

# Sons of Thunder

A Tale of Two Fishermen

A Novel by A.D. Ray

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## ***Prologue***

*In a few days I will be dead. He asked me once if I could drink from the same cup as Him. I said I could. Oh, what arrogance. I had no idea what His cup was. Now I will indeed drink from that same cup. Herod Agrippa has sentenced me to death. In three days I will be beheaded with a sword while Herod and his cronies watch. The penalty of one who teaches heresy or leads believers away from the Jewish faith. Somehow there is a certain irony in it. Herod has given me three days to dwell on my fate. He sits up there on his throne thinking I am in agony of dread and fear, wishing I had never heard the name Yeshua. But would I change it? No. Not one whit. I look forward to joining Him in the Bosom of Abraham. It is the least I can do, after what He did for me... for all of us.*

*My only regret is that I can not tell more people about Him. And so I think it best that it all be put down in writing. I want all to know that I am not just some kind of dissident or trouble maker. I am a true believer in the Hebrew faith and I truly know and believe that our Messiah has come.*

*Then all can read and know that, no matter what the Temple authorities and Herod and all those self-righteous people who call themselves Jews say, He was, is, our Messiah. So I have got myself a scribe and I dictate to him my story... Where do I begin?*

ONE  
The Early Years

## I

My brother John and I were in the boat fishing. He was ten years old and I was twelve. A chill wind blew out of the west and across the water out to where we were anchored a stone's throw from the shore. A huge orange moon rose out over the Sea of Galilee and the stars were just beginning to show.

Our papa Zebedee of Capernaum (I'm sure you recognize his name) had brought us up to be fishermen from the time we could walk. We spent four days a week in *yeshiva*, Jewish schooling conducted during the week by the rabbis at Synagogue, but we were fishermen at heart. Two nights a week we spent on the boat. Yeshiva was a necessary part of our life, but we ate, breathed and slept boats and fishing. The past year or so Papa had been sending us out by ourselves at night to fish. That's why what happened that one day was so unusual. We both knew all about nets and casting and the things to be careful of.

It was just getting dark, the best time of day for the fish, and we were tossing the net over the side. Somehow John's foot got tangled in the net as it went over. I saw what was happening and grabbed for him but the net was so heavy that it just pulled him right out of my grip and over the side. The net was weighted down with stones tied around its edges and I knew John wouldn't have a chance of getting himself loose. I jumped in after him. The water was cold and the shock of it made me suck in a gulp of air as my head went under. I got a good gulp of water into my lungs and thought I was done for, too. In a panic I fought my way back to the surface coughing and spitting. I grabbed for the side of the boat and hung on, my body convulsing as it tried to get rid of the water.

Then I thought of John. He was down there caught in that net just like a fish. In spite of the pain I sucked in a lung full of air and forced myself to let go of the boat and go back under. The water was murky and there was no light, so I couldn't see a thing. I grabbed for the rope that was attached to the net and followed it down.

My lungs ached and my body spasmed, but I had to find him! I fought the cold and pulled myself down along the line until I felt the netting. I didn't know which way to go. Was John to my right or to my left? Then through the murk I saw his sandalled foot off to my left! He was kicking and struggling, trying to get his foot free, but his fighting

was just getting him more tangled. I pulled the knife from my belt and started hacking at the net.

My arms started aching and I thought my lungs would burst. My eyes stung, but I kept hacking. John was kicking and wiggling trying to get loose and I almost cut his leg as it waved past me. It seemed like an hour but must have only been a minute or two. Finally I got enough of the net cut away that I could pull his foot free. We both fought our way back to the surface. Our heads broke water both at the same time and we coughed and gasped for air as we made our way over to the side of the boat. We hung there for a while coughing and shivering. John looked at me and I looked back. He looked so afraid. He trembled with the cold. My heart broke thinking how close my little brother had come to dying right there. Then he laughed! I was shocked to hear it. What could he laugh at at a time like this?

“What’s so funny?” I shouted. “You almost died!”

“Now I know what those fish feel like,” he said. Then his face grew more serious.

“Papa’s gonna be mad at you,” he said shivering. “You cut up his net.”

“Oh, shut up and get back in the boat,” I said.

I managed to help him climb in, then he pulled on my arm as I wiggled my way over the side and back into the boat. I was overcome with a fit of shivering and sat there just looking at my brother. He had almost died and all he could worry about was Papa’s net! I was seized with a fit of coughing until I gagged and almost vomited.

“Are you okay, James?” John asked in a worried tone.

I could only nod my head. Then I shivered some more and coughed and spit water over the side of the boat. My lungs ached and my head felt like it would explode.

After a moment the shivering subsided and we got the net pulled back into the boat. It was in a sorry mess. John looked at it and shook his head.

“Papa’s gonna be real mad,” he said.

“He’s gonna be mad at you!” I spouted and coughed some more. “You’re the one who fell in the water.”

“Well who got water in his lungs?” he retorted shivering. “Papa has always said if we fall in make sure our heads are above water before we breathe.”

I coughed again. My lungs felt raw.

“Well,” I said, “we can’t fish now, not all cold and wet. We better get back to the house and warm up. And I think Papa’s gonna be madder at you for falling in the water than he will be about the net.”

With arms rebelling at the strain and our bodies almost convulsing from the cold we rowed the boat back to shore and tied it to the dock. John had to help me walk to the house, just a little ways from the docks. When we finally made it home I almost fell in as John opened the door.

“What happened to you two?” Mama asked shocked as we stumbled in all soaked and shivering. Then I coughed hoarsely and her eyes went wide as she rushed to help us get inside.

“I fell in the water,” John said, “and James jumped in to help me, but I think he got water in his lungs.”

“Are you okay, James?” Mama asked concerned.

I could only nod my head shivering and clutching at my body trying to get warm.

“Get to your room and get those wet clothes off!” Mama said. “I’ll heat up some stew to warm you up.”

We went upstairs to our room and through fits of shivering and coughing managed to get our clothes changed. We were finally starting to warm up, but I couldn’t stop coughing and my head still ached terribly. With every cough I thought my head would split in two. And I dreaded telling Papa what had happened.

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Papa was a big gruff man. When he was mad he was terrifying. He never punished us unless we deserved it, and I was afraid that that night we both deserved a good one. John had fallen in the water and I had cut up his net. And we hadn’t caught any fish.

These thoughts were going through my still aching head as I tried to eat the stew Mama had fixed up for us. I had a hard time getting any of it down, with all the coughing. I just couldn’t seem to stop. John seemed like he was okay. As soon as he had gotten some dry clothes on he stopped shivering, and he wasn’t coughing at all. But



I couldn't stop coughing. My chest felt like ground up meat. Once, as we were eating, I thought I would throw up right there at the table, but thankfully it passed and I didn't.

Then fear gripped me when Papa came through the door calling out to Mama.

"Salome," he said in a light-hearted manner, "where's my little vixen?"

Then he stopped in his tracks when he spied the two of us sitting at the table.

"Why aren't you boys fishing?" he asked with furrowed brow.

"Oh, Zebedee," Mama said sympathetically as she came to stand beside me and placed a hand on my brow, "they fell in the water and I think there's something wrong with James."

I tried to hold it back, but the cough came on hard and I spit food onto the floor.

"What's the matter?" Papa asked sternly as he walked over toward the table.

I tried to speak, but my voice wouldn't work. John spoke up.

"Papa," he said timidly, "I fell in the water and James jumped in to save me."

"You what?" Papa exclaimed. "Haven't I taught you how to be careful on boats. How did you manage to fall in?"

"My foot got tangled in the net," John explained. "When the net went over it pulled me in."

Then John grinned mischievously.

"I was caught just like one of the fish," he said giggling.

"You could have drowned!" Papa spouted. "What's so funny about that?"

"Zebedee," Mama said gently, "go easy on them."

"Nothing, Papa," John said stifling his laughter.

Another fit of coughing came over me.

"What's the matter with you, James?" Papa asked harshly. "Why do you keep coughing?"

"I think I got some water in my lungs," I said. "They really hurt."

"How did you get water in your lungs?" he asked. "If you *have* to go under water you make sure you breathe *before* your head goes under!"

"I know, Papa," I said, "but the water was so cold and I was afraid for John. I just didn't have time to think."

"You didn't have time to think?" Papa mocked. "How far out were you?"

“Not very far,” John answered. “Maybe a stone’s throw.”

“The water is nasty that close in,” Papa said. “You could get some disease and get really sick. Especially if you got any of it in your lungs.”

Papa had always taught us that the virtue of a man is in him owning up to things he has done. So I had to confess the next part.

“That’s not the worst of it,” I said restraining a cough. “I cut up your net trying to get John loose.”

“You cut up a net?” Papa shouted. He paced now as he ranted.

“Zebedee, please,” Mama said again. Papa shot a look at her then turned back to us.

“You,” he said stabbing a finger at John, “got caught in the net and fell overboard. And you,” now he pointed at me, “had to cut up my net to get him free.”

He turned and walked toward the door, then turned and stalked back toward us running his hand over his face. Then he fell on his knees before John and wrapped his arms around him.

“You could have died,” he said holding John close. “Oh, *Baruch Ha’Shem*, (which is to say *Blessed Lord*) you are okay.”

We never had any doubt that Papa loved us. He always treated us fairly and often showed his affection with hugs or a loving rub on the head. But never when we were in trouble. Those were the times we witnessed his wrath. Even when he punished us we knew it was because he loved us and just wanted us to grow up to be the best we could be. And so I couldn’t tell if we were in trouble or not.

Then Papa stood and came to stand beside me. I coughed some more.

“This coughing is not right,” Papa said with a look of concern on his face. “I hope you don’t get sick from all this. If it’s not better by morning I’ll have the physician take a look at you. If it is better, you can just go repair the net you cut up. And you better do a good job of it, too!”

He went off to the back of the house to wash up as Mama set him a place for supper.

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We got through our supper with me still hacking and coughing and went up to get ready for bed.

“James,” John said as we were getting our bedclothes on, “I’m kinda worried about you. It doesn’t seem like you should be coughing so much.”

“I know,” I said grimacing as I laid down. Laying down seemed to make it worse, so I sat up on the bed.

“My lungs really hurt. Especially on this side.” I indicated the right side of my chest. “All of my muscles ache just from the coughing, but this side of my chest feels really raw.”

Then Papa and Mama both came in. Mama sat on the bed beside me and Papa stood next to her.

“James,” Papa said, “I’m getting worried about you. Exactly what’s making you cough so much?”

“I just feel this rawness,” I said, “in this side of my chest.”

I pointed to my right side.

“And when I breathe,” I went on, “it feels like there’s a rattling or something in there. And it hurts. It hurts to cough, but I just can’t help it. The more I try to keep from coughing, the more it seems like I have to.”

“We will go to the physician first thing in the morning,” Papa said thoughtfully. “If he can’t figure out what’s wrong we’ll go before the *minyan* at Synagogue and have them anoint you and bless you with a special blessing. *Yahweh Rafa* is the God who Heals. He saved our John today from drowning in that awful water and I know He can save you from whatever this is that’s wrong with your lungs.”

Papa and Mama told us goodnight as John got into bed and Mama blew out the lamp as they went out the door. I tried laying down again but that made me start coughing, so I sat up and leaned against the headboard of the bed. John pulled the covers up over himself and in minutes he was sound asleep.

I finally fell asleep sitting up. My head bobbed to one side and I woke. I slid down a little in the bed and laid my head back against the headboard. I managed to sleep a while in that position, then I started coughing again. John turned to look groggily at me.

“You okay, James?” he asked.

“I don’t know,” I said. “I feel like I’m gonna die.”

“Oh, don’t say that!” John said alarmed. “Don’t talk like that. You heard what Papa said. The Lord saved me and He’s not gonna let anything happen to you. Papa’ll take you to the physician in the morning and you’ll be okay. Just don’t say you’re gonna die!”

“Okay,” I wheezed. I managed a weak smile. “I’m not gonna die. Just try not to worry about me and get back to sleep.”

He smiled back at me and closed his eyes.

I got myself into a position where my lungs didn’t seem to rattle so much and managed to doze off myself. Mama came in a couple of times in the night to check on me. I slept in fits and spurts until morning.

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By morning I wasn’t feeling any better, and was coughing up blood. I coughed all through breakfast, then Papa told me to get ready to go to the physician.

By the time we got to his office I was barely able to walk. I was just drained of energy from the coughing and my chest hurt so bad that Papa had to help me stay on my feet.

The physician took one look at me and furrowed his brow as he had me take my shirt off and sit on the edge of the table.

He put an ear to the left side of my chest and told me to breathe as deeply as I could. I did as he said, though it really hurt and made me cough some more. Then he put his ear to the right side of my chest and told me to breathe deeply. After this he put his ear to my back and did the same. Then he told me to put my shirt back on. He wore a worried frown as he spoke.

“This is not good,” he said to no one in particular. He pulled at his beard then scratched his head.

I coughed again and a little blood came out with the spittle. He wiped my chin with his hand and examined the drool.

“He’s got something in his lung,” he said to Papa. Then he turned to look into my face.

“When you sucked in the water,” he said, “did you feel anything go down your throat... besides water I mean?”

I shook my head.

“It was so cold,” I said coughing, “and I was worried about my brother. Something could have, I guess, but I didn’t notice. I could only think about saving John.”

He turned back to Papa.

“There is nothing I can do,” he said worriedly. “He might just cough it up in a day or two. Or it could just stay in there and fester. That would be bad. Really bad.”

I had never seen Papa look so troubled. He started to say something, but his mouth just opened and closed like the words wouldn’t come. And I was scared. More scared than I had ever been in my life.

“Might he... die?” Papa managed to say.

“It is a possibility,” the physician said. “You have to prepare yourself for the worst. If it doesn’t come out it will get even more painful, and there will be more blood. Then an infection could develop and there will be fevers and even fits. It will be real bad before the end.”

“NO!” Papa shouted. He grabbed the physician by the shoulders and shook him. “You’re a physician. There must be something you can do!”

The physician managed to free himself from Papa’s grasp.

“Zebedee,” he said softly, “believe me, if there was anything I could do I would. We just have to wait and see.”

“No!” Papa said again. “We will not wait and see. I’ll take him before the congregation and have the minyan anoint him and pray for him. *Yahweh Elah, Yahweh Rafa*, will heal him. He saved John. He will save James.”

The physician just bowed his head respectfully as Papa took me by the hand and helped me off the table. As we left the physician said, “Yahweh bless you and keep you. May He make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you. May He lift up His face upon you and give you health. Shalom.”

Papa put his arm around me and helped me hobble along the street toward the synagogue. Every few steps I would be seized by the coughing and have to stop for a minute until it passed.

“I’m scared, Papa.” I said. “I don’t want to die. I don’t want to have fevers and fits.”

Papa pulled me closer and said, “Do you believe that Yahweh loves all His creation?”

I just nodded. I didn’t have strength to answer.

“Do you believe that He listens to the prayers of the priests and rabbis?”

I nodded again.

“When the Hebrews were disobedient in the desert,” Papa said, “Yahweh sent serpents to bite and sting them to teach them to be thankful for the manna He had sent. But that was only for a time. Then He told Moses to make a brass serpent and wrap it around a pole. When Moses lifted up the brass serpent any who had been bitten only had to look at it and they were healed of their wounds. When there was a great plague of leprosy in Israel Yahweh sent Elisha into Syria to heal a leper there because the Hebrews were living disobediently.”

He stopped walking and looked into my face to make sure I was listening closely.

“Sometimes,” he said solemnly, “things happen to teach us to rely on Him. I have brought you up to rely on Him. You need to trust now.”

“Yes, Papa,” was all I could say. I coughed again and more blood came up.

“Then let’s get you to the minyan,” he said and led me on down the street.

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“My son is sick,” Papa said to the rabbi. “I’ve taken him to the physician as we are told to do before coming before the congregation.”

The rabbi nodded. I tried to hold it back but a raspy cough issued forth and bloody spittle drooled down my chin. I wiped it away quickly.

“And what did the physician say?” he asked looking at me with concern in his eyes.

“He said that James has something in his lungs,” Papa explained, “and that there is nothing that can be done about it. He said that it might just come out by itself, or that it might not and my son may die.”

Papa choked on these last words.

“And what do you want here?” the rabbi asked quietly.

“I want to take him before the minyan and have them anoint him and bless him,” Papa said. “I want to ask Yahweh to heal him.”

“And do you believe Yahweh can heal?” the rabbi asked.

“Yes!” Papa said without any doubt in his voice.

“And, James,” the rabbi asked looking at me, “do you believe Yahweh can heal?”

I knew that just a “yes” would not be sufficient. When you are questioned by a rabbi it is expected that you will give a reason for your answer.

“I know that He healed the Hebrews when Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert,” I said. “I know that He used Elisha to heal the leper in Syria.”

But would He heal me? Did I believe that? I looked to Papa for guidance in what I should say next. Papa just looked at me. That was his way. In our home he would teach and lecture about the things and ways of Yahweh, but when we were in public we were expected to show our learning in what we said and did. And so I squared my shoulders as best I could and stifled a cough.

“Yes!” I said. “I believe that Yahweh can heal me if it is His will.”

The rabbi nodded approvingly.

“Then come with me,” he said and he turned and walked toward the back of the sanctuary.

We followed and the rabbi went into the priest’s chambers. He motioned for us to wait at the door as he went in to talk with the priest. After a minute or two both of them came out. The priest took a look at me and laid his hand on my head.

“Are you sick, child?” he asked.

I could only nod.

He looked at Papa.

“Hello, Zebedee,” he said solemnly.

Papa nodded a greeting. I coughed.

“Well,” the priest said smiling, “let’s get this child healed.”

He turned and walked further back into the recesses of the synagogue, into places I had never been before. We passed through another doorway into a large room divided in the middle by curtains. Beyond the curtains I could hear voices of men talking in reverential tones. The minyan. I had never been before the minyan, the ten elders who

were holy, righteous men who directed the leadership of the congregation. I trembled as we passed through the curtains.

Ten men sat on cushions around a low table. They wore yarmulkes and had long beards and fetlocks hanging to their chests. The priest who had taken us in spoke.

“Zebedee’s child is sick,” he said. “He has been taken to the physician and the physician said there is nothing he can do. Zebedee has brought him here for anointing and blessing.”

“He fell in the water,” Papa started to explain.

“We don’t need to know what his problem is,” one of the seated men said with a wave of the hand. “We only need to know that he is sick and in need of Yahweh’s touch.”

Then looking at me the man said, “Come over here, child.”

I walked timidly over and stood beside the man. He looked long and hard into my face. I struggled to hold back a cough.

“It’s okay,” the man said. “Let it go.”

I put my hand over my mouth and coughed hoarsely. Bloody spittle spewed into my hand. I wiped it nervously on my pants. The man looked around at the others there around the table and they all nodded.

“Sit here on the floor, James,” the man said gently. I obeyed and he placed his hand on my head. The rabbi took a vial of fragrant oil from a shelf, opened it, and handed it to the priest who had ushered us in. The priest poured some on my head and over the fingers of the other man who still had his hand on my head. The ten men spoke in unison.

“Heal us, oh Lord, and we shall be healed. Save us and we will be saved, for the One we praise is You. Bring complete healing for all our sicknesses. May it be your will, Yahweh Rafa, God of my fathers, that You quickly send *refuah sh’lemah*, complete healing from Heaven, spiritual healing and physical healing to James bar Zebedee, son of Zebedee bar Yakov, for You oh God are our faithful and compassionate Healer and King. Blessed are you, Oh Lord, the Healer of the sick of Israel. Selah.”

I was seized by such a fit of coughing like I hadn’t had yet. My body was wracked with spasms. Blood and spittle flew uncontrolled from my mouth. I tried to



cover my mouth with my hand, but I couldn't. I fell on my back, then rolled over on my side. I thought for a minute that I would throw up right there on the floor. I gagged. I coughed again and a piece of something green about the size of my thumbnail flew from my mouth. The coughing stopped! I hurt. I ached. The muscles in my chest burned like I was on fire. My lungs felt raw like ground up meat. I couldn't move. But there was no more coughing.

I managed to look up at Papa. He stood there with his mouth hanging open, eyes wide and the most frightful look on his face. Somehow, though, it seemed funny. If I hadn't been in so much pain I might have laughed at him.

"Well," said the man who sat beside me, "it looks like we have found the problem."

With his fingertips he picked up the green slimy piece of weed that I had coughed up. He held it up and looked at it, then showed it to the men sitting around the table.

"James," he said as I sat up, "our Father knows the number of hairs on our heads. He knows our every thought. Do you remember what David said? He said, 'Before I was born, You knew me.' And in another place he said, 'You knit me together in my mother's womb.' This happened to you for a reason. I know your Papa has raised you in the Scriptures and that he has taught you to love and obey Yahweh. But there is something for you to learn in this. Figure out what it is and learn it well. If you don't something worse may happen. Our Father in Heaven only disciplines us because He loves us and wants the best for us. He has something great and wonderful planned for you, but you have yet to learn many things before that can come to pass."

I just nodded. Then he looked at Papa.

"Now, go," he said, "and bring the sacrifice commanded by Moses in gratitude to Yahweh for His healing."

As we walked home from the synagogue Papa stopped in to see Levi ben Alphaeus the tax collector. Now, Levi was a just and righteous man and never took more in taxes than was required by Caesar. Papa liked and respected the man, though it sometimes brought him disdain from some of the people around Capernaum. Some said, "You can never trust a publican."

But Papa always said that a man is not determined by what he does for a living but by how he lives, who he is inside, and by how he stands before Yahweh. And Papa said Levi could stand before Yahweh with a pure and humble heart.

As we entered the little booth Levi had set up there on the street he stood and welcomed us with a smile.

“Zebedee,” he said and greeted Papa with a shake of the hand and a kiss on both cheeks. “What brings you this way on this breezy day?”

“Levi,” Papa said returning the greeting, “after the Sabbath we are going to have a *todah* celebration at my home. Yahweh has been merciful to me and my family. I am inviting everyone I know and I would like for you to be there. And bring your family. It’s going to be a grand affair.”

That evening would begin the Sabbath, so of course the celebration would have to wait until the day after.

“I am honored,” Levi replied. “What special thing has Yahweh done for you to warrant the *todah*?”

“He saved the lives of both my boys,” Papa said hugging me tightly. “We thought James was going to die. I’ll tell you all about it at the celebration. You will come?”

I must say that all the attention I was getting was beginning to make me uncomfortable. I had never been one to enjoy being the focus of attention.

“Of course,” Levi said. “What can I bring?”

“You don’t have to bring anything,” Papa answered. “It is my time for thanking Yahweh for His mercies.”

“We will be there at sundown,” Levi said. “And the least I can do is bring some wine. My neighbor Benjamin has a vineyard that produces the most delicious wine.”

“I know his wine,” Papa said with a big smile. “That would be good.”

The scene was repeated a dozen times as we weaved our way through the town stopping first at one place and then another as Papa invited all his friends to the *todah* celebration. Each person was going to bring some offering to the feast, so all we would have to provide would be the meat and the consecrated bread.

When we got home and walked through the door Mama came running from the kitchen. She wore a troubled look.

“What took you so long?” she asked sounding distressed. “I was so worried!”

“Yahweh healed him,” Papa said rubbing my head. I was almost as tall as him so this was no easy task. “The minyan anointed him and prayed a blessing of healing and he coughed up a piece of sea grass. He hasn’t coughed since.”

Mama fell to her knees in front of me and wrapped her arms around me. Sobbing loudly she said, “Allelu Yah.”

I began to squirm but Mama just held me tighter.

John came from the back of the house and stood there watching the spectacle with a look of concern on his face.

Mama held me for a while and sobbed some more then said quietly, “Baruch Ha’Shem. The Lord has restored us.”

Then her countenance changed.

“Why did you take so long getting home?” she scolded Papa as she stood. “I was so afraid John had died or something!”

“We had to invite everyone to the todah celebration,” Papa said unscathed. “We have to have the todah the day after the Sabbath.”

“Well, then,” Mama said wiping her eyes and giving Papa another scolding look, “we have a lot to do. We better get busy.”

She headed out into the kitchen as Papa turned toward the door saying, “I have to go buy a lamb for the sacrifice. I’ll be back later.”

John came to stand beside me. In a quiet tone he said, “Are you okay, James?”

“Yes,” I replied smiling. “Yes. I am healed.”

## II

And Papa did bring the sacrifice. We had no lambs or doves, so Papa bought an unblemished lamb, firstborn of its flock, for the *todah*, or thanksgiving, sacrifice. The lamb stayed in the house with us overnight until we left for the Sabbath services the next day.

As Papa stood before the congregation he said, “Yahweh in His mercy spared both my boys in the last few days. My younger one John fell into the water while he was fishing. He was tangled in the net and could have drowned. But by Yahweh’s grace James was able to jump in and cut him free. Then we learned that James had gotten something in his lung from that nasty water and the physician said that he might die. I brought him before the minyan and they anointed him and blessed him and Yahweh touched him and healed him. And so, my dear friends, I bring the *todah* sacrifice and to Yahweh I pray, ‘Oh praise the Lord, all you nations; praise Him all you people. For His merciful kindness is great toward us, and the truth of the Lord endures forever. Praise the Lord Yahweh.’”

And the congregation repeated, “Praise the Lord Yahweh.”

“Tomorrow night,” Papa continued, “we will have the *todah* meal at my house. You are all invited, my dearest friends, to celebrate His great kindness toward me and my family.”

And the lamb was sacrificed and the Sabbath services went on with great joy in everybody’s hearts.

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The next day we were back to life as normal for a fisherman’s family. John and I were at the docks as soon as it was light, repairing the net I had cut up. Papa didn’t bother to come watch us do it; he had confidence in what he had taught us. The carcass of the sacrificial lamb was brought to our house for meat for the *todah* feast. Papa was spending the day preparing for the feast. As we stretched the net out on the ground John looked at it and laughed.

“What are you laughing at now?” I scolded. “That thing right there could have killed you.” I pointed at the net.

“I just can’t help remembering,” John said still giggling, “when I was caught up in it that I knew just what the fish felt like.”

“And why is that so funny,” I asked crossly.

“I just kept wondering,” John said, “if you hauled me in, who would eat me?”

“You’re crazy, John,” I said, and sat down next to the torn parts and started plaiting the ropes back together.

As we sat there engrossed in our chore I considered the things that had happened. Though Papa was a devoutly religious man and raised us to live our Jewish beliefs and traditions, I never really had taken it all to heart. It was just part of what we did. As a family we observed all the Holy days and practiced the traditions and ceremonies like good Hebrews. Papa didn’t like going to Jerusalem and so we missed out on most of what went on at Temple, but we observed the special times in Synagogue at home.

But I had never considered that Yahweh might actually care about what happened to one so insignificant as me. He had created the world! He had a whole universe to run. Surely I was no more than an ant in His sight. Had He actually had a hand in what happened out there on the lake that day? Did He really heal me, or was it just happenstance that I coughed up that piece of weed just when I was anointed? It gave me a lot to think about.

It took us until almost the middle of the day to get the net repaired. Then we folded it and put it away on the boat and went back to the house for lunch. I reported to Papa just what we had done to get the repairs made and he nodded approvingly.

The rest of the day was a flurry of activity as Papa and I butchered the lamb and Mama worked in the kitchen fixing up skewers of vegetables to roast and a large pot of *hamentashen* for dessert, a dish made of a mixture of sliced apples, cinnamon, honey and raisins. And then the guests started showing up. Levi was the first to arrive, bringing with him two large skins of wine. As more people arrived women gathered in the kitchen with Mama and the men all congregated in the back garden where the huge fire pit was with the lamb on a spit. John and I took turns turning the spit and the aroma was indeed something that The Lord would find pleasing. By now the meat was just about ready and Mama brought out the skewers of garlic- and spice laden vegetables and laid them out over the coals. Papa called everyone into the garden.

“My dear friends,” Papa said just loudly enough to be heard over the crowd, “thank you for coming tonight to celebrate with us in thanksgiving to Yahweh for His mercy. He has restored to us our two boys who might have been lost and gone to be with the fathers if not for His mercy.”

His words carried power and emotion though his voice was soft and humble.

“And so it is with thanks in our hearts that we praise Him and eat the todah supper.”

Then he raised his hands to Heaven and prayed,

“You are mighty, Lord, who brings healing to the sick,

You are great in granting salvation,

providing the living with sustenance, with loving kindness,

caring for the sick with great mercies,

supporting the fallen, healing the sick,

releasing the captive,

and keeping faith with those who are lost among the living,

Who is like You, Master of mighty acts, and who compares to You,

King who restores health, and causes salvation to sprout,

You who are faithful, comforting the ill among us,

Blessed are You, Lord who heals the sick.

Selah”

And everyone there said, “Selah.” And what a party there was that night! Some of the neighbors had brought musical instruments and played tunes, Mama and Papa danced, people laughed and cavorted. A wonderful time was had by all.

\*

We had a good catch that night. We hauled it into the boat and got to the docks just as it was getting light. The men from Papa’s fish market were there waiting for us, and they loaded the fish into a cart and headed off to market.

As we stood there watching the men handle the fish I put my arm around John’s shoulder.

“Good catch,” I said. “Papa’s gonna be real happy.”

“Yeah,” John replied. “And nobody fell in.”

He laughed that mischievous little laugh of his and we headed home, tired but contented with a job well done.

As we walked along the street a couple of boys came from the other direction, boys we had had trouble with in the past. I never exactly knew what they had against us, but they were all haughty and proud because their papa owned some houses in town and considered himself a landlord. Oh, they had more money than our family, and wore fancier clothes, but that didn't make them anybody special. We just ignored them as we walked along. As we passed they both moved out to the edge of the sidewalk and held their noses.

“Pee-ew,” the one named Saul said. “It's the fishmongers.”

“Yeah,” said the other one, Samuel. “I heard the skinny one went swimming the other day.”

“Yeah,” Saul said. “Too bad he didn't drown.”

I could see John's face getting red and frankly I was having a hard time holding my own temper back.

“Just ignore them, John,” I said. “Remember what Papa says. Let's get on home.”

John looked at me and we walked on. Papa had always taught us to just mind our own business and if other people teased us about his profession to just ignore them. He said it was the sure sign of a small mind.

“After all,” he would always say, “it is more important what's inside a man than what he does for a living.”

After a minute or two we heard footsteps hurrying along behind us. Then Saul and Samuel came up, one on each side, and started in again.

John was not very big, actually kind of small and wiry, but I was by no means a small kid. By the time I was twelve I stood almost four cubits tall, about as tall as Papa. All the work on the boats had me built up pretty well and I was broad at the shoulder, with arms as big around as most boys' thighs.

“Fishmonger, fishmonger,” they teased in a singsong voice. “You smell like fish, and so does your mother.”

Well that was all it took. John pushed at Samuel and made him lose his balance. The kid tripped backward over his own feet and almost went down. He came up swinging at John. John easily sidestepped the blow, but seeing Samuel swing at John made me really mad. What he had said about Mama was bad enough, but now he was trying to hurt my little brother! These boys had pestered us for years, but neither of them had ever taken a swing at one of us.

Before I knew what I was doing I stepped between the two of them and lashed out at Samuel's chin with my right fist, sending him reeling backward. I stepped into it and landed one with my left square in the middle of his face. Blood squirted from his nose, but I wasn't finished. I went after him with both fists now, first one and then the other landing on his face and head. By now he was on the ground trying in vain to ward off the blows. I felt both John and Saul trying to pull me off, but after all the teasing and tormenting these boys had done to us I was just out of control.

Finally John got both arms around me and managed to stop the pummeling I was delivering. I stood, shaking and breathing hard, and looked down at the sorry mess before me. Then I turned to Saul.

"You want some of that?" I asked pointing to his brother laying on the ground.

He just shook his head and, keeping one eye on me, bent to help Samuel get up. The two of them went trotting off down the street, glancing back to see if we were coming after them.

"James," John said looking at me with his mouth hanging open. "What's gotten into you?"

"They should never have said that about Mama," I said. I was still shaking and breathing hard. "And he was trying to hit you. No one will ever hit you if I'm around."

I worked my aching fists.

"But you almost killed him," John said staring hard into my eyes. "You scared me, James."

Now it was my turn to laugh. He did look scared. He was crazy. Falling in the water didn't scare him. Getting caught in the net didn't scare him. But seeing me finally lose my temper and give someone what they deserved scared him. I laughed out loud.



“What are you laughing at?” he asked. “You hurt him real bad. And you could have gotten in real trouble.”

“Just you, John,” I said in response to his question.

I put my arm around him and we went on home.

By the time we got to the house my hands were hurting and starting to turn blue around the knuckles. The muscles in my upper arms ached. Even my back ached. I had never been in a real fight before. Oh, sure, John and I had had our falling outs and we had pushed and shoved each other. But I never knew the winner of a fight would hurt so much!

“Don’t say anything to Mama or Papa about it,” I said quietly to John as we entered the house. “They’ll both get real mad if they find out I was in a fight.”

John just nodded as we walked through the door.

“You boys about ready for some breakfast?” Mama asked as we walked into the kitchen.

“Yeah,” I said trying to be nonchalant. “I’m starved.”

“Me, too,” John said.

“Good,” Mama said. “Go get washed up. I have some barley mush cooking up right now. It’ll be ready by time you get cleaned up.”

So went up to our room to wash and change clothes. We were not allowed to sit at the table wearing clothes we had been working in. My hands ached as I washed them, and the cuts burned when the soap got in them. I held them out before me and examined them, and I must admit with some degree of pride. John just looked at them and shook his head.

“You better hope Papa doesn’t notice,” he said pulling his shirt off over his head.

“Yeah,” was all I could say.

We went down to the dining room and sat around the table. I kept my hands under the table as Mama brought the mush out and served it up in bowls. She poured milk over it and turned to put the honey on the table. I was so hungry I couldn’t keep myself from spooning a sample of the hot mush into my mouth. Mama turned just as I put the spoon back into the bowl and she saw my hand, all bruised and cut. She almost dropped the pot of honey in her fright.

“What happened to you?” she asked in horror as she came around the table to examine my hands.

I tried to hide them under the table.

“Oh, nothing, Mama,” I said. I considered lying to her, but I had never lied to either of my parents before. “I just kind of got them banged up today.”

That wasn’t exactly a lie.

“Let me see,” she said trying to pull them out where she could see them.

I resisted.

“It’s nothing, Mama,” I repeated. “I’m okay, really.”

“James,” she said eyeing me suspiciously, “let me see your hands.”

I pulled them from under the table and held them where she could see.

“Tell me what happened,” she said firmly.

I had never disobeyed or disrespected my parents. I sat trying to think what to do now.

“James,” Mama said again, “you can tell me or I will have your brother tell me. Which will it be?”

I looked up at her. Even though I knew I towered over her when we stood side by side, from where I sat now she looked six cubits tall. And she was my mother. And the commandments of Moses tell us to always honor our father and our mother. I squirmed and looked down at the floor. She put her hand under my chin and lifted my head.

“Well?” she asked.

“Mama,” I said quickly, “he said bad things about you, and about us, and he tried to hit John. And I had to do something. He’s been asking for it for a long time, him and his brother both. They always tease us and pick at us because our papa’s a fisherman.”

“Who?” Mama asked frowning and holding up a hand. “Slow down and tell me what happened.”

I took a deep breath.

“Those boys of Ezra,” I said, “the ones who always think they are something special because their papa owns property.”

“Yes?” she asked, her patience obviously wearing thin.

“They always pick on us and pester us,” I explained. “Today they said some bad things about you and about us, and Samuel tried to hit John. Mama, I just lost it. I beat him up. Pretty bad.”

“What did they say about us that would be worth this?” Mama asked waving her hand at mine.

I didn’t want to say it. I looked away.

“They said we all smell like fish,” John blurted out. “And Samuel said you smell. I just couldn’t let him do that, Mama. I pushed him and he tried to hit me. That’s when James started hitting him.”

Mama tried, not very well, to hide her shock at what Samuel had said about her. She lifted my hands gingerly and examined them.

“Well,” she said, “it doesn’t look like anything’s broken.”

Then she looked into my face.

“What does your Papa always tell you about the things people say?” she asked.

“He always tells us that it is only words,” I answered dejectedly, “and that words can only hurt us if we let them.”

She turned to John.

“And what does he say you should do when people say things that you don’t like?” she asked.

“He says we should just ignore them and walk away,” he answered looking toward the floor. Then he looked up into Mama’s eyes.

“But I just couldn’t let him say those things about you!”

“Well,” Mama said, “just eat your breakfast. Papa will be home for lunch. You will have to tell him about it.”

She looked at both of us meaningfully.

“You will tell him,” she stressed.

“Yes, Mama,” I said.

“Yes, Mama,” John echoed.

“You must both be really tired,” Mama said. “After you finish eating go upstairs and sleep a while. I’ll come wake you when your Papa gets home.”

And I was indeed tired. We had both been up all night fishing and then all this mess. But I had a hard time falling asleep. I tossed and turned, and just as I would doze off I would see Samuel's face as I smashed it with my fists. Finally I drifted off into a fitful slumber.

\*

"What in the world is the matter with you two?" Papa shouted as he flung open the door to our room.

I woke with a start blinking my eyes rapidly. I didn't know what was going on. Papa stood over my bed shouting and waving his arms.

"You almost killed that boy!" he shouted. "Ezra came to the shop this afternoon to show me what you had done to his son! You beat him bloody!"

Mama was right on his heels.

"Easy, Zebedee," she said. "At least wait 'til you hear their side."

"Their side, nothing," Papa shouted. "My boys are not rabble rousers and trouble makers! I will not allow this kind of behavior."

It was not like him to shout at Mama. She held up her hands placatingly, not the least bit intimidated.

"Zebedee," she said, "there are always two sides to any story."

"I don't even want to hear their side!" he shouted. "What I want is to beat their hides. James, you know we don't have that kind of a family! What you did is simply inexcusable."

John spoke up.

"It was my fault, Papa. Don't blame James. I started it."

Papa turned to stare balefully at him.

"What do you mean, you started it?"

"Samuel said some really bad things about Mama and I pushed him," John said. "Then he tried to hit me and James got into it. But, Papa, he really deserved it after what he said about Mama."

"I don't want to hear excuses," Papa said, not at all calmed down. "We don't go around getting into fights and beating people up."

I couldn't let John take all the blame. I had done my part.

“But, Papa,” I said, “you should have heard the things he was saying. And when he tried to hit John I had to do something.”

“You could have both just walked away,” Papa said emphatically. “That is what I have always taught you.”

We could both see there was no use. And Papa was right. He had taught us different from that.

“Yes, Papa,” I said.

“Out back, both of you,” Papa said. “I’ll be out there in a minute.”

Oh, boy! We were both in for it now. Out back was the whipping post. Any time we would get a good one we had to hold onto the whipping post while Papa let us have it with the belt.

“Now!” Papa shouted. “John, you’re first, since you started it.”

We both got up and went downstairs with great dread in our hearts. Neither of us said anything. We got out back and John put his hands on the post. As we stood there we could hear Papa’s voice booming through the house and Mama talking more softly, trying to reason with him. She hated seeing us get it almost as much as we hating getting it. After a bit Papa’s voice grew quieter. Then we could tell he was headed to the back of the house.

“It’s still not right,” we heard him say as he came through the door. Mama came out right behind him. To my great surprise Papa was not carrying the belt.

He stood there looking from one to the other of us, shaking his head and breathing deeply.

“Your Mama told me what that boy said,” he said slowly. “To be honest if some man said something like that to me I don’t know that I would have done any different than what you did. That still doesn’t make it right and you should both get a good whipping.”

He looked at us some more.

“We don’t want to start a fight between the two families,” he said shaking his head thoughtfully. “Ezra and I had to go before the minyan this morning. His boys are always into some trouble or other. Everybody knows that. The minyan decided that you were all in the wrong. I have to pay recompense to him for the injuries you did to his

son. I have to pay him the price of one catch of fish. The fishing you did last night will go for that. And for what his son said about us, and especially about your mother, he will have to have us all over for a supper at his house. We have been commanded by the minyan to make you boys make up and get along. There is to be no more fighting between you. Do you understand?"

He said that last part emphatically.

We both nodded.

"After that I want you to stay away from them. I don't care if you have to cross the street when you see them coming. Just stay away from them. Maybe they've learned a lesson and will leave you alone."

I was surprised to realize that some prideful part of me felt good about it all. I knew it was wrong, but I couldn't help feeling a little bit proud of myself.

Papa took a deep sigh.

"You brought in a good catch this morning," he said. "I was at the shop when the men brought it in. Is that net holding up okay after you fixed it?"

"Yeah," I said, the storm having passed. "It worked just fine today. I checked it after we hauled it in and it's just fine."

"Good," Papa said. "Well, I have to get back down to the shop and help out getting it all cleaned and roasted up for sale."

With that he turned and went back into the house saying to Mama with a laugh, "Well, get me some lunch together. I can't hang around here all afternoon."

As Papa walked into the house I stole a quick look at the backs of my hands. I flexed the fingers and worked the knuckles. They ached and the cuts stung but I actually felt kind of proud of myself for finally standing up to those thugs. And something inside of me felt big and strong, powerful, remembering the way Samuel cringed and dodged trying to avoid my blows. I looked up and caught John watching me.

"It's not good, James," he said evenly. "You shouldn't feel good about beating someone up. Even if they did deserve it."

How did he know? Was it that obvious?

"I know," I said shrugging, "but like Papa said, maybe they'll leave us alone now."

### III

We didn't fish that night. It was the start of the week and back to yeshiva. On the way to Synagogue we met our good friend Shimon bar Jonah son of the innkeeper. He and his older brother Andrew sometimes went fishing with us. They both liked boats and being on the water. Papa would pay them whenever they went out with us. We could catch more fish with Shimon and Andrew working one side of the boat and me and John working the other.

"James!" he exclaimed as we walked toward each other. "I heard what you did to Samuel yesterday. You really gave him a good one."

"He was saying bad things about Mama," I said raising my eyebrows, "and he tried to hit John. I had to do something."

"Oh, you don't have to explain anything to me," Shimon said with a chuckle. "I'm sure whatever it was he deserved it. Besides, it's about time somebody gave him a good what for. Him and his brother, too."

I laughed a little myself. Then I saw the disapproving look John was giving both of us.

"Papa tells us that there is always another way," John said. "We don't have to fight. Papa says fighting is the way men without enough brains to figure anything else out solve their problems."

"I have brains," I said slightly offended. "You were there! You tell me if there was any other way."

"I don't know," John replied huffily. "We could have just walked away like Papa says."

"And let them go on talking about Mama like that?" I spouted. "Besides, you started it when you pushed Samuel down."

"Oh, I know," John said shrugging. "I don't know anything else we could have done. Papa himself said he might have done the same thing."

"There!" I said. "See? Sometimes there is no other way."

"Still, though," John said, "I didn't have to do what I did. As much as it hurt I still could have walked away and left Samuel standing there talking to himself. And,

besides, who ever listens to what he and Saul say, anyway? Nobody ever believes them. And everybody in Capernaum likes Mama and Papa. That's what counts. Not what some troublemaker says."

I could see John thinking it over, running through the possibilities in his mind. That was part of the problem with John. He thought too much. Shimon echoed my thoughts when he spoke up.

"John," he said, "you think too much. Sometimes it's just time for action, not thinking. If you and James had walked away then Samuel wouldn't have got what he was asking for. I'm glad he did."

With that we all went on our way to Synagogue.

"Have you guys been having some good fishing lately?" Shimon asked.

John kept silent, pouting about what Shimon had said.

"Yeah," I said. "Night before last we could hardly get it into the boat."

And with that we arrived at the Synagogue.

\*

That night Papa came in from the market and announced that we had been invited to Ezra's house for supper. I didn't really want to go, but the minyan had said it would be thus and so that was it. Mama had us all get on our nicest things and Papa insisted we wear our yarmulkes. He curled his fetlocks up special and combed out his beard, and got out a skin of his best wine.

We walked over to Samuel and Saul's house and knocked on their door.

"Shalom, Zebedee," Ezra said formally when he opened the door. He and Papa exchanged kisses on the cheek. Papa handed him the skin of wine.

"Welcome to my home," he said standing aside to let us all in.

"Hello, Salome," Daniyel, the boys' mother, said to Mama.

Mama smiled and gave her a hug.

This was all starting to bother me. I knew there was no bad blood between those two and my parents, but Ezra and his family seemed to always be so haughty, somehow above us fishermen. The friendliness being handed around here tonight seemed insincere, forced.

"Samuel, Saul," Ezra called, "you boys come in here."



They responded, though obviously not very happily.

“All of you shake hands,” Ezra said. “And apologize.”

“Do we have to, Papa?” Samuel protested.

“Unless you want more of what you got,” Ezra said.

“Okay,” Samuel said.

He extended his hand to me. I must say that I was no more willing to do all this than the other boys, but I knew that I would get the belt when we got home if I didn't willingly cooperate. I shook his hand. Then he and John shook, then me and Saul, then Saul and John.

“I'm sorry,” Samuel said dejectedly, hanging his head.

“I'm sorry,” I repeated. I held my head high, just as I knew Papa would want.

Then Saul and John both uttered half-felt apologies.

“Well,” Ezra said once all this was done, “come on in. I will pour the wine. Daniyel, is supper about ready?”

“Just a few more minutes,” Daniyel answered. “Salome, would you like to join me in the kitchen?”

Mama just nodded and the two of them went off to the back of the house.

“Bring some barley waters for the boys,” Ezra said to their retreating forms.

Ezra turned and went into the sitting room and Papa followed, us boys in tow. We all sat on cushions on the floor before a low table as Ezra poured the wine. Mama and Daniyel brought barley waters in tall mugs and handed them out.

“Boys,” Ezra said as he brought the wine to the table, “all Hebrews are brethren whether or not we agree with one another, or whether we even like one another. Some have one kind of job, some have another. Some have more money, some have less. We don't all have to be friends, or even associate with each other. But we *do* have to treat each other decently. We *do* have to get along. There is enough trouble in this world without us being at each other. Look what's going on around us. The Gentiles have invaded our land. The Romans took away our Kingdom. They allow us to have a king, but even he pays homage to Rome. We are not in much better shape now than we were in Egypt with the Pharaohs. The Romans have a governor in his fortress in our Holy

City, and his soldiers have free run of the place. Don't we have enemies enough, without being enemies of ourselves?"

He looked around at each of us in turn, not neglecting a long stare at both of his sons.

"And now," he went on after a moment, "the lot of you have embarrassed both your families before the congregation. This will stop, is that clear?"

We all just nodded.

Just then Daniyel came in.

"Supper is on the table," she said.

We all stood and went into the dining room.

The food was delicious, but I just couldn't really enjoy it. The atmosphere didn't seem very friendly even though Papa and Ezra had pleasant conversation and the two women smiled and nodded whenever they were addressed.

Finally it was over and we left to go back home. Nothing more was said about it all after that.

\*

It was just another typical week of yeshiva, studies of the Talmud and Torah, the same old boring stuff. Little or nothing more was said of the incident with Samuel, but I did notice, though, that the other boys seemed to look at me differently and to not want to cross me. And life went on.

The days past and it was time for us all to go out fishing again. That night the four of us met at the boat and rowed out a long ways. We wanted to be in deep water since we were working two nets. John and I threw our net in and let it settle. Shimon and Andrew tossed theirs in from the other side of the boat. After a bit John and I began to pull the ropes that would haul the net back, looping the outer edge of the net back up and over itself to trap any fish that happened to get caught up. I could tell by the easy way it pulled that there wasn't much in it.

"Light catch that time," John said.

"Well, let's pull it in and see what we got," I said. "Maybe it's too early yet for a good catch."

We pulled the net into the boat and there were only a few fish flouncing around in it. We dumped those into the bottom of the boat and cast the net again. Shimon and Andrew drew their net in with the same results. They cast their net back into the water.

“They’re all still laying on the bottom,” Shimon said. “The moon’ll come out in a while and then they’ll start swimming around.”

“May as well wait ‘til the moon comes up,” Andrew said. “No point working the nets if they’re just gonna come up empty.”

So we let the nets lay and settled down to wait. We reclined against the edges of the boat watching as the stars twinkled above. A falling star zipped across the sky out over the lake.

“I’d like to own my own boat someday,” Shimon said with a sigh.

“Yeah,” Andrew said wistfully. “You and me partners in our own fishing business.”

“Papa’s talking about buying another boat,” I said. “He might be willing to put you two on it if you’d like that.”

“Well,” Shimon said looking toward his brother, “it’d be a start.”

“Would he pay more than we’re getting now?” Andrew asked.

“I’m sure he would,” I answered. “He pays a portion of the catch to his other boats. I don’t know why it would be any different.”

“We’d have to work every night we’re not at yeshiva, though,” Andrew said thoughtfully, looking at Shimon.

“So?” Shimon asked. “Maybe if we had real jobs Papa wouldn’t expect so much from us at the inn.”

“Yeah,” said Andrew. “I hate serving tables and cleaning up after everybody leaves.”

“You’d think we were some kind of servants,” Shimon said looking at me. “Papa just wants us around to do the work he doesn’t want to do.”

“You shouldn’t talk about your papa that way,” John scolded. “Running an inn or any kind of business is a lot of work. I’m sure your papa just needs your help.”

“Well if he wasn’t so close-fisted with his money he could hire some help,” Shimon said.

Andrew gasped and said, "Shimon!"

"Well, it's true," Shimon said. "You'd think he was going to take it with him when he goes to be with the fathers."

"Shimon, that's enough!" Andrew scolded. "Don't talk about Papa that way. You're breaking the commandments."

Andrew was the older of the two and often took his brother to task for some slip of the lip or hasty speech. Shimon drew his lips tight and looked ruefully at his brother.

"Well," I said trying to get off an unpleasant subject, "I'll mention it to Papa tomorrow and see what he says."

"Mention what?" Shimon said looking puzzled.

"You being on the boat he's gonna buy," I said exasperated. "Remember?"

"Oh," Shimon said. "Yeah. Let us know. I think it would be a good idea."

We sat in silence for a while as the moon started to peek over the hilltops to the east.

Soon the great orange ball of the moon was reflected in the rippling water. A fish broke surface and splashed in the reflection.

"Well," John said, "looks like they're starting to move around down there."

"Yeah," Shimon replied. "Let's give it a little while longer then pull the nets in and see what we got."

"You know," I said as we laid there waiting, "one day Papa's gonna turn this whole business over to me. Maybe we could all be partners. We could buy more boats and maybe even open another fish market in town, or in Bethsaida."

"Yeah," Shimon piped up. "Maybe even in Jerusalem."

"Sure," I said derisively. "How could we manage a fish market all the way down there? And how would we get the fish to the market?"

"We could hire a manager to run it," Shimon said brusquely. "And we could have a boat on the Jordan just to run back and forth and take the fish to Jerusalem. There would be lots of business. They don't get a lot of fresh fish down there."

"Well, aren't we all just getting ambitious," Andrew said laughing. "You guys are some dreamers."

"Every good idea starts with a dream," Shimon said testily.

Fish started jumping out on the lake, ripples shattering the perfect ball of the moon reflected in its surface. For a moment no one spoke. I looked out on the water and watched the ripples cross the orange ball reflected there. Out of nowhere I recalled the rabbi saying to me at the minyan after I had coughed up the piece of weed, “There is something for you to learn in this. Figure out what it is and learn it well. If you don’t something worse may happen.”

I looked at the backs of my hands, scabs beginning to form over the cuts on my knuckles. I worked my fingers and felt the soreness and stiffness.

My reverie was broken sharply when Shimon said, “Well, let’s pull the nets in and see if we’ve got any fish yet.”

My memory of the minyan and any thoughts of what I was supposed to learn vanished as quickly as they came. Shimon and Andrew started pulling their net in and John and I did the same. This time the net was heavy. It seemed to me that it was heavier than normal for the first catch of the night. We really had to wrestle it into the boat. It was indeed quite a haul for the first catch. If the other net was this full we would have to call it quits just with this one haul.

Shimon laughed as he and Andrew struggled with theirs. And it was.

“Wow,” he said. “That’s as many fish as we usually get in a night!”

“Well,” I said, “nothing to do now but row back in and wait for the men to come get them in the morning.”

As we rowed it all just felt so right. I had visions of Shimon’s dream, the four of us big business men, boats all over the lake, shops in Capernaum, Bethsaida, Nazareth, Jerusalem. And it all felt right.

Then I remembered again what the rabbi had said. What was I supposed to learn? Was something worse coming?

\*

And so we spent the night in the boat sitting at the docks waiting for morning. We passed the time just talking about what might be some day, about the great fishing company we would form. We talked about how many boats we would have and how many men we would have to hire to man them all. We talked about having shops in Capernaum and Bethsaida and Nazareth and Jerusalem. Before light it started to turn

cold and a chill wind blew across the water. We bundled up under our heavy coats and dozed for a while under the light of the great full moon. About the time the sun was coming up other boats started to come in off the lake with their night's catch. We teased and joked with the men from the other boats about how easily we had gotten our entire take with one cast of the nets. They didn't believe us at first, but after great insistence on our part they were finally convinced. Then it was morning and the men started showing up from the various fish markets around to unload all their boats. We got ours unloaded and started for home. We had gotten about halfway to our house, Shimon and Andrew still with us, when we spotted Samuel and Saul a little way off coming down the street toward us.

"Let's cross the street," John said. "We don't want any more trouble with them."

"No!" I said impulsively. "I will walk on whatever side of the street I want."

"But Papa said for us to stay away from them," John argued. He tugged at my coat sleeve. "Come on, James."

"No," I said again.

Shimon and Andrew looked on as John and I argued. Then John let go of my sleeve and crossed to the other side of the street by himself. Shimon, Andrew and I just continued on our way. Now Samuel and his brother were getting closer, trying in vain to act as if we weren't there. I could see trepidation in Samuel's eyes.

We drew abreast of each other, Samuel continuing to try to pretend I wasn't there. I could see a cut on Samuel's lip and a big red knot was on his forehead. He had one eye almost swollen shut. *I did that*, I thought with a secret smile.

As we got close, on a sudden impulse, I lunged at him and shouted, acting like I was going to attack him. He dodged and flinched, throwing his arms up over his head and cringing. I don't know why I did it. I just felt like I wanted to give him back some of what he had been dishing out. And it felt good to see him flinch.

Shimon laughed. Andrew looked at me with eyes wide and mouth hanging open. Shimon laughed some more as Samuel and Saul ran past us, looking back fearfully to see if we were coming after them. Shimon's laughter was contagious. I gave out with a great guffaw of my own.

"That was great!" Shimon said. "Did you see the way you scared him, James?"

“Yeah,” I said with a chuckle. “You would have thought the devil himself was after him.”

“James!” John shouted as he came running back from across the street. “You shouldn’t have done that!”

“Oh, come on, John,” Shimon said. “He was just giving Samuel what he deserves.”

“You stay out of this,” John said looking at Shimon then back at me. “If Papa finds out about that you’ll be in big trouble.”

“Well,” I said looking meaningfully at John, “Papa’s not going to find out, is he?”

John looked hard at me for a moment, then said, “I’m not gonna tell him. But don’t be surprised if he hears about it anyway.”

Then John turned and walked on up the street by himself.

\*

And, of course, Papa did find out. I never knew if that big sissy Samuel went crying to his father or what, but that afternoon when Papa came home from the shop he was red with anger.

John and I had gotten home and eaten some breakfast then we went to bed. Some time later we were jolted awake by the door being slammed open and Papa bursting into the room shouting.

“James! Get out of that bed and get dressed. I will be waiting for you out back.”

He stalked out of the room.

This time Mama didn’t come to my rescue. And I didn’t expect her to. I walked into the back garden with great fear in my heart but with my head held high. That’s how Papa would want it. He had always taught us that a man owns up to what he has done, not with shame and guilt but with dignity and honesty. I knew what I had done. I knew I deserved what I was going to get. So I walked over to the post and took a firm hold.

“You know what this is for, don’t you?” Papa said as he wrapped the belt around his hand.

I just nodded.

“I can’t hear you,” Papa said.

“Yes, Papa,” I replied. “I know what this is for.”

And he let me have it. Five good lashes across the backside. His aim was flawless. He never hit us above the waist or below the knees. Every blow struck a different spot somewhere in between. As he was delivering the stripes he spoke.

“I am angry with what you have done,” he said before the first blow. Whack! I held onto the post with all my might.

“But I am not whipping you because I am angry.” Whack!

“I am whipping you because I love you and want you to learn something.” Whack!

“I want you to learn to solve your problems as Yahweh would want you to.” Whack!

“You already know the things I have taught. I want you to apply them in your life.” Whack!

I hadn't let out a yelp or a whimper. Even after it was done I held onto the post. My arm muscles ached with the effort. My fingers turned white. The backs of my legs were on fire. I knew that if I let go of the post I would cry. And I would not let myself cry. Papa walked over to the bench under the old fig tree and sat. He watched me for a moment.

“Come over here, Son,” he said.

I let go of the post and turned toward him. He looked at me with all the love and compassion of a father. I could see the hurt in his eyes. I walked over and stood beside him. I dared not utter a sound or I would indeed start crying.

“Sit beside me,” Papa said. “If you can.” He smiled.

I sat. The backs of my legs burned, but I sat there beside my Papa, proud and brave.

“James,” Papa began hesitantly, “what happened the other day at the lake scared me and Mama. We thought we were going to lose you. What happened to John scared us. Mama and I learned something through that. Life is short, Son, and precious. We learned that we should cherish every day, every moment of our lives, and yours. Any one of us could be gone in an instant. It made us want to be closer to each other and to Yahweh. And we have been. We are spending more special time together with Him.”



He held back tears. I had never seen Papa so close to crying before. He was always so strong, so determined. If pride hadn't been a sin I would have thought of him as proud.

"What you have been doing the last couple of days scares us," he said. He looked into the sky, then at the ground before him.

"The rabbi told you that what had happened was for a reason," he went on after a moment. "He said that Yahweh has some great plan for you. I want you to look at yourself the last few days and ask yourself if Yahweh would use a brawler in His Plan. The rabbi also said that if you don't learn whatever it is that Yahweh wants you to learn something worse may happen."

He was barely holding himself together now.

"I, your mama and I, don't want anything worse to happen," he said, his voice cracking. "Son, don't let the serpent lead you down a path you will regret."

He looked hard into my face, then stood and went inside.

I sat and pondered the things Papa had said. I looked at the backs of my hands. I clenched and unclenched my fists, working the knuckles. The bruises were just about gone but there were still scabs over the little cuts. I remembered the feel of the impact as I pounded Samuel's face. I heard the sound of his head smacking on the paving stones. I had really laid into him. I couldn't hold back a smile. He had deserved it. Shimon said so. And when I had jumped at Samuel on the street it had felt good to put a good scare into him. I was big. I was strong. Now I was the one to be feared. I didn't know if Yahweh had a plan for me or not. I wasn't even sure He knew I existed. But Samuel knew. And to me, that was what mattered.

## IV

The days passed and life went on. The four of us fished together and when we weren't working or at yeshiva we walked on the lakeshore and dreamed of days to come. Sometimes we would go out on the boat just to be out, even if we weren't fishing. On Sabbaths we went to Synagogue with our families, but even then we managed to spend lots of time together, just the four of us.

We saw Samuel and Saul occasionally, but there were no more incidents. They stayed away from us and we stayed away from them. Word had gotten around about what had happened and I began to notice a different kind of respect from the other boys around town. Some of them wanted to be my friend. Some just talked to me differently. And much as I was never one to enjoy being the focus of attention, this somehow felt good. Shimon even remarked on it from time to time.

"James," he would say, "you are the big man around town now. I hear things some of the guys say about you."

I would just look at him with raised eyebrows.

And he would say, "They say you are one to be watched out for."

And he would throw his arm around my shoulder and we would swagger down the street. John and Andrew, of course, would give us disapproving looks.

Once John even said, "Papa's gonna hear this talk and you'll be in trouble again."

"For what?" I asked in feigned innocence. "I haven't done anything. Papa always says that what people say is just what people say and we shouldn't pay it any mind. So why should I be in trouble for what people say?"

John just looked at me and shook his head.

Papa did buy another boat and he put Shimon and Andrew on it, to their great pleasure. It was the first time they had been out by themselves; they had always gone out with me and John. Shimon managed the boat well and they brought in a good catch almost every night. We usually went out together, their boat and ours, so we fished fairly close to one another. We would shout across the water to each other, sometimes talking about where the good fishing was, other times just talking to pass the time 'til the fish started moving.

And then I turned thirteen and I became a *bar mitzvah*, or “son of the commandment”. The day of my thirteenth year was not treated different from any other day except that Papa sat me down before the rest of the family and had a talk with me.

“James,” he said, “today you become a bar mitzvah.”

Mama and John looked on as Papa spoke. Mama was beaming. I squirmed under their scrutiny.

“Today,” Papa went on, “you become responsible for your own behavior. You have been raised in the Torah and the Talmud and you know what is right and what is not. You know how to live a life pleasing to Yahweh and to me and your mama. It is expected now that you will take on that responsibility. You are now a man, no longer a boy. I hear some of the talk that goes around about you. I hope you don’t let it go to your head. On the Sabbath you will be asked to go before the congregation and read from the Torah and to pronounce a blessing.”

Mama smiled real big at me when Papa said that.

“You will choose your own reading,” Papa went on. “Then you will be a member of the congregation. You will be entitled to take part in the minyan. You will be allowed to read before the congregation on Sabbaths. People younger than you will begin to look upon you as an elder, an example. All these things are not rights. They are responsibilities to be taken seriously. You are becoming a man. Lately you have discovered some things about yourself and about becoming a man. That is good. Now you have to discover the difference between becoming a man and becoming a man of God, a man of Yahweh. I have taught you all I can teach. Now you must learn on your own.”

Then Papa closed his eyes and raised his hands above my head.

“Baruch Ha’Shem,” he recited, “please guide and protect this boy, this young man, as You lead him into the path You have for him. As David said in the Psalm, ‘Why do you boast in mischief, oh mighty man? The goodness of Yahweh endures forever. Your tongue devises mischief, like a sharp razor, working deceitfully. The tongue loves evil more than good, and lying rather than to speak righteousness.’”

“Please help James now, Oh Lord, to learn the difference, to control his tongue, and to discern good behavior from that which You would disdain. Selah.”

I had known this day would come. As it is with all Hebrew boys when they reach their thirteenth year, I was now considered a man within the Jewish community. What I did with that was up to me. I wanted to be the kind of man my papa wanted me to be. At the same time, though, I wanted to cut my own path, to be whatever I decided at the moment. I wanted to continue to go about with my friends, Shimon and Andrew and John. I wanted to be a boy just like them and play and scuffle and joke around. I didn't want to be all seriousness and business. And the Torah and Talmud? Did that mean anything more now than it had yesterday? No. What I wanted right at this moment was to get outside with my brother and go see what mischief we could get into with Shimon and Andrew. I squirmed some more.

"Alright," Papa said laughing. "I guess that's enough seriousness for now. I can see you want to get out of here. Consider these things. Don't forget. And be ready to read on the Sabbath. Try to pick out something meaningful or significant."

He could see me about to burst.

"Okay, get out of here," he said pushing at me and laughing.

I jumped up and ran out of the house, John right on my heels.

"Let's go find Shimon and Andrew." I said. "Let's go play army or something."

We had this game we would play sometimes. We would go out into the desert hills north of town and pretend to be Roman soldiers. We would stalk about through the low hills with whatever other friends we could round up, me pretending to be Mark Antony with John as my faithful companion and Shimon and Andrew pretending to be Gaius Cassius and his army. We would have a protracted battle among the hills, throwing stones and dirt clods at one another and using sticks for swords and spears. (Of course, we didn't want to really hurt each other so we didn't hurl the stones. We would just lob them high in the air, but they would still deliver quite a smack when they hit.) We had fashioned shields from goatskins and curved staves we cut from some of the small trees. I even had a pretty good sword I had carved from a dead tree branch. Whichever general got hit or stabbed first would lose the battle. Sometimes our battles would last for hours. On this day I would make sure that I won!

John sustained a minor wound to the shoulder before it was all done, but Andrew took a blow to the head and Shimon got one right in the chest. It was a definite victory

for me. Mark Antony would not die today! When it was all over we all laughed and joked while we saw to one another's wounds, then we all headed on home to get there in time for supper. Just another day in the life of a fisherman's sons. And that night we fished.

It was only two days before the Sabbath. I had to start getting a reading and a blessing ready. I had never done anything like this before. The thought of standing up there before the entire congregation filled me with dread. I was just simple me, son of Zebedee the fisherman. Who was I to read Torah in Synagogue? And to pronounce a blessing?

We had no copies of Scripture at home so I had to spend time at the synagogue studying. The first day I was there I met the rabbi who had taken me to the priest that one day to be anointed.

"James bar Zebedee!" he exclaimed. "How have you been? I heard you had recovered completely. Baruch Ha'Shem. You look in the best of health."

"Thank you, rabbi," I said. "I am doing just fine."

"What brings you to the synagogue all by yourself today?" he asked.

"I have to prepare for a reading on the Sabbath," I explained. "We don't have any scriptures at home so I had to come down here to study."

"I heard that you are now bar mitzvah," the rabbi said. "Congratulations. Well, I will leave you to your studies, then. You know where to find all the scrolls?"

"Right up there?" I asked pointing up toward the platform at the front of the sanctuary.

"Yes," he said. "Just help yourself. Please remember to put everything back where you found it when you're done."

"Thank you, rabbi," I said again. He went on his way and I climbed up on the platform to look over the racks of scrolls. I had never been up there before. I turned and looked out over the sanctuary. I tried to imagine what it would be like on the Sabbath when I had to stand up there with the whole congregation out there watching me. I didn't look forward to it. I tried to force the thought out of my mind and focus on the task at hand. I turned back to the racks of scrolls. Where to begin? I knew it would have to be from the Torah, so that meant the writings of Moses. That narrowed it down some.

It had to be meaningful, either to what was happening in my life at the time or to something going on in the community or the congregation. I didn't know much about what was going on in the community or the congregation so it would have to relate to me somehow. Everyone in Capernaum knew by now what had happened between me and Samuel. Maybe I could find something that would relate to that. But what in the writings of Moses would deal with the fight between two boys?

And right away I knew what I would read. It wasn't exactly the same, but it was close enough. And there was a lesson to be learned in it. Did I really want to do this? Did it matter whether I wanted to or not? If I did it would mean something about me would have to change. Was I willing to change it?

I pulled out the appropriate scrolls and started to read.

\*

On the following Sabbath Papa roused us out of bed as soon as the sun was up, as usual. We washed up and dressed then went downstairs for a light Sabbath breakfast. We all put on our cloaks and coats against the morning chill, then Papa, John and I donned our *yarmulkes*, or skullcaps. I noticed Papa had put a little extra curl in his fetlocks, which hung down almost to his shoulders. This day was as special for him as it was for me.

The Sabbath services were the same as every other week; the call to worship, the incense, the morning prayers, the blessings by the rabbis. Then there was the weekly teaching and the interpretation of Scripture read by the priest. I sat through it all with my typical sense of boredom and routine. But throughout the morning I had a sense of dread. I didn't want to stand up there in front of all those people and read Scripture. Then came a mid-morning break when we all went out into the courtyard to stretch and visit. My stomach felt a little queasy at the thought of what I would be doing in just a few minutes. I wanted to run out of the place as fast as I could.

After a while a rabbi came out to announce that the service was resuming.

"Today," said one of the rabbis once we were all back in our places, "we have a special event. One of our young men has become a son of the commandment. He will be giving us a reading and an interpretation of Torah and then he will pronounce a blessing

over the congregation. James bar Zebedee, son of Zebedee bar Yakov, will you please come up now and give us your reading?”

I quaked. I thought that if I stood I would surely collapse on the spot. When I did stand my knees felt weak. My insides quivered. Then Papa looked at me. I knew what he would expect. I steeled myself, held my head high and my shoulders square and walked to the front of the sanctuary. I mounted the platform and turned to face the people. Very deliberately I sought out the faces of Shimon and Andrew. Then I found Samuel and Saul sitting next to their father. I turned and pulled two scrolls from the rack.

Mustering every bit of courage I had I did my best to imitate what I had so many times seen the rabbis do. I unfurled the first scroll. And I read.

“And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was a grown man, that he went out to his brethren and looked upon their burdens.”

My voice quavered. I swallowed.

“And he saw an Egyptian beating one of the Hebrews, one of his brethren. And he looked this way and that and when he saw that no one was watching he slew the Egyptian and buried him in the sand.”

I steadied myself and went on.

“And when he went out the second day two men of the Hebrews fought with each other. He said to them, ‘Why are you fighting?’ And one of the men said, ‘Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Just yesterday you killed that Egyptian and hid the body.’

“And Moses was afraid and said to himself, ‘Surely this thing is known.’ And Moses fled and lived in the land of Midian.”

By now I was feeling quite courageous. I rolled up the scroll and placed it back in the rack. Then I unrolled the second scroll.

“In the Law we read where Yahweh says, ‘You will not hate your brother in your heart. You shall in no way rebuke your neighbor, and not sin against him. You will not avenge nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, you will love your neighbor as you love yourself.’”

I looked up from the scroll.

“When we fight among ourselves,” I went on, “we are as much committing sin as Moses did when he killed the Egyptian. The Egyptian deserved it, but vengeance is not ours to give. It is the Lord’s. We are to love our neighbor as ourselves. Nothing is hidden from the eyes of Yahweh. As it says in another place, ‘The eyes of the Lord are everywhere, beholding the evil and the good.’ He sees what each of us does. If we sin against one another we sin against Him and His Law.”

Then I raised my hands to cover the congregation, just as Papa had done when he said his blessing over me, and I chanted my blessing over the people.

“Blessed are you, Lord, our God, sovereign of the universe,  
Who separates between sacred and secular,  
Between light and darkness,  
Between Israel and the nations,  
Between the seventh day and the six days of labor.

“Blessed are You, Lord,  
Who separates between sacred and secular.  
Oh, please, Baruch Adonai, help me to know the sacred and the secular,  
That I may never confuse the two.  
Selah.”

And the entire congregation said, “Selah.”

I looked out among the people until I spotted Mama and Papa. Mama had tears flowing freely down her cheeks and Papa was grinning from ear to ear. He nodded once at me approvingly.

\*

“Do you know what you did in there?” Shimon asked in disbelief, throwing his hands into the air. “You as much as admitted guilt over that business with Samuel. He’s a thug. He deserved everything you gave him!”



John and Andrew stood beside me and Shimon outside the synagogue after the services were ended.

“You didn’t listen to the rest of the scripture, did you?” I asked shaking my head.

“I only heard you saying you shouldn’t have done what you did,” Shimon retorted.

“I shouldn’t have,” I said, my voice elevated. “It’s right there in Torah. The Lord says, ‘Vengeance is Mine, and recompense. Their foot will slide in time, for the day of their calamity is at hand. The Lord will judge his people.’”

John and Andrew looked back and forth from one to the other of us as we spouted at each other.

“Well, when did you become a student of Torah?” Shimon shot back hotly. “Are you practicing to become a rabbi, or something?”

“No,” I said. “I just started reading it. It’s all there in the scrolls. I just never applied it to my life before.”

“Do you know how that makes the rest of us look?” Shimon tossed his hands in the air again. “You know we all have our fights and scuffles. You’re going to make us all look like a bunch of ruffians, like we never read the scriptures or something.”

“Well, do you?” I asked.

“Do you?” he retorted.

“No,” I admitted. “But that is going to change.”

“Oh, well don’t go getting all high and mighty now just because you’re a ‘bar mitzvah’,” Shimon said making a face. “One day doesn’t change who you are, what you’ve done.”

“No, it doesn’t,” I agreed, “but *I* can change what I do in the future. And, yes, I am now a bar mitzvah and that has to mean something. I don’t expect you to understand it. I don’t even understand it myself. But it does mean something.”

Just then Papa laid his hand on my shoulder. I hadn’t even become aware of him coming over and listening to our quarrel.

“Let’s go, Son,” he said. “Time to get home. You boys all have some fishing to do soon as the sun goes down. I want some full nets by morning.”

## V

We got home just as the sun was setting. Mama went off into the kitchen to start supper and John and I started up to our room to get into our work clothes. As I started up the stairs Papa called to me.

“James, come out back with me for a minute,” he said. He put his arm around my shoulder and led the way out to the bench under the big old fig tree. He sat and I sat beside him.

“What you did today in Synagogue was really something,” he said.

I didn’t know anything to say so I just looked at him waiting for him to go on.

“You surprised me and everybody there,” he said after a moment. “I wouldn’t have expected something like that from you.”

Then he looked me straight in the eye.

“Did you mean the words you said?” he asked, his gaze never wavering.

“Yes, Papa,” I said slowly, meeting his gaze. “I’ve been thinking about the things you said the other day and your blessing over me. And when I was reading the Scriptures I knew what Yahweh wants of me. He doesn’t want me beating people up. Even if I think they deserve it. If I bully someone else, then I am no different from Samuel. The word ‘Hebrew’ means to be different. It means ‘someone who has crossed over’, doesn’t it?”

Papa just nodded.

“I am a Hebrew,” I said with conviction. “I want to ‘cross over’ to a different kind of life than what I see in other people.”

“And just what does that mean?” Papa asked.

“I don’t know,” I said shrugging. Suddenly I felt like a kid again. I just wanted to go fishing with my brother and Shimon and Andrew. “I guess it just means don’t be like everybody else. Do something different.”

I squirmed in my seat. Papa laughed.

“Well,” he said still laughing, “I guess that’s good enough for now. You will figure it out. Just, when you want to do like everybody else does, do something different.”

He patted me on the shoulder and stood and went inside, leaving me sitting there to think about what I had said. After a bit I went in to get ready for work.

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So we fished that night, and had quite a good catch, Peter and Andrew in their boat and me and John in ours. Our nets were full before midnight and we slept the rest of the night. Soon as the sun was up we headed back to the docks to unload our haul.

“Hey,” Shimon shouted from their boat as we were rowing in, “you guys want to go to the basin today?”

Some years back we had discovered a huge hollowed out place in the ground and called it the basin. It was just off the road going toward Bethsaida, about a Sabbath day’s walk from Capernaum. It did indeed resemble a big wash basin, about a furlong across and half a furlong deep. It was evenly rounded around the top and smooth at the bottom. It was a great place to play war or just go exploring. There were boulders strewn around the bottom and along one side there was a cave in the cliff large enough for us to go into and hide out from one another.

“Yeah!” I shouted back. Then I said in a teasing tone, “We can play war again. Maybe this time you can win.”

“I will beat you soundly,” Shimon said throwing out his chest, “and this will be the day Mark Antony dies at the hands of his own men rather than go down in defeat.”

“We’ll see,” I said. “We’ll come get you after breakfast.”

On the way home I got a sudden idea. As John and I walked along, instead of going straight home I turned up one of the side streets.

“Where you goin’?” John asked following along.

“You’ll see,” I said.

John looked at me like I had lost my senses.

“We’re suppose to go straight home,” he said. “Mama’ll worry if we’re not there soon.”

“We won’t be long,” I said. “Mama won’t have time to worry.”

Then we turned up the street Samuel and Saul lived on.

“What are you doing?” John asked more firmly.

“We’re going to ask Samuel and Saul if they would like to go to the basin with us,” I said matter-of-factly.

John’s eyes went wide.

“Are you nuts?” he asked in shock. “You beat Samuel up and now you want them to play with us?”

“I am doing something different,” I replied.

John looked at me expecting a better explanation than that. I gave none. We entered the gate and I sauntered up to the door and knocked. Samuel’s papa answered the door.

He stood there a moment looking at me with raised eyebrows. I waited for him to speak.

“Well,” he said eyeing me suspiciously, “what do you want?”

“We want to know if Samuel and Saul would like to come play with us,” I said boldly. I held my head up and my shoulders square.

“You want what?” he asked in surprise.

“We’re going to the basin to play after breakfast,” I answered, “and I want to know if Samuel and Saul would like to come.”

I just assumed everyone knew about the basin.

“Is this some kind of trick to get them out where you can beat on them again?” Ezra asked.

“No,” I said. Then I mustered all the courage I had. This was the hardest thing I had ever done.

“I’m sorry about the other day,” I said. “I shouldn’t have done that. Samuel said things he shouldn’t have said, but I shouldn’t have hit him. I want it to stop here.”

Ezra looked at me skeptically. After a moment he called out without taking his eyes off me, “Samuel, Saul, come here.”

The two boys came trotting in from the back of the house. When they saw me standing there they both froze.

“James and his brother want to know if you would like to go play with them today,” Ezra said.

Samuel’s eyes went wide and Saul’s jaw dropped.

“Hi, guys,” I said amiably. “We’re going to the basin after breakfast. You want to come?”

Samuel looked at his papa then back at me. Then he frowned.

“Is this a trick?” he asked.

“No,” I said. “I want us to stop fighting and be friends.”

Samuel looked back at his papa. Ezra looked at him and shrugged.

“It’s up to you, Son,” he said.

“Okay,” Samuel said uncertainly looking at his brother. Saul just shrugged.

“I guess so,” Samuel said. “We haven’t eaten yet.”

“That’s okay,” I said. “Neither have we. Just come over to our house after you eat and we’ll go from there.”

“Where is this ‘basin’?” Ezra asked.

“On the road to Bethsaida,” I said. “About a Sabbath day’s walk. It’s not far.”

“Do you boys know about it?” he said to Samuel.

“I know where it is,” Saul said. “It’s a fun place to play.”

“Have you been there before?” Ezra asked.

“I’ve been there,” Samuel said. “Can we go, Papa?”

“I guess so,” Ezra answered. “Just be careful not to get hurt. Watch out for scorpions.”

“Okay!” Samuel said with a cautious smile. Then to me he said. “We’ll see you right after breakfast.”

I said goodbye to Samuel’s papa and John and I turned and left the house. John said nothing to me the rest of the way home.

We got to our house and went inside. Mama was in the kitchen fixing breakfast and the aroma set my stomach growling.

“Hi, Mama,” I said closing the door behind me. “Is breakfast about ready? I’m starving.”

“It’ll be on the table soon as you get your clothes changed,” she said.

We both rushed up and got changed then hurried down to the table.

“What has you both in such a rush today?” Mama asked with a chuckle.

“We’re going to the basin,” John said shoveling a spoonful of mush into his mouth. “And Samuel and Saul are going with us.”

“What?” Mama said in surprise.

“I decided to do something different,” I said. “Papa said I should do something different, and so I am.”

“Well,” Mama said with raised eyebrows as she put a pot of honey on the table. “What do Samuel and Saul think about this?”

“They think James is nuts,” John said, “and so do I.”

“Why would you think your brother is nuts?” Mama asked.

“It just seems like a nutty thing to do,” John answered spooning honey onto his mush. “You beat someone up one day then a couple days later you decide to be friends? Just sounds nutty to me.”

“It sounds like the right thing to do, if you ask me,” Mama said. “I think your Papa would think so, too.”

And we finished our breakfast, grabbed our coats, and left the house. As soon as we got to the gate we spied Samuel and Saul walking down the street toward us. I waved and they waved back.

“Shimon and Andrew are going with us,” I said as we all started down the street together. “We’re gonna have a great time today. We’ll play war. Samuel, you can be in my army and Saul you can be in Andrew’s. I’m Mark Antony and Andrew is Gaius Cassius.”

We walked along for a while then I spoke up again.

“Samuel,” I said looking at the other boy, “the other day you said some bad things about us and our mother. That can’t happen again.”

“It won’t,” he said. Then hesitantly he added, “Papa gave me a good beating for that. He told me not ever to say anything bad about someone’s mother.”

“Well,” I said laughing, “if it makes you feel any better I got a good one, too.”

Samuel laughed and we went on toward Shimon and Andrew’s house.

They were both outside waiting for us when we arrived.

“What the...?” Shimon said as we walked up.

“What’re they doing here?” he asked pointing at Samuel and Saul.

“They’re going with us,” I said. “We’re friends now.”

“Well, I’m not going if *they* are,” Shimon retorted making a face.

“Yes, you are, Shimon,” I said sternly. “The fighting has to stop. Now, get your stuff and let’s go.”

All the while Andrew looked at me with awe. His mouth hung open and his eyes were wide. Shimon glanced at his brother, who just shrugged and said, “You heard what he said.”

Shimon picked up his spear and shield and we all marched down the street on our way to the basin.

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Well, needless to say it got around in the community that we were all now friends. The boys around all starting calling us “tough guys” and pretty much staying away from us. Often we would be walking down the street together, either going to or coming from yeshiva or on our way to the docks or out to the basin, and people would cross the street when they saw us coming. I was the biggest of the bunch, and all this kind of went to my head. I started to swagger and actually think I was tough. I sometimes remembered the fight with Samuel and the soreness afterward with a sense of bravado. Even the whipping. It wasn’t long before what the rabbi had said to me on the day of my healing was forgotten, along with the things I had read at my bar mitzvah Sabbath.

Then one day on the street a kid about my size met us on the sidewalk. He didn’t cross to the other side. He didn’t make any effort to get out of our way as we sauntered along. In fact, as we approached he stopped walking and stood in the middle of the sidewalk right in our way. We walked right up to him and I stopped just before I actually bumped into him.

“You’re James bar Zebedee, the *fishmonger’s* son, aren’t you?” he said with a sneer.

“I am,” I said. I felt my temper flaring. I thought, *Do something different.*

“I hear you think you’re pretty tough,” the other kid said.

John said, “Come on, James. Forget it. Let’s go.”

He took hold of my arm and tried to steer me around the other kid.

I thought, *Do something different.*

“Well, I don’t think you’re so tough,” the other kid sneered. He pushed me. With both hands he pushed me in the chest and I reeled backward. He laughed.

“How tough are you, *fishmonger*?” he said as I regained my balance.

Before I knew what I was doing I was on top of him. I got my left arm around his neck and smashed at his face with my right fist. He struggled to get free but my grip was merciless. I struck at his face again and we both went down in a pile. My left elbow struck the paving stones with the weight of both of us on it. The other kid tried to fight back, but I got my left hand free and sat on his chest pounding at his face and head with both fists now.

Andrew and John both got me by the shoulders and managed to pull me off him. The other kid just laid there, blood oozing from cuts on his face. His head lolled to one side and his eyes closed slowly. I was dazed. I didn’t know what to do. I was shaking and breathing hard.

“We better get out of here,” Shimon said looking around in a panic. He grabbed my arm and started pulling.

I looked around to see if any other people were around. I didn’t see anyone but the other guys. And the kid laying on the sidewalk.

“We can’t run away,” Andrew said. “He needs help. We have to do something.”

I shook my head trying to clear the fog. I looked at my hands. They were trembling uncontrollably. They were cut and bleeding. I wiped at my face and blood showed on the back of my hand. Somehow he had hit me in the face and I hadn’t even known it. My left elbow was in agony.

Andrew knelt beside the kid.

“What have you done?” John shouted.

“We have to get out of here,” Shimon said. “We’re gonna be in real trouble.”

Samuel and Saul looked at me dumbfounded.

“Not us,” Samuel said. “We didn’t do anything.”

I felt confused.

And then I remembered the rabbi saying, “Something worse may happen.”

“Hey, wake up,” Andrew was saying to the kid laying there. The kid didn’t respond. Andrew shook him by the shoulders.



“You’ve killed him!” Shimon said.

“He’s not dead,” Andrew said. “He’s breathing.”

A couple of men came walking down the street. They noticed the bunch of us stranding there around this kid on the ground. They started running toward us.

“What’s the matter?” one of them asked with a frown. “Do you need help? Is he okay?”

Shimon took off at a dead run in the other direction. Samuel and Saul followed him.

“Hey, you kids come back here,” the other man shouted.

The first man knelt beside Andrew and leaned over the other kid.

“What happened here?” he asked as he put his hand over the kid’s heart.

“They got in a fight,” Andrew said.

“Who did this?” the second man asked accusingly.

“He did,” Andrew said pointing at me.

I wanted to run. My feet wouldn’t move. My elbow screamed in pain.

“His heart’s beating and he’s breathing,” the first man said. “We better get him to the physician.”

By now other people started to gather around.

“What happened here?” someone asked incredulously.

“Who did this?” someone else asked.

My head swam. My elbow was on fire.

“He did,” the man kneeling beside the kid on the ground said and pointed at me.

My feet finally responded and I started backing away. I turned to run.

“Grab him!” someone shouted.

Several of the men got their arms around me.

“Someone help me get this boy up and carry him to the physician,” said the kneeling man.

A couple of the men helped him and they started carrying him down the street. I was dragged along with them.

“Who is this kid?” one of the men asked Andrew.

“I don’t know,” Andrew replied. “We were just walking along and he came up and started pushing James. Then James started hitting him.”

“Does anyone know who he is or where he lives?” the man asked looking around the group.

“He’s Daveed ben Yacob,” someone said, “son of Yacob the farmer in Chorazin.”

“Do you know where he lives?” the man asked.

“Yeah,” came the answer. “I’m a friend of Yacob.”

“Then go get him,” the man said. “Tell him he better get here quick.”

The other man took off at a run.

“Why did you do this to him?” asked one of the men dragging me along.

I looked at him dazed and shook my head.

“He pushed me,” was all I could say.

“You didn’t have to beat him to death!” he shot back.

“I didn’t mean to,” I stammered. “I didn’t mean to hurt him.”

“Who are you?” another of the men asked me.

“James,” I sputtered. “James bar Zebedee.”

“Well, James bar Zebedee,” said the man, “you better hope he doesn’t die.”

“I know who you are,” someone else said. “Your papa Zebedee was just before the minyan for a fight you had with Ezra’s boy.”

I looked at him dumbly.

“You just can’t stay out of trouble, can you?” he said.

My fists ached and my elbow burned so badly it made me limp. My head pounded.

“You just bar mitzvahed, didn’t you?”

I couldn’t even respond to that.

“Well, now it’s not your papa who answers for this,” he said waving a hand at the kid they were carrying. “You have to pay your own penalty now.”

We made it up to the physician’s office and one of the men pounded on the door then threw it open. The other men managed to get the kid into the office as the physician came in from the back room.

“What’s happened?” he asked hastily as he cleared a place on the table. “Put him here.”

“That boy there beat him up,” said one of the men carrying him. He nodded toward me. The other men still held me tightly.

“James,” the physician said looking at me in dismay. “What happened?”

He turned and began examining the kid.

“He pushed me,” I said. I felt stupid. That was all I seemed to be able to say.

“So you beat him like this?” the physician said shocked.

“Give me some room here,” he said to the other men.

He bent over the kid’s head and started touching his face. Then he felt through his hair and the back of his head. The kid started to moan. He moved his head to the side.

“Be still,” the physician said soothingly. “I’m a physician. You’re going to be okay.”

The kid opened his eyes and looked at the physician. He blinked as if he couldn’t focus.

“Can you hear me?” the physician asked.

The kid just stared up at him and blinked.

“What’s your name?” the physician said.

The kid didn’t speak; he just stared at the physician.

“Can you hear me?” the physician asked more slowly.

Sill the kid laid there not saying a word.

“His name’s Daveed,” one of the men said.

“Daveed,” the physician said, “do you know where you are?”

The kid started to mumble something unintelligible. He tried to wipe at his face but the physician held his hand down.

“Don’t move,” the physician said. “I have to examine you to see how badly you’re hurt. Do you know what happened?”

“He hit me,” the kid said slowly. “He just started hitting me and wouldn’t stop.”

“What’s your name?” the physician asked.

“Daveed,” the kid slurred. “Daveed ben Yacob.”

“Who is your papa?”

“Yacob ben Ibrihim. He’s a farmer.”

“Where do you live?” the physician asked as he examined the kid’s face and felt around the cuts.

“Ouch,” the kid mumbled. “That hurts.”

“I have to touch them to see if anything’s broken,” the physician said gently. “So where do you live?”

“Just outside Chorazin,” Daveed answered slowly. “On the road to Capernaum.”

The door burst open and my papa stormed in. The room was crowded but the men seemed to know who he was and quickly made room. They let go of me and stepped back as Papa forced his way in.

“What have you done now?” he shouted at me.

He looked at Daveed laying on the table and his mouth dropped open.

“Is he alive?” he asked the physician.

“Yes,” came the answer, “just barely. I don’t think anything’s broken. He’ll probably be okay, but I have to check him over some more.”

“Baruch Ha’Shem,” Papa said. He grabbed me roughly by the collar. “I am going to see you get the worst punishment for this that I can.”

Then turning to the other men he said, “Did any of you see what happened?”

They all just shook their heads.

“I saw it,” Andrew said.

“Well?” Papa asked gruffly looking at Andrew.

“That kid,” Andrew said pointing to Daveed, “came up and starting pushing James. He almost knocked James down. Then James just lost it. He started beating on him and wouldn’t stop until me and John pulled him off.”

Papa turned to John.

“Is that what happened?” he asked hotly.

John only nodded.

Papa turned back to the physician and said, “Let me know how he does.”

Then he dragged me out of the office with John following along.

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“He’s your problem now!” Papa shouted as he pushed me through the door into the sanctuary.

“What’s the matter, Zebedee?” the rabbi asked as Papa stormed into the building.

“He’s an adult now,” Papa said loudly. “I can’t do anything with him. I want the minyan to deal with him however they see fit.”

“What happened?” the rabbi asked looking confused.

“He beat up another boy,” Papa said roughly. “He almost killed the kid. I want something done with him before he does kill somebody!”

“James,” the rabbi said looking at me, “you tell me what happened.”

“Papa’s right,” I said. “This kid named Daveed started pushing me and I just got so mad! I didn’t even know what I was doing. I just started hitting him and I couldn’t stop.”

“John,” the rabbi said to my brother, “is that what happened?”

“Yes, rabbi,” was all John said.

“Didn’t you try to stop him?” the rabbi asked.

“I was just so shocked I couldn’t do anything at first,” John said. “Then me and Andrew both got hold of James’ arms and pulled him off the kid. He scared me.”

“James,” the rabbi said looking back to me, “you admit you did this thing?”

“Yes,” was all I could say. I hung my head.

“Hold your head up, boy!” Papa exclaimed. “Own up to what you have done!”

I snapped my head up and looked the rabbi squarely in the eye.

“Did the other boy do anything to you besides push you?” the rabbi asked.

“No,” I said.

The rabbi stood there a moment as if deciding what to do next.

“I don’t see any other choice than to take you before the minyan and have them pronounce judgement,” he said.

He looked to Papa.

“He’s a grown man,” Papa said. “He has to pay the penalty for his own actions.”

“And where is Daveed now?” the rabbi asked.

“He’s at the physician’s,” Papa said. “He’s looking at the kid now to see how bad he’s hurt.”

“You three go on home,” the rabbi said. “I’ll go see the physician and then I will tell the minyan all about it. Come back about noon tomorrow and they’ll have a judgement by then.”

We walked home in silence. We got to the house and Papa opened the door and went inside. Then John went in and I started to follow him.

“Not you!” Papa said and he pushed me back out onto the porch.

I looked at him confused.

“You’re not coming back in this house until the minyan is done with you,” he said looking at me hard. “And maybe not even then.”

He shut the door in my face.

I didn’t know what to do. I stood there dumbfounded for a moment, then sat on the porch. I heard muffled voices from inside the house. I could hear Mama saying something, asking Papa what had happened or something.

“He almost killed another boy,” Papa said loudly.

Mama asked something I couldn’t understand.

“I took him to the rabbi,” Papa spouted. “He’s going to see the minyan tomorrow.”

Another question from Mama.

“I don’t know or care what they’ll do to him!” was Papa’s answer.

Something else from Mama.

“No!” Papa said. “Absolutely not! He is not coming back inside this house until he sees the minyan.”

Mama’s voice was now definitely pained. I couldn’t understand what she was asking.

“I don’t care where he sleeps,” Papa said. “He can sleep in the back garden for all I care.”

I couldn’t stand to listen to any more so I went around the house to the back. And still my elbow was on fire. I thought I must have broken something there, but I sure didn’t deserve any treatment for it.

I sat on the bench under the old fig tree. Right there Papa had talked to me about the other fight. I remembered the hurt in his eyes after he had had to whip me. He had

said he and Mama were scared after what had happened at the lake. He said they were afraid something worse might happen to me. He had told me to ask myself if I thought Yahweh would use a brawler in His plan. He reminded me of what the rabbi had said, that if I didn't learn what Yahweh wanted me to learn something worse might happen. Above it all I remembered the hurt in Papa's eyes when he had had to whip me.

Well, something worse had happened. How much more had I hurt him now?

I looked around myself at the garden; the flowers Mama tended so lovingly, the big old fig tree where Papa liked to sit, the whipping post. I didn't want to spend the night out here. Oh, sure, I had spent plenty of nights out under the stars on the boat, me and John laughing and having fun while we fished, Shimon and Andrew there with us clowning around. But this was different. I had shamed my family. I was being shunned by Papa. I was alone. I didn't want to be out here. But I had brought it on myself. A man owns up to what he has done. And so I would spend the night out here alone, thinking about what I had done.

I had thought to myself before that kid pushed me, *Do something different*. Why hadn't I done something different? If I had none of this would be happening. Daveed would be back home on his papa's farm doing chores, not laying up in the physician's office with who knew what kind of injuries. Why hadn't I done something different?

The sun was low in the sky now and it was starting to turn cool. It looked like it was going to be a cold, lonely night.

The back door opened and John came out.

"Hi," he said.

"Hi," I said back.

He came over and sat on the bench beside me.

"I'm sorry you're in trouble," he said looking at his feet.

I didn't know anything to say so I kept quiet.

"Mama wants to bring you some supper," he said, "but Papa says you'll have to go without."

I sat silent and hung my head.

John looked at me and asked, "What's happening with you, James?"

I didn't say anything.

“You’re not the same as you used to be,” John said. “You used to just ignore people when they wanted trouble. You used to just walk around them and not give them the satisfaction.”

“I just got tired of it!” I shot back. “I just got tired of people being bullies and getting away with it.”

“So did Moses,” John said meekly. “You remember the scripture you read in Synagogue? You remember what you said about vengeance belonging to Yahweh? We’re not supposed to go around judging people and being God. Remember what Samuel and Saul’s papa said about all Hebrews being brothers?”

“I remember!” I shouted holding my hands to my head. “I remember.”

John looked at me shocked. I hardly ever shouted at my brother.

“Well,” he said, “I guess I better get inside and clean up for supper.”

He got up and walked away. My heart shattered inside me.

I sat there a while holding my left elbow with my right hand, rocking with the pain and trying to decide if I should go by myself to the physician. Just as the sun set the back door opened slowly and Mama came out. I started to say something to her but she looked at me and shook her head. She was carrying a bowl of stew and a blanket along with my heavy coat. Without saying a word she set the bowl on the bench beside me and laid the coat and blanket across my lap. She looked once briefly into my face and I could see the hurt in her eyes. Then she turned and went back inside.

I tried to lift the bowl of stew with my left hand but my elbow hurt too bad, so I managed to balance it on my lap as I spooned the food into my mouth. It was no easy task but I got through the meal without spilling it.

Then I put on my coat and wrapped the blanket around me. I looked around in the garden to see where I would lay down when I got ready to go to sleep. If I *could* go to sleep. I can’t describe the sadness and loneliness I felt that night. I had never felt so alone. I had always had John around clowning and joking, Mama with her endless attentions, Papa with his gruff but (usually) pleasant manner. There was Shimon and his brother, and recently Samuel and Saul. That night I had nobody. I sat there with the thoughts of how I had shamed and embarrassed my family. And tomorrow I would have



to stand for judgement before the men who, just a couple weeks before, had prayed for my healing. I hung my head in despair.

It turned out to not be cold enough for my coat and the blanket, so I rolled the coat up to use for a pillow and laid down on the bench. The bench was hard and cold but I figured it wasn't any harder or colder than the ground, and one was as good as the other. I spread the blanket out on the bench, laid down on it, and wrapped it around myself. Let me just say that I spent a miserable night. I tossed and turned and couldn't get comfortable. If I rolled the wrong way I started to fall off the bench. And my elbow hurt so bad that I couldn't really relax, even if I found a somewhat comfortable position. I did doze some, though, between bad dreams and tossing and almost falling.

Finally the sky started to turn pink and I heard roosters crowing and stirring from inside the house. I saw Mama and Papa's window light up as Papa lit the lamp.

I sat up on the bench and put my coat on, then wrapped the blanket around me. That pre-dawn chill was in the air and I was definitely getting cold. Oh, how I wished I could go in the house and get warm. I wished that I could sit in there at the table and have mush with my brother. I wished I could see Mama's smiling face. Oh, why did this have to happen? Why couldn't I have just ignored that kid?

As the sun rose I managed to pull my sleeve up and get a look at my elbow. It was swollen and purple halfway up to my shoulder. Something was definitely broken. I rolled my sleeve back down gingerly.

I heard Mama in the kitchen fixing breakfast. Papa would be getting ready to go to the market and John would be dressing for yeshiva. In a few minutes Mama would put the mush on the table and set out the honey pot. She would pour the milk into the mugs and Papa and John would come down to eat.

The back door opened slowly and Mama came out carrying a steaming bowl of mush.

"Mama," I started to say.

She just shook her head and put the bowl down on the bench beside me. She then went to the well and drew out the pail of fresh milk, then turned and picked up my dish from the night before. Without speaking to me she turned and went back inside. What was left of my heart shattered into a million pieces. As I had the night before I

managed to balance the bowl on my lap and eat my breakfast. Just as I finished the door opened again and Papa came out. I had thought I probably wasn't supposed to have the bowl of mush, but couldn't see any place to hide it quickly. So I just sat there. Papa came into the garden and looked at me somberly. He stood there a full minute before he spoke.

"I don't know what to say to you, James," he finally said. "Yesterday I was so very angry that I knew I couldn't be in the same house with you. I figured that if I let you come in I might do something really bad. You have shamed and disgraced this family. By now the whole congregation knows what you have done. You will be lucky if all the minyan does is expel you from the congregation. They might want to flog you. I wouldn't want that to happen, but what they do is up to them."

He took a deep breath and ran his hand through his hair.

"Son," he said after a moment, "I just don't know what to do. You are a man, now, and you have to be responsible for what you do. I have to put you in Yahweh's hands and let Him deal with you."

With that he turned and walked away.

*Niddui*. Excommunication from the congregation. That was more shameful than flogging. I would be *tamiya*, unclean. I would have to do as the lepers do, go down the street proclaiming myself *unclean!* What a disgrace! But I didn't know if I could take the "forty minus one" lashes required by the Talmud. Grown men had died under the lash. What I had done was bad, but not worth dying over. Unless the other kid died. Then I would face the death sentence. I looked into the sky. The sun had barely risen above the horizon. I wasn't supposed to go to the minyan until noon. That was a long time off yet. A long time to sit and agonize over my fate.

The day grew warm so I removed my jacket and stole another look at my elbow. Did I dare say anything about it to Mama or Papa and go to the physician? After what I had done I didn't deserve a physician's care. Daveed was in much worse shape than I was. But it hurt so bad. And it was really looking awful now.

I sat there for what seemed like days. Mama brought out a bowl of stew and put it on the bench beside me without saying a word to me. When she turned and went back inside I thought I would die. My elbow was stiff, now, and I could hardly bend it, but I

managed to eat the stew. Then it was time for me to go see the minyan. I was standing up and putting on my coat when Papa came through the back door.

“I will go with you to see the minyan,” he said. “I want to know what they say.”

He saw me struggling with my coat and came to me with a look of concern on his face.

“What’s the matter?” he asked.

“Nothing,” I said as I struggled.

“James, what’s wrong?” Papa asked. “Why are you having such a hard time with your coat?”

“I hurt my arm,” was all I had the nerve to say.

“Let me see,” he said.

I started to turn away from him but he gently took hold of my shoulder.

“Let me see,” he repeated, more firmly this time.

I removed my arm from the coat and pulled up my sleeve.

“What happened to you there?” he asked shocked.

“I fell on it,” I said.

“When?” he asked.

“During the fight,” I answered. “I had my arm around Daveed’s neck and when we both fell we landed on my elbow.”

“Why didn’t you say something?” Papa demanded. “You should have had the physician look at it while you were there.”

“I didn’t think anybody would think I deserved to have it looked at,” I said. “And I don’t.”

“Don’t talk nonsense!” Papa said sternly. “As soon as you have seen the minyan I’ll take you to the physician.”

I didn’t say anything and we headed around the house and out to the street. All the way to the synagogue neither of us said a word. We walked in the front door and the rabbi met us in the sanctuary.

“The minyan is waiting,” he said, and he ushered us through the back of the sanctuary into the room and through the curtains where the ten men all sat around the low table.

“Hello, Zebedee,” said the man at the head of the table.

Papa nodded a greeting without speaking.

“Hello, James,” the man said to me.

I knew no words to say, so I did the same as Papa.

“James,” the man said, “you have done a terrible thing. Without any regard at all you have beaten a brother almost to death. This is not the first time you have been in a fight. You are not showing the fruits of repentance called for by the Talmud. We have talked with the physician and the boy you beat will live, but he will not be able to work for some time. You broke one of his ribs.”

I couldn't even remember having hit him in the ribs. Maybe it happened when I was sitting on him.

“So you have not only shamed your family and the community,” the man said, “you have deprived Yacob, the boy's father, of the benefits of Daveed's labor.”

He looked at me long and hard. I hung my head.

“By the Talmud we have several options open to us,” he finally went on. “We can have you scourged in the public square. This would be the quickest and simplest. Your punishment would be over and there would be no stigma on you or your family. Or we can execute niddui for a period of thirty to sixty days, or *herem*, permanent excommunication. Under niddui you can still work and you can attend teaching, albeit not at yeshiva. You would have to hire a teacher. Under herem you can do neither. And you can not return to the congregation. We do not believe you are unrepentant.”

He looked around at the other men seated there.

“We believe you can still be a member of the community and the congregation,” he went on. “James, look at me.”

I looked up.

“You have to think a long time about what you have done, what you are doing,” he said. “You have to think about where you are going. When you came in here for healing from the grass you got in your lung I told you that Yahweh has great things planned for you. You had lessons to learn. We hope you have learned them. We have decided to expel you from the congregation for thirty days. During that time you will work for Yacob in Chorazin and do the labors that his son would have done. You will

receive no pay for your work, only food and a place to stay. You will be his bondservant. At the end of that time if you can come to us and convince us that you are repentant and have learned something from your mistakes we will remove the niddui. When you are in public, on the street or on the highway, or anyplace else where you might come in contact with another person you will call out ‘Tamiya’ so the other person will know you are unclean. You are forbidden to cut your hair or wash your clothes. Do you understand the ruling of this minyan?”

“I understand,” I said.

“So be it,” he said.

He handed me a piece of parchment with writing on it.

“Here are the directions to Yacob’s farm. He came this morning to take Daveed home. He is waiting for you there.” he said and dismissed me with a wave of his hand.

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We left the synagogue and Papa led me to the physician. When we got inside Papa had to help me get my coat off.

The physician took one look at my arm and said, “This looks bad. What did you do to it?”

“I fell on it,” I said. “When I was fighting with Daveed, we both fell on it.”

He pulled on my arm trying to straighten it. I cried out in pain in spite of myself. Tears welled up in my eyes but I would not let them fall.

“This is going to hurt,” he said, “but I have to see if I can straighten it. Just try to relax.”

He pulled some more and I almost passed out from the pain. Then he felt around above and below the joint. Just him touching it was almost more than I could stand. Then he touched the tip of the elbow. I almost fainted and Papa caught me before I went down.

After probing and feeling around for a bit he finally said, “The tip of the bone is shattered. There is nothing I can do for it. It will just have to heal by itself. You will need to exercise it as it heals or it will become permanently stiff. Even if it hurts, bend it and work it several times a day. I have heard the judgement of the minyan. You will be going to work on Yacob’s farm for a while. Your arm will be sore and it will hurt, but

you can still work. Come see me when you get back to Capernaum. I want to see how it is healing by then.”