "Anyway, I will keep my eyes opened for them," he said.

"No, Demmy --- dont go yet!"

He frowned. She swallowed and shook her head a little, smiled tentatively at him. He wanted to take her in his arms. He frowned some more.

"Now, tell it to me again, Demmy, slowly this time."

He glowered at her. "No wonder the Capernaum aunts have no use for you. You must have read very little, if any, about King Saul and David not to remember the story."

She listened while he told her, her head on one side, repeating the words soundlessly.

"Saul has slain, but John must -- Saul - Saul --- O, Demmy ---!" She was on her feet, her eyes wide. " --- Demmy --- Saul is his best friend --- or worse enemy --- I have never been sure which!"

Nicodemus looked puzzled. "Saul?"

She laughed suddenly, joyously. "Yes - Saul! A young Greek who studies with Gamaliel. All we have to do is to think of something which Saul has done and which my Johnny thinks should ^{Be} outdone --- do you see? Wherever that leads us, there we will find him!"

"Amen," Demmy said wearily. "Now -- what?"

She gave him a small mischievous smile, shaking her head.

"How could Hannah have prayed for a man-child?"

His eyebrows went up in mock-shock.

"You have been into the scrolls!"

"Rabbi Samuel is my favourite prophet. A forth-right man. He did not relish being poked about by any old witch of Endor. So he nailed Saul."

Nicodemus cleared his throat.

"Ah, well. That's one interpretation. Obviously you will never be called to the bimah on a Sabbath to read from the book. But what has that got to do with the boy?"

She threw back her head and laughed aloud.

"Demmy, he is gone to the Wall!"

Nicodemus fingered his ear, a wry smile, regarding her. "Very clear --- as Damascus mud," he told her.

"The Wall," she said. "Saul did the Wall last Passover and said my Johnny could never do it --- it has haunted him all year --- talked of nothing else! I am sure that's where he is!"

Demmy said with weary patience: "Suppose we make it clear, my dear."

She told him about the Wall. Then her voice trailed off when she saw the horror in his eyes.

"Mary ---! They have doubled the watch on the walls!"

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Chapter

He awoke in the awareness that he must have slept. He had never slept on top of a wall before. When he awoke, at first, he had thought he was still asleep and that he was dreaming. He was dreaming that those stars above him, floating in the inky black, were not stars at all, but the jewels in the hats of a million high ~~XXXXXX~~ ^{priests} hovering over him with their knives. Whetted and poised. ^{would} Arguing where they commence on John Mark. It took him a little time to understand that the stone underneath him was not an altar-stone, but the top of the wall. He recognised the sound of the sentry's feet, tramping overhead. He came

fully awake^{then} He drew in his feet carefully.
He sat up.

He was on a shelf of the wall just below the rampart. Inches above his head, a sentry paced. He had made it. He licked his lips and tried a weak grin. He thought of Saul and the grin grew stronger. He had made it. He twisted his head for a glimpse down into the courtyard out of which he had climbed to the Wall. He nearly fell.

John Mark flung himself backwards, ^{hugging} an angle of the wall. His fingers dug into the rough-finished mortar. He was frightened. He had looked down into sixty feet of nothing, empty air through which, one slip, and he would be falling. One small slip, or, if the sentry choose to lean over and give him a small push.

He held the rough mortar, sick and shaking. His fingers would never ever leave the mortar. They would take roots and grow into it. He was sure that never as long as he lived would his head be ever able to turn. What was he doing up here?

He had come into the courtyard, cautiously, but feeling good, for there was the Wall. Standing like a challenge. He was ready for it. The coast was clear. He had not hesitated. Step by step, his bare feet sure on the well rubbed stones, he had mounted the stairs. He was smart. He

paced his climb to the marches and the wheelings of the sentry, employing all the dodges he had learnt in the night ^{from} ~~XXXX~~ Ben and the Legions. Then when he reached the shelf, he had crawled out to it, stretched at full length, wrapped the cloak about him, grinned --- and had promptly fallen asleep from exhaustion and a filled stomach. Now here he was awake again, but trembling like a leaf. From fear. When morning came they would find him pinned to the Wall and trembling like a leaf. Saul would find him. Saul always found him.

So then he remembered Saul and he fought his fingers until, reluctantly, they eased their grip on the ~~para~~ mortar. His arms slid back. He licked his lips and sat away from the Wall. It had bruised his chest sore. He shut his eyes tightly, turned his head slowly, opened them and looked down into the well below. Nothing happened. He gulped and swallowed. He drew in a deep breath and looked around him. Now and again he looked down. His fear fled.

He wasn't sure if the stars were paled. If he closed his eyes and opened them suddenly, they seemed to have paled. Then when he looked longer, he wasn't sure if they had. It was a puzzle that would trouble him if he kept at it. He wouldn't keep at it.

He knew the ramparts on top of the Joppa

Wall as he knew the palm of his hand. When the time came and he sprang up, he would know where to go. The only worry he had was the coil of pain that went round and round at the bottom of his belly and made his legs slack and tired everytime they remembered that soon he would be depending on them. But this had always happened just before the sprint races. And had he ever fallen down in any of the sprint races? Except that time when Saul had set up the spill. And even then he had got up and won. He pushed out his mouth and shook his head stubbornly.

John Mark slipped his hands inside his pocket and searched around and found nothing. He wished he had some dried dates. He liked to lay down and munch on dried dates. Judas had always carried dried dates and figs in his bag for the times when the band had nothing else to eat.

He should not be thinking about Judas.

Or about any of them. Or about the sounds of the whip when the Temple police had neared the Tomb. He would lay down there and not think. Not even about his mother.

And it was not true that he had her in his eyes and nostrils now, nor the touch of her fingers in his hair, nor the sound of her laughter swelling inside him.

He fell asleep again thinking of his mother.

And if the moment came when she knew the worse, her mind would go. Mary knew that with desperate clarity. All else was dark, or whirled. She stumbled on the arm of Nicodemus and she was numb and shaky all at the same time.

He held her until she was steadier on her feet. His eyes darkened.

"Mary, Mary, my dear," he said low voiced. "Let me take you back to the house. My men and I will be better able to search when you are safely at home."

She shook her head.

"No, no, Demmy. He wont come to anyone but me. He will come to me if he hears me calling him."

Nicodemus blamed himself. He had not handled it right. She should not have left the house at all. His legal mind and logic had deserted him. He should not be guiding a distraught women through the streets of Jerusalem in the hour before dawn, knowing her very presence was a danger to what he had to untangle.

He looked about impatiently, trying with his

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eyes to pierce the pre-dawn gloom. His men had gone up ahead when he halted, were perhaps muttering between the four of them at the surprising stupidity of their master. By some stroke of luck, perhaps because they had been keeping on the edge of the city, following the city wall, they had not encountered any of the patrols. This was the third gate they had reached since they had left the house and the same thing was about to happen as had happened at the others.

There was a light in the guardhouse over the arch of the gate and they could hear the footsteps of the sentry. The rest of the guard would be in the guardhouse, perhaps dicing away the remaining portion of their watch. With a resigned shrug of his shoulder, Nicodemus told himself he would know soon enough.

"Alright," he said to Mary.

Her clear tone, without a trace of anxiety, floated out:

"Joan? John, dear? Are you up there?"

There was a silent pause, then a distant clatter of the sentry's footsteps on the rampart. Nicodemus waited grimly. The steady call came again.

"John? It's I, dear, come down. Can you hear me?"

Now they will come, Nicodemus thought bleakly. Figs out of the pig-sty.

A surprised but delighted howl came from the guardhouse and a heavier rush of feet as the guard tumbled out and scrambled for the parapet. They peered down.

"The boy is not here, Mary!" Nicodemus said, furious because he knew she would not heed him.

"Let's go on!"

"John? John, dear? Come down, John --- can you hear me?"

Hoots and catcalls showered. A gravelly voice came out of it, in hoarse imitation of Mary's.

"I cant come down, dear --- will you come up?"

"He is not here, Mary," Nicodemus said angrily. "They'll make a fool of you!"

Mary clenched her fists and dug them at her ears to keep out the laughter. Her voice rose.

"John --- listen to me, John --- you must come home now, do you hear? The game is off, John!"

"You come up, dear, and the game will be on
----!"

The derision fell in a flood. The men on the parapet yelled and yowled. The boring watch was receiving a totally unexpected gift. But what happened next was equally unlooked for.

Suddenly, she was yelling back at them, throwing back insult for insult. So adequately, that Nicodemus blazingly wondered whether the Capernaum aunts had been right.

"That's enough," he said sternly. He

~~was not a man to be trifled with. He~~

~~he~~ plucked her clean off the ground and carried her fighting from the wall. She fought him and he shouted at her and bullied her until the fight went out of her and she was limp and weeping. Away from the wall, he set her on her feet. Her head drooped tiredly to his shoulder. He held her ~~there.~~ He thought the stars were paling and he said a quick prayer. If the boy was safe at daylight, he would be alright.

Quartus had been puzzled before, but now the puzzle was behind him. In his book, Janus was the one who made the decisions. Something had happened to sour the relationship between the woman and her young Isaac with the boss. He had liked the little Isaac. He was the only Isaac he had liked, he would tell the world. The kid had contained salt, and a tongue like rawhide, and was smart with his fists. But perhaps there had been something soft. A legion-

naire could not be soft, the captain always said. The young Isaac had found his soft spot. That had been all. But he guessed something had been wrong. There was always something wrong with the Jews. Something wrong --- inside, he guessed. Something always rotten inside of them. Only a Roman was sound wood through and through. The others, Greeks, Egyptians, Jews they were always spongy at the middle. Sure, he had liked the young Isaac. But now it was not his bag o' ~~beef~~ beef.

If his stiff army-trained back had been capable of shrugging while on the march, Quartus would have shrugged. He kicked his foot steadily beside Janus in the Roman patrol step. Behind them marched the squad.

Janus went about it with the precision of a machine. Bleaky^l, sparingly he had issued his orders. Fetch the boy in, alive. He himself had turned out with Quartus' patrol. He needed not to have done so, but he had found it impossible to remain at Fort Antonia.

He had thought of getting drunk and had gone to the officers' tavern, but had drawn back without entering when he saw Max Seneca and Guiseppe Zellini slopping about in there. They may be comrades in arms, but he could not consider with any kindness the thought of mixing

socially with either of the two. He preferred the company of Quartus.

He strode along in the easy patrol stride and kept his mind swept clean. Nothing must enter it, save the job at hand. If his mind took to turning to Mary, he only had to remember how Pilate had looked at him. First and foremost. And to a bottomless pit with the rest! He must beat that crooked priest and the trap he had set for him. He had only to remember that he had almost stepped with both feet into it, and why he had almost stepped into it.

If his mind took to turning to her, he had only to remember how she had used him and would have willingly left him there for the Temple to collect, had not Pilate, because of their kinship, thrown him a second chance. But for this, in a day or two he would have been on the way to Rome. No doubt, though, they would have given him one last job. They would have made him take the place of Zellini on the crucifixion detail. The parish job. The nasty task which so suited Guiseppe Zellini. To haul the Nazarene out of the city to that charnel house called the Place of Skulls and there, with hammer and nails, measure him for the cross. To stand with the squad, like the chief vulture, watching the young recruits whom you were blooding, howl-

ing at them if they grew ^{green} in the face ~~xxxxxxx~~ as they waited
~~xxx~~ for the man on the cross to go out of his
body.

Sometimes, if they had no friends, you
had to take them down yourself afterwards.

He strode on, his face cold and remote,
a machine in motion.

I am not supposed to have a code of mercy.
I am arresting the son of a woman I could have
loved, and turning him over to her Jewish priest
so he may know that the sickle of Rome, which I
am, spares no favourites. That she has been
morally unfaithful, is no matter. I could see
her now and not wring her neck. I could meet
her now and not squeeze her beautiful neck.
This is nothing personal. Nothing between her
and me. He watched the paling.

"Eyes watchful. It is the morning," he
said curtly to Quartus.

"The heathen priests soon will be sounding
their horns."

Janus threw up his hand and the squad
halted. He spoke in a low voice to Quartus.
"You think any of the other squads may have
picked him up?"

Quartus shook his head. "No, sir. I
told them the minute they did so they should
send runners after us."

"Hmm. Queer --- where could he be hiding?"

Quartus chuckled. "He's a clever one, that boy. Smarter than a horse trader he --"

"I did not ask you for a list of his virtues," Janus said coldly.

Quartus bit it off. He had forgotten. They were hunting the boy. He scowled and kept scowling at the boy's memory until he was again in the right frame of mind.

He snarled softly: "When I see him, I'm going to twist his ---!"

"You are going to do what I tell you," Janus snapped. Sunlight smote the tops of the city. He heard the burst of sound from the Joppa Gate.

"Let's go," Janus commanded.

"Squad, forward," Quartus said glumly.

Ben Legion propped his back to the wall. A dozen more sprawled in the chair-court.

"We will never get another chance," Demas said.

"Except at the Passover clemency," Ben said.

That startled them. The chuckling began after awhile.

"Whom shall we ask for?"

"Barabbas."

For the first time that night, their laughter became a roar.

Chapter

The long, sensitive face of Nicodemus looked down at her as he rose and took the few paces forward. The cloak of Mediterranean linen made from the finest flax fell in soft folds from his shoulders. Like many of the aristocratic Jerusalem Jews, he affected the style of the toga, draped over his left shoulder. Mary too had taken to the Roman palla, the mantle she now threw back from her head, revealing her face as she confronted him.

He had brought her here from the horrible Wall, to wait until it would be time for John to appear. She had refused to sleep or lie

down. They had talked around everything but had not been able to escape the grasp of the events which were destroying so much they both loved.

In a subdued voice, Nicodemus was saying, "I suspect that both Annas and Caiaphas knew I had private talks with your Nazarene. It was no crime, then. But now that they have proscribed him, it could be so construed. The law, depending on whose hands hold the reins, can travel backwards or forwards. Not enough, I daresay, to send me to prison, but uncomfortable enough. I do not know how ineffective my, er, lapse of judgment may have made me."

Her eyes were grave on his.

"I have sometimes wondered why really did you go to see Jesus."

He shrugged. "And I have told you before. Out of curiosity, perhaps. My insatiable desire for knowledge. His fame was growing. In the words of that Simon Something fellow, the fisherman who seems to be his deputy...."

"Simon Peter."

"Ah, yes. Quite a fellow. Exaggerates somewhat but very impressive. Told me once that all the world had gone after his master. Upcountry fellows from the little villages around Galilee whose idea of the world is

limited to the distance they can walk. Anyway, minus my present comment, I told it to the Sanhedrin last week when he arrived in Jerusalem to that tumultuous welcome. I don't think I endeared myself to the Council with that remark. But even when he rode into town on that ridiculous ass, of no semblance whatever to a royal progress, the people still hailed him ^{so} as ~~was~~ a Caesar. It really was as if all the world, Romans, Greek, Ethiopians, Egyptians, Arabs, everyone, had, quite literally, gone after him. Perhaps this is what Simon fellow meant. In that case, he has a point. However, you asked, why did I go."

He strode away, stood at the window, his back to her.

"I wondered whether he was really the Messiah. That is why I went. I wondered. Was he the one who was due to come? The one to lead us into becoming, once again, a nation? Was he our latter-day Moses? And if he was, how would he do it? How would he put into us, a defeated people, a people whose God grew so disgusted with us at times, he allowed us to be pummelled almost into oblivion, how would he put the will and the strength in us to fight against Rome? Would we use guile or javelin? More than that, to fight against ourselves: against our greed, our faithlessness, our eagerness to obtain a

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better lamb for sacrifice than our neighbour's. Perhaps, above all, for on this fact so much rested, what kind of man was he? Was he a wilderness saint, given to browsing over nature, seeking God in contemplation? Seeking God in the bush? Or was he a man for the Arena, ruthless enough to play the ruthless God that the scriptures teach us about. Our sacred scrolls make no effort to conceal that our Jehovah is a deity of mixed emotions. All of them startlingly human. Our beloved Jehovah had no compunction against blasting our ancestors out of existence as He did so many of our foes who dared resist our piratical inroads into their sovereignty, their land, their cattle, whenever He ordered us to. You know, my dear, our Jehovah is so much like us that it is no wonder our love and loyalty to him is of a force powerful enough to make us put our lives on the line for Him. From the earliest beginning, Father Abram was ready to lay poor Isaac on the altar, for Him. So what kind of man was this Jesus who called himself also the Messiah?"

She had the awful thought, while Nicodemus spoke, that maybe history would be repeated, was being repeated. It was there, in that part of the sacred scroll entitled Genesis and read so frequently in synagogue. Abram had not hesitated to offer his son on the altar.

Abram, the priests said, pleased God. And God, in His turn, was pleased with Abram. The Nazarene had said he was the Son of God. So, the logic. Was he, too, like Isaac, to be laid on an altar? She buried her face in her hands. Another thought rose unbidden into her head. Abram, with what she sometimes guiltily thought of as exquisite cruelty, had made Isaac carry the wood for his own sacrifice. In the rituals of the legal murder the Romans called crucifixion, the victim was made to carry his own cross. The wood. Her mind gave. She clutched at the arms of the chair. She stared dry-eyed at the floor.

Nicodemus turned from the window. His eyes smiled in his deadly serious face.

"Our God is so human that I have no doubt whatever we are made in his image and likeness. Perhaps I wanted to see the face of Jesus."

It took her a while to find her voice. She smiled back bravely.

"Don't be blasphemous, Demmy."

"No, my dear cousin, no," he said softly.

"I am not blasphemous. I believe in my God with a passion that nobody, I think, imagines. I tell you this because I have the feeling that none of us in Jerusalem, or, for that matter, if you can believe Simon-what's-his-

name, nobody in the world will ever be the same after tonight. It is the night for truth. I have the strangest feeling that tonight is our last chance for truth."

And it was strange that dear worldly-wise Demmy was repeating almost thought for thought what was in her mind. Except of course that Demmy was doing it out of an intellectual curiosity. On the other hand, why was she with the Nazarene? Yes, with him as much as any of those poor unlettered nomads, the disciples of the tragic young Rabbi who now had been brought down like a sparrow, by the arrow of Annas. What had happened within her? The upheaval that without volition had taken over her life, giving her this knowledge of rightness that was not, could not, be knowledge at all, since there was no sequence of learning to it? Only an awesome, frightening, yet serene certainty that it was all, somehow, right. It had no logic, yet it was, somehow, truth. It was an experience she was sure she would never be able to explain. Something had occurred in her personality, in her soul, that had made her ^{come} ~~back~~ alive, really alive, in the most peculiar way. What was the curious phrase the Nazarene had used to Demmy? Poor Demmy had been outraged by it. Born again. That was how she felt. Born again. On this night of betrayal, cruelty, death, she felt born

again.

"Demmy!" she whispered.

But he was staring out of the window, his back to her, his hands clasped behind him, shoulders carried high and tense. Nicodemus twisted his head to the east. The sky was rosy. He sighed heavily.

"It is a night like no other night," he said.

"It is an ugly night," she said harshly. A small star fell and scattered.

"And a bad Sabbath eve it promises to be," he muttered.

She shrugged wearily to her feet.

"It is time to return to the Wall. I understand from John that, according to the rules of the game, daybreak is when it happens. His friendly enemy, Saul ---"

She stopped, stared at Nicodemus. "Of course! On, Demmy! All we have to do to find John is to seek Saul, and he is more than likely to be out in the open!"

slept
He had ~~woken~~ again and awoke wound up real tight. He knew it in his legs, and in his belly, and in the front of his head. He would never be

able to stand up again as long as he lived. He was in a knot and somebody had drawn the knot real tight. The stars were really paling now. The fainter ^{ones} ~~xxxx~~ were gone and the brighter ones were going. Up, past his head, he could see the top of the parapet distinctly and the colour of the sky above it, which was a blue like a poor sort of egg. The kind of egg Saul and the big boys used to throw at the meetings of the Zealots.

Cocks were crowing down in the city and the dogs had stopped barking. The blood beat a drum at his temples and he just knew he was getting tighter. A man shouted something unrecognizable and a mare whinnied loudly. His mouth was dry and he could bet his palms were wet. There, he knew it. And he wanted to turn his head but he couldn't turn an inch. He wanted to sit up and look around him, but everytime he thought of it a muscle sagged and his legs refused to move.

Krrump krrump krrump krrump went the sentry's footbeats past his head as the soldier drilled his post along the wall. Sometimes the footbeats slowed near his head, as if they would halt on the next jolt, right beside his head. And at those times, when he shut his eyes tight, he saw it plain as ever. Saw the sentry's lips draw away from his

teeth, and the muscular forearm go back and come forward and the point of the sword go in into him ---

The sweat broke out under his armpits. He felt cold all over. He wanted to be out of it.

He did not care what Saul or the Committee would say. He had to be out of it. There were things rushing up into his throat and he was ready to vomit. He had to be off the wall.

He opened his eyes, the sweat chilling him all over, prickling inside his nostrils. He knew now he had never wanted to do any wall. He wanted to go home. He wanted to be in bed now with the pillows soft under his head and the covers warm over him and his mother breathing softly in the room next to him and sure if you only whispered, Mother, she would be in and her arms soft and strong about you in no time. So Saul had called him Mother's boy! Saul had said he would never take him on a journey since he would be snivelling for his mother before they had travelled a league. But Saul was wrong. Saul did not understand love; that to love and to need was not weakness. He breathed in deeply. Resolutely, he sniffed. His face hardened. He would show Saul.

He had never been out late enough to witness the dawn. To see how night drew away from the world. He had a notion when he was smaller that

night was lifted off the world somewhat like the cover from a tureen of soup. But of course all that was nonsense. It seemed that the night sank into the ground, but ever so slowly. As if forever afterwards you were doomed to live in a half-lit world like the Blind Ones.

He remembered the Blind One who they said the Nazarene had made to see. But Saul had said it was a trick. A trick to sell the Nazarene to the people as a great doctor.

"For," Saul had said, "I bet if you scratch the Blind One hard enough, underneath you will find Galilean fisherman! One of his own country-bumpkin friends pretending he had been healed. Just as the only ~~man~~^{one} he has been said to have raised from the dead ~~was~~^{was} his own bosom friend, Lazarus; and, note this, it happens away out in stupid Bethany. Then there is the girl in silly Capernaum. Why does he not raise them in Jerusalem? Why does he not raise a total stranger from the dead in Jerusalem?"

And since you did not know whether he had ever raised a total stranger from the dead, you made up some, saying these total strangers had been raised in Capernaum and Bethany, not in Jerusalem.

But these could not stand the test of Saul's tongue and you were thrown into confusion with face hot and a noise in your head and you ran

It was growing lighter.

But he must be off the wall. He must try.

He sat up and he gripped the edge of the shelf as his feet dangled in space. He forced his back against the parapet. The flesh of his face stiffened with fear. He thought he was a goner. He thought he had dropped like a stone into the courtyard and become a goner. His bones would have broken off into bits as a piece of rotten rock. He licked his lips and pressed the back of his head to the parapet and closed his eyes.

The panic at last died. He tried to whisper the words of the Hallel to show himself that he was alright again but the words were dammed up inside. He could remember nothing. He was a piece of rotten rock. He drew in a breath, held it there, and then pushed it out. That made him feel better. He sat up.

Daybreak.

There were voices in the courtyard below. Wheels creaked. He pushed ^{his head} ~~forward~~ slowly forward, chin up, and looked cautiously down past his nose. There. It was alright. Except for a little giddiness, it was alright. He could see people moving in the courtyard. They were the early hucksters trundling their barrows of watermelons and syrups, and some with the cages holding the sacrificial doves for sale in the Temple courts. And --- and - there were some shadowy figures standing over there, under that stunted olive. He drew back quickly.

It was Saul. It was Saul and the Committee. From the class at school. They had come to see him do the Joppa Wall. But I will not be doing the Wall! --- he wanted to scream at them.

Instead he rubbed his toes reflectively.

Sombrely, he told himself he would go down. He would edge along the shelf and gain the steps and then walk boldly down into the courtyard and

say he would not do the Wall. He was a man; he could make his own decisions. He could not do the Wall this morning. Not after the night he had. That was it. It would be foolish to do the Wall after a night like the one he just had.

He rose to his feet, small but distinct against the wall. The eyes that searched for him, saw the small figure, foolish and gallant, etched against the ancient stones. They were not sure. They bent and peered and whispered. Someone cried his name. O, no. How could it be?

What was she doing here!

Then, furiously, he knew it.

It was Saul. Saul had got to her. Saul had told her he would be on the Wall and that the soldiers would kill him. Told her, so she would ^{slink} home behind her with his tail between his legs like a shamed pup, while Saul and the Committee walked behind laughing their heads off! He could kill that Saul! He shook his head and wished for fortitude in this treacherous, mixed-up world. Al-
right, Saul!

Chapter

A blade of light touched his eyes.

His head jerked up. It was the sun. The trembling entered his limbs again; he was sweating all over. He tried to remember what Cousin Demmy had said about the Temple ceremony at daybreak. The two hundred and forty watching priests were by now at their stations. The fire would be glowing on the altar in the middle of the terrace.

Ah, there it was!

There was the priest on the pinnacle of the Temple crying down that the morning was shining already!

Pensively almost, John Mark watched the ceremony unfold. Soon now, he thought, one

John Mark would become High Priest of the Wall.

He heard the voice of the priest in the court.

"Is the sky lit up as far as Hebron?"

"As far as Hebron," the priest on the pinnacle replied.

And the two hundred and forty priests raised the silver trumpets to their lips.

Lit up as far as Hebron ... Lit up

Lit up ... Hebron ... Hebron...

Whirled and clashed the wheels in his head.
at
A cutting ~~his~~ his belly and his knees like jelly.
His mouth opened and closed in silence like a fish.

And then the trumpets came.

They came as at the end of nothing and the beginning of everything. The soaring music from the trumpets in a shower of silver, shooting through him, lifting him ~~the whole body~~ in one fluent motion that stood him on his toes, stretched as if everything would snap in him.

Mary Mark saw him. A sharp cry. His head bared to the sun, against light-washed sky, taller than the battlement.

He saw Saul. He saw the stunner he gave Saul. Saw how the grins were erased from the faces of Saul and the fellows; the wide opened eyes and fallen jaws of the Committee at his

sudden appearance. He looked archly down at them. But they were good fellows all. Saul and all. Nice, astonished fellows. The way they looked at him, in awe of the great John Mark, swell-chested on the parapet. They had come to witness his triumph. He was a Jewish champion of the order of ~~the~~ Maccabees. Come at last to the Walls of Jerusalem.

Janus, half hidden behind a buttress, uttered a quick oath of alarm as the boy touched his fingers to the wall and leaped to the battlement.

Mark swayed tidily, like a bird on a limb. The sixty-foot drop behind him. He swung his head right and left, taking in the length of wall, the blockhouses and the corner keeps. He gulped. What next? The Hallel! But the verses of the Hallel were a jumble in his head! According to the rules of the game invented by Saul, he had to recite the verses of the Hallel as he eluded the sentries. And now here he was, his mind a blank ^{because} ~~because~~ of fear. The late Spring sun smote fiercely down but he was cold and frightened. No words in his head, only confusion. A dumb lamb before his shearers.

Part of John Mark's fear was caused by surprise. Never before had so many soldiers ~~been seen~~ ~~seen~~ on the wall. He shivered in the sun.

"John --- John --- dont! Climb down, John!
Climb down!"

She was close to cracking. He heard it in her voice. He wanted to turn his head, to look at her, but he couldn't for he was all wood. The hated Roman soldiers were all over the wall. He whispered a phrase from poor old Samuel, that Judge of Israel whom his mother often quoted whenever a mischance fell in David Street. Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in Askelon, she would say. Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in Askelon, but they have nailed John Mark! Mother was right. He would search for the way he had ascended. Maybe they would allow him to leave unmolested.

And then he heard Saul's yell of derision. And that did it.

The hold at his throat loosened. There was a quiet in his head. And what he had wanted, suddenly was all there. The Hallel. He threw back his head and yelled back at Saul like a marauding Bedouin.

The sentries had been standing with their backs to him, leaning outwards from the embrasures to watch the scene in the courtyard, ~~laughing and~~ joking as they recognized the voice of last night's calling lady. But now John Mark's battle-yell jerked them around, oversized puppets in a Corinthian show. John Mark grinned feelingly. All was well, flowing good. Then he remembered that the moment had come. His face grew serious. Pursued his mouth. Took a breath. Braced his shoulders. All

was well. The verses of the Hallel, the great national psalm of the Jews, were clear in his head. He held up his hands imperiously, the grand actor asking for silence. The small figure on top of the enormous wall caused a great indrawn gasp among the crowd below. He threw back his head, shining in the sun, and cried triumphantly:

"'God of Israel, to whom vengeance be-
longeth, show thyself!'"

It was all here in his head now. Every stanza of the psalm which he had thought he had forgotten forever. He was ready now. He would go to the left as he had planned; and then he would work to the right, roving at speed between the ramparts and the garrison blockhouses and gaining the right corner keep, then back again to the stairs for the courtyard by the time the Hallel was completed.

He sprang from parapet to platform and commenced his race along the wall, the words of the psalm stringing out behind him, shrill banners whipping in the sunlight.

The soldiers at the embrasures stared uncomprehendingly at the running figure, cloak streaming behind him, legs briskly working. Then one of the legionnaires, a short squat man whose jerkin was stained with long service,

remembered something and chucklingly imparted it to the younger fellow beside him. "It is some pilly sort of game the young Isaacs have taken to playing. They did it last year, last Passover eve. Let the young fellow have his fun if none of the officers appear."

Anyway, it was a break in the monotony of watch; especially with them doing double duty since last night because of some lousy affair with the Temple.

John Mark skidded around a blockhouse at the end of his beat to the left and off to the right, up the slight tilt of the wall. He was getting angry, for the soldiers seemed to take his business for a joke. None of them had made a real pass at him yet as he had raced down the wall, hurling the biting verses right and left ^{IN} ~~at~~ their faces. His arms pumping, his face earnest and accusing, he stared straight at the legionnaire of the stained jerkin, veered towards him and hurled at him:

"They murder the widow and the stranger; and put the fatherless to death. O, ye fools, when will ye understand?"

The old soldier broke out a grin and made a playful pass at his legs with his javelin. John Mark leaped aside nimbly without a jar in his stride.

"Look out, little Isaac!" the younger

soldier laughed. "Father Moses mightn't like your blasphemy!"

But the others had got the idea. They were all making passes at him as he flew by.

He did not know they were playing. He thought ^{the} it was real thing. Now the game had zest.

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Chapter

Some kind of queer ^{game}/was going on up there.

A woman of Antioch rolled her eyes and looked up over her shoulder at the tall Ascalonian wrestler with whom she had travelled to Jerusalem for the Passover.

"Something new in this creaky old town at last!" She said in her light voice.

He was big and slow-brained but he was heavily handsome from beetling brow to powerful legs.

"Do they have that game in Ascalon? I'd

love to put you up there to play that game with the Romans! You would throw them around like ~~D~~iscusses."

He grinned around, a little sheepishly, at the faces in the small crowd which had turned from staring up at the wall to stare at the owner of the light voice. She put her head back on his chest and rubbed her cheek on the swell of muscles there. A few of the men grinned. An old woman eating pieces of fruit from a bowl, snorted and looked around for a pair of ears and found Mary Mark standing beside her and muttered: "She should be stoned from David's city."

Mary never heard her. She had descended into a quiet hell all of her own. Her lips moved in a prayer. But it was a flat prayer, with no spirit in it. She repeated it only because her reflexes pursued it. Nicodemus turned his head like an animal at bay. He had sent his men to hunt up a centurion -- any officer who could halt what would happen on the wall. He thought of Janus Aurelius with a great need.

Quartus, concealed with the rest of the squad behind a buttress, stole a glance at the cold face of Janus and wished he would do something. He knew the guards up there were merely playing with the boy. But he expected a turn in the game soon, anytime. It would come anytime the lazing, dozing, lead-bottom of a noncom in

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charge of the guard detail choose to leave his bed and be out on the wall exposing his beautifully pale countenance to the ravages of the weather. Quartus thought he would like to have that noncom for a week in his company. He would take to him as a tiger to uncooked meat. He would open him up. Quartus thought lovingly on how he would open up the noncom and take out the lead and put such a fine spirit in the man that he would be dead within a week. Dead from over-exertion.

He spat in the dust at his feet and swivelled his head suddenly to scowl at the squadmen crowding up behind him. He wondered what in two oaths they were crowding up behind him for.

He had liked the young fool Isaac. He had thought the boy had salt in spite of the silks he had lived in at David Street. He wished it had turned out to be somebody else; but what the boss said, stood.

"Back up -- you lumps o' loose acts!" he growled at the squadmen.

Some swifts were disturbed and flew up out of a grove of eucalypti outside the wall.

They flew up and wheeled, screaming, and flew screaming over the wall into the city. The noncom growled from his morning doze into wakefulness. He heard the screams of the swifts and the boy's shrilling voice outside on the battlements and his head jerked up. Growling, he reached for his helmet.

John Mark brought his run back and settled down into a steady trot. He was eluding them easily. He knew the Roman soldiers were slow and clumsy, but he had not thought ~~xxxx~~ ^{them} this slow and clumsy. The way Saul had talked, you would believe you would be nearly pinned through the throat at every step. Instead, you did it easier than playing chase. Why, here he was, at the end of his run to the right, and none of their thrusts had come even remotely near.

"I will rise up against the wicked ---" he cried at a young, red-headed legionnaire leaning against the rampart around which he was to turn. The young fellow regarded him quizzically and said: "Go ^{to} it, little Abram."

John Mark cut the psalm long enough to wrinkle his nose at the soldier. Why, the louts weren't even trying! He put out his hand and fended around the rampart, picked up the psalm again and began the down run.

But then a big voice bombarded the

morning.

The noncom ducked his head under the ~~arch~~ arch and stepped outside. He blinked in the glare of the sun and knuckled his eyes. He stared again, and it was really unbelievable. But there it was. So he held back his head and loosened a roar that swung to him the head of every man on the wall.

"You leftovers from last week's washing!" was what the noncom roared. "What do you think you're here for? A picnic? That's the young Hebrew they want at the Temple --- get him and bring him over here!"

The swifts found better lodgings on a roof across from the courtyard and their screamings ended suddenly as begun. Deep silence fell on the wall. The people in the courtyard stood like silent islands in a sea except for the bobbing of their heads as they sought the source of the bellow.

They knew that the sport had been spoilt. The menace of authority was in that voice. Something had gone wrong with the game on the wall. Grudgingly, for everybody cared, they knew that a grim phase had begun. The woman

of Antioch, her black eyes flashing underneath the tent of silver shawl she wore on her head, flung up her hands so the jewelled bangles flashed and clashed like a dancer's.

"Lord God of Hosts --- the Romans have killed him up there!" she shrieked.

Mary Mark moaned and Nicodemus caught her in his arms. He held her there and turned his head towards the woman of Antioch and said ~~softly~~ softly and uglily, "Get out of here --- get out of here ---!"

The wrestler grinned sheepishly.

Quartus looked hard at the back of Janus' neck. No, he reckoned they wouldn't be moving out after all. He had seen the captain lean forward as if he would step from concealment, but then he had seen the movement stilled and the muscles cord at the back of his neck and he reckoned they wouldn't be moving after all.

He ~~guessed~~ guessed the boss was tougher than he thought. Well, the boss always knew how to handle his troubles. But had it been his woman, he would have gone out there for her. Cousin or no cousin, in arms was in arms. He snarled at the squadmen. "Hold it --- who you think you're pushing?"

A man who bore two hampers filled with vegetables on a pole across his shoulder rested his wrists on the pole and flung back his head and shouted up at the wall:

"You murdering heathens --- you would kill an infant?"

"But they have killed him already, I tell you!" shrieked the woman of Antioch, her bangles clashing. "I saw them run the spears into him --- I saw them!"

A fat man, with doves fluttering against the bars of the cage he carried on his head, said: "They haven't killed him yet --- I saw him move."

and
"They held him by his heels ~~and~~ struck his head to the stones!" yelled a man who had climbed into ^a ~~the~~ stunted olive.

Gaul licked his lips and his face was very white. One of the smaller boys of the Committee vomited suddenly and they stopped looking up at the wall and looked at him. And one of the children said: "You will catch it now, Bar-Amos. You will catch it now for vomiting on your clothes."

and about then, they heard him. Heard his voice piping it on top of the wall.

The old woman who had given him food in the

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inn threw her shawl over her head and said in a quaver to the pilgrims around her:

"Lord God of our fathers --- he is singing the Great Hallel!"

The blast of the non-cô's voice had caught him ^aunware and he had stumbled and almost tripped. He recovered and braked his run. He stayed in a half crouch, his head pushed forward, tense as a pointer. He saw the man blinking in the sunlight and the soldiers frozen against ^{the} ramparts. He watched them, unable to move, as the purport of the words and the command reached them and their heads turned towards him. It was a year and a day he ~~had~~ watched them. Watched all the good humour and the indulgence drain from them and become ~~machines~~ machines again. And there he was, a scapegoat pinned to a rockface.

He saw the slow lift of the weapons to the ready and the feet moving deliberately forward, the mailed feet, the big-knuckled knees, the sway of the leather jerkins. Slowly. For now they had him. They thought they had him.

He laughed suddenly, a boyish laughter that tinkled and made them freeze.

He laughed for he felt everything coming back into him.

He spoke up. He made the words ring the way Cousin Demmy could make them ring. He put wings on them and they mounted powerfully, as eagles. He made arrows of some and he aimed them and drew back the bowstrings and out they flew, true and singing. He handled some of the words lovingly, those telling of the greatness of Israel; and other he made into millstones and rolled them down upon the heathen Romans. He hoped the master, Gamaliel, was down in the courtyard to hear them. For never were the words of the Hallel spoken with the aching glory to a tongue as they were spoken now. He made his voice grow taller as they came nearer and he rose on his toes to be tall as the words.

"Your idols are silver and gold; the work of men's hands. They have mouths and speak not ... They that make them are like unto them...."

and when they thought they had him, he was ready. He had seen it long ago. He whirled and his clutching fingers reached the top of the rampart and he swung himself up. A hurled javelin clanged loudly against the stones. The noncom blinking in the doorway, yelled: "Dont kill him, you fools! Orders are to take him alive!"

John Mark grinned tightly against his teeth and leaped from the rampart to the platform and raced towards the stairs, the words tumbling from his lips. He aimed straight for the head of the stairs, drawing the dozen or so guards into a move to intercept, then, less than twenty feet from them he wheeled lightly as a fawn and sprinted for the far side of the wall, drawing them behind him.

Metal

~~Iron~~-studded sandals were no good for running; ^{if} ~~they~~ they had asked him he ~~would have told~~ them. They floundered and slipped and they couldn't run free as he, for they had to do it according to the regulations, sideways like crabs scuttling up the beach at Galilee, for they must hold their spears at their waists, with the right ^{arms} ~~xxx~~ crooked and holding the butt, and the left arms across their bellies, clutching the shaft. Clumsy. Clumsy.

Out of the corners of his eyes he watched the wings pull out and then circle in, to enclose him and he sprinted on, like not knowing, and allowed them to close; and when they reached for him, he slid his foot forward under him and hit the ground with his body already turning and pushing forward from his hands and feet, while the men above him collided mailed chests, grunting for wind and pain as they staggered.

His face was pinched and serious. He was out-running a dozen or so of them, leaping sideways from the restrained thrusts they made at him; straining his muscles in sudden halts to wheel back the way he had been coming, springing to the breastworks and off again, jeering at them and yelling the Hallel.

They were slowing up at the unaccustomed run in the sun, but he knew he was tiring too. The ache at his knees and the looks of anticipation on their faces. He thought hard. He had to end it. The Hallel was so long!

He saw that the non-com had moved now from the doorway of the small blockhouse and taken up a position at the head of the stair leading down into the courtyard. The movement had freed, for the chase, the two guards he had placed there earlier. His retreat was still cut-off except that now there was just one man. He sucked in good lungfuls of breath, waiting silently as the men closed in.

There were a few verses left, only a few. The rule laid down by Saul was that the Hallel must be completed before reaching the courtyard. He waited, watching the soldiers shuffle to right and left. Straight down the middle was the head of the stairs and they thought he would not make a break for it since it was specially guarded. By the lone non-com. John Mark worked his toes

for a grip on the edge of the parapet, head down, quick eyes searching. The legionnaire in charge had said they had orders to take him alive. But, O, the monkey-men, the clod-footed apes of Ophir! Trained into use of their swords and javelins, and clumsy in the gift possessed by John Mark the Runner. He had been the all-night Quarry of priests and police, of pilgrims and soldiers of the Nazarene's apostles and Ben Legion's crazier, and out-foxed every one of them.

He took off.

He tore down the straightway, shrilly piping the verses. Then, as he reached the awkwardly bracing soldiers, he dodged right and dodged left while they flailed about and dodged between them. The noncom was ready to be roped.

He roared: "After him, you jelly-fingered ---!"
^{he}
 But/broke off.

For he was staring straight into the eyes of the boy. The young Isaac was heading straight at him. The little stinker was for making a monkey out of him as he had done with the men. And in front of his own squad too. Then, by all the gods, he would not pass here! The dirty little swipe would not pass here! Trembling with rage, he drew his short cutting sword and awaited the oncoming boy.

John Mark flew straight at him, his heart pounding. He could see that the soldiers meant to bring him down.

And then ^{from} ~~XXXX~~ the courtyard came a rolling roar of command. It numbed the non-com. He

Knew it was Janus. He cried at the top of his voice:

"Janus!"

But that would be of no use for Janus was too far away to prevent the soldier using his sword and he could not stop nor turn back for it was too late and he had been a fool to believe they would not kill him and he wished he could stop crying out these stupid words of the psalm for they were taking his wind and he needed all the wind he could get. And then he saw the numb noncom toss his weapon aside. The bellow from Janus had done it. But not yet. For the legionnaire was about to eat him alive. With a roar of outrage, the soldier came at him, John Mark, in a swirl of cloak twisted and leaped over the wall. The spy's cloak settled at the soldier's sandal.

He leaped clean over the wall and the noncom shouted with satisfaction; for it seemed that the boy had only chosen another ^{form} ~~form~~ of death. But John Mark had remembered the shelf on which earlier he had lain. His feet hit the shelf with a jar that rattled his teeth. The wall tore his skin as he spread-eagled and clutched for dear life. He heard the gasp and the mighty roar of the Hebrew voices in the courtyard. A mighty roar ^{hailing} ~~hailing~~ the mighty Jewish ^{warrior} ~~warrior~~ on his mighty feat. He jumped from the shelf to the steps and raced downward, the last ragged verses ~~stumbling~~ past his lips.

There was a darkness gathering in his head

but there she was coming out of the dark, running, with Janus behind her, and Cousin Demmy behind Janus, and even tough old Quartus was running to meet him too. So, alright.

Janus took the linen cloak from Quartus who had carried it, and tossed it at Nicodemus.

"Wrap him up," he said stonily. "He's shivering."

Chapter

It was a day of burning beauty. The buttercups yellowed furiously down the long slopes of the hills that ringed Jerusalem, ~~to the base of the walls~~. The old stones in the walls glowed warmly and where the masons had repaired the ravages of time and old wars, the newer bricks aged in mellow half tones of browns and reddish pink. Atop the walls, the sun struck from the weapons of the soldiers walking the ramparts, was reflected in flashes from the peaks of their helmets each time the men turned ~~XXXX~~ ^{their} heads. Sunlight danced cross the roofs of the city, leaping from domes and settling for an instant on balustrades, then diving into the streets and peering curiously into the shadows under the awnings. Most of the streets were deserted; but the long narrow lanes from the palace courtyard to the Damascus Gate were receiving a flood of witnesses never before gathered in Jerusalem for an execution. Pilgrims and burghers, men, women, and children, Jews out of every race, colour, and country ^{earth, a} on ~~XXXX~~, ~~the~~ tidewater of people ~~XXXXXXXX~~ bulged and flattened against the walls ^{as} ~~XXXX~~ the soldiers ~~XXXX~~ kept a way open for the train.

Behind the closed gates of the palace court, Janus Aurelius had marshalled his men. He heard the marmur from the hungry crowd. Nothing showed on his face. Quartus, big

strong, loudmouthed and angry, barked the sullen squad into two double lines where they now stood, awaiting further commands. Quartus wheeled away from the men and saluted his captain. For awhile, the courtyard was still, and, far away in the Temple, the gongs of the priests struck the hour.

"It is the eighth hour, Captain," Quartus said, standing immovable as granite, his arm upflung in the salute. "All is ready."

Janus had never know such humiliation. The pulses at his temples and wrists throbbed painfully against mail chinstrap and bronze wristbands. He was floating in a vacuum in which everything was unreal and he had difficulty focussing his eyes on the faces of the men before him. In the eyes of Rome and all the provinces where soldiers stood guard over the Empire, the spectacular fall of the famed Company of the Ravens under the captain, Janus Aurelius, would be a conversation ^{piece} ~~story~~ for every barrackroom anecdote, every garrulous garrisoneer ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ who ever gossiped as he polished a javelin. All within a night.

His Aunt Claudia had saved him the final end --- being sent off to Rome in chains. But fiercely he wished the woman had not been so solicitous over her nephew. Living with it would be a greater punishment. For he had

absolutely ~~(on)~~ doubt that Pilate would see that his cup be kept filled to the brim. The last time he had seen Pilate, the governor had been beside himself with rage. White and trembling, ^{berated} he ~~berated~~ the officer, promising that as long as he lived, he would remain in Judea and be in charge of executions. And below that, no officer has ever sunk, Pilate reminded him.

As if he had not known. As if he did not know that now he was ^{pariah} ~~pariah~~ and could not protest even if Guiseppe Zellini refused to drink wine with him. He had taken over the job of crucifier from Guiseppe. He had a scarring moment as the thought rose unbidden that it would make no difference to his career if now he married a Jewess. His face prickled hotly and then went ^{ice} ~~ice~~ cold under a film of sweat.

"Very well," he rasped at Quartus. "Carry on."

The thick-waisted cross was dragged from a corner of the court by a couple of menials in the garrison service. At least, they had spared his men the humiliation of that. He eyed the monstrous object and wondered whether the frail Nazarene could carry it. But many of these frail wanderers were surprisingly strong. A diet of figs and honey and goat's milk could put tough sinews on a skinny frame. Quartus curtly nodded to the men and they put down their burden

between the ranks of soldiers. Quartus bellowed across the courtyard and the guards brought out the prisoner.

Janus could see he had been brutally punished. That was to be expected. The Company was not pleased at being made the ^{pariah} ~~pariah~~ Company and they placed the responsibility for it on the prisoner. Because his mind was never far off Mary, Janus was using Jewish symbols and he likened the Nazarene's beating to the Jewish ceremony of the Day of Atonement. His squad had heaped their bad luck on the man and would lead from Nazareth/the scapegoat out into the wilderness. Outside the city wall where they held executions. Curiously, at close range, Janus inspected the prisoner; the itinerant Teacher for whom Mary and so many of the Jews had been willing to risk their reputations and worse. The Nazarene did not look ^{at} ~~at~~ him. His eyes were on the cross where it lay on the ground. Rough-hewn timber with the axe marks of careless gougings splintering the edges. He wore his hair long, framing a hauntingly serene face. Pale but at peace. He had been terribly scourged. Some savage jester had made a crown of thorns and rammed it down on his brow. Fresh streaks of blood still bubbled like pinpricks on his forehead.

The Nazarene raised his eyes from his survey of the cross. They met those of Janus. The Roman had expected the eyes to be hate-filled, or frightened, or, at least, accusing. They were, instead, composed. The prisoner had obviously been brutalised by the soldiers, yet he somehow seemed tranquil. Janus had the most peculiar feeling that the eyes of the wandering Jewish prophet were conveying understanding. It was as if this man on his way to a cross sought to comfort him. To reassure him by his cloudless countenance that Janus worried needlessly. And this was of course absurd. How could this stranger know of his affairs? The whole thing was preposterous. In his heightened sense of danger and political peril, he was imagining that a desert preacher possessed supernatural powers. Continue along this road, Janus, and you end up placing the one-god heretic alongside your better Roman gods.

He looked around at his men. The squad looked back, puzzled at his long silence. He opened his mouth for another rasped command. He cleared his throat instead.

"Can you carry --- that?" he asked the Nazarene quietly.

The Nazarene stooped, his whip-tattered garment dragging in the mud. He fitted his shoulder to the cross, bore it up off the

ground and rose slowly, the thing with him. Janus breathed a sigh of relief. He did not want problems so early in the ugly affair.

"Squad, forward," Janus said tonelessly.

The way out of the city was over one of the lesser streets in which the pavement stones were torn up or loose. The men could hardly keep step, what with the road and the crowd.

"Get them back! Get them back!" Quartus incessantly bellowed as the line of soldiers guarding the way in places sagged under the pressure of the crowd. The whips of the soldiers cracked and flailed on either side clearing a passage. Thrice the prisoner had stumbled and straightened as the whips turned from working the edge of the crowd and sent their tongues at him.

marched

Janus ~~XXXX~~ at the head of the column, his face stony and eyes fixed straight ahead. Once the procession had passed some weeping women, better dressed than the general rabble, and his eyes had veered to see if Mary Mark was among them. But she was not. He had waited impatiently while ^{the} Nazarene, struggling under the burden, paused to speak to them. He had not

interfered when one of the women had wiped the Nazarene's face. Ironically, he thought if Max Seneca was somewhere watching, he could be reported for this. But then he remembered that Pilate had commented that he could sink no lower. He wished it was over and done with.

There was a yelping roar from the crowd. Behind him, Quartus bellowed for the squad to halt. Janus turned sharply, impatiently, his bleak eyes searching. It was as he feared. The Nazarene was weakening fast.

"Pick it up! Pick it up!" monotonously roared Quartus above the crack of the whips. Janus began scanning the noisy rabble. He knew enough about his new duties to know that he was within his rights to impress someone to help carry the cross. Old crucifixion watchers in the crowd who knew what was coming began sidling away. A strange anger came upon Janus.

You sick citizens of Jerusalem, I have been made one of you by my illustrious uncle the Governor! Condemned to be among you for life! You took green branches and strewed his path into your city less than a week ago! Now you yell for his crucifixion! You have no will of your own! Only the will of your priests, and of monsters such as my uncle! The only man among you now carries a cross!

I will not sink him any lower by giving his cross to be borne by you!

His eyes searched the crowd for a stranger. He must study how to exert Roman rule in the provinces; ~~it~~ it was now his life's career. His uncle the governor, large, urbane, careful of his position as proconsul never to offend Caesar; What was it Pilate had quoted yesterday, while he rolled the rings on his fingers? A man so devoted to staying ahead of his conscience, he was never still. He liked to quote some recent poet named Vergil.

"Remember, Roman, to rule the people under law, to establish the way of peace, to battle down the haughty and to spare the meek, these are ^{our} ~~the~~ fine arts."

Very well. A crucifixion was not exactly exercising a fine art but there was a portion of the poet he could use to practice the peace of Rome. He could spare the meek. He searched the crowd for a stranger.

The calm, dark-skinned, intellectual face and quiet dress, proclaimed the man a Cyrenian, perhaps one of the Greek scholars in to observe the religious rites. Janus pointed his officer's staff at him and a couple of soldiers closed in about the man. The Cyrenian walked eagerly forward. Quartus raised his eyebrows at the stranger's eagerness.

"What is your name?" Janus asked the dark-skinned man.

"Simon, a visitor from Cyrene in Libya, in Africa."

"Pick it up," he said tonelessly.

"I'll bet you were afraid," a Committeeman said.

"And I say I was not!" John Mark cried.

The Committeeman was his own height and weight and John Mark thought he could take him. He felt very able today.

"Our little rooster has grown his spurs, Dan," Saul said, a full head taller than the rest of his Committee, staring up the rising ground. "He has a right to crow. Why, he is even enjoying it out here today at Golgotha with us."

John Mark gulped nervously. He did not follow the direction of Saul's eyes. The three crosses were too plainly etched against the darkening sky.

"Where are his fishermen, young Mark?" Saul asked. "Hiding under a rock?"

Mark swallowed again, felt hot and confused. He pulled the blue linen cloak away from his shoulders.

"It is going to thunder," said Dan, looking at the lowering sky.

"Oh --- look!" Saul said with quickened interest. "Look -- the soldiers are going to use the spear!"

John Mark whirled and ran as fast as he could.

Chapter

A wind stole into the room, brushing past the heavy window curtains, a soft-walking wind that lightly stirred the roses on the carved Egyptian table at the far corner, tiptoed around the room bent double, cautious as Ben Legion crossing a forecourt, and finally slipped under the couches and the ottomans, and Mary never knew what became of it afterwards. She was startlingly the look-alike John Mark's mum when she worked at the idea of a soft-walking wind, miming the glides and twists of the smart little wind hiding ahead of whatever was after it.

She smiled fleetingly at Nicodemus.

"You say we are safe now, Demmy?"

Nicodemus nodded. His face was gloomy. "Annas was not pleased with me. Was not pleased at all. I had Satan's own time. But I suppose since he had the Nazarene, it atoned somewhat."

"He was the sacrificial lamb, eh Demmy?" Mary asked, smiling still.

"I suppose, if I overlook your blasphemy, you may call it that."

"Quartus called him that. I have merely chipped the tablets, as John Mark would say. He, Quartus, came in to see me after the -- afterwards. He wanted me to know he wasn't angry at us that his - boss - had been --- kicked down the ladder, he said. He said he made his boss stand aside while he ---" she swallowed "--- drove the nails. Said he hadn't minded, for he knew that this meant Johnny was safe. He had liked the little runt --- that's what he calls my son. And then he said, 'The fellow wasn't tough at all. I thought he would kick ^{like} your lambs at the sacrifice.'"

"Stop it, Mary!" Nicodemus said loudly. "No use brooding over it!"

"But I am not brooding, Demmy," she said, looking up at him. "In fact, I feel strangely --- free!"

"Free? Did he have that ^{kind} ~~xxxx~~ of a hold on you?"

Her look puzzled. "Hold? I dont know. I dont feel as if I am in an escape. Nor a release either. Rather, I guess I feel freed of - encumbrances. No, not a release. Nor a ~~w~~escape. More like an arrival.

xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
~~I know it does not sound son~~

I know it does not sound sensible. Not to me. Yet. I guess I feel content to wait until it does." She gave a dubious smile. "And this puzzles me. I am not usually so content. You know that."

Nicodemus settled back on the couch and his long fingers trailed relaxedly along the cushions. "Talk to me, Mary. I want to know, to help you."

She looked seriously at him. "You know you dont fool me a bit, Demmy."

He dropped the pose and looked at her alertly, curiously. "Mary, why had you never taken an interest in politics, or religion, before the coming of this man from Nazareth? What cure-all did he offer? O, I know at the trial they said he had proclaimed himself the son of God. I thought that should have gone to his credit. Not to have claimed to be a God, as so many before him had done, but a son of God. But what were his politics? Was he a nationalist, as the Zealots? A compromiser as the Herodians? Of the Sicarii, arguing violence against the Romans? Willing to make the square mile of Jerusalem into a holocaust for every Hebrew? What?"

She answered him quickly. "All I know is that he was born into the clean-limbed, clear-eyed, brutal human race and they killed him!"

"I know he is one of us," Nicodemus said dryly.

"Yes," she said bitterly. "The same knees and knuckles, the same mouth and nose."

"The Romans say we are a nation of noses," he

said in an attempt at raillery.

"No. A nation of empty ears and mouths full of sham righteousness."

"Now, Mary," he said cautiously.

She got up and walked across the room, stood for a moment staring at the wall and returned. [REDACTED]

"You say it is men like Annas who secure the world against unstableness. But might it not be the other way around? Perhaps our disc would be less in a wobble if men like Annas would not try to stop changes in direction. Or rather, cease making adjustments in direction." She tossed her head. "As time moves on."

He grinned rudely. "Not a disc, my angel. A sphere. Eratosthenes of Cyrene measured it and Aristotle the Greek proved it several centuries ago."

"Whatever. And stop grinning like a monkey with butter on its mouth."

"Monkeys do not eat butter," he said firmly. "They eat ~~whatever~~ ~~everything~~ we eat, except meat and butter."

She sat down and took up the shawl which had fallen from her shoulders and ran the tassles through her fingers.

"What did he say?" she asked in an under^tone.

"Who? he answered, too quickly.

She looked at him levelly. He shrugged.

"I could not hear. I wasn't near enough."

"The same safe, old breed," she said quietly.

"Good Lord, Mary, did you expect me to stand at the foot of the cross? I did what I could.-- I asked Janus to be as merciful as he could --- to - to use ^{he} the spear as soon as lawfully could!"

She shuddered and hugged herself. She turned away. Her shoulders went high and tensed. He waited for her to be steady again. He asked in a quieter voice: "Where is Janus? Is he coming?"

She answered him in a matter-of-fact tone.

"I - I think so. He - he has asked me to marry him."

He said lamely, "It may not last, you know. Unless you go to Rome. But not in Jerusalem."

She turned a crinkled gamin grin on him. "And then, dear Demmy, you know it may. You are the historian. Isn't it possible that Janus may be my Persian consort, and I, his Jewish Esther? Having him here in Jerusalem, living with us may hold Tiger Annas in check."

She wished the day was the thirteenth. A lucky day for the Jews, as provided by that fine Jerusalem girl, Esther.

He had got awake several minutes before. The quiet in the room was fat all around him and it was as if he was sinking into it. He liked the sinking, and now the tiredness slipped down his limbs and out at his fingertips and the feel at the back of his neck as he sought the pillow-softness. A wind blew in at the window and ballooned the draperies. Outside, the day was browning. Soon his mother would be in to night-latch the windows. He guessed he wouldn't want to see her when she came in. He wouldn't want to see her tearful. He threw himself around and burrowed his face violently into the pillows.

But there was no removing it. His mind sat stubbornly with the thing he did not want to remember and he threw himself on his back again and gazed sombrely up at the ceiling.

It must be over by now. They took them down before now. Those who had watched, such as the family and the soldiers, would be coming back into the city now. They would be smelling of Golgotha dust and heat, and scrubbing the backs of their necks with the end of their robes to get the dirt and the sweat off. And the soldiers would be marching camel-footed back into Antonia, not kicking hind-legged, pegging the ~~loose~~ cobbles,

as they had gone out. But they would be loud-mouthed in the taverns tonight.

The friends of the dead would not be loud-mouthed. They would be mumbling the psalm from dry mouths as they mortared up the sepulchre. The women would be there. But he did not think the poor little apostles would be there. They were now Quarries like he had been. He wished he had taken the time to teach them how to run and be a very good Quarry.

A Quarry had to learn how to bide and hide and run. The poor little country apostles did not know the city. Not one of them was from Jerusalem. They would be afraid. They could not lay down in soft beds tonight as he could. Nor go to school tomorrow with everything alright again as he could. Ah, not tomorrow. Almost, he had forgotten. Tomorrow was Passover. A day of long prayers in synagogue. But maybe not altogether. He knew of some rocks less than a Sabbath day's journey up the Sinai road. He would persuade Cousin Demmy. Cousin Demmy might not mind going less than a Sabbath day's journey on Passover if he told him there were coneys among the rocks.

But then, day-after-tomorrow. Day-after-tomorrow he could look forward to being a king. A king when he faced Saul and looked him up and down and said, Could you have taken the Wall as I did?

And Saul, a worm seeking a place to burrow, but you giving him no quarter, but following him close and asking down your nose, Could you? Could you have taken the Wall as me? Could you ---?

He shook his head guiltily. No.

No. Not now. Must not think of that now. Should be remembering my friends and be sorry for them. Especially poor Judas. Judas is doubly a Quarry.

He hoped Judas got away. That even now he was on his way to the far border country of Tyre and Sidon. There was some talk he had overheard, that Judas was a traitor. He hoped it was not true. Judas was very good with boys and a smart man in the wilderness. He could see Judas going now as he and the others had gone the last time. Tall, striding up the Bethany road and then turning to look back and waving at him just before he disappeared over the hump of Olivet. And all the others turning too to wave back at him as he had stood bare-headed on the viaduct outside the city, and Judas and big Simon bellowing it so the echoes returned.

"So long, Cox! See you next Spring!"

And then turning to follow the Nazarene down the other side of Olivet.

He must remember them now. One by one. It was a good way to remember them. One by one. And then he could put them out of his mind and think of Saul.

He would think of them one by one. It was a duty. He wished he had made time to teach them how to run and hide in the city. How to elude the priests, the Temple police and the Roman soldiers. They knew so little about anything except praying and preaching. He would think of them now. First, he would think of Judas.

He settled himself comfortably to think.

Poor little Judas. But he will get away from them. Judas is smart. I wonder what is poor little Judas doing now?

Father,

Judas the Ishcariot said, turning his agonised eyes up to the darker loom of rope he had fashioned above his head.

Forgive them, for they know not what they do.

And I must think of poor little James. James the Thunderer. I wonder if Jimmy Thunder has got over the time when the Nazarene made them catch so much fish, the net split? Jimmy Thunder said he did not know whether to give thanks for the fish or swear over the net! Good thing they hadnt needed the net any-more, him, his brother John nor Simon.

And I must think of his brother, poor little John, ruled by that hungry-looking lady who, Judas told me, once caused such a fuss when she asked the Nazarene to make her sons, James and John, his chief ministers when he came to power. I wonder if Johnny Thunder is still talking big?

John, huddled in a corner of the room where they had taken refuge, stared blindly at the wall.

The master had not forgotten. Even up there, on the cross, torn and bleeding from nail and spear, he forgave the weakness of our mother and gave his own gentle mother to our charge.

Son, behold thy mother.....!

John Mark pulled the covers from his head. He was thinking of Peter.

Poor little Simon Peter who ^{named} ~~XXXX~~ me the Cox.

Simon Peter had returned to Gethsamane. Now he crouched at the foot of a gnarled olive tree, his back to the Jerusalem lights. He was shaken with sobs. He had denied the Master. How was he different from Judas who had acted, at least, on the courage of his convictions? And at the trial, not one of them had stood up to witness for a guiltless man.

He lifted his powerful oar-hardened fists.

"My God! My strength!" he cried hoarsely,
"Why have you forsaken me!"

He was getting drowsy again. It was the

warm bath and the rub his mother had given him with her nice-smelling olive berry oils. But he had others to think about.

Like poor little Thomas with his jokes. Heavy stuff. But I like him for he tells you what he thinks.

Thomas spoke thickly to the huddled back of Peter. A moon-cloud shed a ghostly light in the rock-shadowed garden. Anger and agony was in his voice.

"He said, I thirst, and we looked the other way. For we remembered that once he fed five thousand and then four thousand, and it was unbelievable now that he should entreat men for a drink. So we looked the other way when they gave him vinegar. We needed new evidence that he was the son of God."

And then there is poor little Matthew, a sharp one, but still a village fellow. Not used to big city ways at all. Where will he go?

Matthew rubbed his nose with the back of his hand and shrugged. Tomorrow the roads would be clear. There was nothing to wait for in Jerusalem. Perhaps elsewhere. But not here. It was finished.

It is finished.

The Rabbi had said it.

He had a friend in Phillipi who hired hands for the Customs there. It could be arranged. He would wait awhile of course to see what the others would do. Especially old Philip.

And of course there is poor little Philip. I liked Philip. Philip was always willing to talk.

The cough was really in good fettle. It racked him and creased his chest with fire. But he was not afraid of it. He was ready. He had been ready since he left the charnel house ^{the} ~~xxx~~ Jerusalem savages called the Place of Skulls.

"Into thy hands," Philip murmured, remembering. He tightened his arms over his chest and waited for

the paroxysm to pass. "Into thy hands I commend my spirit," he said to whatever there was.

John Mark closed his eyes to recall the names of the others.

"And there is poor little Andrew, and Bartholomew, and Thaddeus, and the other Simon, a Zealot, like Judas, but a quiet man, and the other James, Alphaeus, wherever they have fled to.

"There, now I have thought of them all."

Today had been a big day. But if what Philip told him was true then day after tomorrow would be even bigger.

Passover Sabbath promised to be a long day. The longest Sabbath in the world wide world. But he would go to bed early on Passover night. He hoped he would not oversleep. All the aches and bruises would be gone by then. By morning of the first day of the week, he would be fit, he was sure. He hoped he would not oversleep. He was always oversleeping for Rabbi Gamaliel's classes and had to be awakened by his mother. He had everything planned in his head. He had marked where the tomb lay. He had followed Uncle Demmy and his friend, Joseph the Arimathean, to the Sepulchre. He would go out early to be there before the women came to spice the body. Today had been too near to the Sabbath for them to

spice the body.

Not that he believed it. Nobody rose from the dead. Thomas had rolled his eyes and shaken his head at old Philip, as if he had never heard anything crazier from the Legions. Old Philip had shrugged away the belief of Thomas. He would rather wait and see. Not that it mattered. It was Saul he wanted to stun. Saul would wide-open his eyes and dog-hang his jaw, listening to him telling the Little Sanhedrin he John Mark, had been at the tomb and had seen the spicing!

He heard footsteps approach. He half-opened his eyes. Under the lashes he saw his mother enter, Janus with her. He feigned sleep.

He had to see Quartus tomorrow. He had to thank Quartus for allowing him to walk home on his own two feet rather than letting him be carried by the soldiers.

He listened to his mother and Janus go out, They were talking about him on the Wall. How fine and brave and a little Maccabees he had been on the Wall. He breathed in deeply and swelled his chest then let it out again.