

a woman  
called mary



a novel by A.D. Ray © 2011

*A Woman Called Mary*

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Cover Art by Ray Beltran/ReS Graphics.

## Author's Foreword

Mary Magdalene - prostitute, adulteress or saint? How much do we really know about this woman? How much do we *think* we know that is not really borne out by a study of the scriptural references to her?

When I undertook the writing of this story I *thought* I knew a lot. Reading through the gospel accounts I found that they don't really describe her in great detail; the details of her life, where she came from, how she met Jesus, when and how He healed her, and just what He healed her of. We know that she became a faithful follower of His at some point during His ministry, that she was there at His death and resurrection, that she was one of several women who contributed to the finances of the ministry.

The purpose of this novel, indeed of all my writings about Biblical characters, is to draw the reader into the Bible story, to show that these stories we learned in Vacation Bible School and at Sunday School are more than Bible stories, more than fairy tales. These were real events that happened in real peoples' lives and shaped them, the people around them, and the early church. I want to encourage you, Dear Reader, to read the Bible as if *it* were a novel, the telling of great and wonderful things that happened so long ago (or not so long ago, depending on one's perspective). I would suggest that you put yourself into the scene, hear the dialogue, read between the lines what did not get put onto paper. See the people, smell the smells, hear the voices. Dig out the "back story". But, at the same time, don't lose track of the fact that *it is* real.

In creating this work I have taken considerable creative license in describing the events and places, suggesting how the people might have lived, how they felt. I have taken great liberty in telling who Mary Magdalene was; her character, her flaws, her strengths. But I have done it with a great deal of prayer and made every effort to remain true to the Biblical and historical record.

And so, Dear Reader, please read this as a novel, enjoy it as a wonderful story, but remember that these were indeed people just like you and me, who had hopes and dreams, who laughed and cried, who bled when they were pricked, and many of whom died for their faith.

Humbly Yours,  
A.D. Ray

## I

We were watching for Him. For hundreds of years we had been waiting, but now we were watching. Some of the scholars and rabbis had been saying for all my life that it was time. There was a movement among the people teaching, proclaiming that this was indeed the appointed time. And the movement was growing, gaining momentum. The Priests and Temple authorities played it down, tried to make it into the wishful thinking of the masses.

“Sure,” they said, “the Messiah will come some day, but there is no way to know when. The prophecies and old writings are too indefinite, too obscure for us to narrow it down to a specific time frame.”

But there were those who said they could tell from the ancient writings that the time was near. They believed He would be here within our generation.

My father was a deeply religious man and brought us all up with the same reverence and awe of our religion that he had. He disciplined us with love and we learned to cherish our religion as much as he did. We learned to love the Lord and His ways. We learned to love the Scriptures. Our father taught us all the prophecies of the coming Messiah, the Promised One. He would be the new Moses. As Moses had led our people out of the *mitzrayim*, the land of great misery, and freed them from the slavemasters, so the Messiah would free us of this present tyranny. This time, though, it would not be the Israelites who fled, but the Gentile invaders. And *biet'Y'Israel*, the Land of Promise, would be ours again.

At least that's the way my father told it. And that's the way some of the rabbis at Synagogue told it. And those of us who continued to believe the prophecies, the promises of Yahweh, hoped, believed, that it was true.

And this time, when He freed us we would be obedient; we would not be the grumblers and mumblers that our forefathers had been. That much the devout hoped for, too. Too many people had the attitude, “Ever since the fathers fell asleep nothing has changed. Things continue as they always have. Where is the hope of His coming?”

We knew, though. The devout continued to believe.

And so we lived in anticipation of the day He would arrive. Father told us often of the Magi who had come sent by kings from the east looking for the King of the Jews

the One born in Bethlehem, some ten years or so before I was born. They said they had read the ancient Hebrew writings and studied the heavens earnestly until the Star appeared. They had followed the Star until it stopped over the City of David, and there they found Him. They worshipped and offered their expensive gifts with tidings from their own kings. Then they went on their way, returning whence they came, never to be seen or heard from again.

All the land was taken with great joy and excitement. The Promised One had come at last.

Then great tragedy struck when Herod heard of the new King. In a jealous rage he ordered that all male children in the region of Bethlehem under the age of two years be slain. Oh, there was great mourning and weeping in those days. In the midst of it all the new King was forgotten. Nothing more was heard of Him after that.

But still the devout watched and waited.

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I am Miriam bat Jacob (pronounced in the Hebrew fashion, Ya-cob'). Some call me Mary. Many people these days are going over to the Hellenized versions of their names. In my family we cling to the Hebrew ways, the Jewish names, the old beliefs. So I call myself Miriam.

I come from a large family in Magdala, the oldest of seven girls. About a year after I was born Mama had one baby who died at birth. Then she couldn't have any more for a long time. Finally, when I was about five years old, she had another little baby girl, Rebekah, who was as healthy as could be. After that there was one every year or so until Leah, the youngest. Then there were no more. Papa was not a very happy man, having no sons, but he knew Yahweh always has a plan for those who love and serve Him. And so he just loved us all the more for it.

My father, Jacob, is a farmer. He owns a great deal of land and grows mostly wheat and barley. He is not a rich man by most standards, but we never lacked any of the necessities of life.

The work was divided up among us girls, the older of us working in the fields alongside Papa and the others managing the affairs of the house with Mama. No one of us worked harder than any of the others did. Whether inside or out it was never easy

taking care of the family. Whatever we did, though, it was done with love and a cheerful heart.

As I said, I am the oldest, twenty years old and divorced. No boys would ever take any interest in me, you see, what with my affliction and all. Some said I had a demon. At times I would just fall down and start writhing, my entire body convulsing uncontrollably. I would foam at the mouth and sometimes bite my tongue 'til it bled. Sometimes I would hurt myself falling or bang my head on the furniture or on the ground. If Mama or Papa were there they would hold me until it was over, then they would get me cleaned up and put me to bed and sit beside me until I felt better. If they weren't I would just be left lying there until it stopped and I could get myself up.

And I wasn't the prettiest of the sisters, either. In fact, all of my sisters were far prettier than I was. Oh, Mama and Papa always told me that it wasn't true. But I knew.

As it is with Jewish tradition the oldest daughter has to be married first, so when I was very young I had been betrothed to the son of a friend of my father. When I was fourteen we were married. We had been married only a year when he divorced me saying he just couldn't live with a woman who had a demon.

And so my shame was triple. I was afflicted. I was divorced. I was not pretty like my sisters.

I knew I would never have the love of a man, or a marriage, or children. I had long ago reconciled myself to these facts, but sometimes it still hurt. I would just push the hurt way down inside and find a way to be happy that I was loved by my Mama and Papa.



## II

One evening as we sat at dinner Papa spoke.

“Tomorrow,” he said, “I am going on a journey. Miriam, I want you to go with me.”

Papa always took me with him whenever he went on some business or other, since I was the oldest and he wanted me to understand the workings of trade and commerce. At least that’s what he always told me. I knew, though, that it was because he knew I felt less than all the others, less worthy, less likely to ever get a husband. He wanted to make sure I could have a way to support myself whenever it came to that. And since there was no male heir, and Papa had no brothers, he wanted me to be able to run things once he was gone.

Going away with him was always a bittersweet experience.

(Of course, Hebrew law says that when a man dies his property goes to the nearest male relative. In this case that would be Cousin Lazarus. But he lived so far away that he could not properly manage the place, so it would be up to me. Tradition would not allow a woman to run a business so Lazarus would send a man as overseer, but I would be the one in charge; I would be the one responsible for the affairs of the farm and the family.)

I smiled and asked with at least some level of excitement, “Where to, Papa?”

“You will see tomorrow,” he said smiling back at me. “We are going on a little investigation.”

Now I was truly curious. I knew better, though, than to ask more. Papa could be coy at times, and when he was in one of those moods nothing could pry out of him whatever was on his mind.

For the rest of the evening he sat quietly thinking. Mama tried to get him involved in conversation but he just sat with a half smile on his face, lost in thought.

It was our family custom to spend time before getting ready for bed with Papa reciting Scripture and praying while we all sat and listened. This night he seemed far away as he recited from the prophet Micah.

“You, Bethlehem Ephratah, though you are little among Judah, yet out of you shall come forth He that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from old, from everlasting.”

There was a palpable tension in the air as he sat quietly for a moment, then started speaking again. The faraway look was still in his eyes.

“There is a tale of an old man named Simeon who lived in Bethlehem. He was one of those who believe that the Messiah will come in this generation. He had been told by an angel of the Lord that he would not die before he had seen the Consolation of Israel. One day while he was in the Temple worshipping a child was brought in to be circumcised and presented to the Lord. Simeon suddenly jumped up from his prayers and rushed to the child. He looked upon the child and threw his arms into the air in praise. ‘Now, oh Lord, let your servant depart in peace,’ he said, ‘for my eyes have seen Your salvation. A light unto the Gentiles and the glory of Your people Israel.’

“According to the story,” Papa continued, “after speaking a blessing over the child and the parents he fell dead on the spot with a rapturous smile on his face. It is said that this child would be about thirty now. My children,” Papa said looking around at all of us slowly, “we may yet see Him soon.”

Papa could be exasperating like that sometimes. He would have something on his mind, but just tease us all along making us guess and wonder what he was thinking until he decided he was ready to let us all in on the secret. He was doing it again. Mama just sat and watched him with a patient smile on her face. The rest of us itched with excitement and curiosity. We knew, though, that any attempt to get more from him would be futile.

“Well,” he finally said with a clap of his hands, “time for bed. Tomorrow is another long day.”

He stood and we knew that another evening had ended with a big question mark.

My sister Rebekah and I shared a room. As we undressed for bed she said in a whisper, “Do you think Papa knows something about the Messiah?”

“I don’t know,” I answered. “There is something going on he’s not telling us. But if the Messiah had come we would know about it. That’s not something anyone could keep secret.”

Rebekah shrugged as she slipped under the covers.

“Well, something is happening,” she said. “Papa knows something he’s not telling us.”

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The next morning Papa woke me early. He stood over my bed shaking me gently by the shoulder.

“Pack light,” he said. “We might be gone four or five days, but it’s a long walk. We don’t want to have too much to carry.”

“What?” I said groggily.

I rubbed my eyes and squinted up at him. Rebekah stirred and mumbled, “What’s going on?”

Then the events of the night before slowly began to come to me. I looked out the window to see that it hadn’t even begun to grow light outside.

“Get up, you lazy bones,” Papa chided. “We have a long day ahead of us.”

Gaining my full capacities I sprang from the bed as Papa scurried out the door. Now I was excited again, heading off on some adventure with Papa. I changed from my bedclothes hurriedly as he called from the hallway, “Mama has breakfast ready for you. Don’t take too long eating or I will go without you.”

His laughter echoed on the other side of the door as I washed my face at the basin and finished dressing. Rebekah said sleepily, “Glad it’s you and not me getting up this early. Tell me all about it when you get back.”

Then she pulled the blanket up over her head.

I threw a few things together into a traveling bag and rushed down to breakfast. I ate quickly and went out to find Papa waiting with Mama on the porch.

“You all ready for a grand adventure?” he asked.

I just nodded and wiped the corner of my mouth. He turned and kissed Mama goodbye, and without another word we headed out to the gate.

We walked along for a while, neither of us saying a word. I was eaten up with curiosity, but I knew Papa would let me know where we were headed when he was ready.

After we had gone a Sabbath day’s walk he finally spoke. There was a deeply thoughtful note in his voice, and he spoke slowly as if measuring his words carefully.

The sky was just growing pink in the east and birds were beginning to waken. A rooster crowed somewhere and a dog barked.

“There is a man,” he began, “down by the river near Bethabara baptizing people in the water and preaching repentance of sin. He has a number of disciples with him. He speaks with great authority and boldness.”

He stopped speaking for a moment, but continued walking. I dared not interrupt.

“I have been hearing about him for a couple of days now,” he continued. “Some say he might be the Messiah.” My heart leapt. Could it be? After all this time, could He finally have arrived?

“Others say he is that Prophet who is to come beforehand,” Papa said. “He doesn’t seem to be afraid of the Temple authorities. The Priests have sent people to question him, but he just rebukes them and calls them vipers. He speaks with such power and authority that no one can argue with him or dispute what he says. I would think that the Messiah would appear in the Temple, not out on the desert by a river. This man is dressed only in a camel hair cloak and eats locusts and wild honey. The Messiah should be wearing purple and dining at the King’s table. I just don’t know,” he said shaking his head slowly.

Then his countenance brightened.

“But we are going to find out for ourselves,” he said finally, looking at me and smiling.

Putting his arm about my shoulder and trudging on he repeated thoughtfully, “We are going to find out for ourselves.”

My mind raced. My heart beat even faster. The Messiah! Hundreds of years we had been waiting for His arrival. Could we indeed be the generation that saw His coming? Papa had been telling us the old stories all of our lives. We had grown up with the anticipation of seeing the Redeemer of Israel, the One who would drive the invaders from our land.

It was a two-day journey to Bethabara. Ordinarily a trip of that distance would seem daunting, but thoughts of maybe seeing the Savior with my own eyes blocked out any concern for the long walk ahead of us. I tried to think of things to say but couldn’t find words.

“Papa,” I finally said, “can you imagine what it would be like to see Him? To listen to Him? Maybe even to speak to Him?”

“I am trying to imagine Israel free of the invaders from Rome,” Papa said. “The Promised Land ours once again.”

Papa wore a fierce look about him suddenly, a look I seldom saw. His jaw clenched and his fists worked. I knew how he loathed the Romans and how he hated giving his money in taxes to Caesar. I had heard him often enough, when he thought we were all in bed asleep, as he talked to Mama about it. The crop he grew was to feed his family and the money he made from it was to provide our needs. The first tenth of each crop went to the Temple as his tithe. That part he did willingly, cheerfully. Then the tax collector would come around demanding his portion. Papa would say to Mama late at night that Rome had no claim to what Yahweh had given us. I would hear Mama reply that he was right, but that it was only for a time, only until the Redeemer of Israel would come to set all things right.

After walking about three hours we went by the town of Tiberias. By now the sun had climbed high into the sky and it was getting warm. We stopped briefly at a tavern there to sit and sip a barley water.

“Jacob!” the innkeeper exclaimed as we walked in. He strode over to welcome my Papa with a kiss on the cheek and a shake of the hand. “How have you been? I haven’t seen you in a while.”

“I have been well, Shimeon,” Papa said returning the greeting. “You know my daughter Miriam.” He nodded toward me.

“Yes, of course,” Shimeon replied with a wry look toward me. “How are you, Miriam?”

I just nodded politely. I could tell by his face that he wasn’t particularly happy to have me in his place of business. He was cordial enough, but I could tell. It was the same look I got everywhere. People just hoped I wouldn’t have an attack around them. He showed us to a place to sit and Papa ordered our drinks.

“So where are you off to on this warm day, Jacob?” Shimeon asked after he had told the man behind the bar what to bring.

“We are going down to Bethabara to see this Baptist,” Papa replied matter-of-factly. “Going to see what manner of man he is.”

“I’ve been hearing a lot about him,” Shimeon said. “I’ve been mighty curious about him myself, but just haven’t been able to get away from the tavern to go see him. People are saying he just might be the Messiah.”

“That’s what I’ve been hearing,” Papa said. “But I want to go see him and make up my mind for myself.”

“That’s the best way,” Shimeon answered. “You can’t believe half of what you hear.”

“Isn’t that the truth?” Papa said.

Our drinks arrived and Shimeon excused himself to go tend to some other customers. It was nice to be in out of the sun for a few minutes, but I was anxious to get started again. I fidgeted while I sipped the sweet watery drink. Papa downed his in a couple of gulps, then waited for me to finish mine. As much as I wanted to gulp mine down, I knew Papa would scold me if I did, so I got through it as quickly as I could while still trying to be dignified.

“You ready to go?” Papa asked, soon as I put my mug down.

I just nodded and we stood and left. Papa waved farewell to Shimeon as we went out the door into the bright sunlight.

Heading out of Tiberias the traffic picked up. We fell in with a group of people heading south along the seashore. We walked along the Galilee Road leading to the south right along the shore of the lake. In the little group we were in there were probably twenty people. Ahead of us we could see dust kicked up by another group just beyond our range of vision. Looking back we could see even more leaving the town and following behind us.

There were excited voices all around us. In the hubbub one could occasionally pick out bits of a conversation, then other voices would drown that out. You could not really make sense of what any one of them was about.

“He called the Pharisees from the Temple a bunch of snakes,” someone said.

“The Messiah would not be saying bad things about the Priests,” said another.

“He would be raising an army against the Romans.”

“I don’t think it’s Him,” said yet another. “But maybe it’s one of the Maccabees getting ready for a revolt against the Temple authorities and against Rome at the same time.”

“As if that would stand a chance of working,” someone said laughing derisively. “Besides, there aren’t any Maccabees left. They were all wiped out after their last failed attempt.”

Papa, I noticed, kept his peace, not joining in any of the speculation, but listening intently to it all. A man walking beside him tried to draw him into the fray.

“You’re going down to see him, too, aren’t you?” the man asked.

Papa just nodded.

“Well what kinds of things do you hear about him?”

“I hear lots of things,” Papa said, “but I only believe what I see.”

This left the other man without any response so he just walked a little faster to get ahead of us and resume his guessing game with someone else.

After a while the dust started to choke us, so Papa and I stopped and sat on the shore to let the throng get ahead of us. It was nice to sit for a minute, anyway. We had been walking now for three hours since we had left Tiberias, and were just about at the point where the Sea of Galilee flows into the Jordan then south toward the Dead Sea. We sat under a tree and looked across at the far bank.

Papa leaned back against the trunk of the tree and sighed deeply.

“He is there,” he said quietly looking across the lake.

I looked at him askance.

“I don’t know if it will be this Baptist everyone is talking about, but He is there.”

Papa looked at me and continued speaking in his quiet thoughtful voice.

“Some part of me knows it. I feel it in my spirit. I haven’t told your Mama or anyone else, but for days now I have felt drawn, irresistibly compelled to go see Him. He hasn’t announced Himself yet, but He will soon.”

I felt a shudder of anticipation course through my body. As I looked into Papa’s eyes I felt just what he was describing. I hadn’t even recognized it as such, but I had been feeling it all day. Somewhere deep inside me I had known since we had left Tiberias that if for some reason Papa decided to turn back that I wouldn’t, couldn’t. I

must go on to Bethabara. Even if I had to go alone. I was deeply happy, though, that Papa was going. Whatever waited there, I wanted Papa and me together to discover it.

“Do you think they feel it too?” I asked motioning toward the crowd disappearing down the road.

“I think so,” Papa replied. “I think everyone who is going feels it. I think they just don’t want to say it. It’s kind of a weird feeling. I think the Spirit of God is drawing us all together for the Grand Entry of His Messiah. Somehow I think that He is not going to be what we expect.”

I just listened as Papa spoke. It felt like such a reverent moment that for me to speak would somehow break the spell. Suddenly I loved my Papa more than I ever had before. I loved Yahweh more than I ever had. My body shuddered again. I feared I might have another attack right there. But it wasn’t the same kind of quivering that was taking me this time. It seemed to come from my spirit, from somewhere deep inside my soul.

Papa looked one more time across the lake, then back at me.

“Well,” he said, “we better get going or that other bunch will catch up with us and we will be eating dust again.”

Bracing himself against the tree he stood up. I stood, too, and we walked back out to the road. We could hear the chatter of the crowd of pilgrims growing closer so we quickened our pace just a little to stay ahead of them.

At noon we didn’t want to stop to eat so we pulled pieces of dried meat and fruit from our bags and munched as we walked.

“What do you think He will look like, Papa?” I asked chewing on a tough piece of meat.

“Probably just like anybody else,” he said. He seemed far away, looking forward into another time. “But there will be something about Him... something different, something undefinable. Once we see Him we will know. I am sure there will be naysayers, but it will be undeniable that the Redeemer of Israel has come at last.”

Then Papa’s tone changed. His voice took on that rabbinical air as when he was teaching us Scripture. His face wore the look of authority. There was something now he wanted me to learn... to never forget.



“There are those in the synagogues and even in the Temple who are more interested in their own careers, their political futures, than they are in the truth of Scripture. I have never wanted for you to see it. I never wanted you to become jaded or disillusioned with the rabbis and scholars. Most of them are true men of Yahweh, men who long to see His salvation, to see His Kingdom on earth. They burn to see Him once again in His place, taking His residence in the Temple. Don’t lose sight of that. But I think that we are going to see the worst of the Temple authorities before this thing is done.”

I listened in awe as he spoke. Of course I knew that the rabbis and even the Priests were only men, and subject to men’s foibles, but I had never heard my Papa speak a demeaning word about any of them. Then his face took on that far away look again.

“When the King of Israel appears those in high places will shake and tremble with fear of Him. Yahweh has enemies even in Israel. As Lucifer was cast out when he rebelled, those who resist Him will be unseated and thrown down in shame.”

It sounded almost scriptural when Papa said it that way. For all I knew he might be quoting prophecy. Usually, when he did so, he would say, “the Prophets say.” He didn’t include that little qualifier this time so I wasn’t sure. But I decided not to ask.

He said nothing more and we walked along lost in our own thoughts.

We reached Aenon just as the great orange ball of the sun kissed the western horizon. Papa got us checked into an inn and with joy in our souls we found our rooms.

“Come knock on my door when you have gotten cleaned up,” Papa said, “and we will go down for dinner.”

I went into my room and sat on the edge of the bed. I wanted desperately to collapse onto it and rest my bones, but I was much too dirty. After a moment I stood and stripped off all my dusty clothes. Standing naked before the basin I soaked a towel and sloshed the cool water over my body. It splashed onto the floor, but I didn’t care. I just wanted to get the dust and sweat off me. I would clean up the mess later. There were already stains on the floorboards where other weary travelers had done the same as me.

The water felt good running down my sides and legs. I swabbed myself from head to foot until I was clean again. Then I lay naked upon the bed and breathed a great sigh of relief. Sleep drifted over me like a long shadow. I dozed for some time, then

woke with a start. It was dark outside and I could hear the sounds of guests out in the courtyard. I hurriedly got some clean clothes from my traveling bag and threw them on. Lacing up a clean pair of sandals, I rushed out and over to Papa's room. I rapped on the door.

"Papa," I said, "I'm sorry, I fell asleep."

I heard his laughter from the other side of the door.

"Just a minute," he said. Then his door opened.

"I thought you would," he said as he came out of his room. "I talked the innkeeper into saving you some supper. He was reluctant at first, saying if he did it for one person he would have to do it for everyone. But I managed to convince him that it would be worth his effort."

I knew how Papa had convinced him. Papa was skilled at a well-placed bribe from time to time.

"Oh, thank you, Papa," I said smiling. "I am starved. I hope you didn't wait for me."

"Oh, no," he said laughing. "Once I knew you would be taken care of I ate my fill. It was wonderful, too."

"Well, don't tell me about it," I said leading the way down the hall. "Just show me to the food."

And it was indeed wonderful. The innkeeper's wife served me and made me feel like I was a princess. Papa's bribe must have been something! I was served roast vegetables on a skewer, wine, succulent quail and lamb laden with spice and garlic, then *hamentashen* for desert. By the time Papa asked me if I wanted to go out into the courtyard and have a barley water, I was stuffed.

"Oh, Papa," I moaned. "I couldn't sip another drink if I wanted to. Besides, my bones are so sore I just want to go lay back down."

"Okay," he said with a chuckle. "We better both get a good night's sleep. Tomorrow will be another long day of walking. If we get an early start we can make Bethabara before sunset."

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I was awake before it started to grow light and got dressed, then took my dusty clothes from the day before out into the courtyard. I shook them vigorously and pounded my dirty sandals against the paving stones to get most of the dust and dirt off. Satisfied that I couldn't do any better, I went back to my room and switched from my clean clothes back into the dirty ones. I stowed the clean ones back in my bag just as Papa knocked on my door.

"Breakfast is ready, Little One," he said, "if you are ready to eat."

I liked it when he called me Little One. He didn't do that very often these days.

"I'll be right there, Papa," I replied. "Just let me grab my bag."

I toted my bag out into the hallway where Papa stood with his bag on the floor at his feet.

"You were at it early, weren't you?" he said looking me up and down as we walked down the hall.

"I figured you would want to get started as soon as it was light enough to travel," I said.

"Well you figured right," he said. "The sooner we get going the sooner we will get there."

There were only a couple of other guests at the table when we arrived in the dining room. We sat at the table and were served our breakfast.

The food was just as delicious as dinner the night before. We ate as quickly as decorum would allow, then Papa paid our bill and we headed outside. The town was just beginning to wake up as we left the gates and headed out onto the road south. A few people were already headed that direction, but generally it was quiet and peaceful. We got onto the roadway just as the sun peeked over the eastern horizon.

The second day of our journey we spent in quiet contemplation, not much conversation between the two of us. About middle of the morning we stopped for a rest and sat under an old gnarled tree on the banks of the Jordan. We drank water from a skin Papa had brought along then went down to the riverbank and splashed cool water on our faces. Grimacing to one another and smiling we took up our bags and headed back out onto the road.

Late in the day we neared Jericho.

“What do you say we spend the night here?” Papa asked. “By now the Baptist will have quit for the day, and we’re only a couple of hours from where he is supposed to be doing his baptizing.”

I was anxious to see this Baptist who might be the Savior, but it didn’t take much convincing to get me to agree to stopping for the night. I was sore from my head to my toes, and I looked forward to a soft bed and a cool wash off.

“Sounds like a good idea to me,” I answered.

Papa looked at me and laughed heartily.

“What?” I asked.

“You look awful,” he said laughing some more.

“Thanks,” I said feigning hurt feelings.

“I don’t mean anything bad,” he said getting his laughter under control. “You are just so dirty and look so tired. I’ll bet I don’t look any better.”

“Well,” I said looking him over, “you aren’t exactly a beautiful sight.”

We laughed together then and turned into the city to find lodging. The first couple of inns we checked at were full.

“All these people coming to see the Baptist,” one of the innkeepers explained.

“You will be lucky to find a place anywhere within a day’s walk.”

Papa was able to get us a couple of rooms at the next place we checked. I didn’t see the money change hands, but I knew Papa was greasing the wheels of commerce once again.

We went to our rooms and cleaned up, changed clothes, then met in the dining room for our supper. The fare didn’t seem as delicious as where we had been the night before, but it was none the less welcome. I didn’t know about Papa, but I was famished.

### III

As soon as the sun had risen we were leaving Jericho behind us. Already crowds of people were on the road headed south. Dust swirled around us and the smell of human bodies pervaded the atmosphere. The air was still and we could feel the sun promising to make it a sultry day as we all headed along the riverbank. After only a few minutes I could feel sweat beading on my forehead and trickling down my sides.

Then I thought that in only a couple of hours I might be seeing the One for whom all of Israel had waited since David had gone to be with the fathers. All thoughts of sweat or the smell of body odor or the dust or the heat disappeared. I quivered within in anticipation. I wanted to talk with Papa but I couldn't think of anything to say that would fit the situation. I looked at his face and saw his lips moving as if in silent prayer. His eyes had that faraway look again.

I realized that the crowd around us had grown quiet, as if they had all at last run out of words to say. A shiver rippled through my body. All one could hear was the clump, clump of sandalled feet tramping though the dirt, the rustle of clothes, the occasional grunt of someone shifting his traveling bag from one shoulder to the other. The eerie silence made me shudder some more. Then another shiver shook my entire body. *Oh, dear Father, I prayed silently, please don't let me have an attack right now.*

The sun climbed farther up in the sky and the air grew oppressive. The spell was broken when Papa finally spoke.

"We should be there soon," he said.

"How do we know where he is?" I asked.

"Just follow the crowds," Papa replied. "We are all going to the same place."

As if on cue the crowd stopped moving forward. We bumped against the people ahead of us, and those behind bumped into us. We heard a voice from out in the water talking. Again the silence of the crowd was chilling as we listened to hear what the Baptist was saying.

"Have you all come again to flee the wrath that is to come?" he asked. He was speaking just loudly enough to be heard, but not shouting.

Throngs of people crowded in to see him. At first, I couldn't see over the heads of those in front of me. I burned to see Him, to look upon the Savior, to finally, at long last,

see our Redemption. I stretched and stood on my toes, placing my hand on Papa's shoulder for balance. There stood the Baptist, his camelhair cloak drawn up around his waist and held by a leather belt. His breeches were wet to the waist. He stood in water up to his knees, looking out at the crowd and shaking his head. His disciples stood around him, as if in a protective posture. I noticed that some of them wore swords, others were armed with clubs and staves.

"What spectacle have you come to see?" he asked. "Why are you here?"

My calves ached with holding myself up on my toes but I had to watch, to see what would happen now.

"We have come to be baptized," one man said, rushing forward. The crowd surged toward the water's edge but the disciples moved in front of the Baptist and placed their hands on the butts of their weapons.

The crowd drew back, but the one man who had gone forward stood his ground. The Baptist raised his hands into the air in a placating gesture. Moving out between two of his men he walked over to the lone man.

"And why have you come to be baptized?" he asked the man.

"For salvation," the man stammered. "We know that you are the Promised One, the One who will lead us into freedom. Oh, save me please."

And the man fell onto his knees in the water clasping the Baptist by the legs. One of the disciples moved forward quickly and took the man roughly by the shoulders to pull him away. I felt another shudder course through my body as I watched.

The Baptist placed his hand on the disciple's shoulder and said softly, "Let him be."

The disciple looked at him and started to utter some protest but the Baptist just gave him a look and he backed away. The Baptist gently freed himself from the man's grip and said, "Stand up."

The man stood.

"I am not He," the Baptist said to the man. His eyes never left the man, but his voice carried out into the crowd.

“I baptize in water for repentance of sin,” he said. “One comes after me who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire for the salvation of Israel and of all mankind. What is your name?”

“I am Nathan ben Daveed,” the man answered. I noticed that he pronounced his name in the Hebrew way, not the way the Greeks say it, David.

“Nathan ben Daveed,” the Baptist said, still focused on the man before him but speaking loudly enough for all to hear, “do you repent of your sin, vow to live from this day on in observance of the Torah and looking forward to the true Redemption who will save you in that day of wrath?”

“I do,” said Nathan ben Daveed.

The Baptist went down on his knees into the water and Nathan ben Daveed did the same. Placing his hand on the man’s back the Baptist bent him forward until the man’s face went below the water. Then he brought him up and kissed him on both cheeks. The man shook the water from his head and face.

“Go and live the Torah and know that your Redeemer comes soon,” the Baptist said standing. The man walked out of the water back into the silent and expectant crowd. My legs cramped suddenly and I went back down on the flats on my feet. Finally I found a spot where I could see out through the crowd to where the Baptist stood.

“This man said,” the Baptist said loudly looking out over the crowd, “that you all know that I am the Promised One who will lead Israel into freedom. I tell you again that I am not He. I am the voice of one crying in the desert, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord.’ One comes after me whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. It is He for whom all Israel waits as a woman groans in labor. It is He who will be a light unto all men, unto Israel first, then unto the Gentiles.”

At this last bit boos and hissing issued forth from the crowd.

“He comes for Israel,” said someone loudly, “not for the Gentiles!”

“He comes for all men,” the Baptist responded firmly.

Then his gaze focused upon a certain spot in the crowd. He stopped speaking and drew in a sudden deep breath. All eyes went to where he seemed to be gazing. I couldn’t see who he was looking at, but I could feel the movement of the crowd as people drew back to make room for someone walking among them. I went up on my toes again and

glimpsed the head of someone making his way through the crowd. My legs cramped and I had to lower myself back onto my feet.

“Behold,” the Baptist shouted pointing, “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

The crowd thinned enough that I could finally see who he was talking about. A man strode through the midst of the people, not taking note of those around him, only looking steadfastly at the Baptist. Without breaking eye contact he walked into the water and straight out to him. He stood less than a cubit away from the man and spoke something so quietly that no one besides the Baptist could hear.

The Baptist shook his head violently and said, “No, my Lord, *I* should be asking You to baptize *me!*”

Again the man spoke quietly and went down on his knees into the water. Suddenly it dawned on me just who I was looking at here. I knew it was He. The Redeemer of Israel had appeared at last! The crowd seemed to get it all at the same time I did. There seemed to be a collective gasp, a holding of breath in expectation of some great wonder.

“I do this so that prophecy should be fulfilled,” the Baptist said, and dropping to his knees he placed his hand on the man’s back and dunked His face into the water. As the man came up out of the water the Baptist looked as if he wanted to kiss the man on the cheeks, as he had with Nathan ben Daveed, but held back in reverence.

The man stood but the Baptist remained on his knees.

“My mission is complete,” the Baptist said quietly. “My destiny is fulfilled.”

Looking out upon the crowd and remaining on his knees he said, “Now I must grow less and He must grow greater.”

My spirit burned. This was He! This was the One for whom we had all been waiting. There was nothing particularly special about this man. He was ordinary looking; tall and broad-shouldered, but other than that He looked no different than anyone else. I felt let down. I am not sure just what I had expected, but I certainly didn’t think the Redeemer of Israel would be so common looking. As He looked down upon the Baptist I could see a love and tenderness in His gaze like I had never witnessed before.



Looking toward Heaven He said, “Thank You, Abba Elohim, for Your grace and goodness. Give me strength now to do the things I must, to do Your will as You have laid it out for me until the end.”

Looking up at the Messiah the Baptist said, “Bless me now, Lord, for we will not speak again until all things are fulfilled.”

That seemed a cryptic remark, but it appeared to mean something special between the two of them. The Messiah placed a hand upon the Baptist’s head and muttered something so quietly that no one else could hear what was said. The Baptist stood with tears streaming down his face and the Messiah turned and walked out of the water, then was lost among the crowd.

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“There goes the King of the Jews!” shouted the Baptist. “Herod, that Idumean who calls himself a Jew and is no Jew at all, is certainly not the King of the Jews. He sleeps with his brother’s wife and lusts after his own stepdaughter! There is nothing holy or righteous about him! Today you have witnessed the coming of the true King of Israel, the Righteous One who will free you from the captivity of sin and rebellion.”

Some Pharisees who were watching from the crowd came forward all adorned in their robes and jewelry, proclaiming their task sent straight from Caiaphas himself.

“We have been sent by the High Priest to examine you and see who you are,” one of them announced. “We also are here to warn you against speaking thusly about King Herod Antipas. He sits on the throne with the blessing of the Temple and of Rome. You tread in deep water when you attack his character this way.”

“Vipers,” the Baptist spat. “You come out here wearing your purple and gold and dare to say you are on a mission of the Temple! You are on a mission of those whose only concern is their frail grasp on their position. Rome could squash any of them at any time, and they know it. Their thoughts are only to build themselves up and to try to keep Rome happy. And the Messiah *will* squash Rome. You just saw the arrival of the true Savior of Israel and don’t even know it! Where is your religion, or that of Caiaphas or Herod? You came out here to examine me and see who I am? I tell you, I am no one, but He is all.” He indicated the retreating form of the Messiah who was now far away from the melee and still walking.

“He is the one you should be chasing after. He brings life, you whitewashed graves. You are rotting corpses and don’t even know it!”

The lead Pharisee finally regained his wits and started sputtering warnings and condemnation at the Baptist, but the Baptist ignored him and spoke to the crowd.

“I will baptize no more today,” he said, then turned and waded across to the far bank, his disciples trailing after him, muttering among themselves and looking confused.

I turned to Papa.

“Oh, Papa,” I said, “it truly is Him, isn’t it?”

“It is,” Papa said. He was looking after the retreating form of the Messiah.

“What now?” I asked. “Why is He just walking away like that? Isn’t He going to do something now?”

“I don’t know, Little One,” he answered looking at me. “We just have to wait and see. Whatever happens next is up to Yahweh and His plan.”

## IV

With much mumbling and scratching of heads the crowd started to disperse, some people heading one direction, others another.

“Well is that all there is?” I asked starting to feel somewhat dismayed. “We walked for two days to get to see Him and He just turns around and walks away?”

It all seemed to be a bit of a let down. Was it supposed to go this way? Was he really the Promised One? Why didn’t he say anything to the crowds of people standing there amazed at what they just heard? I was sure everyone there was just as astounded as I was.

“I think we will go visit my Cousin Lazarus,” Papa said as if I hadn’t even been talking. “I want to talk with him about all these things.”

Now my feelings of dismay turned to exasperation. The Redeemer of Israel had come! What now? Shouldn’t He do something spectacular? He just turned and walked away!

“Papa, what about Him?” I asked pointing in the direction the Messiah had gone. I tried to see Him in the distance but He had disappeared from view. “Maybe we should follow after Him, try to talk to Him.”

“Patience, Little One,” Papa said smiling. “We haven’t seen the last of Him.”

He was being coy again, so I gave up and followed as he started down the road toward Bethany. Papa knew that I liked it when he called me “Little One” and I thought he was doing it so much lately just to placate me, or to keep me from asking too many questions... questions he wasn’t sure he had the answers for. But there were questions! Big questions!

From where we were it was about a two-hour walk to Lazarus’ house where he lived with his widowed mother and two sisters Mary and Martha. Lazarus was a devoutly religious man who spent a great deal of time at the Temple studying with the rabbis and scholars. He had inherited land and property from his father and was wealthy enough that he had time to spend in such pursuits. He was envied by some and despised by others for his fortunate circumstance.

I hoped that Papa would let me sit with them while they talked. I was sure Lazarus would have some deep insight into today’s events.

As we walked along the road a cloud of dust billowed up from the horizon in the direction of Jerusalem. Soon we could hear what sounded like distant thunder as the dust cloud grew closer. Then a phalanx of Roman soldiers came into view riding on huge horses and tearing up the road coming toward us. The crowd melted before them as they roared by. I backed up quickly to get out of their way and stumbled and fell on my backside. I sat there dazed as the soldiers rushed past, looking through and between the horses' legs as they passed only an arm's reach from my face. Light flashed and the scene alternated rapidly from dark to light. An indescribable terror overtook me and I felt dizzy. I tried to steady myself by placing my hands on the ground behind me, but I fell anyway, landing on my back and banging my head hard on the ground. I felt nauseous and for a moment forgot where I was. Then I felt cold and all went black. I was having another of my spells.

I woke with my head in Papa's lap as he sat on the ground holding me. I heard him growling angrily at the onlookers to get back, waving at them to go away and mind their own business. I saw the frightened looks on the faces of those who dared get close enough to see, to stare in morbid curiosity at this girl possessed by a demon.

I tasted blood in my mouth and knew I had bitten my tongue again. Papa wiped at my face and smoothed my hair back. He dabbed blood from the side of my mouth as I slowly regained my wits.

"There, there, Little One," he cooed. "You're okay now. I am here."

The crowd decided the show was over and began to drift away.

"*Yetzahara*," I heard one of them say. The meaning of the derogatory Hebrew word is complex but basically means "One who has an affliction from birth." The word cut me to the quick.

"Get," Papa growled menacingly at the man. He retreated in fear and melted into the crowd.

I lay there collecting myself for a minute more then Papa helped me to my feet.

I leaned on him for a moment then said, "I'm okay now. We can go on."

And on we went toward Cousin Lazarus' house.

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As we neared the walls of Lazarus' courtyard we could see ahead of us Lazarus, Mary and Martha separating themselves from the crowd of people. They had been there, too, at the river when the Messiah had appeared! Papa and I quickened our pace to catch up with them.

"Lazarus," Papa called out when we came within earshot.

Lazarus hadn't heard above the commotion of the crowd.

"Lazarus!" Papa called out louder.

Lazarus stopped and turned trying to see who had called his name. His sisters stopped, too, and turned looking.

Papa waved and Lazarus spotted him.

"Jacob!" Lazarus cried and came running to greet us. Mary and Martha saw us at the same time and followed quickly after him.

The two men met each other with hugs and kisses and Mary and Martha ran to greet me the same way.

"Cousin Miriam," Mary said, "what a surprise! What are you doing here?"

As I was trying to answer the question Lazarus came over and hugged me warmly.

"We came down to see this Baptist," I explained around Lazarus' bear hug.

"Papa has been hearing a lot about him and wanted to come see for himself."

I suddenly felt self-conscious, remembering my disheveled appearance. I brushed inately at my clothes, hoping sincerely that they hadn't seen what had happened to me.

"Please forgive the way I look," I said noticing a spot of blood on my shirt. "I fell down back there."

I tried to smile, then realized that they had been too far ahead in the crowd to even know anything had happened.

Lazarus listened without interrupting then spoke to me sweetly, covering my uncomfortable situation gracefully. He must have at least guessed at what had transpired.

"Not to worry, my dear Miriam," he said. "How are you, sweet girl?"

"I am well, Cousin," I said hugging him back. Of all Papa's acquaintances and relatives, Lazarus and his sisters were the only ones whom I felt were genuinely glad whenever they saw me.

“Well,” Mary said, “we all got a bit of a surprise, didn’t we?”

“I’m just not sure what the surprise is,” I said starting to feel dismayed and frustrated again. I looked around at the group. “What the Baptist said about not speaking again until ‘all things are fulfilled’ sounded ominous. What do you suppose he was talking about? It sounded more like a portent of doom than an expectation of the Restoration of Israel.”

“There is much we have to talk about,” Lazarus said solemnly, as if in answer to the questions in all our minds. Then he smiled real big. “But first let’s all go in and have lunch. I will have Sarah set extra places for our guests.”

He put his arm around Papa’s shoulder and we all walked through the gate and up to the house.

“Mary,” he said as we neared the ornate main doors, “you and Martha take Miriam upstairs and help her get cleaned up.”

He looked at me and smiled lovingly.

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Lunch was lavish, as were most things in Lazarus’ home. There were vegetables on a skewer roasted over an open fire, a delicious mutton stew, roast fish, good wine in abundance and dried fruits for desert. Lazarus had a rule in his house against talking politics, business or religion during meal times, so we ate just making small talk. We talked about the weather, our health, what relatives had gotten married, who had new little ones, and other items of little or no real consequence. Thoughts of the Messiah burned in my brain until I couldn’t keep track of the prattle. I could think only of Him as He came up out of the water; those eyes that held such tenderness, the self-confidence that possessed Him, His broad square shoulders.

I looked around at the others and could see in Mary’s and Martha’s eyes that they weren’t deeply engrossed in the conversation, either. One or the other of them would occasionally have some input, or respond to something Lazarus had said, but he and Papa were doing most of the talking.

Throughout the meal Martha would jump up occasionally to help Sarah the housekeeper put some new dish on the table or refill the wine goblets. She seemed to be smiling and enjoying herself the whole time, but I did catch her a time or two as she

glanced meaningfully toward Mary. I wanted to get up and help, but being a guest in the house it would have been considered ill manners for me to do so.

Thankfully the meal was soon over, and Lazarus suggested we all go out into the garden at the back of the house. Martha stayed behind to help clean up, then joined us after a little while. We sat on benches in the shade of a huge old tree. I longed for some words of wisdom from the elders as we sat there while Lazarus pulled on his long beard. Suddenly I wanted to sit on the ground at their feet as I had so often at home, when Papa would talk about the Scriptures and the Prophets. I itched to hear what Lazarus would say now. He sat thoughtfully for a moment before opening his mouth.

He pulled on his beard some more and finally said, "I have no doubt at all that it is indeed Him. It will just take some time for Him to establish Himself as the proper ruler of Israel and muster a following strong enough to lead us all against Rome. As I have said before that is going to take time. Some people," he looked at Papa when he said this, "expect it to happen overnight. Ridding ourselves of this scourge and taking our land back will not be easy. It will take a well-trained and prepared army, of which we have none. It will take leaders who believe in the restoration of Israel to her former glory, a power to be reckoned with. I don't know what today was about, but perhaps He wants to make His entrance slowly, carefully, feeling out the attitude of the people."

It was obvious he and Papa had had this conversation before. I could see it coming. Papa's face was already becoming a distinct red. His arms flew into the air as he began to speak.

"If He is here to restore our nation, as the prophets foretell," Papa retorted, almost shouting "and He has the power of Yahweh behind Him all He has to do is speak it and every Roman in Israel would drop dead. There would be no battle, no army to muster."

Oh, boy. This was the way with the two of them, as it usually is with Jewish men when they talk about important things. Especially anything religious.

"Look back at all the battles the Israelites ever fought," Lazarus said belligerently. He was standing now. "David against the Philistines, Joshua at Jericho. There was always an army and always a difficult fight. Yes, Yahweh was there and the Israelites overcame against overwhelming odds, but there was a great leader and a great army. Even with Yahweh's help and guidance the battle required planning and strategy and

execution. So it will be now. The Messiah will gather a following of men. He will build up His army, which will take money, men and weapons. He will develop a battle plan and, when He is ready, He will strike. This will all take time and require a great deal of secrecy. For all we know it may all be happening already and He just wasn't ready to make a public appearance until today."

"Then why didn't He state His case today, there on the Jordan with a thousand people there to hear Him?" Papa asked sounding exasperated. "I think it will be like that first Passover night. Just as Moses warned Pharaoh in the *mitzrayim*, the Messiah will give Caesar fair warning. There will probably be the plagues and signs, and the Romans will not listen. When these warnings are not heeded we will all just wake up one morning and find them all dead. We will drag their carcasses out to the dung heap and that will be the end of it all."

I hadn't been invited into the conversation so I kept my peace. I had nothing of consequence to add, anyway, so I just sat and listened and watched the show. And so I was shocked when Lazarus turned to me and asked heatedly, "And what do you think, Miriam?"

I stammered a moment then sputtered, "Well, I guess we will all just have to see whenever it happens. I am just glad it is happening, whatever it is. The Messiah has come. Now what He does is up to Him."

I felt stupid. It sounded so inane, so unintelligent, next to these learned men.

"Out of the mouths of babes," Lazarus said laughing and slapping Papa on the back. "I think that's the best thing that has been said all day."

Papa laughed, too, looking at me with a father's loving eyes. He threw his arm around Lazarus' shoulder. What had I said that was so profound?

"You brought up a question, dear girl," Lazarus said finally, looking at me, the antagonism gone as suddenly as it had sprouted "about the Baptist's comment. I am not sure exactly what he was referring to. Within my heart it felt like a prophecy, perhaps a foretelling of his own death. And as to what happens next, I think you said it well when you said we will just have to wait and see."

"Well," Papa said, "I guess we will find out something tomorrow at the river. We can all go back out there and see what the Baptist has to say next."



“I don’t know anything else to do,” Lazarus agreed.

We sat in silence for a moment contemplating the day. After a bit Lazarus said, “Well, I have some business to attend. Would you like to go with me, Jacob?”

They both stood and left me, Mary and Martha sitting in the garden.

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It went without saying that we would stay the night at Lazarus’ house. When he and Papa returned from their business we had a lavish dinner and retired to the garden for drinks and pleasant talk until bedtime. Then I was given a room of my own where I got undressed and collapsed gratefully on the bed. I lay there replaying the events of the day in my head. It seemed as if it had been three days since He had risen up out of the water that morning. *What did it all mean?* I asked myself. There was no doubt He was The One. I felt it in my soul. The Baptist had proclaimed Him the Savior of Israel. Lazarus and Papa were both convinced. So why had He just walked away like that? Whatever His mission, whether to raise up an army like the Maccabees had done or to strike in a miracle as Yahweh had when He had slain all the first born of the Egyptians, He should have made His move there at the riverbank. With these questions plaguing me and my belly full of fine food I fell into a deep slumber.

## V

I awoke the next morning feeling confused and disoriented. For a moment I couldn't remember where I was. The fog cleared quickly and I sat up in the bed. What did the day hold in store? I was eager to get back to the river and see what would happen there. Papa seemed to think that the Baptist would be there again and perhaps the Messiah, too. Maybe today would be the day. A knock on the door broke my reverie.

"Miriam?" Martha called from the hallway. "Are you up?"

"Come on in," I said.

The door opened and Martha stepped inside.

"Breakfast is just about ready," Martha said. "We are all going back down to the river as soon as we eat."

I sprang from the bed and began removing my nightgown.

"Do you think the Messiah will be there today?" I asked as I donned my garments.

"I couldn't begin to guess," Martha said with a shrug, "but Lazarus and Jacob both expect He will."

A shudder passed through me at the thought. I recalled His face, the long curls of His fetlocks hanging down from the sides of His head, wet and dripping as He came up out of the water. I remembered the look of love and compassion in His eyes as He blessed the Baptist. In my mind I saw Him as He strode from the water, shoulders held high, looking neither right nor left, but going steadfastly forward as if He had someplace important to be. I remembered that as the Pharisees came forth to badger the Baptist the Messiah had paid them no heed. It was as if they were the Baptist's worry and not His. My spirit yearned to know Him, to speak with Him, to hear His voice.

And then I remembered His voice as He had prayed to the Father asking for strength to do what He must do. The timbre was deep and mellow, somehow sweet sounding. He sounded at the same time gentle and strong, tender but self-assured.

All this passed through my mind in half an instant.

"He struck you, didn't He?" Martha asked.

"What?" I asked, drawn sharply back into the moment.

“He struck you just as He did everyone else there,” Martha said. “Mary and I were talking about it. No one seems to want to say it, but there is something about Him that is striking. He just looks like a man of authority.”

“I guess that’s the only way to put it,” I responded as I finished getting dressed. “I had expected someone more... I don’t know, regal looking. In a crowd you wouldn’t be able to tell Him from anyone else.”

“Lazarus and Jacob were talking about that this morning,” Martha said thoughtfully. “They were saying that Isaiah said He would not be good-looking. I think they quoted him as saying, ‘When we shall see Him there shall be no beauty that we should desire Him.’”

“He looks like he could be a military man,” I said.

“He could be a prophet like Moses, as your Papa says,” Martha said with a shrug. “Maybe He’s neither.”

“What do you mean?” Martha asked looking puzzled.

“I’m not sure,” I answered honestly with a sigh, “but I think Papa and Lazarus will both be wrong about Him.”

“What makes you think that?” Martha asked.

“I don’t know,” I said. “It’s just that as soon as I saw Him I got this weird feeling deep down inside that we may have gotten it all wrong for all these years.”

I finished dressing and we walked out the door and down the hallway to go downstairs to eat.

“But all the prophecies say that the Redeemer will liberate us from our captors, that He will throw off the yoke of oppression we are under,” Martha said as we walked. “It would take a great warrior to accomplish that.”

“I’m not arguing with the Prophets,” I said. “I am just saying that... I don’t even know what I’m saying. I just get this feeling that we might have the wrong perspective.”

“What other perspective is there,” she asked beginning to sound exasperated.

“The prophecies are the prophecies. Either He will liberate us or He’s not the Promised One.”

We arrived in the dining room to find everyone else waiting there.

“Well, Little One,” Papa said, “we are so glad you two finally decided to join us.”

I blushed.

“Sorry, Papa,” I said and found a place to sit.

“It sounds like you two were having quite a discussion,” Lazarus said, “but you’ll have to continue it after breakfast. You know the rules.”

I nodded and we all began our meal. The food was wonderful, but I just couldn’t focus on it. My mind was still at the riverbank. This was indeed the Messiah. I had no doubt. He was the Redeemer we had all been waiting for. From His appearance He could indeed be a ruthless, cunning warrior. What had the Baptist called Him? *The Lamb who takes away the sin of the world?* What did that have to do with liberating Israel?

We all ate our breakfast as quickly as good manners would allow, then took the basket of food Sarah had fixed up for our lunch and headed out the door.

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By the time we got to the river the sun had risen well into the sky and it promised to be another hot day. We arrived to find a crowd already gathered and the Baptist preaching on the riverbank.

“You live however you want,” he was saying, “and do whatever enters your heart. You go to the synagogue on the Sabbath and you make your offerings at the Temple on the Holy Days, but in between you take no heed of Yahweh and the way He would have you live. He spelled it all out in the Scriptures of Moses that we call Torah. Do you live the Torah? You think that because you count David or Elijah or Moses one of your ancestors that you are a Hebrew and that Yahweh offers you salvation because of that. I tell you that if you do not live the way He wants and respect Yahweh’s laws that you are no more Hebrew than any other man. Do you remember what the word *Hebrew* means? It means ‘One who has crossed over.’ If you are not living the way God wants you to every day you certainly have not ‘crossed over’ to the life Yahweh wants you to live.”

He raised his hands toward heaven and stepped a little closer to the crowd.

“Repent, and be baptized,” he said more loudly. “The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand and if you continue in your delusions of self-righteousness you will not be a partaker of the reward. I say again, I offer baptism in water for repentance. The Messiah will baptize all Israel, and the world, with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”

He stepped backward into the water never taking his eyes off the crowd.

“As the world was cleansed by water at the time of Noah by the Great Flood so you should be cleansed now. The Lord Yahweh repented of ever making man because all were so lost within themselves and their debauchery. They rejected Him over and over as He plead with them to return to Him. Finally, sickened by their lust and sin, He washed the Earth clean, the first *mikveh*, saving only Noah and his family. He is just as sickened today by what He sees in His chosen people. Come, I say, and be cleansed by the water and return to Him that He may forgive you. Come receive *mikveh* of repentance, baptism by water for true cleansing. His Kingdom is near and soon it may be too late.

“Who will be baptized now, so that when His Chosen One comes you will be ready to receive Him for who He truly is?”

The crowd was in a stunned silence. Sweat trickled down my sides. My underarms were sticky. A droplet of perspiration ran into my eye. I wiped it away impatiently.

“Who?” the Baptist said loudly.

A man rushed forth and shouted, “I will. Baptize me please so that I may see the Kingdom to come.”

This broke the spell and several more ran into the water begging to be baptized. One by one the Baptist asked their names and dunked them into the water, then commanded them to go and live the Torah and to worship daily in their spirits. The line grew longer as more people went forward. Oh, I wanted to follow that procession into the water! I wanted to be sure that I would enter the Kingdom. But Papa had always taught that we would enter the Bosom of Abraham just because we were Jews. As far as I knew we lived by the Torah. We were not *sinner*s. Still my spirit yearned to have this man baptize me.

As I stood watching in awe I saw that Martha and Mary had walked into the water and were asking the Baptist to baptize them. I stole a glance at Papa to see what he would do, but saw a look of stoicism on his face. He stood with fists on his hips, lips drawn tight as he watched first Mary’s and then Martha’s heads go under the water. Then he turned and strode away. He glanced briefly back at me, but I could not follow. I had to stay and hear more from the Baptist. I was so torn. I wanted to follow my Papa,

but I needed to know more about the Kingdom and the Messiah. I looked back toward the water where even more people waited to be baptized then I looked at Papa. Suddenly I felt dizzy. My skin grew cold and clammy. I became nauseous. I collapsed onto my knees in the dirt, then fell backward onto my back, my legs doubled back underneath me, as all went black.

I woke with my head in Papa's lap. I was disoriented and confused. Where was I? I saw the ugly faces of the morbidly curious as they stared at the spectacle playing out on the ground before them. Then the numbness in my brain cleared and I remembered. I was on the riverbank where we had been listening to the Baptist talk about the Kingdom to come. Papa angrily shouted at the onlookers to go away. He waved viciously at them and told them to go get themselves baptized or something, anything, just go away.

Then he looked softly into my face and stroked my hair.

"There, there, Little One," he said gently. "It's over now. It will be okay."

My tongue hurt where I had bitten it, and my head ached from being banged on the ground. My knees burned from being bent unnaturally backward. Spittle drooled over my chin and Papa wiped it away.

"Are you better now?" Papa asked.

I nodded and he helped me get to my feet. I was so embarrassed! If Mary and Martha had seen this spectacle I would certainly not be able to go back to their house today... maybe not for a long time to come. Even they would not want this *yetzahara* in their home. I avoided making eye contact with any of the gawkers standing around me. I tried to see if Mary and Martha were anywhere around but couldn't find them. I so hoped they hadn't seen.

The crowd returned its attention to the man in the water. He had baptized all whom had come forth and was preaching again about living the Torah and being prepared for the Kingdom. As he spoke his eyes scanned the crowd, almost as if he were expecting someone.

After a little while he pointed into the crowd and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!"

All eyes turned in the direction he pointed. There was the Messiah again, walking along the riverbank, headed away from the crowd out away from the water.

Immediately two of the Baptist's disciples left his side and went hurriedly after the Messiah. He saw them following Him and turned to speak to them. They were close enough to where I was standing that I could hear them as they spoke.

"What are you looking for?" He asked.

"Teacher," one of them said to Him, "where are you staying? We would like to talk with you."

"Come," He said gently, "follow me and I will show you all things."

I wanted to follow this enigmatic man. I burned to know if He was soldier, prophet, or something entirely different. My feet were glued to the ground. My eyes trailed His progress as He melted among the crowd then I lost sight of Him.

"Well," Papa said startling me, "I guess that's all there is to see today."

I returned my attention to Papa then realized the crowd was dispersing. The Baptist had gone back across the river, his work for the day finished.

"We may as well go on back to Lazarus' house," Papa said.

"I don't think I can go," I said.

"Why not, Little One?" he asked, even though he already knew the answer.

"You know," I said. I could feel the blush rising in my throat and cheeks. "They have never seen me have an episode."

"They didn't see you today," Papa said smiling sweetly, "but even if they had it wouldn't matter a bit. They all love you just as much as I do. Now come along and stop this silliness."

He took me softly by the arm and led me onto the road and we headed back toward Bethany. After only a little while we spotted Lazarus and his sisters just ahead of us. They were looking among the throng of people for something, then I realized they were looking for us.

"Lazarus," Papa called loudly.

Lazarus heard him and turned shading his eyes with his hand.

"Jacob!" he said. "There you are."

The three of them stopped and stood where they were until we caught up with them.

“Let’s find a tree to sit under and eat our lunch,” Martha said. “I’m starving and I’ll bet everybody else is, too.”

“There’s a good place,” Mary said pointing to a huge gnarled old tree.

We all found places to sit as Martha opened the basket and started serving out the food. There was a skin of wine, some dried meat and roast vegetables, and dried fruit. I burned to talk to Martha and Mary about their baptism experience, to ask them why they had gone down, if it really meant anything special after all. I decided it would be better to wait until we were back at the house and the men were not sitting there listening in. And, after all, Lazarus had his rule. As we ate in the cool of the shade we made small talk, wondering what the next day would bring, discussing whether it would even be worthwhile to come out again on the two-hour trek. If the Messiah was not going to speak to the crowd after all this, what would be the point?

Through the meal Lazarus sat uncharacteristically quiet. His lips were pursed in thought and he gazed into the distance not paying any heed to the conversation. When a comment was directed toward him he would just nod and say, “Uh-huh.”

We finished eating and Martha started cleaning up. I started to help, but Martha waved a hand at me and said, “Sit. You are our guest. It would not be proper for you to have to help with chores.”

She threw a look at Mary, who seemed not to notice.

Finally we all stood and started down the road toward Lazarus’ house. As the walls of the courtyard came into view Lazarus spoke.

“I have some people I want to go see,” he said. “Jacob would you like to come with me?”

“Sure,” Papa said.

“Good,” Lazarus replied. “You girls go on to the house. I’m not sure how long we will be, but we will be home by suppertime, at least.”

So Mary, Martha and I turned onto the road up to the house as Lazarus and Papa split off and continued toward Bethany.

“Mary!” I exclaimed as soon as we were in the house. “What was that all about?” I looked from her to Martha and back.

“What?” Mary asked.



“You being baptized,” I said wryly. “Why did you do it?”

I, of course, had had *mikveh* at Temple whenever we went, the ceremonial cleansing all must undergo before entering the holy place. I had even been to the Pool of Siloam and been immersed in the healing waters there in hope of a cure for my affliction. But this whole concept of *mikveh* for repentance was new to me.

“We just felt drawn,” Mary said looking to Martha for her agreement. “We just felt like it was what we were supposed to do.”

“But you aren’t ‘sinners’,” I said. “You go to Temple on all the Holy Days and Synagogue on Sabbath. You pay your tithes and observe all the Law and the Torah.”

“But we don’t have it in our hearts,” Martha said humbly. “We didn’t... But we do now, don’t we Mary?”

She looked at her sister.

“It’s something you really can’t explain to someone else,” Mary said. “You just have to experience it for yourself.”

This left me more confused than before.

## VI

Lazarus and Papa did indeed return home just before suppertime. They came in and washed up just as Martha and Sarah were putting the supper on the table. Neither of the men said anything about what they had done or where they had gone. We chatted through our supper and when we had finished we all went out to the garden where we were served fruit and barley water.

“Well,” Lazarus said as we sipped our drinks, “we found out something very interesting this afternoon.”

“And what, pray tell, did you find out?” Mary asked teasingly.

“We learned who this Messiah is,” he responded with a lilt in his voice. “His name is Yeshua ben Yusef. He is the son of a carpenter from Nazareth.”

“Nazareth?” Mary interrupted sounding slightly disgusted. “What good can come from Nazareth?”

“Mary,” Lazarus scolded, “don’t be so haughty. Good people come from anywhere, everywhere. And He is a not-too-distant relative of ours.”

We all sucked in our breath in surprise. Not that it was that great a wonder to come across a relative anywhere in Israel. Ultimately every Jew is in one way or another related to every other. But the news that the Messiah was closely related to us seemed shocking.

“His father is Yusef bar Yacob, who was the brother of my mother’s father,” Lazarus continued. “So that makes Him some kind of a cousin to us all.”

“Wow,” Martha said. “Hmmm. Imagine that.”

I didn’t quite know what to make of this news. We were cousins of the Messiah. And He had a name. Yeshua ben Yusef.

“I was going to try to get an invitation to Him to come to our home soon,” Lazarus said, “but no one seems to know where He has gone or where He is staying.”

“Oh, Papa,” I said excitedly, “wouldn’t it be wonderful to be able to meet Him? Imagine, just to sit and talk with Him, learn about Him and what His plan is.”

“It would indeed, Little One,” Papa said smiling.

“Well,” said Lazarus, “we may be able to do that. I told some of the people who know Him to let Him know whenever they see Him again that He is invited. I expect we will be hearing from Him soon.”

I felt that quivering in my spirit again as I contemplated the possibility of talking face-to-face with the One for Whom all Israel had waited so long. And I was a cousin of the Messiah!

“Well, Little One,” Papa said to me as I sat awestruck, “we better get some good sleep tonight. Tomorrow we are heading home.”

“But, Papa,” I said, “what about the Messiah? What if He answers Lazarus’ invitation? Shouldn’t we be here?”

“We don’t know if or when He might do that,” Papa said gently. “It probably wouldn’t be in the next few days, at any rate. And when He does Lazarus will let us know so we can come down.”

“I would want to make it a grand event,” Lazarus said looking my direction, “and I would want the rest of your family to be here, too. There will be time to get a message to you and for all of you to come.”

“Besides,” Papa said, “I am sure Mama is wondering what has happened to us. She was expecting us back in just a few days. We don’t want her worrying, now, do we?”

“No,” I said dejected. I felt let down. We had traveled for two days to see the Baptist, and then there was all the excitement when the Messiah showed up at the river. And then His enigmatic behavior, just showing up like that and then disappearing! Now the news that He was actually a cousin, and we were just going to turn around and go back home without ever even meeting Him. What did it all mean?

“We haven’t seen the last of Him,” Papa said looking at me meaningfully. It was almost as if he knew what I was thinking.

“He is going to liberate us, either by brute force,” he glanced at Lazarus when he said this, “or by an amazing miracle of Yahweh. We will see more of Him.”

“Yes, Papa,” was all I could say.

With that Lazarus and Papa stood and we all knew it was time to go in and get ready for bed.

As I lay there trying to fall asleep the events of the last two days kept running through my mind. I recalled His face as He came up out of the water, all dripping wet, and His eyes as He had looked upon the Baptist and blessed Him. I heard His voice as He prayed for strength to do what the Father had laid out for Him. When I finally did doze off I dreamed briefly of the Romans waking up one morning to find all their first-born dead. Then in another dream I saw Yeshua ben Yusef the commander of a great army of Israelites leading His men in a massive attack on the Fortress Antonia and against Pilate's soldiers. There was a great massacre as Gabriel and Michael led armies of angels alongside the Israelites and slew every Gentile in Jerusalem, then across Israel. Finally I passed into a deep dreamless slumber.

\*

For two and a half days we trudged along the dusty road, the merciless heat beating down, with little conversation between us. I began to feel dismayed, disappointed, disillusioned. In recent years there had been several self-styled messiahs. One by one they had been beheaded or crucified by the Romans and their followers executed before the Temple gates. Was this Yeshua ben Yusef just another of those? Was His strange behavior, appearing then disappearing, showing up and then walking away, all a sign of indecision on His part? Was He another false hope? On the trip down I had been so excited, so certain that we would at last be seeing the Redeemer. Now I didn't know what to think... I just didn't know.

Again, Papa seemed to know my thoughts.

"Don't look so glum, Little One," he said jarring me out of my reverie. "This Yeshua ben Yusef is the One we have waited for. I can just feel it in my spirit."

"Then why did He just walk away like that?" I asked in exasperation. "Why isn't He doing something?"

"How do we know He is not doing something?" Papa said smiling that teasing smile of his. "He might be secretly gathering an army right now, or seeking that strength He asked the Father for, so that He can strike at the right time. He may be on His way to Pilate as we speak to issue an ultimatum. It's all in Yahweh's hands and according to His time. We have waited this long. We just have to be patient until He decides the time is right."

I sighed in resignation.

“Well,” I said hanging my head and examining my dirty feet, “I hope He does *something* soon.”

“Patience, Little One,” Papa said putting an arm around my shoulders.

“Patience.” And on we walked.

Papa, loving to keep everyone in suspense the way he did, forbade me to talk about our adventure once we got home. After supper, he said, he would regale the entire family with the exciting events. If the sisters pressed me about it I was just to say that Papa would tell them all about it after we cleaned up and had a good home-cooked meal.

\*

We finally arrived home, dirty, sore and tired. Mama, of course, was delighted to see us and prepared a grand supper to celebrate our return. And, indeed, the sisters all gathered ‘round me as I cleaned up and changed clothes, pestering me with questions and begging me to at least tell them something of what had transpired.

I wanted so much to say at least a little bit, but I wasn’t even sure what I wanted to tell them. I had lost track of what I believed about the whole trip. How could I tell them we had found the Messiah when I was no longer sure about it myself? And what great news would it be that we had seen a distant cousin we knew nothing about? One moment I felt jubilant, excited that we had actually seen the Savior, the next I felt depressed thinking it had all been a great hoax, just another disappointment.

The hubbub of my sisters all squawking at once, the mixed emotions, the confusion, all collapsed in on me. It was all just too much. I suddenly felt dizzy and nauseous. My knees grew weak and I fell onto the floor, grabbing ineffectually at the bedpost as I went down. All went black as I succumbed to another of the damnable attacks.

I woke lying on the floor with Mama sitting beside me, cradling me in her lap and dabbing the spittle off my chin. My sisters stood in a circle around us, gazing down with pity and sorrow. I despised that look on their faces! I didn’t want their pity and sorrow! Oh, how I hated when this happened, even at home. Especially at home! But I knew they all loved me and just felt badly for me, so I was gracious and as dignified as I could be as Mama helped me stand and straighten my clothes.

After dinner we all sat on the floor around Papa as he told of our sojourn. He told in hushed but excited tones how the Messiah appeared on the riverbank and how the Baptist had proclaimed him “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” This evoked gasps and excited jabbering from the sisters, and Mama sat with her hands in her lap smiling as big as she could.

“Oh, Jacob,” she said in a whisper, “how wonderful. He has come at last.”

Then she closed her eyes for a minute as if in a private moment of prayer.

Papa told of meeting Lazarus and his sisters on the road, and how they had welcomed us into their home. He talked about our second day at the river and how the Messiah had appeared again, just to walk by and how the Baptist pointed him out a second time. Then he told how he and Lazarus had discovered that the Messiah was a cousin of ours named Yeshua. This brought even greater gasps from all, even Mama.

As I sat and listened to it all I couldn’t help but think, *But what if it’s not really what it seems? What if He is just another false messiah? How silly would we all look if we believed a lie?*

Had I lost all hope in having found Him? When we had left home just a few days before I had been so certain. I had been so hopeful. Now, for the first time, I realized that I felt resentful of the letdown. I closed my eyes and leaned back on my hands and just listened to Papa talk.

Later as we got ready for bed my next younger sister Esther said hesitantly, “Miriam, you don’t seem to be very happy. Ever since you and Papa got home you haven’t been yourself. You seem sad. What’s wrong?”

I smiled at her.

“I don’t know,” I answered. “I am just not so sure that this man we saw is really the One we have been waiting for.”

“Why ever not?” Esther asked shocked. “Papa is sure. He is not one to go around making statements he’s not sure about. And that Baptist fellow said He is the One.”

“But He didn’t *do* anything!” I said. I was feeling exasperated again. “He just showed up and then walked away. The Messiah is supposed to throw out the invaders, liberate us from tyranny, restore the Throne of David, all that stuff that’s in the Scriptures. He didn’t do any of that. He just walked away!”

“Well do you expect it all just to happen instantly?” Esther asked wide-eyed.  
“It’s going to take time.”

“I expected Him to do *something*,” I said throwing up my hands. “I thought He would make a statement, call the people together, give some kind of reassurance that He has a plan! Instead He just walked away and left us all wondering what is going on.”

“Well,” Esther said with a sigh, “I guess we will find out in time.”

And with that we got into bed.

## VII

And life went on. The next day we all worked in the fields trying to catch up on things that hadn't gotten done with Papa and me away. It was good to be home again, to get back into the routine of life. The soreness from our travels wore off in a day or two to be replaced by the familiar aches of planting and weeding and repairing stone walls. It didn't take long for my hands to get re-accustomed to the milking and gathering of eggs.

The memories of the Baptist and the river and the time with Martha and Mary faded and soon were lost to the cares of the day-to-day. My feelings of resentment and disillusionment faded with them.

I guess a little over a month had passed when Papa announced at dinner, "We have all been invited to Jochanan bar Jonah's home next week for his daughter's wedding. She is marrying Silas bar Timoteo."

"Papa, no," I said in dismay. "You know those people don't like me. Why would they invite us?"

"We have been invited," Papa replied firmly, "and we will go. It would be the worst of manners not to do so."

"Maybe they are hoping you will all go without me," I said.

"Miriam," Papa said giving me a stern look, "they are not hoping any such thing. A daughter's wedding is a grand event and Jochanan is going to throw a big celebration. All the important people around Galilee will be there."

"That's exactly why I don't want to go," I said. "It will just be a big bunch of hypocrites all trying to impress one another. Frankly I am not impressed with any of them. Maybe I *will* just stay home and all of you can go and enjoy yourselves."

Mama and my sisters all sat with mouths agape at my audacity. No one ever questioned Papa once he had said things would be a certain way. But I didn't like those people and certainly none of them liked me.

"I will hear no more of that talk!" Papa said, his voice elevated. "The whole family has been invited and we will *all* go. That is the end of it."

I said nothing else about it but I was not happy through the rest of dinner. Mama, of course, was excited about getting out of the house. She seldom went anywhere, and the idea of a big party seemed just grand to her. And my sisters were all happy about



Jochanan's daughter Joanna getting married. Joanna was five years younger than I so she and I had never really been friends, but my sisters saw her often at Synagogue and at the Temple holy days and they had all become pretty close. So the dinnertime was alive with their chatter. They didn't even seem to notice that I wasn't joining in the lively conversation.

We finished our dinner and sat in the parlor while Papa recited Scripture and prayed. Then we all got up to head for bed.

"Miriam," Papa said as I stood, "come walk with me for a few minutes."

A sense of dread swept over me. I guessed I was in for a tongue lashing for my sass. We walked outside under a fat orange moon hanging just above the horizon. Crickets chirped as we made our way across the courtyard to a bench beneath a great old tree. Papa sighed as he sat upon the bench. I sat beside him my stomach in knots. I knew I had been just on the verge of breaking the commandment to always honor your father. But still I couldn't stand the thought of spending a whole day around a house full of snobby somebodies.

It seemed an eternity before Papa spoke.

"Little One," he finally said softly as he gazed up at the moon, "I know how you feel about going to this wedding. I don't like most of those people any more than you do."

He turned to look at me.

"But we are people of good manners and proper upbringing," he went on. "I would prefer to have not been invited, but we have been and so we will go, and we will be gracious guests when we are there." He sighed again and looked at his hands.

"It will only be for two days," he said and looked back at me.

"But they don't want *me* around," I said quietly, examining my sandalled feet. "What if I have another spell. They know how I am. Everyone in Galilee knows about me. Why would they take a chance of having me fall down in the middle of their 'gala event'?"

"Miriam," Papa said taking my chin in his hand and making me look him in the eye, "yes, everyone in Galilee knows about you. And everyone in Galilee knows how much I love you and what I would do to anyone who said anything bad about you. Try to

see it from Jochanan's perspective. His daughter is getting married. That doesn't happen every day. *It is a big deal for a Papa.*"

I remembered the great affair Papa had thrown when I had gotten married. He had invited everyone he knew in all of Galilee, and even some important *somebodies* he hadn't known. Of course it was a big deal. But I still didn't want to go.

And then it dawned on me. *I* was afraid I might have an attack in the middle of the wedding. But they were still a bunch of snobs and I didn't want to be around them! I smiled at Papa and took his hand in mine.

"Okay, Papa," I said. "I will go. And I will be a gracious guest."

"I love you so much," Papa said and he hugged me tightly.

We got up and walked back to the house without another word. And so we were going to go to the wedding of Joanna bat Jochanan in Cana.

\*

The next day Papa and I had gone into Magdala to take care of some business or other. We were having lunch in Papa's favorite tavern when Elijah the innkeeper came over to speak to Papa.

"Jacob," he said, "how are things?"

"Everything is well," Papa answered standing and shaking Elijah's hand. "How are things for you?"

"Better than I deserve," Elijah replied with a huge smile. Papa sat and resumed his meal.

"Do you remember that Baptist fellow that everyone was all excited about?" Elijah asked.

Papa nodded chewing a mouthful of food.

"He was arrested the other day," Elijah said. "Herod had him put in prison."

"Well," Papa said swallowing, "I am not surprised. He was offending some pretty powerful people with the things he was saying."

"That's what I heard," Elijah said. "I never got to go down there and see him, but I have heard some stories."

"Well Miriam and I went to hear him," Papa said. "He really laid into the priests and Pharisees who came out to question him. He didn't seem to be afraid of anyone."

“Well,” Elijah said with a shudder, “I guess he’ll learn now to be afraid. I sure wouldn’t want to be on the bad side of Herod.”

“Somehow I don’t think he will,” Papa said with a sigh. “He seemed to have the Lord on his side. If the Lord is on your side why should you be afraid?”

“I think he’ll need more than the Lord on his side before Herod gets through with him,” Elijah said shaking his head. He walked away to tend some other customers. Papa was quiet as we finished our meal.

\*

We took care of the business we had come into town for and headed back toward home as the sun was getting low in the sky. As we walked along we encountered yet another of Papa’s friends, a man I only knew as Nathanael. He seemed rather excited when he saw us.

“Jacob,” he said excitedly. “Have you heard the news?”

“No,” Papa said as he and Nathanael exchanged kisses on the cheek. “What news has you so worked up today?”

“That John the Baptist that Herod had arrested,” Nathanael said, as if that were explanation enough. Papa just looked at him in bewilderment.

“He has risen from the dead!” Nathanael exclaimed looking at Papa as if this were something we all should already know.

“What?” Papa asked derisively. “People don’t rise from the dead. Besides, what makes you think he is dead, anyway. I heard he had been arrested, but that’s all.”

“Well,” Nathanael replied his excitement not the least abated, “people are saying he was beheaded and that now he is in Galilee preaching and working miracles.”

“Oh, nonsense,” Papa said smiling his big smile. “People say a lot of things. I say just believe what you see, and only half of that.”

“Well I *did* see him,” Nathanael said slowing down a little to catch his breath. “There is a man going around preaching and teaching from the Scriptures just like that Baptist did. He’s been around for a few days now. Just last Sabbath he was in Synagogue in Nazareth and he read the Scripture that says, ‘The Spirit of the Lord has sent me to preach good news to the poor and freedom for the prisoners. He has sent me

for recovery of sight for the blind and to release the oppressed.’ Then he sat down and said to the congregation ‘Today this prophecy is fulfilled.’ I was there. I heard him!”

“What makes you think it was the Baptist?” Papa asked. “It could have been anyone. A lot of people read prophecy in Synagogue and say it has been fulfilled.”

“But this man taught with authority and knowledge,” Nathanael said getting worked up again. “Jacob, you should have heard him. Whoever he was, he certainly has some serious training in Scripture and prophecy. I am convinced it was the Baptist raised from the dead.”

“Did you ever see the Baptist?” Papa asked.

“Well, no,” Nathanael said hesitantly.

“Then how can you be so sure?” Papa said. “And why are you so sure he has been killed anyway?”

“Well,” Nathanael said even more uncertainly, “just because that is all the talk around.”

“Well Miriam and I did see him at Bethabara,” Papa said chuckling, “and if I see him again I will be sure and let you know. And I will be sure and ask him if he was beheaded.”

With that we went our way and Nathanael turned and walked back toward town shaking his head as if not sure now what to think.

“Some people are just gullible,” Papa said chuckling some more.

“Maybe the Baptist was released or escaped and is out preaching,” I said.

“Well,” Papa said thoughtfully, “if he had escaped he certainly wouldn’t be making a public spectacle of himself.” He pulled at his long beard.

“And I doubt very much,” he went on after a moment, “that he has been released from prison. You heard the things he was saying about Herod. From all I hear about that man it will be a long time before the Baptist sees daylight... if ever.”

We walked a while longer both of us lost in thought. I recalled standing at the water’s edge listening to this man talk about Yahweh and the Torah and telling how the Kingdom of God was at hand. I remembered how he had said that we no longer lived the Torah. He said that most Hebrews who observed the Torah only did so by rote; they lived some set of rules and tradition handed down by the priests and Levites. He said

Yahweh's word was not really in our hearts, only in our heads. And then I envisioned him staring into the crowd and pointing, then saying, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

And Him! I hadn't thought of any of this for weeks! Now it all came flooding back unbidden to my memory. In my mind I saw Him as He came up out of the water His hair and face all dripping, His fetlocks dangling and the water running off them. I saw Him as He blessed the Baptist, then as He walked out of the water and away from the crowd. Again I felt that maddening frustration. Why hadn't He done something? Something spectacular, something that would undeniably tell the world, "I am here. I will now restore the Kingdom. Follow me and we shall throw the heathen out of our land!"

Papa shocked me out of my reverie. "How do you think your Mama would like to go to Nazareth for the Sabbath this week?" he asked.

"What?" I asked stupefied. "Why would we go to Nazareth for the Sabbath?"

"I think your Mama would enjoy the chance to get out for a couple of days," he said, obviously avoiding my question. Again there was the impish smile on his face.

"That's a half a day's walk," I protested. "And the wedding in Cana is only a week off. Going to the wedding will give Mama several days away from the house."

"We can hitch up the ox-cart," Papa said still being evasive. "Then Mama can ride and you girls can take turns riding. That would make the trip easier."

"Papa," I said feeling exasperated, "why do you want to go to Nazareth for the Sabbath?"

He put his arm around my shoulder and said, "Little One, if this man everyone thinks is 'the Baptist raised from the dead' was in Nazareth last Sabbath he may be there again. I think it would be a good idea if we go see for ourselves."

It sounded silly to me. A half-day journey on the off chance that someone *might* be preaching in Synagogue who might or might not be the Baptist who might or might not be raised from the dead? But I knew better than to question Papa. His word was the final authority. So we would go to Nazareth and see what was there.

## VIII

And so the day before the next Sabbath we all loaded into the ox-cart and headed off for Nazareth. Papa in his impish way had not told the rest of the family the reason for our sojourn and had forbidden me to divulge his little secret.

Summer had come on full by then and it was a hot day. I walked beside Papa as we went along, Mama and four of the sisters riding in the cart, the other two sisters walking beside. Papa drove the ox with gentle taps and pats on the shoulder now and again to keep it walking in a straight line along the road. Every hour or so we would stop to rest the beast as Mama clambered down to stretch her legs and the sisters would trade places, two getting down and two others climbing aboard.

As we passed to the south of Gans we knew we were about halfway to Nazareth so we stopped in the shade of a huge old tree and ate lunch from the basket Mama had packed. It was really more of a light snack of cheese and fruit washed down with wine. We rested a bit then those who would ride climbed back onto the cart and we trudged on.

We arrived in Nazareth in the middle of the afternoon and Papa got us lodging at a tavern near the Synagogue. Between the nine of us we took four rooms, the three youngest sisters in a room together, the rest of us doubling up. I roomed with Rebekah.

“Papa is up to something again, isn’t he?” Rebekah said to me as we cleaned up and changed clothes. “We didn’t just come all the way down here to get out of the house.”

“I never know what Papa is up to,” I said trying to avoid having to answer her.

“Oh, come on,” Rebekah said, “you know something.”

Then with a conspiratorial giggle she said, “You can tell me. I won’t tell anyone else.”

I burned to tell as much as I knew. Papa’s little games aggravated me as much as they did anyone else. I wished I didn’t know anything. Why did he have to let me in on his secret then tell me not to tell?

I decided to take on the authority granted me by virtue of being the oldest sister.

“We will just have to wait until tomorrow,” I said in a no-nonsense tone. “If anything at all happens it will happen in Synagogue.”

Rebekah stuck out her tongue at me and finished getting her clothes on without another word about it.

We all spent the afternoon lounging about the tavern then had supper and went to bed. Next morning we were all up as soon as the sun had risen. We dressed, ate a light breakfast and went off to Synagogue.

The services began as they always did with prayers and incense, scripture readings and instruction by the rabbis. The morning wore on with more of the same until a break at lunchtime. After the lunch break the services were opened up to any of the learned men who wanted to read from the scriptures and discuss them with the congregation.

Then *He* was there! It *was* Him. It was not John the Baptist. It was the Messiah! I whispered to Rebekah sitting beside me that this was Yeshua ben Yusef, our cousin, the Messiah. She whispered to Sarah, who sat beside her, and the news spread down the line to Mama. I saw Mama's jaw drop in an unladylike fashion, then she recovered her aplomb and closed her mouth.

He took a scroll from the stand and read a passage. Then He sat and discussed its meaning and significance. He spoke with such authority! He had knowledge one could only acquire from training in the Temple with the scholars. He spoke of the Prophets and of the Kingdom to come. He spoke of living the Torah, not just practicing it. He talked about having the Word of Yahweh, the Scriptures of Moses, in our hearts and not just in our heads. He spoke about loving our neighbors and blessing those who curse us.

He was mesmerizing. He was enchanting. When one of the priests decided Yeshua had taken enough of the congregation's time another of the priests scolded the first and told him just to sit and listen to a Master.

There was no doubt He was a master. But was He the Messiah? The Messiah, the Redeemer of Israel, was supposed to be restoring our nation, not sitting in the synagogues teaching! He should be doing something spectacular; leading an army against the Romans or bringing down some plague on their heads, or something! Even if He was quietly preparing His army for the battle, as Cousin Lazarus supposed, I wouldn't think He would be sitting there teaching about peace and love!

Before we knew it the afternoon wore into evening and the services were ended. He finished His teaching and turned the services back over to the priests, got up and walked out of the building. A few men followed after Him, presumably some of His disciples, and they all just disappeared out into the street. I watched like one in a daze as they left. Then I noticed the whole of the congregation looking after Him. Some had their mouths agape, some scratched at their heads, some of the elders pulled thoughtfully at their beards. But not a sound was uttered among any of them.

After a moment the head priest announced the end of the worship day as, through the huge windows, we saw the sun touch the western horizon.

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“It truly was Him, wasn’t it?” Rebekah said as we walked back to the inn.

Papa, as always at times like this, walked lost in thought, oblivious to anything we might say among ourselves.

Leah said reverently, “There is no doubt.”

Leah is next to the youngest of the sisters. As one of the “little ones” she seldom spoke unless spoken too. At this time she was probably only ten years old. But now she spoke with an assurance that astounded me. Then, for some reason, I remembered Lazarus saying, when I had spoken in response to his prompting, “Out of the mouths of babes.”

Mama nodded and Esther said, “Did you hear the way He talked? He was so humble, yet you couldn’t help but feel guilty when He talked about living the Torah, not just practicing it.”

Mama nodded again.

We arrived at the inn and went inside. Papa was still silent as we ascended the stairs to go to our rooms and prepare for supper. After the light fare of the Sabbath I was ready for a proper meal. I sure hoped the innkeeper’s wife would prepare as good a banquet as she had the day before.

Once Rebekah and I were in our room she said to me, “You seem particularly quiet. What do you think? Is He the Messiah or not?”

“I don’t know,” I answered shaking my head. “I just don’t know.”



“But He’s not John the Baptist resurrected?” she said, making it more of a statement than a question.

“Definitely not,” I replied sullenly. “I have seen both of them, and this is Yeshua. He just doesn’t seem like the type to overthrow the Romans and lead us all out of captivity.”

“Well,” she retorted raising her eyebrows, “what do you think Moses looked like? He was eighty years old when Yahweh called him. He had spent half of his life as the Pharaoh’s son. He was next in line for the crown. Then he went off and worked as a shepherd for the next forty years. Who would have thought he would do the things he did? And what about David? He was a boy when he killed Goliath. No one thought he would grow up to be the great king that he became.”

“Well at least he killed the Philistine!” I shot back. “He didn’t just show up at the battlefield and then walk away.”

“My, my,” Rebekah said shaking her head slowly. “It seems like you have put a lot into Him being the Messiah.”

“Who hasn’t?” I asked hotly. “There is a lot riding on this. *If* He is the One then He should be doing *something*. Not just sitting around teaching on the Sabbath. The priests do that and look where we are for it.”

“Well, Papa says we just have to wait for Yahweh to work in His own good time,” Rebekah replied calmly. Oh, I hated how she could be so smug sometimes. Especially when she had Papa’s word to back her up.

“Listen,” she went on, “let’s all just try to relax and go down and have supper. I’m sure Papa will have something to say by then that will make it all make sense.”

“I’m sorry,” I said humbly. “I shouldn’t shout at you.”

“It’s okay,” she said and gave me a big hug.

As we washed up and changed clothes I considered what Rebekah had said. I *had* put a lot into Yeshua being the Messiah. More than I realized. Six or seven weeks had passed since Papa and I had seen Him at the river, and in that time we hadn’t heard anything about Him. But some part of me had still hoped... still believed. Maybe there was more to Yahweh’s plan of salvation for the Jews than I could understand. Maybe I just wanted it all and wanted it now. What is the old saying? Lord, give me patience and

give it to me now! I laughed to myself. Rebekah shot me a questioning look and I just stuck my tongue out at her.

And Papa didn't have much to say at supper, after all. He just ate quietly, lost in his own thoughts and not letting any of us in on what he was thinking about.

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The trip home the next day was about the same as it had been coming out... hot, sweaty and tiring. Papa didn't talk much, just brooded, as was his wont when he had a lot to think about. Nobody wanted to stop for lunch. We all just wanted to get home, so we munched on dried fruit and trudged on until the walls of Magdala came into sight. Then we turned south onto the road to Bethmaus, which would take us right past our home. In just a few minutes we could see the gates to our house. Cheers issued from the younger sisters, and I must say that I shared their enthusiasm though I tried to maintain my composure a little better.

As Mama alighted from the cart in front of the house she let out an audible sigh of relief, stretched her back, and rubbed her backside. That had been the first and only indication of discomfort from Mama on the entire trip. We all went in to clean up and get ready for supper. By the time Rebekah and I came down Mama and the other sisters were hard at work in the kitchen. Papa was nowhere to be seen.

"Where's Papa?" I asked Mama.

"He's out in the garden," she replied. "He's hardly said a word since we left Nazareth. Why don't you go see if you can break his spell?"

I found him sitting on the bench beneath the old tree where he had lectured me about going to the wedding. Without saying anything I walked over and sat beside him. I knew he would open up in a little while. And it didn't take long.

"He is the One," he said thoughtfully after a moment, pulling on his beard. I wondered with a smile if a long beard made a man wise and pulling on it somehow squeezed wisdom up into the front of his brain where he could put it into words.

"I don't understand the timing or the method," he went on from some great distance in his mind, "but I can just feel it in my spirit."

Then he looked at me. Something in his eyes gave me a spooky feeling. Again my spirit quivered within me.

“That day at the river,” he said coming back into the moment, “when He stood in the water after being baptized, I could tell. I think we have got Yahweh’s plan all wrong.”

He saw the startled look on my face and held up a hand to quash any response from me.

“Just wait,” he said, “and hear me out. I still believe what the Prophets say about Him being our Liberator. I still believe in a free and united Israel. It’s just... listening to Him speak, listening to Him quote the Scriptures and the way he talks about the prophecies, I just think maybe we all want it to happen in our way in our time. Maybe there is a different way than armed rebellion or a miraculous slaughter of the Romans.”

He looked away again toward the hills to the west.

Papa’s voice was soothing and listening to him made me begin to believe it, too. Maybe my angst and disappointment were uncalled-for, after all. I was full of questions but before I could speak Papa stood with a grunt, took me by the hand, and led the way back to the house.

Supper was welcome and delicious. For some reason I was reluctant to ask Papa the questions on my mind there in front of the rest of the family. Somehow these things seemed like something to be discussed in a more reverent setting than among all my sisters gobbling up their dinner. And maybe Papa didn’t have answers to the things I was wondering about anyway.

\*

The next day we were back at work doing all the things needed to keep the farm going. There were cows and goats to milk, eggs to gather, weeding to do, barns to prepare for the harvest only a month away. And so the next three days passed in a flurry of activity. Papa wanted to get ahead on a few things, since we were planning to be gone four days going to the wedding. It was a half day’s travel each way to Cana and the ceremonies and parties would last a couple of days before we could courteously depart. The gala celebration would actually last a week, but proper manners would only require us to stay two days, thank goodness!

Then before I knew it the day had arrived and we were getting loaded up into the ox-cart to head off to Cana. The trip over was just about the same as when we had gone

to Nazareth. We stopped every hour or so to stretch, had a light lunch, then plodded along until we came to Cana. Papa arranged lodging for us near the huge estate of Jochanan bar Jonah.

Everyone in Cana was talking about the wedding. It was indeed going to be a grand affair. A few priests and Pharisees, and even some Sadducees, were already lodged at the inn where we were staying. They strutted around the place like they thought they were something important. I was dismayed at the way some of the people, guests and innkeeper alike, bowed and scraped whenever they came around. A sick feeling in my stomach reminded me that this was exactly why I hadn't wanted to come.

We got all settled into our rooms and had supper with the rest of the guests. The "important" people all made a big show of everything they did, even eating. Others seated around the table made great efforts to join in the conversation with these *somebodies*, each trying to outdo the other with his knowledge of Scripture, or with who he knew in Cana, or with his personal acquaintance with Jochanan bar Jonah. I had a hard time just getting my food down! Papa caught me looking with distaste at one of the loud Pharisees and shot me a warning look. After that I just focused on my plate and as soon as the meal was over I went up to my room. After a while Rebekah came up and we went to bed.

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Music played and people laughed and talked. There was great ruckus and noise and gaiety everywhere. We could hear the commotion long before we reached the huge house where Jochanan bar Jonah lived with his large family, and all his servants and slaves. The gates were adorned with wreathes and bouquets of fragrant flowers. The roadway leading into the place teemed with people making their way to the festivities. We slowly worked our way along through the milling crowd up to the house where the wedding would take place in a couple of hours.

A couple of Pharisees in their robes and jewelry made their way through the gate behind us, the crowd melting out of their way as they strode along. Papa indicated discreetly that we should all move aside to let them pass. I glared at him wondering how he could become part of the worshipping throng. After they had gotten a good ways past us he took me by the arm and pulled me aside.

“I understand how you feel, Miriam,” he said tersely, “but you *will* show respect of your elders and of the elders of the congregation. Regardless of how you feel about them personally, they are still men of the church and are due the respect of their positions. Is that clear?”

“Yes, Papa,” I said, properly reprimanded. He was right, of course. I shouldn’t be disrespectful of anyone.

We finally made our way inside where food and wine were in abundance. We ate and drank and Papa visited with some of the men he knew there. Mama and us girls talked among ourselves, occasionally being greeted by one or another of Jochanan’s family. Joanna, of course, was nowhere to be seen. The bride was sequestered in some upstairs room waiting for the wedding ceremony to begin. The happy groom Silas bar Timoteo floated among the guests all dressed up in his finest, beard and hair neatly trimmed, fetlocks hanging almost to his collar. His smile was so big I thought it would split his face. Suddenly I was seized by a great feeling of sadness. For a little while I couldn’t understand why I should feel so depressed at such a gala event. Then I realized. It was all so reminiscent of another wedding, at another time long ago, when I was the fourteen-year-old bride... and of the heartbreak a year later when my groom divorced me for my “affliction”. I shook it off and put on a smile.

After a little more celebration we were all called in to the huge hall where we took our seats and the ceremony began. It was the typical Jewish wedding with all the pomp and ritual. The rabbi addressed us all and reminded us why we were there. He told us of the love between a man and a woman and how Yahweh had created this union as a symbol of His love for us and His desire to have spiritual union with us. He said we must always remember the sanctity of the wedding and the significance of the wedding vows. Oh, he took his time, using as many words as he could, and making us all wait with eager anticipation the joining of these two in holy union.

Finally he finished and the bride was escorted into the room by her father. Oh, and she was a beautiful sight. Looking upon her my dislike for Jochanan and his whole fancy family was forgotten. She walked slowly toward the front of the hall holding her papa’s arm, veil over her face, looking like an angel in white. Silas stood at the front awaiting his bride, looking upon her with such love and awe that it took my breath away.

Again a flash of memory and melancholy swept over me, but I pushed it down and shared the happiness of the bride. I thought for a moment that I might have another spell right there in the wedding, but *Barouch Ha'Shem* (Blessed Lord) it passed and I was okay.

Jochanan escorted his daughter up to the front where he gave her arm to Silas. Then he turned and took a seat in the front row.

Silas and Joanna turned to face the rabbi.

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“Jochanan, you have done well,” Papa said to the father of the bride. “That Silas is a good man, if everything I hear is correct.”

Jochanan smiled and slapped Papa on the back.

“You hear correctly, Jacob,” Jochanan said. “He will make me a proud man, there is no doubt. And I will have many good grandsons out of this, too.” He smiled some more.

Papa quaffed a gulp of wine from the mug in his hand. Wiping his mouth he said, “And Joanna is such a beautiful bride.”

Jochanan grew wistful for a moment, looked toward Joanna and Silas at the front of the hall greeting and kissing all the well-wishers.

“She looks just like her Mama,” he said. “She was an angel, too.”

I realized suddenly that these were people, too, even though they were different from me and my family. They felt grief, joy, anticipation, anxiety just like the rest of us. The pain in Jochanan’s eyes was evident as he thought of his wife, gone to the fathers a year ago now. I felt ashamed of myself for just a moment, then one of the church elders came along, all bedecked in gold and purple, and Jochanan was his same old self, strutting over to shake the man’s hand and kiss him on the cheek.

Then we were all called in to the banquet. Oh, it was impressive, with a whole roast goat on a spit laid out in the middle of the table surrounded by roast quail and other fowl I didn’t recognize, all covered with skewers of vegetables. There were roasts of mutton and beef; a feast indeed fit for a king. Well, for it all one would think Jochanan bar Jonah *was* the king of Galilee.

We sated ourselves upon the sumptuous repast and then went out to the ornate garden to socialize some more. Papa and I reclined on a bench with Mama and my sisters

sitting on the ground near a grand old olive tree. With our bellies so full of good food it was hard to stay awake. Then I became aware that I was actually enjoying myself! Apart from the occasional swaggering *somebody* coming along to distract me, I was having a good time.

About then Jochanan came up to Papa, held out a flagon of wine and said, “Jacob, I want you to taste this.”

“What?” Papa asked, somewhat bleary-eyed. He looked like he had already had quite enough wine today.

“Just taste it and tell me what you think,” Jochanan said.

Papa took the mug and peered into it suspiciously. He looked up at Jochanan then back into the goblet. He tilted it up and took a tentative sip. He smacked his lips thoughtfully then took another. He rolled this one around in his mouth to savor the taste.

“This is good,” he said. Then he took a good mouthful and swallowed it.

“This is good,” he repeated. “What did you do, Jochanan? Save the best for last?”

“It came from one of those vats over there,” Jochanan said pointing. “You may not believe this, but this morning those vats were full of water. Now they are full of the best wine I have ever tasted.”

“What?” Papa said again, sobering up somewhat as he listened to Jochanan talk.

“This morning they held water. Now they hold wine,” Jochanan explained again, slowly as if talking to a backward child.

“I hadn’t anticipated so many people showing up early,” Jochanan went on, “and we started to run low on wine. I told my servants to go quickly and get more from town. Now, here is what they told me, believe it or not. You know that Yeshua from Nazareth, the carpenter’s son?”

Papa nodded.

“Well,” Jochanan continued, “he and his mother and brothers are here. Apparently she heard me tell the servant to go get more wine. After I walked away she took the servant aside and told him to do whatever Yeshua told him to do. He ignored her and started out the door. The woman followed him, took him by the arm, and led him over to Yeshua. She looked at her son and told him we were out of wine. He said

something like, ‘So what? What does that have to do with me?’ She turned again to the servant and told him to do whatever her son said.”

Jochanan paused to catch his breath.

“Yeshua told my servant to refill both vats to the top. By now he was getting nervous because he knew I wanted him to go buy the wine right away. But the sincerity in the woman’s eyes held him to the spot, so he told the other servants to refill the vats. Then Yeshua put his hands on the sides of one of the vats, closed his eyes, mumbled some kind of a prayer and then did the same to the other vat. Then he told the servants to draw out a sample and bring to me. Well, I don’t mind telling you that they thought I would have them whipped for bringing me water instead of wine. Jacob, what you are tasting now is what they brought me!” Jochanan smiled real big. “Yeshua turned the water into wine! And not just wine. It is the best I have ever tasted! Have you ever tasted anything like it?”

By now Papa had fully recovered his senses. He looked at Jochanan, then at the goblet, then back at Jochanan. Then he laughed heartily.

“Jochanan,” he said, “you old prankster. You almost got me that time. You pulled that one off real well.”

He laughed some more.

Jochanan grew serious.

“Jacob,” he said firmly, “I am not joking. He made the water wine.”

“Sure,” Papa said with a smile. Being somewhat of a jokester himself, Papa was not to be fooled by such as this.

“Jacob,” Jochanan said heatedly, “I am not joking. I am serious. It is just as I said.”

Papa looked at him then laughed again.

Jochanan snatched the now half-empty mug from Papa’s hand, turned and stalked away.

Papa looked confused and hurt.

“Papa,” I said, “I think he really means it. Maybe Yeshua is a miracle worker after all.”



I felt that familiar quavering deep inside me. I thought for a moment that I might fall down with another spell. But this came from deep within my soul. Maybe this curious carpenter's son would turn out to be the Messiah, after all.

*That's silly, I thought. Just because He does some kind of magic trick doesn't mean He is the Promised One!*

"Just a magician's stunt," Papa said, echoing my thoughts. His face betrayed his uncertainty. After a moment's reflection he said, "Let's go take a look at this 'magic man'."

We all got up, Papa a little unsteadily, and went off to see if we could find Him. After asking a couple of different people we were told that Yeshua and His mother and brothers were inside the house. We found them in the hall where the wedding ceremony had taken place, Yeshua surrounded by a throng of people, all jabbering questions at Him at once. He spoke softly but no one could hear what He was saying over the hubbub. He spoke a little more loudly, but still no one heard.

"Rabbi," someone called out, "we have heard of the miracles of healing you have been doing all over Galilee. Please, heal my son. He has been sick for three years."

Someone else was begging Him to heal a daughter, another wanted a miracle for a mother. Finally a look of exasperation came into His eyes. He held His hands into the air for everyone to be silent. The crowd hushed.

"It is not right for all of you to be here asking me for things today," He said gently but loudly enough to be heard. "Today is Jochanan's day, and his daughter's. Please, let us have enough respect and dignity to allow them their day. Your day will come, each one of you. As will mine."

With that He stood and turned to go out the back door into the rear courtyard. For just a moment His eyes met mine. Our eyes locked. It lasted only an instant, but for that instant He and I were the only ones there. The crowd disappeared, the noise vanished. He looked into my soul. He smiled as if He recognized me, then turned and slipped out the rear door. His mother followed Him and His brothers closed the door on their way out to prevent the throng from following Him. I thought I would faint. I grew weak and had to clasp Papa's shoulder to keep from falling. Now I knew! There was no doubt; He

was the One. The crowd began their murmuring and then all was pandemonium as they all rushed toward the door, trying to get outside before He vanished again.

By the time they got the door open He was gone.

That was the last that was seen of Him for the rest of the celebration. I was in a daze as we went through the rest of the day. Oh, there was music and dancing and gaiety all around, but I found it difficult to focus on Joanna's special day. Papa was quiet and thoughtful through it all. Mama and the sisters didn't seem to have any difficulty enjoying themselves, though. Rebekah gave me a quizzical look now and again, but refrained from asking me questions; the questions I knew must be on her mind. And so we got through the party and late into the night we finally went back to the inn.

Once Rebekah and I had gone up to our room she asked, "What was *that* all about?"

"What?" I asked tiredly. I knew what she was talking about, but I was just too tired to talk, and frankly I wasn't sure what it had been about, either.

"The way Yeshua looked at you before He went out," she said emphatically. "You almost fainted."

"I don't know, Rebekah," I answered, looking straight into her eyes. "He looked at me like He knew me. And when He did, I felt as if He *did* know me; as if He knew everything there was to know about me. As if I had no secrets, no hiding place He couldn't see into."

"Wow," she said. And we undressed and got into bed.