Maud Hart and Delos Wheeler Lovelace Family Papers.

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KEEPER OF THE SCROLLS

By Delos W. Lovelace

CHAPTER ONE

Every Sabbath Eve the Fifteen set a dependable Brother apart to rouse the Community for the first ritual of each of the following seven days.

In thanks to God who, among countless wonders, had made the Community this ritual, handed down from generation to generation, was performed at dawn. The Brothers called themselves the Sons of Light. Their zeal had been enough to establish Priests, Masters, Brothers and Novices on this barren plateau beside the Salt Sea and to maintain them there, apart from other men, for more than a hundred years but it was not enough, unaided, to bring them all so early from warm pallets into the dark, often biting cold.

It had to be a dependable Brother who was set apart and for this seven days the Awakener was Jared. He was among the youngest ~~nearly a smudge along his jaw~~ but no one was more responsive to the Discipline and certainly he was big enough to sound a rousing

blast.

He sat up in the pitchy darkness, looked toward the cave entrance and caught a glimmer of light. His fingers found sandals, groped for the Awakener's long trumpet an, closed stiffly on the cold metal. Shaking off a little sleep with every step he got out of the cave which was one of many in a line of eroded cliffs; the younger stronger Brothers slept in them. He scrambled down the steep incline to the stony plateau and looked eastward.

He had risen in time. The horizon was only a thin luminous ribbon but on the far side of the plateau the low buildings of the Community were becoming visible and beyond and below them he could catch a murky glimmer of the Sea.

Darkness was lessening even on the desert and looking into that dim sterility stretching all around Jared paused with the trumpet half way to his lips. The Book said that great Moses had told spies to bring back the fruit of this land which the Tribes had found after the Wilderness and that they had needed a pole to carry just one bunch of grapes picked at the Brook Eschol. Jared wondered. Had this now barren land once been so abundant? The Chaste One thought the spies might have found the grapes in an oasis. He shook his head. It was beyond him.

He brought the trumpet up. His lips shrank from the frigid mouthpiece but he drew a long breath, pressed firmly and blew. The rolling summons which for so long had roused the Brotherhood to work and worship buffeted the cliffs and rebounded from the buildings across the plateau back into the caves. Shadowy figures erupted from cave entrences. One or two paused to shout

blast.

He sat up in the pitchy darkness, looked toward the cave entrance and caught a glimmer of light. His fingers found sandals, groped for the Awakener's long trumpet and caught a glimmer of

into adjacent caves when sluggards did not erupt. Silence was not enforced until after first ritual and after work assignments for the day had been given out.

Jared blew a second summons to warn the last laggard, then proceeded in long strides, the rest following, toward the rendezvous in the courtyard of the Community. Across the plateau the Fifteen came into sight, approaching the courtyard from their side in a slow procession, their lack of speed emphasizing both their dignity and their weight of years.

"Cold! How did you manage to get up?"

Jared did not need to look to know that the newest Brother had spoken. His name was Heber. He was big, lumpish, good-natured and almost always talked without thinking.

"I hardly slept," Jared said. The whole truth would have been that he had had the Awakening on his mind.

"I waked up a time or two. I guess I was worried. I am accused again."

"What is it this time?"

Heber was forever being accused of some lapse from the Discipline. That was harsh and its penalties severe. The rule of silence forbade unnecessary speech all day; and even when speech was permitted no Brother might talk before another had finished. Nor before his rank allowed. Nor might any walk naked before the others. Nor gossip. The rules went on and on. A lesser one said no Brother might even doze in a general Assembly, and Jared suspected that it was such an one that Heber had broken this time.

"It is charged that I replied with a stiff neck."

"It is charged that I replied with a stiff neck."

Jared sobered. An angry retort might separate a Brother from the sacred food for as much as a year.

"Is the charge true?"

"Oh, I did let fly. He had used my mattock and brought it back with the edge spoiled. But I caught myself when I had barely begun."

"Did you need the mattock soon?"

"That very evening. I had no duty. No reading to my Ten. No extra prayers. So I was going over to Ain Feshka to help the new family."

The Fifteen had permitted a family to settle on the oasis to the south where special food was grown. In normal times permission would have been denied unless the man had been approved for Brotherhood membership. These, however, were not normal times. Romans were pillaging from Dan to Beersheba. The family had been pillaged and it was partly in mercy that permission had been given, although a promise to help with crops on the oasis certainly had helped.

Now that was kind of Heber, Jared thought, to plan to help the farmer on top of a hard day's work!

"Explain to the Overseer," he said. "I doubt you'll be separated from the food. He'll think up something hard, though."

Heber, easily consoled, chuckled. They both knew the Overseer.

Jared slowed down. They were getting near to the [illegible]

Fifteen and a decorous pace and soft speech were enjoined. He called a guarded, "Not so fast!" to Heber who was ploughing ahead.

Beyond the courtyard, to the left, rose the Scriptorium - library. It stood out because it was two stories high and flanked by a watch tower. In it the Scrolls which guided the life of the Community were stored and, when worn illegible by devoted hands, repaired or copied. Jared ~~usually~~ was ~~assigned~~ sometimes some duty here and he looked at the building with possessive pride.

Hardly less impressive was the Assembly Hall where the Community ate two meals a day. Both were spare but both were events. The first one came after a morning of hard work. The second, in the evening, was a ceremonial occasion. To partake of it one must have cleansed ~~himself~~ one's self with a lustral bath, put on fresh garments, ~~and~~ even purified one's thoughts.

In the ~~yet~~ dim courtyard the Fifteen reached their appointed places. The Priest of Aaron stood in front of everyone, tall, humped rather than stooped and with a beard which was silky snow in daylight but now was a long mauve shadow tapering below his ~~rebel~~ girdle. The Overseer, sturdy but much shorter, stood just behind, as was his right. He was in charge of everything not in the spiritual dominion of the Priest of Aaron. The others of the Fifteen stood next and then the Senior priests, including the Chaste One, long Jared's guide and mentor. Jared picked out his thoughtfully bent old head. He would be praying as many now were. The Chaste One was one of the priestly Sons of

Aaron.

The Sons of Levi stood next, only a little lower in rank for Jehovah had told Moses that the descendants of the third son of Jacob should bear the Ark. Great Moses himself was descended from Levi. Behind the Priests stood the Masters who had passed probationary tests and were eligible for all privileges. These included the most competent copyists.

Behind the Masters stood the Brothers, divided into Tens, in one of which Jared took his place. Each Ten was led by its appointed Priest. All were facing east.

The night was ending. Across the Salt Sea and beyond the hills of Moab massed clouds were darkly crimson. The narrow luminous ribbon along the horizon had widened and turned pink. Fingers of light reached out ~~from the ribbon~~ and ~~then~~ the rim of the sun rose into sight.

The murmured prayers stopped. Arms were flung upward, and silence was broken by a chant in which everyone joined. The Brotherhood had no chorus leader. None was needed. Day after day, year after year, in bad weather and good, they had joined in this chant to the rising sun. The chant, new Brothers were told, had been handed down from the first generation of the Community. Jared had known it since he was four. He threw back his head and his deep voice joined the voices which rose and seemed to sweep across the Salt Sea to Moab's purpling crests, seemed to lift the arc of sun until it rounded into a circle and at last soared free into a sky now ablaze with color.

The Priest of Aaron cried out in a high brittle voice:

"We thank thee, O Lord!

The Brothers took up the thanksgiving.

"We thank thee, O Lord!"

"We thank thee, O Lord!"

"We thank thee, O Lord!"

They prostrated themselves. Young Brothers fell in one bold curve, sure of their strong arms. Old men creaked to knees, to palms andonly then fell flat. When they stood up young Brothers made it in one proud surge, old men in a wheezy reversal of their descent. Upright again, they all waited with heads bowed, the less pious increasingly aware of the morning chill and shivvering inside their thin garments toward the waxing, warming circle overhead.

The sun now was whitening the robes which had been mauve in the pre-dawn light. T he Overseer's robe swirled like drifting snow and his wispy beard quivvered as he trotted purposefully forward. He must now assign the daily tasks, ~~and even the youngest Brother knew that proper completion would be required.~~ He was a fluttery, pompous little man who seemed no wiser and no abler than many others but all had come to ~~know~~ agree that his devout purpose never faltered. Some of the Brotherhood were dedicated to prayer, some to holy learning, some to the adoration of the Lord, some like the Chaste One to loving kindness. The Overseer was dedicated to keeping the Community tight and tidy and woe to the ~~man~~ novice who assumed that ~~the sometimes ludicrous little man~~ did not ~~know~~ ~~how to~~ accomplish this! He beckoned with an urgent, brown-splotched ~~xxxxx~~

hand and directed, assigned and dispatched with such vigor and passion that each man hurried away in almost alarmed obedience.

Heber was told to step aside and worry rushed back into his face and he looked towards Jared who nodded encouragement. Jared's own turn came.

"Jared! Patch the Watch Tower roof."

Jared had hoped to be sent to the Scriptorium or the Library, as usual, but he had learned not question the Overseer's assignments. Besides, he knew that patching the Tower required both strength and skill and not all the Brothers had his share of them. Moreover none had his deep interest in the task. The Chaste One lived in the Tower. For the Chaste One's comfort he would patch every crack so that not one would leak a drop!

He set off at a run but before he reached the Tower silence fell upon the stone buildings, the courtyard and over the whole barren plateau. It would hold until after the evening meal. Jared took this daylong hush for granted, even liked it. Not because it was peaceful although many of the older Brothers found it so. For him it belonged to work, learning and thought.

He climbed the Tower's spiral stairway empty-handed to survey his task before he went for the asphaltum. That stuff for patching lay beyond a crumbling slope off a hazardous, salt-encrusted shore and he would not walk such a distance ~~walk that far~~ before making sure how much would be needed of the brownish clots which bobbed so mysteriously out of the strangely buoyant Salt Sea and floated so handily upon its surface. He pushed back the trap-door, climbed

onto the roof and looked for cracks. He found plenty. The Overseer was always right.

Standing for a moment against the parapet Jared looked over the desert. Whwnever a Brother climbed the Tower he was supposed to do this on the chance of turning up a distressed traveller. Aid to distressed travellers was a Community duty. There was none in sight but just below him nine score Brothers were scattering out across the plateau and beyond to their assigned chores. In a cement-lined pit one group would soon be turning huge stones, grinding grain. In a low shed others would be making pottery. Brothers were heading for the kitchen and the dyer's room. Several were carrying water. The aqueduct which brought water from the hills ~~xxxxx~~ emptied into a half dozen reservoirs to serve the Community's ordinary need as well as for baptisms and ritual washings.

Up in some of the caves Brothers would be reading. Out of each Ten one was always, in his appointed turn, searching the Scrolls for enlightenment and wisdom. The rules required that the Law be studied without interruption day and night. And at night the stars, also, were studied.

Masters were turning toward the Scriptorium and Library. A priest was walking along the Mall in prayer. The Chaste One had disappeared; he would be on his way to a favorite rock where he liked to sit while he meditated or worked on a commentary. The Fifteen were going into the Assembly Hall to deliberate on their special concerns. The Overseer was among them. That meant he had finished with Heber and Jared, a little troubled, searched the

landscape for the plodding figure of the sinner.

He found Heber, mattock on shoulder, heading for the cemetary. In that stretch of sand and rock between the Community and the Sea more than a thousand Brothers slept. A rough headstone stood at the south end of each burial mound, ~~and~~ a footstone at the north. Interred thus each Son of Light, on that Resurrection Day which the Brotherhood confidently awaited, would naturally arise facing north and northward lay the blissful next world in which all would be made right by the Lord's hand.

Tha Overseer must have accepted Heber's explanation and had imposed no worse punishment than straightening headstones and clearing away the prickly desert growth always accumulating around the graves. But big, lumpish Heber's good nature would be strained by the assignment. Moreover he was timid of death. He was also timid of lifr. Jared sometimes thought that fear of both had brought him into the security of the Community.

To the south the cemetary ended in a breakneck ravine. This was dry now but in rainy seasons it was fed by waters from the hills and for days its brimful raging torrent swept boulders before it on its way to the Salt Sea. Impassable at such times, it was formidable even when dry. It bounded the Community on the south. The other sides were enclosed by a low wall, no defense at all against enemies but enough of a barrier to keep the Brotherhood's few sheep and cattle from straying.

A long walk beyond the ravine Jared could glimpse the oasis and low house of the family Heber had thought to help. Here

stock pastured when grass was good and wheat, barley, flax, beans, peas, leeks, mandrake and garlic were grown. Sometimes, for old appetites, lettuce and melons were grown, too; but not much of the scanty, fertile acreage could be spared for luxuries.

Jared's gaze came back to the Community's rough stone structures, limestone-paved courts and low walls. They lay peacefully under the morning sun. Of course the Sons of Light, preservers of the Covenant which the Lord had made with the Chosen People, did not expect to be at peace always. Some day they would be called to do battle with the Sons of Darkness. But that was in an unforseeable future. The Community was seldom ~~threaten~~ threatened now by enemies. Bandit intruders, after a look at scanty provisions, rude dishes, crude tools and worn apparel usually left in something like apology, taking nothing. Here the Brothers, all goods shared, worked and worshipped in amity and silence.

The roof was full of cracks but Jared decided that a single load of patching stuff would fill them all and, thankful for that, got back to ground level for a shovel and a ~~wide-mouthed jar~~ basket. Along the Sea's edge he found brown blobs aplenty. Shouldering a full ~~jar~~ basket he clambered back over shale and sand and back up to the roof ~~and~~ where he stuffed every crack. The Chaste One would not be disturbed by drip or draft. Not even the Overseer could find fault with this patching.

Sure of a job well done, Jared took a last look for a distressed traveller, but he saw ~~none. He saw~~ only the sprawling,

silent, busy Community, the only home he remembered.

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"We are of Hebron," his father had said on bringing him. "My son's mother is dead there of a fire in her belly. Now I am hired to guard a caravan back to Aqaba. But so small a boy should not take that hard journey. If I do not come back, let him become one of your Brotherhood."

The Priest of Aaron, quicker then with decisions, had looked around for someone to find a very small robe and mantle and an unoccupied cave. He had had in mind a young Brother but the Chaste One had stepped forward and thereafter had watched over the Community's youngest ward, and never with more loving-kindness than when Jared scrambled in loneliness from his cave, wondering when his father would come back.

A boy of barely four could not know that even with luck one needed many days to journey ~~from~~ To Aqaba and return, and that usually the luck was bad. No one travelled in the heat of the day and never at night. By night what seemed at first glance merely shadows turned into hummocks and holes which tripped even surefooted camels. Toward dusk an exasperated caravan master usually told everyone to find as tight (for warmth) a hollow in the sand as he could and try to sleep until dawn. But when the caravan got back on the road groaning beasts and creaking gear called so loudly that there was always danger of a charge by robbers from behind ~~the nearest~~ every dune.

Jared never learned whether his father had survived such

hazards. No word ever came.

"Do you think he will be here tomorrow?" he said when time for a dozen journeys to Aqaba had passed.

"Your father is in the keeping of the Lord who cares for all," the Chaste One said.

Loneliness continued to weigh Jared. Years later he wondered if, when his body was small, it had not held a loneliness heavier than any of the boulders tumbled along by the raging torrents in the ravine.

"Do you think a leopard came at him off a tall rock?"

Before rolling up for the night in his mantle a small boy at least once had heard elders in Hebron Oh! and Ah! of leopards that came off tall rocks, of lions that roared out of the bush, of plunging boars with long tusks like sickles, of wolves slashing, whirling away and slashing again.

"Your father would be on a horse or camel. A leopard would be foolish to try to go that high."

"Do you think a lion came roaring out of the bush?"

"A lion would not live after leaping against the great sword your father carries."

"Once I heard my father tell how a boar came plunging with tusks longer and sharper than sickles."

"A horse or camel will outrun a boar."

"Can they outrun wolves that slash and whirl away and slash again?"

"Wolves would need to slash your father's whole caravan. In that there are twice as many men as you have fingers

and toes."

Jared had wriggled his fingers and the toes poking out from his sandals. That many, twice over, he decided, ought to drive off lots of wolves.

"What does slashing mean?"

The Chaste One had chuckled and said he would explain later; and by stages Jared's weight of loneliness ~~grew lighter~~ lessened. It increased again sometimes. He would be busy with work, first set by the Chaste One but, as he grew older, by the Overseer. At work he would have forgotten loneliness but then he would look south and that emptiness would bring it back.

After a long time, while he grew at such a rate that the Chaste One said he could never decide whether his charge was getting bigger faster than he was getting taller, he had less and less time to look south. Now it it was ~~always~~ the Overseer who set his chores and the Overseer seemed to have no trouble at all filling every daylight hour.

"The boy is doing well enough," he said.

"Very well for one so young," the Chaste One said.

Jared's first chores, not badly done by even the Overseer's strict standards, had been small. He swept paths clear of pebbles that the Overseer fussily complained made rough going for old feet, he replaced broken sandal thongs, he carried out of the way discarded pottery. He had done increasingly better at patching aqueducts and reservoirs. Then he had been a sturdy young sower and then, behind a plow, his feet ~~had~~ pressed down

sown seed and the plow had covered these to await the rains. His mattock had chopped tares choking young grain and his sickle had harvested the grain in maturity. There was nothing needing to be done in the Community that he had not done. In autumn his fork had tossed ripe stalks into the west wind while their kernels fell to the threshing floor [redacted] he had pounded.

The Overseer, of course, had decided which west wind. He decided everything. He even set the days when Jared and the other Brothers sang charm songs to discomfit mice, locusts, caterpillars and other pests in field and granary. With trifling help from the Chaste One, the Overseer had also finally decided that Jared was particularly suited to look after ~~the Scriptorium and~~ the Library, of course when not busy with other chores.

"He does wonderfully well with his hands but isn't he worth something better?" the Chaste One had said. "He reads and writes. He knows the whole Book."

"If you hadn't been so slow a teacher I'd have had him in the Scriptorium and Library long ago," the Overseer had said.

"They need him. Jared would never leave an inkwell dry or a pen unpointed or a writing brush ~~too loosely~~ poorly frayed."

"It is the Scrolls I've been thinking of. He would mend and order everyone. And if he reads half as well as you say he's the very one to tell me when an old Scroll needs copying. Then I wouldn't be bothered by Masters complaining they can't make out such worn writing."

Even more than the Overseer's strict demands, the Discipline of the Community had moulded Jared's life. Its rules told him when to sleep, rise, work, eat and pray. Some rules were harsh, but all the Brothers had been kind to the orphan and, in place of a mother or any other woman, the Chaste One had supplied loving kindness.

There had never been more than an occasional woman. The Fifteen had accepted a few members who, before coming to the Brotherhood, had followed the order of the earth. But the last wife had left months ago with her husband. Married Brothers, especially those with children, had from the outset of the Roman aggression feared that their families were dangerously conspicuous in an open nest on the desert. And, in any case, the Priest of Aaron felt that marriage was nothing to flaunt among austere monks.

Grown to be a bony boy tall for his age, Jared had found adolesence easier than he might have in the world outside and had finally accepted celibacy as he had accepted all else in the Community. It had helped that he was allowed to go by himself into the desert. The Chaste One, remembering his own youthful, gnawing restlessness, had won permission for his charge to wander until fatigue, or as near fatigue as Jared's strong body could be driven, had subdued wild appetites.

The angel Michael also had helped. Jared had learned of Michael in an Enoch scroll. This told how Cain's oldest son had been translated into Heaven but had come back telling of

wonder, and especially of Michael who was set apart to be the guardian of Israel.

"Great Michael!" Jared prayed when grappling with torment. "Help me! Give me strength!"

He believed in angels, of course. He believed in much he never saw. Enoch had seen, and for Jared that made belief simple. He believed in many angels. The chief was the Angel of the Presence; he (or perhaps she since with angels it was hard to say) was wholly one with the Lord and sometimes spoke for the Lord in the Lord's absence. Other indubitable creatures of glory were singing angels who attended the Sun and the Moon and ordered the stars. Lesser angels were in charge of fire, the winds, clouds, snow, hail, frost, thunder, lightning, the four seasons ~~winter, spring, autumn.~~

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No angel appeared now as Jared gazed over the wasteland. No vast wings blotted out the sky and the only shadows on the billowing sand were cast by shrubs and chips of weathered blue rock. These were scattered as though once some giant had cracked boulders and sown their shards with mighty arm sweeps. In the distance -- in shadow gray, sable, lavender or purple, in sunlight gold, salmon silver or snow white -- the desert billowed past outcroppings of limestone and piled into hillocks (one, perhaps, marking the lost well revealed to Hagar) until horizon haze made one of desert and sky. But never a traveller appeared, let alone an angel.

Northward, though not in sight, was Jericho and her

balsam plantations. Jared had often been half sure he smelled this wonder but he had never gone near enough to see it. Westward lay Jerusalem. To the south lay eroded peaks and the stronghold of Masada and the ancient caravan trail to Aqaba. Sometimes the Chosen People scornfully called this the King's Highway because Edom's king had denied it to the Tribes coming out of Egypt under great Moses. Immemorially, however, it had been the Incense Road over which outlandish caravans brought camel loads of perfumes and other priceless wares to Beersheba or Hebron, from there tobe portered piecemeal to Jerusalem and beyond.

Jared thought he saw a caravan now, or was it only a line of bright ants? He looked again, and his black eyes widened. Although he had never been out of sight of the Community he was sure. The brightness flashed off breastplates.

They would be Roman! The foes of whom he had heard so much! Even the distant sight of them filled him with excited thoughts strange in one of the Community. I would be a match for any of them, and I am the son of a man of valor.

They would be long in arriving; long, even, in reaching the ravine; longer in crossing or skirting that. Just the same, he could not give the warning soon enough. He tilted his black head and raised a great shout.

"The Romans!"

"He built it up.

"The Romans, Brothers! The Romans come!"

He made it plainer.

"Romans! Romans come from the South!"

He turned to the trapdoor but would not take time for the cramped descent by stairs. He stooped, got a handgrip in an embrasure, lowered himself from the parapet and dropped, ~~wondering if the Overseer had a charm song to discomfit these pests from Rome.~~

Alarmed Brothers below were gazing south although from their level the Romans would not be visible for a long while. Jared jostled past clustered white robes and ~~brown legs and~~ raced along the Mall toward the Assembly Hall. Only the Fifteen! Truly only the Priest of Aaron or the Overseer could decide what must be done!

The Hall was no more than twenty or so strides ~~along~~ away but before he finished them the Overseer came trotting out, complacently sure that he was equal to this crisis as to all earlier ones and testily determined to get to the bottom of it at once.

"Where are you going? You raise a big shout of Romans but when I come for the whole story you are running away."

"I was only running to find you after dropping from the Tower," Jared said. A word of praise for that drop wouldn't have been too much. It might have broken ~~kkx~~ a leg.

"How long before these Romans will get here?"

Jared offered his estimate and the Overseer nodded as though his own estimate had merely been confirmed.

"Come! We must tell the Priest of Aaron!"

He turned and trotted away from the alarmed, crowding, curious Brothers and Jared followed and both entered the Hall.

The Priest of Aaron was waiting on the podium from which he addressed the Many and presided over the councils of the Fifteen. The Fifteen were seated on benches along the bare walls. Jared stopped a respectful distance away. The Overseer got briskly to a point from which he could address all and rep ated what Jared had told him and the old faces grew bewildered and dismayed.

* * * * *

Many kinds of men made up the Brotherhood living aloof, they said, from the corrupt world outside withholding fellowship even from the priesthood of Israel's temple in Jerusalem. A lonely, austere Brotherhood under an obedience as harsh as its worship was devout. No postulant was admitted who did not profess total vocation. But over the generations, had every postulant had total vocation? Even in this generation were there not some of little vocation as well as those of pure intention but faulty performance? Had not cowards fled to such a haven from a world they dared not face? Had not shirkers sought in it hands willing to do double? Had not malingerers gone there counting on hood-winking artless companions? And pretenders hoping their hollowness would go undiscovered? Had not weak men accepted the regimentation to escape responsibility?

If only these whom any adverse wind shakes had now been

bewildered and dismayed it would have been understandable. But the Fifteen were men of total vocation. Although all readily confessed faults, they had ~~sacrificed and~~ given their whole lives to the Lord and had ~~and~~ thanked ~~the~~ him ~~lord~~ daily for accepting their offerings. These should instantly have conquered alarm and cast off bewilderment. Long ago they would have. ~~done so.~~ Now, however, they had lost what once had enabled them to surmount the ceaseless challenge of their desert existence. They still had faith and that remained a dim promise of succor but it did not reveal how or when succor would come and they were terribly afraid.

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The priest of Aaron looked at Jared in doubt barely leavened by hope. His dismay and bewilderment might be groundless. So young and inexperienced a lookout could have made a mistake.

"Are you sure it is Romans who come?"

"I have seen few Roman breastplates but the sun glances off them as off nothing else."

"A few distant flashes!" the Overseer said. "Is that all you go on?"

"They are Roman flashes."

"How many?" the Priest of Aaron said.

"~~Around a hundred. They~~ It could be ~~the flashing breast-plates of~~ a century."

The Priest of Aaron covered his face with his hands. The Fifteen stared at one another, ~~in growing alarm.~~ But the

overseer shrugged to show assurance. Only a century?

Jared was excited rather than alarmed. He had had no experience to teach him how pitiless legionnaires might be. He had never been out of sight of the Community.

Nor, except for the Overseer, had the Fifteen been away from the Community for years. Before entering the Brotherhood many had known the world outside -- Jerusalem, Alexandria, Antioch and more. But since then they had heard only what travellers told. And these had never been inclined to make the legions' crimes less than, in fact, they were.

Imperial Rome sent her maurauders all over the world as though her gods had chosen her to destroy the existing order and with the spoils create new nations. But to her victims she was not a creator but a scourge. Redheaded, bitter Calgacus, chief of the tartaned Caledones, spoke in Britain for all free men when he called Romans "Brigands of the world--who create a desolation and call it peace." They had desolated Egypt, Libya, Hispania, Gaul, Dalmatia, Thrace, Macedonia, Greece and, across the Bospherus, Lycia, Bithnyia, Pamphelia, Phrygia, Mesapotamia and even Parthia with her wild bowmen. Now, by order of Nero, her legions, first under Vespasianus and then his son Titus, were spreading desolation through Palestine.

~~The Priest of AAron peared through his fingers, suddenly buoyed by a new hope. The Romans might be comin ; nut would they not go away, taking nothing? Many others had.~~

~~"What do we possess that Romans could want? We have no~~

 to make the usual 26 lines to a page.

No smallest part of the often barren though sometimes fertile land dared hope tp escape. Poor, small Nazareth was no less threatened than rich Sebaste, or Jerusalem, the holiest. The Negeb the southern desert, was as threatened as theunbelievesbly fertile valley of Jezreel.

---22-~~A~~ Make a separate page though only these few lines.

The Priest of Aaron peered through his fingers, suddenly buoyed by a new hopr. The Romans might be coming, but would they not go away taking nothing. So many others had.

"What do we possess that Romans could want? We have no

money or any other wealth."

"Perhaps they have been told we are another Masada," Jared said.

He had never before spoken in a council of the Fifteen. He would not, ordinarily, have been present. But no one else had spoken. And some had looked at him as though, having reported the Romans, he should tell them how to deal with the advancing terror.

"But we are not another great fortress," the Priest of Aaron said. "And as soon as they see that and how little we have they will go away like the others."

"Perhaps not," the Overseer said.

He was not as disparaging as when he had pooh-poohed a few distant flashes. Not to the Priest of Aaron! But his disagreement was unmistakeable.

"Well now, why not?"

Shorn by old age of what he required to grapple with a challenge, the Priest of Aaron had been shorn of none of his love of procrastinating talk.

"Can they, or anyone, want our cracked dishes, our threadbare garments, the little we grow on the oasis or here?"

"They may want our younger Brothers," the Overseer said. "Many servants--slaves is the better word -- serve the legions and fight with them, too. This century may want strong young men to replace losses in Galilee."

"No!" the Priest of Aaron said in a loud voice.

"You can't trust Romans," the Overseer said. But in spite of his comfortless declaration his complacent self-assurance seemed to grow.

"No!" the Priest of Aaron said again. "If the younger Brothers are taken by the Romans, ~~then, we older ones die,~~ it would be the end. ~~The end~~ Just of the Community! It cannot be permitted."

He looked around wildly as though for assurance and his gaze fell on Jared ~~whose eyes were flashing.~~ Just all

"The young Brothers can fight," Jared said but even as he said it he realized that this would not answer the Priest of Aaron's need.

"If they fought," the Overseer said, "They would only be killed. They have no weapons. They are men of peace. What could they do against this century? But I will speak to the Romans." That, his tone implied, would be all that was necessary.

"The younger Brothers," Jared said, "could hide in the caves."

"Of course!" The Overseer sounded relieved although impatient with himself for not having thought of the caves first. "I'll put all in order here, then hurry the young men to the caves. They will hide and even if the Romans find their hiding place they will have a way of escape."

The Fifteen nodded and so did Jared. Wind, water and time had eroded many caves until they extended through the cliff. Even if the Romans found the right cave the occupants should be able to flee into the desert.

"And the Romans will find only our oldest," the Overseer said. "Romans love blood, but what pleasure will the blood of old men give them?"

"They will find me," the Priest of Aaron said. For once he seemed to have no difficulty in reaching a decision.

"And me! And me!" the benches said. "And me!"

"And me!" the Overseer said.

"And I'll stay," Jared said.

The Overseer whipped around.

"No! A Roman needing a servant would never miss a tall cedar like you."

"I would guard the Scrolls," Jared said. "These Romans might destroy them."

T he benches paled. The Scrolls were the life of the Community. Without Scrolls how could even the wisest deal with past, present and future?

"The Scrolls will be in no danger," the Overseer said, addressing the Priest of Aaron who had covered his eyes again. "Besides, there is no time."

He turned back to Jared.

"Come!" he said and satisfied that he had solved another problem, he hurried out, Jared following. On the Mall he paused.

"I must work quickly," he said. "Quickly! And you must help. The others sometimes move for you almost as fast as for me."

Jared stayed at his side but it was chiefly the Overseer who set all in order and hurried off those who were to hide. As at dawn he ~~demonstrated why the Priest of Aaron gave him supervision over so much. He~~ fussed, fluttered, frowned, pranced, his old splotched hands gestured wildly, he gushed commands. But even while all this seemed to be bringing on chaos it created order. And at the end, ~~on the surface at least,~~ the Community looked as though no one had ever lived there except those oldsters whom were staying behind.

Most of the young men went in silent obedience and this was natural because they had been schooled by the Discipline. Many went in prayer. A few, however, went in plain reluctance. Reluctance was especially plain in one Brother with a scar that cut from his right temple through the center of his mouth. It was said of him that before he entered the Brotherhood he had plundered travellers from one end of the North Road to the other. Although now vowed to peace and obedience he was loath to climb to his cave without a blow against those who scourged where once he had. So were a few others. This handful scrambled to inaccessible caves but there armed themselves in case the Romans scrambled after. They regained slings that they had cached on entering the Community ~~and~~, lacking slings, found clubs. Scarface even brought out a long-concealed sword and spear.

"Let these Romans come," Scarface said. "Under white robes they will find red courage."

Jared's cave was not the most inaccessible but it had

the needed escape hole and he studied the precipitous descent ~~from that~~ to the waste land and he found a club and it did not break against the wall of the cave. It would not be as good as a battle-axe, but it would do. He had never held a battle-axe and had seen only two or three.

He rubbed a smooth cheek and ~~found himself mulling over~~ that recalled one of his few clear memories of his father. In the bearded Community he alone shaved. He shaved because his father had.

His father had told him about a king who commanded his army to shave, not to offer beards to be yanked by their enemies.

"So," his father had said, "I offer none to be yanked by caravan robbers."

Jared looked southward toward the double file. It was no longer tiny, far-off columns of ants. It was files of legionnaires. But these still must cross a long stretch of desert and clamber down and up the ravine and go around by the Sea's shore to reach the Brothers' beards.

* * * * * *

The century was only one sixtieth part of the all-sufficient legion, ~~that~~ the myriad-legged monster with which Rome was over-running the world. But although so much smaller it was, by itself, a formidable whole and having reached the ravine it halted to await further orders with a confidence born of the knowledge that it had everything to carry out any order -- everything,

although in smaller units--~~as well as~~ that an entire legion ~~could~~ had: artisans, artificers, road-trench-fort builders as well as fighters.

A cohort, pushing south to reconnoiter Masada, now a hideout for marauding Jews, had dropped ~~this~~ the century off to make sure that this reportedly peaceful ~~settlement~~ Brotherhood was not a ~~smaller~~

hideout dangerous to Roman search parties and foragers.

The Centurion eyed the clutter of buildings beyond the steep ravine, and ~~then~~ beckoned

The Centurion was even more confiddnt than his men; and none of them would have denied that he was, probably, more than the equal of any. A century trained specialists to swim rivers in full armor and, when the far bank threatened a hard fight, their centurion swam with them. ~~H~~his one had swum many rivers.

"You'll be in charge," he said to his Optio. "Don't dawdle over the job."

"I won't dawdle," the Optio said, "But why are we we here at all?"

He forced a smile. It was intended to show that he was not asking as a malcontent, ~~only joking.~~ joking But beneath the smile lay a surly contradiction. The Promotion list had passed him over twice. And now, after a few cups of wine, he was quick to tell cronies how unfair the Lists had been.

~~"I'd make a better centurion than most," he would say. "No Optio carries out orders faster or better."~~

~~It was frustrating that~~ his own Centurion never showed any awareness of this well warranted resentment. ~~He did not even answer the question his Second had asked.~~

"Just a routine inspection is all that's needed ~~today,~~ here," the Centurion said. "There isn't a real hiding place anywhere."

~~The Optio's nod covered a shrug of indifference.~~

~~"This is a place of peaceful men," the Centurion said.~~

~~"We can~~

The Optio's ~~quick~~ nod covered a shrug of indifference.

"This is ~~said~~ supposed to be a place of peaceful men," the Centurion said. "We can count on them not to make trouble."

"Get your guard up when you count on a Jew for anything."

Optios did not often correct their centurions but this one risked it to ease his frustration. Every Roman had been saying pretty much the same thing ever since the Legions marched into Palestine.

"I have faced them for two years," the Optio said. "And I know. Even the meekest, the least likely, come at us with swords, spears, bows and arrows and worst of all, slings."

"The ones who call themselves the Sons of Benjamin claim to sling stones to a hairsbreadth," the Centurion said in professional approval of excellence.

"If trouble is so unlikely here, why did we wear out our boots to come?" the Optio said. The Legions had learned in Egypt that nothing wore out boots like ~~said~~ sand. "I am paid ten times more than a private's few daily coppers but how can I afford boots on top of clothes, weapons, food, gear, the burial society and the levy for the annual bust-out?"

"Finish here fast and we'll be back in Caesarea in time for this year's saturnalia," the Centurion said.

The Optio remembered another grievance as legitimate as boots.

"And what food! Wheat or barley more than likely ~~mouldy, and whatever wilted vegetables are around and a little lard all ending up in a soup swine wouldn't grunt over. And~~

mouldy, and whatever wilted vegetables are around and a little lard, all ending up in a swill pigs wouldn't grunt over. And for drink a little vinegar in a lot of water. Posca! Pah!"

"The hoopla at Caeserea will be like nothing our legion ever saw before," the Centurion said. "Titus has increased by half the money all six cohorts saved all year."

The Optio remembered another grievance.

"Those of us born Roman citizens are treated no better than auxiliaries who joined up to win citizenship. They retire after twenty-five years with enough bonus to buy their farm in the pick of the provinces. But isn't our enlistment as long? Is our bonus any bigger?"

"We need to hurry," the Centurion said.

He turned back to his men who were gossiping guardedly.

"Now hear!"

The files straightened.

"There are two ways past this ditch. Scramble down and up. Go along the shore of ~~this~~ the Salt Sea."

The files stiffened. They knew about the Salt Sea because of a thing Vespasianus was reported to have said.

<u>We could toss a man in full armor and pack into this sea and really find out if it will float that much weight.</u>

They looked at their centurion warily.

"I certainly won't take you down and up. Even a few Jews, hidden over there, could make ~~too much~~ trouble. We'll follow the shore beyond that graveyard. ~~But~~ Now look past the

graveyard to ~~that~~ the tower. You might be jumped there, ~~also.~~ Be ready."

The Centurion looked along the files of soldiers.

"Questions?"

There were none and he nodded to his Optio.

"Right WHEEL!" the Optio said. "MARCH!"

The leading file lurched off over slippery sand. The Centurion got alongside and nodded again.

"Route Step! MARCH!" the Optio said, and

Again free to talk -- to gossip, grumble, or to try to frighten one another with lurid exaggerations of lurking perils -- the column snaked into loose gravel. Shortly the way grew steep and the men had to dig heels in. They came to where storms had flung ~~blobs~~ chunks of asphaltum to dry and harden. They ~~blobs~~ chunks were full of sand, stones and had such brutal edges ~~and corners so~~ that whoever stumbled rose with bleeding palms and knees.

The Optio cursed the stumblers and ~~the stumblers~~ glared ahead. The Century pounded along ~~at~~ the strangely blue, strangely oily water, ~~and remembered Vespasianus's fancy and grew apprehensive.~~ This Sea might not ~~even half~~ begin to float a man in armor and full pack.

The Optio, also, was remembering Vespasianus. How he would like to toss a legionnaire into this sea! And, serve him ~~filth~~ right if he sank for good! He swung his spear at a ~~dry hard~~ salty chunk ~~blob~~ and thought how easily the blow would ~~have~~ cracked any head in the Century -- or any in this queer Community they were ~~at last~~ approaching.

* * * * *

From his eyrie Jared was surprised to see the legionnaires turn toward the Sea. One day he would know enough to be surprised if a commander sent troops through a ravine when a less dangerous alternate route was open. Now he was ignorantly sure that the Romans were foolish to march so much farther than they needed. Then, looking away from the column, he was filled with consternation. ~~Across the rocky terrain of the Community~~ the Chaste One, nebulously white in the sunlight, was emerging from the Mall. He had not kept to the security of his Tower room. He was aiming for his favorite rock as unconcernedly as though no legionnaires were within leagues.

"No! No!" Jared said and for the second time that day scrambled down the steep trail and ran -- raced -- toward the courtyard, this time in defiance of any Romans who might debouch onto the plateau and find him in full view. He finished his run as the Chaste One was settling down, and the sand that spurted from his skidding sandals caused the ivory ancient to smile up in mild questioning.

"Jared! You are supposed to be with the others in the caves."

Jared tried for a stern manner.

"Aren't you supposed to be in the Tower?"

"It was bleak, Jared. This warm rock makes my thoughts flow."

¶ The Chaste One was so old that

Jared looked down and marvelled. Weight seemed ~~sons out of~~

to have gone out of hair

~~the old man~~ as sin certainly was. In the desert tall plants grow which, after flowering, turn pith dry. That was what the Chaste One seemed to have done. His face above the white beard was full of tiny ~~wrinkles~~ cracks. He was so frail that even a playful Roman blow would undo him.

"I have a new commentary in mind, Jared," he said.

Jared wanted to hurry the return to the Tower but he could not, at once, decide how to do this so he only repeated the announcement.

"A new commentary?"

"A very small seed. But this sun will encourage it."

"Where are the others who remained in the Community?"

"In their rooms. Except the Overseer! He is on a last inspection to make sure nothing has been overlooked."

"Does he know you are here?"

"Does it matter where I am?" The Chaste One seemed mildly surprised.

"It would matter to everyone of us if the Romans found and harmed you."

"If they find you they are likely to do you worse harm."

But he was rising and took Jared's arm.

"Let us covenent. You go back to the cliffs. I'll go back to my tower." He beamed. "Then ~~I shall~~ both will be saved from the Overseer's rebuke."

Jared adjusted himself to his companion's pace and they got to the Mall and the Overseer erupted around a corner, his robe

billowing ~~about its fuming owner~~ like smoke.

"You shouldn't be here. Why aren't you in your cave?"

He aimed his irascibility at Jared but it included the Chaste One.

"Do not blame Jared. He left his own security only because he saw that I had strayed from mine."

The Overseer rose on tiptoes, and pointed. "Look!" he said

Down along the shore the whole hundred Romans had turned westward and ~~was~~ were advancing. ~~The Overseer came down on his heels.~~

"I'll just take ~~Jared would have escorted~~ the Chaste One back to the Tower," Jared said, but the Overseer interrupted. ~~but the latter protested.~~

~~"No, Jared! Go!"~~ "I'll go with the Chaste one. You

"Get back to the cliffs!" ~~the Overseer said.~~ "Keep the buildings at your back and you will reach them without a Roman seeing you."

He set off with the Chaste One and Jared got behind the aqueduct where it joined the first of the Community's cisterns and then behind the stable, smelling mustily of donkeys, goats and sheep, but he did not race for the cliffs. He took off his robe, climbed the sloping roof and lay down in loin cloth and sandals. He was ready to run if he had to but meanwhile he looked, with only his black hair and eyes visible above the ridgepole and these only through a fringe of reeds and branchtops.

He was violating the Discipline. The Overseer had told him to be off and an order from any of the Fifteen should be strictly obeyed. But Romans? Were ~~they~~ Romans as formidable as ~~gossip~~ report made out? He wanted a closer look.

They

They were certainly ruthless; their deeds in Palestine proved that. But were they better than Jews? He remembered a thing in praise of Jews which had been said by a Pharisee famous for his stand against the Romans. His name was Josephus. Some in Judea thought less of him now because he had surrendered to Vespasianus. But earlier, in Galilee and especially at Jotopata there in the mountains, he had fought like Gideon. And ~~there~~ at Jotopata he had said this thing.

<u>These qualities distinguish our people in war. Charging together against an enemy. Persevering even though we do not at first succeed! Violence of assault! Boldness!</u>

"Charging together! Persevering! Violent! Bold!" Jared made the words clash like stones. He stared at the Roman leader who had reconnoitered in front of the century across the ravine. He could stare without being seen. And what, he thought, if he were seen? He could outrun any armored Roman and dodge any Roman spear. He could race over the sand and around rocks to the cliffs and if the Romans did find his cave they still would have to find its second exit. Long before that he would be away across the billowing waste.

* * * * * *

The Overseer ~~paused to rake a finger in pursuit of~~ perched on one leg while a finger raked at a peeble between sole and sandal, then determinedly trotted toward the expressionless Centurion.

"Let me make that little stork tell what we want to know," ~~xxxx~~

the Optio said.

Abuse, the Centurion had learned, seldom got results from a Jew. It was likely to turn this one as stubborn as an ass.

"I'll talk to him," he said and briefly, thought of Jews with admiration. They were smart. They read a handsign before you finished it. When you used words they were likely to get way ahead of you.

The Centurion had the words. Romans had picked up Jewish words and Jews had picked up Roman words and usually both had started with some Greek. The end product was a mishmash but it served remarkably well even though, the Centurion reflected, a Jew's first mouthful made you want to laugh in his face.

"I'll talk to him," he said again. "Halt the Century."

"Century! HALT!"

The Optio ~~vented his frustration in a~~ roared ~~loud enough to have halted a cohort.~~

Jared, flat on his roof, peering through reeds and branch tops, could not help admiring the precision with which the files stopped on sand and rock.

The Overseer came forward deliberately to give himself time to measure this pair whom he must mollify.

The Centurion was what Palestine had come to dread, a personification of Roman might, a leader of hated invaders who, although differently from Jews, also looked on themselves as a chosen people. Better than anyone else! Not, precisely, better fighters; not always; Jews had smashed the Twelfth Legion a few years back; that defeat had brought on the aggression. Not

better builders, philosophers, merchants or mathematicians. Greeks were better builders and philosophers, Persians better merchants, Egyptians better mathematicians. Somewhere, your Roman would not bother to deny, others were usually better in specialties. It was in the large sense that Romans were always better. Didn't Rome rule the world?

The Overseer needed only the last step or so to measure the Optio. A jackal! But, he decided as he bent in a slight bow which included both men, far more dangerous than the Centurion. His greeting was addressed ~~spoke~~ only to the Centurion. He had learned to identify Roman officers and now this came in handy.

"In the name of the Priest of Aaron who guides this Brotherhood I bid you welcome," he said.

"A Brotherhood!" The Centurion said. "What sort of brotherhood?"

"What one possesses all possess."

"And ~~this~~ your Priest of Aaron leads all?"

"Yes! The Lord has given him great wisdom."

"Fetch him!"

The Overseer shuddered. This grim Roman and his jackal would throw the Priest of Aaron into total confusion.

"The Priest of Aaron has sent me to show you whatever you wish to see. But he is at prayer. I beg you, let him remain."

"How many are you?"

"Fewer than you command. There were more but we do not marry ~~often~~ and begat children. We live in silence, praying, studying the law, making this poor land yield food. I will show you all that we have, if

that should please you."

The Centurion looked at the low buildings and across the desolate graves to the desert, always with the same lack of expression.

"I believe our little stork is telling the truth, as nearly as a Jew ever tells the truth to a Roman," he said.

"You'll trust him?" the Optio said.

"Well! You look the place over. Take twenty. I'll be here if you need me. But you won't. We'll start back in less time than we take now talking."

The Optio choose his twenty and they set off, following the Overseer. This was exactly what the Optio liked. He was in full authority. ~~Success would be his alone.~~ He slapped his spear elatedly across the meager buttocks of the Overseer who lowered his eyelids to cover a look of outrage. The Optio slapped again.

"Get along, you old bugger."

This slap was harder although ~~the~~ his tone was playful.

Now Jared, from his lookout, could catch more than glimpses and was filled with helpless anger. The Overseer was being spanked in a leisurely rhythm. ~~Watching Brothers would say later that the blows were savage even though the Optio's smile said this was only good natured fun.~~ The twenty got to the Mall and to a number of big jars. Each was a third as tall as a man, flat-bottomed for steadiness, ~~and~~ with a collared neck and a fitted cover to make it watertight.

"If these were a little bigger they could hide a man," the Optio said. "What are they for? Why are they here?"

"They are for storing," the Overseer said. His voice trembled but his meager body was straighter than ever. "They are new from our pottery. This is a handy place to keep them until needed."

The Optio struck a jar with his spear, nodded when it chimed, struck harder and harder and broke it. Pleased to have found the ~~precise~~ right blow for the job he struck until all were broken. Then, laughing, he sent two men to check the courtyard and pointed to the Tower. "What is up there?"

"One of our oldest lives there, a Brother who is of such purity that his thoughts always are holy. ~~He is too frail to harm anyone."~~

"Look him over," the Optio said to two more men. "If he is as this old bugger says, come back. If not you know what to do."

He jerked a thumb toward the kitchen.

"That is empty. But in a little the cooks will be about our evening meal. Just ahead is another room where a few are writing."

The Optio sent two more men.

"At the end of this mall," the Overseer said, "is the dyers' place, also empty. Against it is our Assembly Hall but no one is in that. Behind the Hall is a pantry holding only dishes."

"Look into the lot," the Optio said to two more men.

"There are also a workshop, a laundry and the stable."

"Look," the Optio said to two more.

He had sent off half his detail and, spanking the Overseer on ahead, he led the remainder ~~on~~ along.

"Where are those you call Brothers," ~~he said.~~

Each is in his own room, at meditations or writing or composing commentaries on what they have read or thought."

The Optio decided not to ask what commentaries were. He wanted to hurry. He was uneasy about the pace at which the assigned ten had moved off. Wouldn't they have moved faster for the Centurion.

"Bring the whole batch of Brothers out," he said to the Overseer. "Let's see this precious lot, so full of prayers. ~~and what have you."~~

The Overseer turned to obey but moved slowly and in pain. The Optio was sure the old bugger was trying to hold up the mission ~~that~~ the Centurion had assigned. Just like a Jew!

He hefted his spear. He meant to carry out the mission without delay. ~~Though,~~ even so, the Centurion would ~~never~~ not give him any credit.

"Start them west," the Centurion would say. Or, "We'll never get to Caesarea in time." Practically accusing the Optio of having taken so long that the Century had lost any chance of getting to the wine before it ~~had been~~ was watered to tastelessness.

Taken so long! Who could have taken less? The Optio balanced his spear, eyeing the helmets of the detail. Why, he wondered, shouldn't he crack the heads of the ~~ear~~ nearest of these

~~[illegible] and hauling [illegible] out, and the old bugger's, too?~~

men who were ~~holding~~ slowing him up, and The old bugger too?

The Brothers began to appear. The Optio had never seen a crew so creaking, wrinkled, stooped, skin and bones. Although one with a pale ivory face so suggested a venerable Roman ~~flamen~~ priest that the Optio, for a moment unconsciously ~~he~~ lowered his spear. ~~for a moment.~~

The Overseer returned and made a -- something -- like the -- something -- he had made to the Centurion. Not a bow, ~~though~~ although passing for a bow. The Optio was certain it was not as respectful. Not respectful at all! He raised his spear.

"Are they all here?"

"All!" the Overseer said and the Optio noted the omission of any respectful title.

"This is all?"

"Every room is empty. Your own men will tell you there are no more."

"Where is your Priest of Aaron?"

The Overseer shuddered once more.

"I explained to your Centurion. You heard. The Priest of Aaron is at prayer. No one preaks in upon the Priest of Aaron at prayer."

The Optio's temper had been shortened by the malicious slowness of the old bugger and by the sly attempts of his own men to discredit him with the Centurion, and now it broke. He had pictured the satisfaction of swinging his spear shaft against helmets and an old head. ~~Now~~ He swung at the old head.

He told himself afterwards that he had aimed more at the

bony old back. The shaft fell, however, on an old pate with a sound very like ~~that~~ the sound of the blows which had cracked the jars.

Stretched out behind ~~the~~ reeds and branch tops Jared bit into his upper lip and pulled his knees up for a horrified, furious rush but reason stopped him. If he killed the murderer everyone in the Community would be killed. The Chaste One would be killed. He sank back ~~against~~ behind his cover and sucked ~~the~~ his bleeding mouth.

On the Mall a few Brothers sidled near the fallen Overseer and bent over and began to wail.

The Optio drew erect before his ~~detail.~~ detail.

"Fall IN!"

The Priest of Aaron hadn't come but now, the Optio told himself, there was no one to tell him to come and anyway ~~the old~~ it didn't matter. The old bugger had been told to show everything and he certainly had ~~so~~ and the ~~Century~~ Century ~~could~~ would be able to start for the Saturnalia in plenty of time.

The twenty had fallen in but all were looking at the Overseer and at the stain spreading around his nearly bald head and the Optio was sure he knew what they were thinking.

<u>What good did it do to bang the fussy little old codger?</u>

"Forward. MARCH!" he said and just did manage not to swing at the nearest helmet.

The twenty marched back along the wall and across the sand to the waiting Centurion.

"Detail! HALT!"

No Optio ever gave a more perfect salute.

~~"We made him show everything. But all we found was the lot of old men the bugger said we would find."~~

"I made him show everything," he said, "But all they found was the lot of old men the bugger said we would find." He was having trouble speaking although he seemed uncontrollably eager to speak.

A supordinate reports a well performed mission without any uneasy feeling that he must go on and on saying something, anything. But the Optio, having said that he had done exactly as ordered, was aware of something held back. Oh! Nothing to indicate that he had not carried out orders. Nothing like that! Nevertheless, when the expressionless Centurion's face turned to the twenty the Optio, turning also, saw in their faces the same question he had seen before they left the Mall and he could not stop talking.

"I told the old bugger to trot out his Priest of Aaron but he told me he couldn't break in in his priest's prayers. So I slugged him for disobeying a Roman." He began to laugh. "And whatd'you know? It sounded just like the sound when I busted some big jars these Jews were trying to store up."

The Centurion turned his expressionless face back from the twenty.

"I certainly layed the butt of my spear where it would do the most good," the Optio said.

The Centurion continued to look.

"Well, he asked for it. Right on the noggin! But that was his own fault. I meant to bang his back but he dodged. He'll never have another chance to disobey a Roman."

"You mean you killed that little old man?"

"It was his own fault. If he had dodged he'd just have gotk a lesson. And if he hadn't had a head like an eggshell it probably wouldn't have busted."

"Well!" the Centurion said, "Get them moving. He looked across to the Brothers, clustered around a fallen figure."

"Fall, IN!" the Optio said, almost choking over the two words. Hadn't he known how it would be? "Forward, MARCH!"

This time the Century did not need to go cautiously around by the shore. It headed north. On its left, too far away to show in much detail, a line of pocked cliffs rose.

"Column! Half Right! MARCH!" the Optio said. "Route Step! MARCH!" His voice was under better control but he almost choked again when the Century, permitted to talk, began to gossip. He knew what they were jabbering about. Oh, he knew!

* * * * *

Imperial Rome required each legionnaire below centurion rank to carry two spears. Buy them as he must buy armor, arms and gear out of his yearly three hundred denarii which, also, must pay for saturnalias. One spear was heavier and could serve, happily, as a club now and then.

The pompous, fluttery, dedicated Overseer did not move after the Optio's club drupped him. The few Brothers who went hesitantly to his side froze when they saw that aid would be useless, and after the twenty marched away nothing moved f or a

time except a creeping red nimbus crowning the still, meager form and this soon clotted to fix for a little the shocking asymmetry of the white old head.

Violent death came almost never to the Community in its nearly deathlike setting. When Jared came down from his lookout the Brothers seemed to be waiting for the Overseer himself to tell them what to do. They looked anxiously at Jared who said, "Wait!" and went up to the Tower to report what had happened to the Priest of Aaron. That old man first covered his eyes and sat in silence but then he told Jared that all must proceed as prescribed after any death. Jared descended to the Brothers and he and another lifted the corpse and carried it gently to its last lustral bath.

Led by the Priest of Aaron and the others of the Fifteen a mournful procession carried the Overseer to the windblown burying ground. After prayers and chants all stood in mournful silence while the body, purified by lustration, shrunken by embalming and clothed in fresh garments was placed in his shallow grave on a ledge cut into the side wall. Reverently, optimistically, head and feet were oriented for easy entrance into Paradise. On the way back the Brothers whispered.

"He will be missed."

"Who can take his place?"

"How he did drive us!"

For a few days it seemed as though that driving had not been needed. The Community ran on momentum. Or because everyone did what

the Overseer would have ordered if he had been there. But on the eve of the Sabbath the Priest of Aaron summoned the Fifteen. They must, at least, set aside a new Awakener.

They did. No one even suggested a new Overseer. He was not one to be replaced like a cracked jar. But after much discussion they did summon Jared.

"Among many duties," the Priest of Aaron said, "the Overseer had charge of the Library and Scriptorium."

Jared nodded. He was aware of that.

"You shall now be responsible for the same treasures," the Priest of Aaron said. "You shall be our Keeper of the Scrolls."

He gave a little sigh which onconsciously revealed his relief at being able to shift such responsibility to young, strong shoulders.

Keeper of the Scrolls!

Jared knew what he had heard but he still doubted. So far as he saw his only qualification for the honor was that he had gone to the treasures of the Library and the intimacy of the Scriptorium as often as he had been permitted.

"Well," he said slowly, "I'll do my best."

"You have our confidence," the Priest of Aaron said and the others of the Fifteen nodded and the Priest of Aaron raised a hand in blessing over Jared's head and he took that for permission to leave. He was on fire to leave.

"I thank you," he said and turned, again confused, and

got out to the Mall and hurried off to find the Chaste One. He found him, where else, on the sunny rock. But he was not able immediately to tell his story. The Chaste One had something of his own to tell.

"The commentary grows," he said on catching sight of his longtime ward. "The seed is good. Here is the seed. Listen!"

With nothing but the will of God shall a man be concerned.

Faced with such gentle enthisiasm, Jared put his own arresting news aside.

"It is very good. Where does it come from?"

"Where but from one of our own psalms?" The Chaste One shook his head in mild rebuke at such forgetfulness. "But you did not come to talk about my commentary."

"To thank you. I am straight from the Fifteen. I could not come fast enough. They have made me the Keeper of the Scrolls."

"They choose well."

"Only because of you."

"You earned the choice. You are our best."

"Because you guided me. Guide me still."

"You are past my guidance. Go to your new duty. I can see it fills your mind."

"Give me your blessing," Jared said and knelt, the sun hot on his back.

"May the Lord keep the fruits of holiness on your lips," the Chaste One said and a slow smile brightened his mouth.

Warmed by more than the sun Jared walked until he

reached the Mall. Then he could not keep from running. He was, indeed, bent on taking over his new duties.

The Discipline enjoined silence during working hours but even Brothers whose consciences bruised easily saw no grave disobedience in a nod, wink, shrug, lift of eveyrows, pursing of lips, change of gait, carriage or mien, all of which could be meaningful without a word uttered.

As Jared hurried this sort of dialogue spread the news of his promotion and when he climbed to the Library the fiery ears of the young new Brother there said that he had heard. And lest this one now in Authority, but lately scarcely better than himself, question his diligence he continued intent before the narrow shelves rising from floor to ceiling. Not looking up or sidewise he dusted, rearranged and straightened papyrus, copper and leather rolls and adjusted the tags sewn to exposed ends, little flags from which to read at a glance the subject of each.

The Library attendant was required to keep scrolls on readiness. He must also see that, being returned, none was torn or smudged or, if it was, was properly repaired. He must make make sure that every returned scroll was properly rolled since a crease made papyrus or leather much more illegible. If more shelves were needed he must build them, and he must maintain the supply of ink and pens and, of course, keep everything neat and tidy.

The Overseer had regularly inspected for all this and now, preparing to do the same, Jared unexpectedly found himself resisting an impulse to clear his throat in imitation of the ~~Overseer's sputter against slipshod work or any other nonsense.~~

Overseer's sputter against slipshod work or any other nonsense. Happily, he recalled advice from the Chaste One:

Whoever holds his tongue may be saved from both boasting and a show of his ignorance.

And he began his inspection in sedate silence.

In a corner he noticed fragments of a jar broken by the Roman who had killed the Overseer. The innerface of these, an inviting surface for writing, bore fresh letters. This Attendant did not mean to remain an attendant. He aspired to be, like the Masters, learned, and was already well along on his alphabet. Confronted with such frugal use of the Optio's potsherds it was not easy to keep silent. But the Overseer would scarcely have praised openly what was, after all, merely the normal effort at self-improvement expected of all Brothers. So Jared only gave a half smile of approval and, guiding himself on precedent, said nothing.

The Library, the Community's only second floor room, was not much more than a sizeable, airy storeroom but its scrolls made it precious. The much larger Scriptorium below was long and lofty and its floor a serene counterpoint of grey and white marble blocks. Its western balcony invited the breezes that flowed each afternoon from the Great Sea and on its other sides windows were both ventilators and frames for the panoramas of Nature. This the Masters' long day was shortened by tranquillity, coolness and vistas of Moab's dreaming peaks and the sometimes sunlit and golden, sometimes shadowed and bewitching, desert.

sputter against slipshod work or any other nonsense.

Jared hesitated at the Scriptorium entrance. Before promotion he would not have entered except by direction of the Overseer or invitation of a Master. An ordinary Brother, having no business in the place reserved for the learned would not have been turned away, but before the day ended the Overseer would have warned him to walk wide thereafter and not risk disturbing his betters. Now, of course, it was Jared's duty to enter. The Overseer had not gone a day without giving those in the Scriptorium opportunity to request whatever seemed required or desired of that was only to have reed pens sharpened or the ink thinned or thickened. Now Jared must do what he could to ease the labor of those who worked, it might be said, almost in the very Presence, probing for such veiled truths as had been revealed earlier to Prophets and, by grace, might today be made clearer to this select few who were trying to live in a purity equal to that of the Prophets. When he did enter it was with a humbling awareness of his own shortcomings.

The Masters, however, showed no such low opinion of the new Keeper. As his sandals broke their silence they looked up in smiling welcome, then glanced around to alert any who might have missed this arrival. But smiling was not enough for this young Brother now become one in Authority. Honor paid Jared was, in a manner, theirs. Might he not have been the son of a son of any of them? They got up from the mats that had coddled their old knees while they knelt to read or write or meditate before the long low tables. And this rising was all the more meaningful

because some of them, once down, got up only with considerable creaking. But up they came, whitebearded except for a few who were still unseasonably brownish, blackish or reddish, and came forward in their robes (drifting snow topped at random with varicolored autumn leaves) and closed around Jared, nodding their full approval of this younger Brother now almost one of the Fifteen but only this morning on the lowest rung of the Community ladder.

They returned to their tables still smiling. These smiles, however, were different, saying now that the Masters could take no more time from their scrolls. That, as of course the new Master understood, counted up to more than even so excellent a promotion.

For two or three days more the roomful continued to look up and smile at the clip of Jared's sandals but then it only smiled over shoulders, without really looking away from the tables.

Jared came every day, as the Overseer had, making himself available for any request. This, also, enabled him to make sure the Attendant did not spend so much time on his shards and alphabet that he neglected the bronze inkwells and terra cotta vases for pens, set between each pair of tables.

* * * * *

The reading, copying and study of the scrolls went on. Some were old and worn, some mint fresh. A few were made of copper

nut copper was so new in Palestine for writing that many were unfamiliar with it and a few older Masters refused to use it. In addition is was scarce and so expensive. Some were of papyrus which was cheap. Most were of parchment which cost inbetween and was in all ways best.

A copper scroll was a single strip long or short. Parchment and papyrus scrolls were of three or four up to a dozen or more sections sewn together. Parchment was the expertly prepared skins of unborn or new-born lambs, goats or calves. Papyrus was thin, peeled strips of reed layed side by side and another layer crosswise. These were pounded to set the natural adhesive, rubbed smooth with an ivory spatula or a shell with the proper surface, then dried. The finished papyrus sheet was grade one to nine but only the first four grades were considered suitable for writing. The inferior grades had many uses but the nines were chiefly for wrapping. The best papyrus was said to come from reeds out of Lake Hulah, a shallow little water above the Sea of Galillee. Dissidents, however, plumped for papyrus from Egypt.

Worn out scrolls were painstakingly, and expertly, copied onto new blanks when the subject matter was sufficiently valuable, each new letter so like the old that the likeness was astounding. The rules for copying, for all writing, were foxed except, of course, for copper scrolls when some rules, as will be obvious, did not apply.

Penmen were of two schools. One used afirmly pointed reed. The other frayed the reed-end to brush letters on, painter style. Ink was soot or carbon mixed with oil. The attendant prepared carbon cakes for brushmen, filled inkwells for the others.

The rules for copying, for all writing, were fixed. Each sewn

section must have the same number of columns reading from left to right. Each column must have no less than forty-eight lines, no more than sixty. Each line must have thirty letters but some letters were wide, some narrow, so an extra one or two was allowed.

Olasters hung letters from guide lines as their fathers and grandfathers had. Younger Masters set letters between two lines, a new style hardly a hundred years old. Both wrote with a precision and beauty which made Jared marvel as he walked along the long low tables.

Erasures and corrections (carried out to a margin) were permitted and took time on copper. Water washed out mistakes on papyrus and parchment but sometimes disintigrated brittle, thin papyrus. Corrections were interlined as well as put on a margin.

Penmen divided into two schools. One used a firmly sharpened reed. The other frayed his reed and brushed letters on, painter fashion. Ink was soot or carbon mixed with oil or water. The attendant made carbon cakes for brushmen, filled inkwells for the others.

And what were these Brothers in their purity reading, writing and studying? Always the Law handed down by great Moses. Often the Prophets. Sometimes great David's glorious psalms or later imitations. Now and then the stories of Job, Ruth, Esther, Tobit and others. From time to time the history of the People, told and retold by proud chroniclers. And, naturally, the Brothers' own commentaries on nearly everything under the sun.

The Masters maintained a tranquil mood throughout each day. But this did not mean tranqul acceptance of hindrances to their work. They were quick to protest bothers and all the more quick as Jared's daily visits indicated that this new Keeper could be induced to put

the most unsatisfactory condition to rights.

* * * * * *

Unannounced in any formal fashion, Jared's position did slowly change until he was looked on as one of the Fifteen in all but name. He would have been content to stay one of his Ten. For a while he continued to stand with his group when the Brotherhood formed for the evening meal. Even more than before this was the most rewarding hour of his day. Lustration over, his body cool under white garments which smelled clean and sweet, he waited with the others in a calming silence, his day's work finished, his mind untroubled.

As often as not his mind dwelt on the Community's psalms. He had missed the linearound which the Chaste One was shaping his commentary but he did not miss many. He accepted as truth what the Community's oldsters said, that the psalms of the Temple were not a patch on theirs. All the world knew, the oldsters insisted, that many, many Temple psalms were written for selfish reasons by a little clique of priests and leaders of the Leavite choirs there.

Great David had first established these choirs and he was still set down as composer of every Temple psalm although no one explained how he could have been so prolific a poet while he was general, king and Temple planner. But choirmasters were forever popping up with a new:

<u>Meditation of David</u>.

Harp Song of David.

Song of David After Doves in Distant Terebinths.

Song of David After Lilies in the Fields.

These pop-ups, critical Brothers insisted, were in fact written for bribes from rich men wanting forgiveness. Naturally, forgiveness seemed more likely when a psalm linked the briber with Israel's greatest more or less forgiven sinner.

The bribes stirred up the greediest competition. A choirmaster filched a good line or so from a rival's psalm and coaxed away his singers and musicians. Not, of course, a whole chorus or all seven harps or all six lyres. It was enough to coax just one of the best.

At the Community, psalms were composed for the love of the Lord. And it was snatches of such psalms that ran through waiting Jared's tired but tranqul mind.

With an offering of the lips will I bless Him.
On his steadfast love I shall lean all the day.
In His hands is the uprightness of my heart.
The faithfulness of God is the rock I tread.

Jared's next advancement was as unexpected and as casual as his first. One evening he was recalling psalms, comfortablt aware that his Ten were also trying to keep their minds on holy things when the Fifteen passed on its way to the head of the line and the hand of Priest of Aaron fell on Jared's shoulder and drew him along.

"Come sit with us, Jared."

The line of Brothers was staggered. Though no one made a sound the suddenly straightened shoulders and the quickly lifted headsbetrayed their amazement. Such an elevation, almost to membership among the Fifteen, had never been made in this manner before. Nor had so young a Brother ever been set among those in authority.

Jared sat with the Fifteen thereafter. But for him the chief consequence was that the meal took on a deeper significance. His work increased but that was another matter. He felt a sharper purpose in the evening ritual. The Priest of Aaron's blessing held a holier note, the psalm singing a richer meaning. The spare meal, itself, was no more filling but enormously more satisfying.

In truth, of course, nothing was really changed unless you counted the lamps used when darkness fell early enough to make them necessary, These grew steadily fewer because the Priest of Aaron complained that their brightness hurt his eyes. After a number of such complaints a Brother recalled that his grandfather had complained similarly and then had gone blind.

There was, however, Jared's increased work load. He continued to be called the Keeper of the Scrolls but more and more he picked up duties that had been the Overseer's. Not all! An aged Brother who would shortly lay in the cemetary began to keep it tidy. Heber gave more leisure hours to the oasis, so that Jared needed to find almost no other help for the farmer. But he stood forward regularly now at the hour of Assignments which followed ~~khazhaurxar~~ First Ritual. The grounds and buildings became his care and in the Library and Scriptorium he did as much or more than his predecessor.

"Keeper!" one Master said when they all had learned they would not be refused anything, "Is there no good Hulah papyrus? Must I use this sleezy stuff out of Egypt?"

Jared examined it. The stuff was unmistakeably out of Egypt, fourth grade at best.

"Egyptians never make the first grade," he said, "But as long as Rome stays in Palestine you may have to use worse."

"Not on what I am copying," the Master said. "The Overseer set me at it. It is a great writing and deserves better."

Jared looked at the old, worn, scroll on the table. Once he, too, had kept the Library in order and he would have sworn there was no roll there that he could not identify by some detail. Color! Knife marks on its roller which, more than likely, he himself had cut! Its little flag! Scent! However alike the all seemed at first glance every one had its oddity. Its own marshy sourness ~~of~~ of papyrus. Its own special odor of long gone heat if of copper. And each parchment roll had its own astringency. But looking hard he discovered no familiarity at all.

"Now what is this?" he said.

"For a time I thought it was so worn that it amounted to nothing."

But now it does?"

"It is out of Egypt, but not really Egypt. Ethiopia, rather! But Alexandria sent it to us."

Alexandria explained a little. Alaxendria would not send a valueless scroll. Alexandria's Community had been old in wisdom ~~when this one by the Salt Sea began.~~

~~"Keeper."~~

when this one by the Salt Sea began.

"Keeper!" the Master said, and his tone made it plain that he knew he was reporting a wonder, "This is a new writing about Enoch."

Jared was awed. He would have been by any new Writing about Cain's eldest son who had, by faith, been translated into Heaven. Who, the Book said, had walked with the Lord and then was not for the Lord took him. And the Book of Jubilee told more. How Enoch had brought back from Heaven the secrets of writing, of numbers, of the stars and, to Noah especially, the secret of remedies. And how, in Heaven, he had seen the march of the sun and moon and the glorious parade of beings from all ten celestial realms. He had seen the phoenix of perfect beauty, the seraphim which have six wings and the cherubim which never sleep. He had seen the Guardians, each having a whole people in his charge. Michael had charge of Israel. Jared well knew. Hadn't he prayed to Michael in the desert?

"Mighty Michael! Give..."

"Keeper!" the Master said. He was openly wheedling. "This is a copying for which I should have better than papyrus. Not Copper!" He made a face. "I won't try to use that hard stuff. But not even papyrus from Hulah. Parchment! Unhaired, washed, rewashed, stretched and rubbed smooth with pumice. And the separate skins sewn hairside to hairside and fleshside to flesh side to better blend adjoining tints."

"But we haven't such a parchment," Jared said. "The Romans

make it impossible for scrolls like that to reach us."

"The Overseer," the old Master said, "Had permission to go into the world outside. You stand here in his place." He was still wheedling.

Jared had never faced up to the possibility that he, too, might go into the world outside. Now perhaps he must. The prospect both thrilled and repelled him. Of course all sorts of goods had to be hunted in this Roman-made scarcity. But by him, who had never been out of sight of the Community?

Well, he had been in the desert. The Chaste one's intercession had made him free to go a long way into the desert. And learn! Brothers told him he had become a desert lier-in-wait. And he was able to find cover in next to nothing--a trough, a billow, almost any shadow. Where many would have been easily spotted he had safely watched unsuspecting caravans, Roman patrols and bandits and over and over the usual jumble of travellers.

But go into the world outside? Deal there with Temple priests, merchants, innkeepers, beggars, robbers and thieves? And worse, with the gnawing temptations he had managed to subdue in the desert? How subdue them in the strange world outside?

And yet, he told himself, it would be a thing indeed to deal with the whole lot of bullies, tricksters, bandits, dogs-in-the-manger who, he had been told, crowded the world outside. Especially Romans and more especially Temple usurers. Lucky that there was also the priestly school at Jamnia where money was money was honestly weighed and usury was never met.

"I never thought of going into the world outside," he said. But perhaps it is put upon me. I shall speak to the Priest of Aaron."

The Priest of Aaron was startled. Jared need not ask permission to do what the Overseer had done regularly.

"But of course," the old man said. He spoke easily because no decision was needed. It had been made long before. "Go as often as you wish. Never feel you must speak of it again."

Jared found the Chaste One on his rock but this time not wrapped in his commentary. He was looking soberly across the desert.

"I am to go into the world outside," Jared said. "The Priest of Aaron permits."

"I know."

"I shall go to Jerusalem and Jamnia, surely, and maybe farther."

"Into the very pit! Well, each of us must do his duty."

"When they made me Keeper, I asked your blessing. Will you bless me against this going?"

"I bless you every day, whether you ask or not, whether I see you or not."

Jared knelt. It was late afternoon and the wind out of the west felt cold on his back.

"May the Lord keep baseness from your heart! If you stumble in the iniquity of the flesh, may his righteousness cleanse you."

Jared turned back to the Mall. This time, when he reached

it he did not run. He was not on fire to begin his new duty. He went on slowly, puzzling over this blessing, so different from the earlier one.

But on the day before his journey started excitement put the puzzle out of his mind. He was again on the sunny rock, this time to ask if there was anything -- anything --he could do in the world outside for one who deserved everything.

Nothing, the Chaste One told him contentedly, except to return safe and sound. He described the country Jared would see, told him what honored landmarks to look for.

"Also," the Chaste One said, "Do not go far your first day."

"I'll be starting early. I could go well past Jerusalem."

"Stop early. Your first taste of the world outside will help when you think how to prepare for the second and third."

"There is the inn at Netophah on the Incense road. Or if that too near even for a first day?

"Netophah is far enough. Speak of me to the unnkeeper or, if he is gone, to his son."

"You knew the innkeeper?"

"We met in a pass below Jerusalem. A falling rock had broken his leg. He said he would never forget."

Jared thought back. When he came to the Community the Chaste One, even then, had been snow white. And the rock would fallen before the Chaste One joined the Brotherhood. And in a

lonely place where only the brave and merciful stopped to help.

"The son of the son of the innkeeper should never forget," he said.

--x --

TWO

The inn at Netophah was the most ancient station on the northern end of the Incense Road and mouldering walls sustained the legend that their original rude brick had been improved only once. The walls had been repaired, legend said, and three alcoves had been made into one for the inn's most memorable guest.

The legend ran back a thousand years. Then Balkis, queen of Saba, had come in a soft litter to rest in the new, big alcove, the next day continuing her skeptical journey to test Israel's upstart King, son of an ex-sheepherder. Five hundred slaves, captured in one of the raids which made Saba notorious from Damascus to Thebes followed her, and a hundred milk white camels laden with more spices than would ever again reach Jerusalem and also with ivory, perfumes, precious stones, a hundred and twenty talents in raw gold from Saba's mines and a dozen beautiful virgins from Saba's castles.

Netophah was at first only the hard angle of two distant walls meeting on a naked desert hill. Striding from crest to trough and trough to crest of dunes that billowed endlessly Jared lost sight of everything before and behind, but climbing up to each new crest his first view as he halted to check his path was always of the old

inn's rampant wedge.

The naked hill was more than another of the ubiquituous dunes. A compact, solitary peak, it rose south of the last visible vertebra of the backnone which stretches from end to end of Palestine. Perhaps cracked off by an earthquake, it was more rock than sand and offered boulders against which Hared could brace his staff, outcroppings for a handhold and patches of bare limestone on which his sandals slipped. The peak rose gradually and at the top flattened out, providing a level walk to the inn's weathered gates.

These were in better condition than the mouldering wall. Of terebinth planks, their natural oil and pitch had preserved them against wind, sun, rain and age. They were closed, of course. Closed gates discouraged beggars.

Jared slipped from the last limestone patch to the flattened top of the hill and made a fist to knock but he was still several strides from the weathered gates when a ferocious barking pulled him up.

Dogs! And not a sort he was familiar with. He had never heard such snarling and slavering. These beasts sounded mad. He squared his shoulders and advanced. Wasn't this an inn? Well, then it couldn't mean travellers to be dog-devoured. He knocked. The barking grew more ferocious and he got a firmer grip on his staff.

A small panel in one wing of the gate grated bek to make a shoulder high opening. It was so small that it trimmedthe face suddenly appearing in itto two narrow oblongs of fat cheek, a flat-ended nose, brows arching over squinting eyes, almost no fore-

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Netophah was a naked village on a naked desert hill. All around, sand dunes billowed so high that a man, descending from crest to trough, would drop out of sight; but even in the troughs an approaching visitor could see the Inn's gaunt walls. It loomed on its hill as bare as though dogs had licked it.

This was the most ancient station on the northern end of the Incense Road and its legend ran back a thousand years. Then three alcoves had been made into one for the Inn's most memorable guest. Balkis, queen of Saba, had come in a soft litter to rest there, continuing the next day her skeptical journey to test Israel's upstart king. Five hundred slaves had followed her, and a hundred milk-white camels laden with spices, ivory, perfumes, precious stones, a hundred and twenty talents in raw gold from Saba's mines and a dozen beautiful virgins from Saba's castles.

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head and only a piece of chin below a puckered mouth. For a reason not at once apparent the bony arch over the eyes had something very odd about them. The cropped face jerked in response to an unseen reflex and the barking turned into yelps.

It must have taken a savage kick to silence the brutes even for a little. Jared was sorry for them.

Inside the snarling and slavering resumed but not so loud and the squinting eyes measured Jared's worn garments, tousled black hair and intense dark face.

"What do you want?"

The sour question withheld hospitality from a traveller whose girdle did have a lump in it but too big a lump to mean money and whose staff was stout enough to flatten a gatekeeper, given half a chance. Here might be the worst of beggars.

"To spend the night."

Jared made his reply amiable although what he chiefly felt was embarrassment. For the first time in his life he was about to buy something and he was not sure that the inn would want to bother with so small a purchase. Every Brother claiming knowledge of the world outside said that money was important there above everything else and this gatekeeper might decide that a few mites did not justify opening his gates. But, Jared reminded himself, not all travellers could afford the best. Sourface might be pleased that this one was, at least, not a beggar.

"I can pay."

The dogs continued to snarl and slaver but the face at the peephole tilted down and the dogs fell silent and the face came back to full view. Now it was faintly apologetic.

"I wouldn't stay here long if I opened without making sure it wasn't just a beggar at the gates," the Gatekeeper said.

The gates swung back enough to admit a narrow man. Jared squeezed into a great unpaved courtyard, trying for a casual air which would not reveal that this was his first visit to an inn.

Two big watchdogs, half black, half gray and, Jared thought, half wolf, muttered. The narrow oblong of fat cheek, nose, mouth, eyebrows, eyes and chin expanded into a man so fat that he seemed to waddle standing still. And now the oddness of the eyebrows was cleared up. They were hairless. So was the gatekeeper's entire face. Even the corrugated skull was hairless. Not s haven! Hairless! Some taint, lack or abortion made it impossible for him to grow hair.

"I am of the Brotherhood," Jared said and gestured into the east. "You do know of the Brotherhood?"

"I'd just begun to wonder if you mightn't be," The puckered mouth grew less sour.

"I am Jared ben Joktan."

"I am Obal. If you are one of them I know where to put you. In an alcove."

Jared looked around. An alcove would be one of the roofless stalls -- one enormous -- on three sides of the wall.

Over against the fourth wall were the quarters of the inn's household and alongside, under an awning to ward off rain and sun, were two cooking hearths. Large parties of travellers needed more than braziers.

"How much for a little alcove and no wood?" Jared said.

"I'll speak to the mistress."

Mistress?"

Jared was startled.

"Where is the master?"

"The last master died a little while back and good riddance. The old master and his son long ago."

Jared began a solicituous murmur but Obal cut him short.

"The old master and his son left sadness, but their time had come. The last one is where he belongs. Do not mourn for any of the three. The mistress is all we need."

"Tell her I can pay."

"I'll tell her. But she will say. She says as to all things." Obal looked at Jared with eyes almost kind under the hairless brows. "In the past no Brother has been asked to pay for anything here."

Jared's heart grew warm.

Someone here has not forgotten the Chaste One.

"I suppose you want food, too?" Obal said.

Jared tapped his girdle cache of cheese and flat loaves and shook his head. He had enough food for this evening and the next day and the next. He had also, folded into his girdle, a frugal sufficiency of money for new scrolls and everything else.

"But I could use water for a bath."

"Oh, I know!"

Obal, along with the whole desert, knew how often the Brothers bathed and was outraged at being asked to encourage so wasteful a practice.

"For a lus--" Jared began. But lustration would mean little to Obal. "A small pitcher will do."

"Even as to a very small pitcher the mistress will say. But I'll ask when I ask about the alcove."

Jared looked the stalls over as Obal waddled off. Each held bed-straw and firewood. Not much of either; both were scarce in this desert. If more warmth were needed the guest probably would have charcoal and brazier. Most travellers carried these, he knew. But he would keep warm without them. Any alcove in the north wall would be somewhat protected from the west wind, sure to blow as night came on.

He heard waddling steps and turned to see if Obal had brought water. He hadn't.

"The Mistress says, 'Come!' "

Jared felt a touch of panic at this order to come and stand before a woman of the world outside. He knew nothing of women except for the few wives of married brothers.

"She need not bother with me," he said. "An alcove and a little water are all I need."

"She said, 'Come.', Obal repeated. "Here no one keeps the Mistress waiting."

This Mistress, Jared thought, sound almost too quick with orders. But then he rebuked himself. I am the one who is too quick. ~~How can I be when this inn has not forgotten the Chaste One?~~

~~Also he remembered a thing the Chaste One had told him. Within the stranger's gates the stranger's law is the law~~

How can I be, when this inn has not forgotten the Chaste One?

Also he remembered a thing the Chaste One had told him.

Within the stranger's gates the stranger's law is the law of the guest.

And he followed Obal, trying to decide what a Brother's manner toward a strange woman of the world outside ought to be. He settled on a cool aloofness.

Obal led into an all purpose room where he had to duck strings of garlic and figs hanging from rafters. Three women, one young, looked up. The young one, a high colored girl, was slicing carrots into a pot suspended over a frugal hearth fire. Another was sewing. The third's lap balanced a handmill in which she was grinding grain. All three smiled and Jared flushed but held himself soberly erect and followed Obal across the room to a door on which Obal knocked. His fat knuckles made the barely audible tattoo of one hesitant about approaching authority.

A voice said, "Come," and Jared's testiness washed away in a surge of pleasure. The voices of the hard-worked wives of the Brothers were usually hurried and sharp. This one was leisurely and soft. The Discipline discouraged the Brotherhood from dwelling on women's voices but it could not control thoughts in sleep. And undisciplined sleepx had exorcised, for Jared, a phantom of womanhood more satisfactory than any wife of the Brothers, even though in waking hours he had not yielded enough to temptation to rub the lamp of his imagination until it lighted the phantom. Not now, with his loins as well as his thoughts suddenly stirred he extended the picture

which sleep had exorcised.

She will be beautoful.

And he followed Obal through the second doorway.

She sat across the room in a chair with curved arms that had been shaped to rest old hands. Now they helped to give her a dignity beyond her years. Her own hands rested in the lap of a green dress. Her eyes were a warm green. A spinning wheel alongside her chair said that the mistress of the inn kept busy. Her full skirt spread over sandalled feet so that only her toetips showed. Toes, sandals, the dress's embroidered hem and its embossed leather belt all were bright vermillion. And when she stirred a faint tinkling drifted through the room. Tiny bells hung from her sandal straps.

One of the Prophets had written it, Jared remembered. Women mincing ~~along~~ making a tinkling with their feet.

She was not, of course, to be put in with the haughty daughters of Zion whom the Prophet had rebuked. But, Jared told himself, feeling dimly that he had just clambered off a precipice to safety, she was not beautiful.

She was older than he was although, he decided, not by much. And she was no phantom. She could walk the desert, climb this hill, ride a horse and, faced with her dignity, he understood Obal's, "No one keeps the Mistress waiting." But she was not beautiful. Her brown hair cascaded too stormily over her shoulders, ~~and~~ face was too wide at the cheekbones, her mouth too full and, finally, she was too wind-browned. Although on this bare hill who wouldn't be wind-browned. If she had been a beautiful woman of the world outside

he might have felt panic again. But he was sure he was equal to this brown desert girl for all that she owned an inn.

He touched hand to head and heart.

If the mistress of the inn was not what Jared had expected neither, plainly, was he what she had expected. Her manner had been deferential when she looked past Obal toward the guest he escorted. But with her first glance the look had changed to surprise and then a mild, amused rebuke.

"You didn't tell me, Obal!"

Then she pressed brown hands against brown cheeks and broke into laughter.

"I expected someone old enough to be a grandfather," she said to Jared. "They all have been."

For a moment Jared struggled for a cool aloofness. But then, considering how dumfounded she must have been with his towering black hulk when she expected someone like the Overseer he had to grin. And Obal could not keep his thick lips from twitching and the inn-Mistress rocked with mirth.

But contrition quickly erased Jared's grin. He knew that a Brother ought not to feel such harmony with a woman of the world outside. Moreover, he remembered the Overseer who should have been here but was under a low mound among the stunted forest of stones beside the Salt Sea.

The inn-mistress also sobered, perhaps in response to Jared's sobriety perhaps remembering her grandfather in whose chair she sat and who, like the Overseer, was gone. Her hands dropped ~~dropped from cheeks that her fingers had pressed pink under the desert brown and she stood up, the full skirt swirling across tinkling sandals.~~

from cheeks that her fingers had pressed pink under the desert brown and she stood up, the full skirt swirling across tinkling sandals. Bright tendrils of her hair floated about her head and caught the light. She was slender and firm breasted and she was, Jared saw, taller than he had judged while she sat. The top of her cascading hair would be level with his eyes if they stood close.

"I am Tamar, granddaughter of Gershon and daughter of Amram who are both gone. In their names I welcome one of the holy Community by the Salt Sea," she said.

Nothing that the Chaste One had ever taught Jared helped him to frame a reply but he made a stab at one, the best that came to mind.

"I am Jared. In the name of the Priest of AAron and of the Brotherhood I thank you and through you Gershon and Amram."

He was half minded to add <u>and your husband</u>. Obal must have meant a husband when he spoke of the one whose passing had been a good riddance. But she had named only the first two. The husband almost surely had been unloved.

Tamar sat down again and looked at Obal and Obal, familiar with all her looks, pushed a second seat near her.

Jared sat down and pretended to look around on what, with only the caves of the Community and its bare rooms and cubicles to guide him, seemed luxury. Fired bricks, oiled to lay dust, made a floor under scattered, lively rugs left, perhaps, by grateful caravan masters and, also perhaps, because leagues and years had worn them. An olivewood table look as though expert rubbing under a thousand hands

during scores of years had brought it to its soft gray-green. It was set with dishes for dining.

Taborets and more seats were placed at random and bright pillows were scattered about and on the walls basins and trays of copper had been hung. Lamps stood in two wall niches. A door ajar allowed a glimpse of a smaller room with a pallet.

"This inn has never asked a Brother to pay for lodging or food either," Tamar said. She smiled. "Go with Obal. When you are rid of your travel stains come back. The table will be ready as it has been made ready for all earlier Brothers."

"As I told Obal, I can pay for an alcove," Jared said. He avoided her gaze. "And I brought food. You need not take this trouble."

"If the visits of Brothers troubled us in this inn, I would feel disgraced an, a disgrace to my grandfather and father."

The deference with which she had awaited a venerable Brother was all gone now. Her manner was that of a young woman who had learned to deal with men of all sorts -- preemptory caravan masters, bold guards, rude drivers, condescending Jerusalemites, oily Syrians, wily Egyptians, subtle Greeks, truculent Samaritans, voletile Arabs, serpentine Numidians, now and then a blustering Gaul and, of late, imperious Romans. She had schooled herself to smile them all into decorum but hardly with the smile she now turned on Jared. Her changed manner said that he seemed less and less like one of the austere Salt Sea Community.

Obal tells me you are staying only one night."

Belatedly, it occurred to Jared that he might break the agreeable but forbidden haromny in emphasizing that he was more than an ordinary Brother.

"I am sent as the Keeper of the Scrolls," he said.

"The Keeper of the Scrolls!"

Tamar's tone confessed that she did not know exactly what a Keeper of the Scrolls was. But it also said she had expected her guest to be more than an ordinary Brother.

"It has always been one in authority in the Community who came here, and I see it is now."

* * * * *

A holy washing, the Fifteen said, cleansed spirit as well as body. Obal's pitcherful was not ample but Jared, after his lustration, did feel twice refreshed. It occurred to him that now might be a time to ponder, as the Chaste One had advised, on what he had met up with and what still might come and he could see now that he would meet many women as well as men and with them the practices of the Community would not be a sufficient guide. So far away from the Brotherhood he ought to find reliable new ones.

Recalling his early touch of panic at the prospect of facing a strange woman of the world outside he decided that he had found--at least might have found --one helpful guide that might make future panic less likely. The woman, seen close, had turned out to to be only a brown desert girl whose green swirling dress certainly held your eye but who was not anyone to confound a man. So! A threat when brought out into the open could be seen in its true

proportions and was, usually, no threat at all, and out in the courtyard he nodded to Obal who was back with his couched, muttering dogs and went back into the alll-purpose room. There he nodded to the three women, but no more than was courteous from a Brother. They modded back, smiling as before.

Dodging garlic bulbs and pigs, Jared knocked on the opposite door. Not Obal's padded tattoo, nor a preemptory hammer but a good firm thump to show a man was making it.

No voice said, "Come!" Instead the door opened and Tamar beyond, her green skirt swirling and bells tinkling with a vigor that showed she had hurried.

Jared saw that he had misjudged her. She was not at all what his sleep had exorcised but she was warm and vivid and not desert brown. More nearly golden! The harmony returned. He entered and the door closed behind him. The olivewood table now was spread with food. Jared looked and shook his head.

"What do you not like?" Tamar said, but lightly because the headshake had not been disapproving.

"I had thought of eating bread and cheese in a windy alcove."

Tamar laughed and gestured toward a basin and even though he had just come from a lustration he washed his hands and so did she. That convention finished, they sat down and he bowed his black head.

"Blessed be he who gives food for all."

Great Moses had given the words to the Tribes and after

more than a thousand years they were still fresh and heartening.

The stew for which one of the women had sliced carrots and another had ground wheat contained also beans and onions. And there were also ripe olives, a pale, soft cheese, preserved ginger probably left by some caravan and wine, and water to thin the wine.

"Our Hebron grapes," Tamar said, "Make a light wine but it builds an appetite."

Jared marvelled.

Here they need wine to sharpen appetite!

When the Brothers had wine they thinned it, five parts water to one of wine. Tamar added two parts water and handed Jared a cup, her sleeve slipping from a golden arm. He sipped to be polite.

Bread was a different matter. He took up a flat, round loaf and prayer came, out of habit.

Blessed be thou who hath brought bread from the earth.

He cut from the best baked side and offered her a fragrant crescent and cut a piece for himself and they bent to the stew. Jared caught a faint odor of fish. It would be dried fish from Galillee. Accustomed to silence, Jared did not speak but Tamar said.

"The Brothers who came here before you were more like your Overseer who came often."

"Not many of us are that old. Although the Roman aggression keeps novices from joining us."

"Romans!" Her shoulders lifted in condemnation.

"I am on this mission because the Romans killed the Overseer," Jared said.

"What?" Tamar said. "That good old man dead?"

After a moment of sorrowful silence she added: "Death waited a long time for him. But my grandfather used to say that few mind delaying death."

"I never knew anyone who enjoyed life more than the Overseer," Jared said.

"How long did you know him?"

"From the day I came among the Brothers. I wasn't quite four years old."

"Then it was not by your own decision that you joined the Community?"

"Well, that came later. But I was brought by my father."

"Your mother did not mind?"

"It was because my mother had died that my father brought me. He had hired himself as a caravan guard along this Road. He said he would come back. But the Chaste One told me later that caravan guards live too dangerously to make their promises anything to count on."

Tamar's hands went to her cheeks. Jared was to discover that hands-to-cheeks meant chiefly excitement or pleasure.

"The Chaste One? My grandfather has been gone a long while and I haven't heard the Chaste One named since he went. But if you know the Chaste One you are twice welcome here."

"The Chaste One told me to speak of him. But he meant your grandfather, or father, or your father's son. Speaking of him went out of my mind when I found you were the innkeeper."

"Here," Tamar said, "Whoever is innkeeper inherits the duties and honors of all those who were." She spoke with slow dignity. "And especially I inherit the honor of welcoming any who come in the name of the Chaste One. Do you know him well?"

"He has been a father, grandfather -- everything -- to me." Jared said. His voice was thick with emotion.

"My grandfather always said the Chaste One saved his life. He gave help when scores passed by."

"I was told only that a falling rock hurt your grandfather."

"Afterward robbers stripped and robbed and beat him. Later, travellers feared that if they stopped to help the same robbers would catch them."

<u>So the Chaste One had risked robbers when he stopped to help her grandfather!</u>

"Did the Chaste One warn you of robbers when you started this journey?"

"He never doubts I can take care of myself, even though I do," Jared said.

"Of course he doesn't," Tamar said. Her gaze rested on him in admiration.

Jared rose. They had finished their meal. But Tamar told him she wished to speak of Obal. He sat down again.

"That affliction! The lack of hair. He has had it all his life. His own mother and father could not be toward him as they He left his home when he was less than half grown. And out in the everybody shunned him."

"Now why?" Jared said. The Community shunned noone.

"People thought the taint meant evil. He came begging to this inn--that was in my grandfather's day. He was given charge of the gates. But he feared our guests'disgust over his strange looks."

She stopped and looked at Jarad almost, he thought, as though asking his approval.

"I wish I had the Chaste One's wisdom."

He sat silent for a moment, then got up again and thanked her.

"When will you leave, Jared?"

"Before sun-up. And I'll be back at the Community in three or four days."

"Why so early?"

"I must get on to Jerusalem and probably Jamnia, too."

He explained about the papyrus needed by one special Brother.

"I have never been to Jerusalem," she said. "It is near, but Hebron is easier to reach and has all we need. But often, from the desert, I have seen the Temple's golden tip." She put her hands to her cheeks and smiled. "On your return stop here. You will be welcome for yourself as well as because of the Chaste One."

Jared felt the sense of harmony growing stronger.

"I'll show you a thing," Tamar said and led him to a second door, opposite the one by which he had entered. They went through to a small balcony looking out to the desert. Close at hand, in the starry darkness, the wall of the inn rose and in the wall another door was set.

"When you return you are likely to reach the inn after dark. You will come to this side first, so knock at this door. If you went around to the great gate that would be locked and you would have to rouse Obal and the dogs would make a clamor and the whole household would be waked."

"If I come when the great gate is closed, I'll knock here," Jared said.

"Have you food for tomorrow?"

He had plenty, he said, the whole supply that he had brought from the Community.

"No matter how early or late you reach the inn," she said. "Knock. I'll hear."

"Oh, I'll knock," Jared said.

He went out into the all-purpose room, empty now, and her door closed behind him.

He fixed himself for the night in his alcove. The rising wind was soft and he was pleasantly warm but he did not sleep. In his loins and mind were the memory of her golden arms and soft voice.

"When you come back, tell me about Jerusalem," she had said.

Before dawn, and after a brief browsing, he was up and off. Obal waddled up to open the gates but the dogs slept. He ploughed ahead, through the darkness and the ocean of sand and reached a hill. From there, looking back, he caught the first light. At the Community this would be the time of First Ritual.

"We thank thee, Oh Lord!" he chanted sofyly and flung his arms high. "We thank thee, Oh Lord!" and ploughed on.

The desert birds knew that night was going and began to tell one another. And when the spokes of the wheel of morning were clear, Jared flung himself prostrate for an instant, then rose and ploughed ahead once more. The harmony which he had felt throughout his evening with Tamar was still strong.

* * * * * *

Long after he told himself that it had drugged him so that he missed the landmarks which the Chaste One's teaching should have made arresting --the high cave over the little village called Elam, where Samson hid after smiting the Philistines hip and thigh; marshy Bethbasi, a watering place on the Incense Road; great David's Bethlehem, its limestone walls glistening that early among green figs and silver-grey olive trees and black stubs that would become lush vines and newly ploughed fields later to turn yellow with waving grain. When he heard a guarded, rebuking voice he turned as though he had been shaken out of a dream.

"Are you trying to draw bandits or robbers? Do you always go as though whipped by demons?"

"A tall, weathered, watchful man more than twice Jared's age stood in nice concealment against a dune nearly as white as his robe.

Jared blinked at him and came back to consciousness.

"And you go unarmed! Do your elders give no counsel at all?"

He beckoned Jared to share his dune and his gaze marked

the shabby tunic and threadbare cloak.

"You must belong to that Community! Who else would travel around here without sword, spear, dagger or even a sling?"

"I have never touched anything but a sling," Jared said. "And that just to whack vultures off new lambs."

"With only a sling even your size of lamb would find bandits too much vulture. And since the Romans have come, they would be more."

The man's speech had a peaceable deliberation although he had muscle enough for a fighter and was armed. A sword swung from a baldric and a dagger clung to his thigh from a broad belt buckled outside his robe. All this, Jared would learn later, was Roman style.

"I am going just to Jerusalem and maybe Jamnia," Jared "Am I really in much danger?"

"Through here you are. This is robber country and Roman patrols like it, too. But we'll soon be among trees. I know safe paths and I, too, am going to Jerusalem. Let us go together."

The man smiled.

"I am Heth. My village is Emmaus. Do you know Emmaus?"

Jared had heard of the small village near Jerusalem.

"I am Jared. I am, as you guessed, from the Salt Sea Brotherhood. Your company would be welcome if there were no danger."

They walked along a path plain to Heth although for Jared it only ascended, as it should. Everyone knew you got to Jerusalem only by going up.

Watchful Heth favored low, well-wooded country but now and then he led to some bare ridge which looked away on every quarter

and then Jared glimpsed villages all around and ravines winding down to the fertile coast and the long gash marking the River Jordan, and palm decked, balsam blessed Jericho and his own Salt Sea. And Trees! Trees! Trees! In contrast to the naked desert trees were everywhere. Pine, oak, terebinth, tamarask, ash, elm, sycamore, beech, poplar and that spruce whose sun-firmed flanks made the best spear shafts. Heth pointed them all out and also shrubs --hazel, spicy storach, acacia, sumach, willow and hawthorne.

"You know this country," Jared said.

"Only fairly. I'm chiefly in Emmaus. I was in Bethlehem yesterday only to collect a debt. In Emmaus I have a vineyard, sheep and crop land. Do you know Rome has put a colony in Emmaus?"

"Romans in Emmaus?"

The Chaste One had said Roman colonies sprouted everywhere after Rome's conquering heel but nothing of a colony in Emmaus.

"Legion veterans," Heth said. "You must know of Rome's legions, even in your Community."

For all its isolation the Community knew a good deal about the legions which had been aprowl in Palestine for almost four years. It had mourned their successes in Galilee, had rejoiced when Jews routed Roman garrisons and took back the southern stronghold, Masada, and the Fortress of Antonia in Jerusalem.

"I have heard," Jared said. "Titus Flavius Sabinus Vespasianus commands them."

"Vespasianus no longer," Heth said. "His son commands. He is another Titus. There are four legions and many auxiliaries. The Fifth is full of wild former pirates. The Tenth claims a hundred years of unbroken victories. The Fifteenth boasts that on the seventh

of each month it cannot be beaten. Apollo, a Roman god, protects it. Apollo and his twin sister were born on the seventh day of some month, they say. The Twelfth will fight for revenge. Three years or so ago our people drove it from Mount Scopus where it is again encamped."

He looked at Jared apologetically.

"Don't think I got all this from lies scribbled on broadsheets. Men told me who knew what they were talking about. Some are colonists in Emmaus."

"Can only four legions win over us?" Jared said.

"Titus has any many more auxiliaries. Only a few of these are Roman citizens, like the legionnaires. They come from all over. Some from Arabia, some from Lebanon, some Agrippa provided and one lot comes from islands off Spain. They are Balearic slingers."

Jared was thoughtful.

"Is this son of Vespasianus fit for such a command. A son must be young."

Heth looked at Jared, estimating.

"He is only a few years older than you. He always wants women which is not a sign of strength; lately he has taken up with the Herodian Princess Berenice. But his father trained him and the legions follow him."

"Where is Vespasianus?"

"Back in Rome. To be Emperor! But while he commanded here he set up the Emmaus colony. They are doing well with their discharge bonus. Also they were goven our best crop land, vineyards and animals."

Jared looked away not to betray his thought that some must be doing well at Heth's expense. The Discipline discouraged a Brother

from any act or word that might provoke another's resentment.

"And I do well," Heth said. His voice was full of satisfaction. "Our ways with planting, plowing, harvesting and with animals are unknown to the colonists and when they ask I help and am repaid."

"I was told a Roman never pays."

"After I help I ask, in my turn, about Roman ways with weapons. I am no fighter. But my only son and his wife were taken by a plague just before the last Ingathering. He and I had just chosen a kid for sacrifice in thanks for harvests you would never believe had come off so small a farm. Now I am the only security of three grandsons. And although I am no man of war I would fight for my son's sons. So I have asked. And now I know why a Roman grips a dagger to make it a longer finger. Why they thrust with a sword rather than slash. While the sword arm is swing up or around to slash, a Roman thrust can get at your vitals."

Jared listened raptly to the martial recital. His Discipline directed him to think no unpeaceful thoughts. But after mastering the sling (You had to cast almost to a hairbreadth and hit just as the lumbering vulture seemed to hang motionless before sinking onto its prey) he had more than once asked himself an unpeaceful question. It it was right to war against vultures, who was it wrong to use the sling or a better weapon against other enemies? He had asked oftener after the slaying of the Overseer. He asked himself again. He had never before been with anyone who might teach the use of weapons he knew he might need to use any time now.

"Did you learn about spears," he said after a pause.

"I lean least of all to spears," Heth said. "I never carry one. But I asked. Romans use two. One has a broad, double-edged blade and is mainly for thrusting. The other is lighter with a long lean point that goes in easily. It is often hurled. As I said before, the truest of these is made of wood from the side of a spruce tree oftenest in the sun. They carry far, but except when thrown from quite close they can be dodged. Perhaps not by me! But the colonists say a trained man need only step to one side or, even, just turn or lean a little."

Jared let this sink in.

"And slings? Can Romans sling like a Benjaminite?"

"Who everyone can sling to a hairsbreadth and not miss?"

Hethsmiled as he repeated the familiar boast. Generations had smiled, because by no means all of the Tribe of Benjamin could make the boast good. Yet who could be sure which Benjaminite could or couldn't?

"The legions do not take to slings," he said. "Nor do the Numidian auxiliaries who go into battle ahorseback curved as supple as snakes behind little round shields and chanting a wil, sing-song. But other auxiliaries, from islands off Hispania where the Empire gets its best olives and snails, these throw even with Benjaminites. And I think," Heth looked Jared overm approvingly, "That if you can whack vultures you may too."

"I might not need too much teaching with a sling," Jared said, "But to use any other weapon I'd need everything."

"Your vows do not forbid taking up arms?"

"In a way. But it is never forbidden to stand against Sons of Darkness."

Jared spoke stoutly. The Community had never made its position on fighting plain.

"Sons of Darkness?"

"The Fifteen says any who break the Covenant are Sons of Darkness."

"Well, then, these Romans certainly are."

Jared was sure the Century which had come to the Community had broken the Covenant and he told how the Overseer had been slain. His sober voice told how much the crime still moved him.

Heth dropped a hand on the younger man's shoulder.

"Let me show you what I have tried to learn," he said.

Jared kindled. The legions had mainly kept to Galillee but might they not come up against Jerusalem? And would the Priest of Aaron then say No to one offering to defend the City and the Temple? Besides, as Keeper would he not need to go often into the world outside where Romans, as well as other robbers, might be on every hand? Finally, would he ever come on another willing as well as able to teach the use of Rome's own weapons?

"If you have time to teach I have more than enough to learn."

"I have plenty for the little I have picked up."

"For even a little I'll be in your debt."

"Then you shall have your first lesson as soon as we are

past Jerusalem. And you haven't long to wait or far to go. Look!

Above Heth's beard his face flamed with color as he pointed.

Jared's eyes, following the pointing finger, grew bright. In that time for Jews everywhere the City and its holy temple made up for centuries of captivity, exile defeat and oppression.

They were on a bare ridge, the sun at their backs and deep narrow Kidron Valley before them. At its southern end this met another gentler valley bending eastward for the meeting. In the opposite direction it turned out of sight into the northwest. Where the two valleys met a small road led to a smallish gate of the City and it was filled with men, women, children, horses, camels, asses, cattle, sheep. Jared looked and looked.

Why! It is so close I could run the whole way and hardly draw a quick breath!

Embraced by the valley, locked in a matrx of huge walls begun a millennium earlier the City loomed which, since Solomon, had been Israel's glory. On a plateau split by precipituous Tyropoeon Valley (which was not visible but was suggested) the holy city's steep terraces cascaded and on the plateau's nearest side the golden Temple soared out of the shadow of a bulkin fortress. The Holy House, a showy expanse of marble seemed to drift up behind a slender tower at the near corner of a wall enclosing the Temple. The tower was so lofty that Jared almost thought he was seeing one of the glorious creatures from heavenly realms its folded wings rising to a tip that all but vanished into the blue.

"Here only" Heth said, "may Israel make the commanded

sacrifices. On Passover, not far off, we shall come to make them by thousands from all over the world." His voice was hoarse with reverence.

Jared nodded in an excitement too great for words.

* * * * * *

They scrambled down Kidron, crossed a level open space and Heth pointed ahead.

"All Jerusalem brings its trash through that," he said.

"I know. The dung gate. Everything unclean under the Law."

The stench came out to greet them from cartloads, sackloads, basketsful that had been dumped to steam and rot under the sun. Jared looked disapprovingly.

<u>No one buries , as the Brothers do, with their little shovels.</u>

They got onto the crowded road they had seen from the ridge and Jared noticed that many men, and some women and children, carried chickens and ducks, leg-tied two by two, and hung on the owner's shoulder.

"They think they'll save the price of a sacrifice bought from the priests," Heth said, "but if the priests find a blemish on one of those birds whoever brought it will have to buy. And some priests can always find a blemish."

"The Community did not sacrifice birds and animals but Jared said nothing. He had heard, of course, that there were priests who cheated.

Jostled, elbowed, bumped they got through the gate and

came to a pool.

"Siloam," Heth said.

Jared knelt and drank from his hand in the wary fashion of Gideon's three hundred. The water was cool and sweet.

"Siloam's water is said to be good for the stomach," Heth said.

"So I have read."

"I never much liked reading. But I have a friend in Jamnia who is at it all the time. He is in the school there. His name is Amos."

They turned upt a narrow street which twisted upward. Men, women, children, little burdened asses and now and then a horse or camel crowded between plaster walls that glittered when the sunlight fell on them. The crowd, whose many-hued tunics, robes, cloaks and dresses made a bright mosaic above dusty cobble stones included strangers from far away, people of the surrounding countryside and citizens of Jerusalem. The Jerusalemites were unmistakable, so assured and nimble eyed. Country folks often seemed bewildered in the press, so much more confusing than the tangle of their hills and valleys.

Scattered through the mosaic the crippled and diseased and those who pretended to be scretched out begging hands. The pretenders, the pickpockets and tricksters, made covert fraternal signs to one another before sidling off on search of victims.

Heth, who had been mild with Romans, shouldered the cheats unforgivingly. He could not abide them, he said. Jared scarcely noticed them he was so awed by his first sight of crowds. Nowhere else

in all the world, he thought, could there be another city as crowded as Jerusalem?

"This is only the Lower City," Heth said. They had turned into a narrow street.

In the Upper City, Jared would see, there were princes palaces and merchants mansions. Here, however, except for poorer homes and a part set aside for Temple Priests, nearly all was given over to business.

"Everybody certainly seems busy," Jared said. Before their shops, in shade and sunshine, tailors were sewing, iron workers were hammering, carpenters were sawing in full view of passersby.

"Here's what I came for," Heth said. He stopped before a shoemaker. "My grandsons outgrow footwear before it is half worn. The noise of a small boy is terri le to hear when he stubs a toe that sticks out beyond a sandal sole. Jared, you never said what your errand is."

"I need one fine parchment and a few good papyrus scrolls."

They came to a shop which tempted writers with a display of their tools but the proprietor shook his head when asked for parchment. As he made more inviting patterns of styluses in ivory and silver, vari-colored little pots and trays of red and black ink and carbon and reeds both pointed and frayed, his headshake expressed pity for the ignorance that that such a request indicated.

"The Roman aggression keeps us short of almost everything," he said. "Or havn't they heard of the aggression where you come from?"

He could, however, offer some papyrus and copper.

"I'd rather see the Temple."

"I'll look in Jamnia," he said. But he did buy some papyrus and one copper strip.

"We climb for the Temple. Before we climb let's put strength in our legs. Let's eat."

"Hungry?" Heth said. An, then not allowing time for an answer swept one arm in a half circle that called on Jared to look. "You're passing up sights you'll never see outside Jerusalem. All these arcades! Stalls! Bazaars! Shops! Their owners offer stuff only the rich dare think of buying. Copper, iron, silver and gold smiths! Jewelers! Dealers in silks and linens finer than silk! Fabrics from Egypt, Babylon, India and farther." Another arm sweep. "Here a man can buy anything from a false tooth to an emerald bigger than any false tooth. But speaking for myself, I'm ready to eat."

"I could eat," Jared said. He looked at the sun, almost up to mid sky. "But I'd rather see the Temple."

"We climb for the Temple. Before we climb let's put strength in our legs. Let's eat."

Jared did not need to ask where. All around were the places where anyx visitor to Jerusalem could find food ready to eat and waiting.

"A man can buy a Jerusalem-cooked meal nearly as cheap as he can buy just the rew stuff in Emmaus," Jared said. "The Romans haven't cut off our supply of food or of good Galillean and Judean wine, or a sour stuff called beer." He made a face." There's beer of Babylon and Egypt. I can't own either. Egyptian wine is worse. It's sold hot, cold, sweet and spiced."

They came to a restaurant whose bosomy waitress gestured, showering the scent of a strong perfume."

"Women in restaurents," Heth said, "get themselves up to please customers. They hope!"

"Here e very price is low," the waitress said, "and we have perfumed beer."

"Perfumed?" Jared looked at Heth. "You missed one!"

"I just fprgot," Heth said. "He smiled. "Perfumed isn't much different fromsweet or spiced."

The waitress gestured again her necklace and bracelets clinking. The sound brought back to Jared a more inviting chime of little bells and of golden cheeks more pleasing than this painted face and eyes ringed with kohl.

They passed through the dorless, windowless frame which separated restaurant from street to a small table close to a larger one. That stood against the inner wall. It held stone slabs on which food was arranged. One stone, over a brazier half-full of smouldering ~~charcoal, bore platters of fish and vegetables and a small pot of~~ soup. Unheated slabs displayed dried fish and salt, parched grain, dates, figs, sweetmeats, fruitcake and flat round loaves of bread

charcoal, bore platters of fish, vegetables and a pot of soup. Unheated slabs displayed salted and dried fish, parched grain, dates, fruitcake, sweetmeats and flat round loaves of bread like the one Jared had cut the night before.

Heth chose soup, lentils, bread and figs. Jared nodded that he would have the same. He did not take his gaze off a ragged papyrus whuch hung on the wall over the food slabs and was packed with big, bold writing.

It was his first sight of a sensation which travellers had often described. This, Jared told himself, must be one of the broadsheets full of gossip that were hawked to any tradesman who could be made to believe that such stuff drew trade. Scribes who were small credit to their calling wrote them, putting in whatevernewsmongers had picked up throughout the City, chiefly in the Profane Court of the Temple. Sooner or later everyone went intoxthe Profane Court.

This broadsheet began with an explosive prediction.

TITUS WILL LAY SIEGE TO JERUSALEM!

Jared looked at Heth in dismay. If this was true the Roman aggression was on the verge of a terrible advance, a threat not only to the City but to the Holy Temple.

Heth broke his bread and sipped his sopu.

That thing is too old to mean anything," he said. "Look at its flyspecks. Anyway, those sheets say whatever will inflame. Our leaders have denied over and over that Titus will move against the City. So has Titus. Jerusalem has twenty men of valor for every

legionnaires and auxiliaries in Titus's army and thousands more are coming for the Passover."

Reassured, Jared turned to his own food and when they had finished he marvelled at Heth's rugged refusal to pay the first bill that the bosomy waitress presented. He marvelled more when she settled amiably for little more than half.

They walked a way up the street and Heth pointed to a long steep valley appearing on their left. Small houses were clinging to it. Lower down were larger ones which Heth said were dairies.

"Tyropoeon Valley," he said. "It's called the valley of the cheesemakers because it provides Jerusalem with almost everything made of milk. It's the smelliest place in the City next the Dung Gate. But look across it."

Across, Jared saw terraced streets, splendid houses each inside its own wall and, half hidden by the walls, lawns and gardens.

"Is that the Upper City?"

"We'll be going there after the Temple. To reach the Temple we keep this side of Tyropoeon."

Jared stepped up his pace although the climb was growing steeper. Now, soaring above him though distant, he saw a fortress that had to be set in a high cliff.

"Is that the Fortress Antonia?"

"It overlooks the Temple from the north," Heth said. "While the Romans held it they could see everything that went on inside. They even had their own entrance by the roof of a connecting collonade. Thanks be to God they do not hold it now."

"And eat," Eben said. "Any bite that anybody has handy."

nights and a long, hard day. We're going to sleep.

"Amen!" Jared said.

"That gray wall, just coming into sight above the roofs, is the Temple wall."

Jared's heart stirred. Staring, he saw again the slim, vaulting pinnacl, he had seen from Kidron's crest. If wall and tower were so close, must not the greater wonder appear soon?

Heth pointed again, but not toward the Temple.

"The finest synagogue in the City," he said.

Jared looked briefly. The Chaste One had told of synagogues. They had risen with the scattering of the People. They did not replace the Temple; they were not for sacrifice. But men who tried to do right in the eyes of the Lord but were too far off for the prescribed Temple compliances could go into the synagogue of their choice and pray and every Sabbath hear the reading from the five books of great Moses. The Chaste One said they were wherever the People had wandered, in Egypt, Africa, Spain and farther and that even in Jerusalem each guild and craft had built its own.

Jared could not hold his eyes long from the pinnacle and Heth followed his gaze.

"Every dawn a Levite blows a silver trumpet up there," Heth said, "calling us to worship and sacrifice. You know that the greatest Herod built the Temple?"

"I know he began it. But the Temple was finished only a few years ago and Herod has been dead for many."

"He finished the chief work," Heth said. "He wanted a Temple to wipe out Jerusalem's memories of his evils and to prove that an Idumean was as truly a Jew as any Judean or Galillean. He allowed only Temple priests to do the Temple work. Only such holy men were commanded to learn masonry, carpentry, stone-cutting and delicate wood work and he would not let them rest until the Temple was finished. Of course he also thought to catch the eye of his master, the Emperor in Rome."

"In the first year," Jared said, repeating what he had been told at the Community, "No rain fel by day to stop the work but at

aight it fell for all the crops."

"I have heard that, too," Heth said, "But the Lord makes rain to fall day or night."

Jared pointed to spikes bristling on top of the wall.

"Thieves must have a hard time getting at the Temple's riches."

"More than those spikes stop them," Heth said. "There are guards. And after the Temple is closed at night the Guard Captain names one special guard. The captain and this assiattnt close the gates. They close The Beautiful Gate last of all. The key is put in a hole before the gate. A marble slab covers the hole. A chain hangs from the marble and the key is fixed to the chain and the special guard rests on the marble but never sleeps. Even if a thief got past the spikes and all the other guards he could not get into the Temple unless he overpowered the guard on the marble."

They wove their way through an enormous complex of buildings associated with the Temple and as they passed Heth identified many. But Hared was not listening. Beyond and above them was the Holy House which he had glimpsed from the far side of Kidron. They crossed an open space and beyond that, before his widening eyes, rose the sheer face of the wall that enclosed the Temple area, ponderous, spiked, stretching right and left and, in the center two prodigious walls, iron frames inset with squares of marble and topped with tile.

"These let directly onto the porch overlooking the Profane Court," Heth said.

~~"How mighty Huldah was that the Temple gates honor her!"~~

"How mighty Huldah was that two Temple gates honor her!"

"How mighty your teachers to have taught you so much! Who was Huldah? Why is she so honored?"

"She was a prophetess of Josiah, a king of Judah who did right in the eyes of the Lord. She foretold that, for sins, Jerusalem would burn. But not in Josiah's day. Not for his eyes, she promised, so great a calamity."

The old prophecy recalled the proadsheet of the eating place.

"Heth! Could this be that time of calamity? Is the sheet a true warning?"

"I told you every broadsheet lies," Heth said. He hurried through the Huldah Gates.

Jared followed and came out on a great raised promenade. It ran along the south wall under a roof upheld by massive pillars. Smaller promenades ran along the east and west walls. Forward was a great, cobbled pavement.

"The Court of the Gentiles! The Profane Court," Heth said. He waved at the great, crowded, cobbled space.

Beyond, behind a triple terrace, rose the Temple itself. It seemed at first a snowy expanse of white marble with, off to one side, aslender tower. Then Jared saw that it was a five storied building faced with squares of softly white marble into which, at intervals, bright plates of gold were set. It was partly dimmed by an oily smoke which billowed up from an unknown source and drifted slowly across the terrace clouding also the Profane Court and the ~~jostling crowds. But the smoke only partly clouded the beauty~~

jostling crowds. But the smoke only partly clouded the beauty spread before Jared who stood motionless.

The Profane Court was, as always, packed. It was a sight every visitor to Jerusalem tried to see and today, as usual, it was filled with a human conglomeration from all over the world. Heth could identify some. Huge Gauls sweated in fur breeches; tall Africans stood in little except their black skins; Greeks were extravagantly dressed, as always; Persians were known by their splendid brocades; Egyptians, whose curious religion forebade a woolen garment in any of their own places of worship wore cotton even here to avoid the possibility of sin. Swarming beggars were marked by ragged loincloths.

Even in such a prismatic throng Jews stood out. Not because of a reverent air which the Temple might have inspired but because of their own apparel. Every Jew, of course, wore something white. Beyond that, however, many indulged their fancies -- violet and purple wool from Tyre so costly it was sold by weight; even more costly cloth from a flax grown in only one province in India so light that wearing it was like wearing thistledown.

The striking apparel of some Saducees, Pharisees, Priests and Scribes almost served as an identification. The Scribes girdles were obviously fashioned to hold up to public view the inkpot and pen of their calling. The Priests' purple robes were cut conspicuously short to uncover the immaculate whiteness of their trousers. The Saducees's dress was more extravagant than any Greek's. The Pharisees's shawls and phylacteries drew every eye. Shawls, at

each corner, had four white fringes and one of hyacinth. The fringes all but swept the streets and the leather and wood phylacteries were polished and ornamented as though they had been precious metals. Yet none of the overelaborated members of these four groups appeared overly devout.

Money changers sat against pre-empted columns on the porch of the Profane Court, each beside his own little table and his own big box. And all day long, Heth said, they inched around their columns to escape a chill wind or a burning sun. Each box was divided into two compartments. One held Temple coinage, each coin stamped on one face with a chalice and on the other with a lily and the legend, Jerusalem the Holy. The second compartment held a goulash of coins from everywhere but especially from Rome. Roman coins ran from superb specimens honoring a new Emperor to crude disks stamped in Antioch or Caesarea when a new exarch took over some nearby piece of the sprawling Empire.

The moneychangers's chief chore was to supply the half-shekels of Temple coinage which each worshipper must pay yearly. A four per cent commission was lawful and the changers incessantly droned "Just four! No more! Just four!"

"But they often get much more," Heth said.

"How?"

"Watch this!"

The rhythmic "Just four!" had coaxed a gold daric from the hand of a brocaded Persian. The moneychanger's numble fingers had found that the outlines of the coin's archer were mint-fresh. His

other hand had gestured flatteringly that no further testing was needed. Then the second hand had cascaded coppers over the little table and no sooner had cascaded than had heaped them into the Persian's palm.

"Cheated for sure," Heth said. "the Persian should have made a true count while the coins were on the table."

Shocked, Jared turned away to priests across the court. They were offering fowls, doves and animals for sacrifice. In substitute for the moneychangers' "Just Four! No more! Just four!" they were droning "Unblemished! Unblemished!"

Jared took a careful look.

"That isn't unblemished stock!" he said.

"But you'll notice that business is brisk," Heth said and motioned to move on.

Pushed and jostled, the two worked across the Profane Court to a balustrade before the triple terrence. This was the beginning of the true Temple. The snow and gold Holy House rose just beyond. No Gentile might pass the balustrade, It bore a plaque on all four sides warning in Greek and Roman that any Gentile who did pass invited his own death.

But Jared, a Jew, might pass. He might climb the terrace steps and go anywhere he chose except into the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. He and Heth went around to the Beautiful Gate and through it into the Court of the Women.

<u>The Court of the Women</u>! Jared saw where his own mother must have sat with many other anxious mothers among the thirteen trumpet-

shaped repositories for gifts given to provide a special sacrifice. She had sat, perhaps after dropping her mites, and prayed while he had been redeemed, as every first born had to be, from the service of the Lord.

First his father had taken him and held him while giving the Temple five pieces of silver and only then had returned their son to his waiting wife. Now his mother and father were gone and he was the Brotherhood's Keeper of the Scrolls. It would, he thought have pleased them to know.

He and Heth crossed the blue and white tiled floor of the Court of the Women, passed between the pillars called Jachin and Boaz, symbols of the unassailable strength of the Lord, and went through the lofty Nicanor Gate and into the Court of Israel. That divided the space beyond Nicanor Gate with the slightly raised Court of thr Priests.

Now they were looking directly up at the five-storied Holy House of marble snow and bright gold. Twelve more steps would bring them onto the porch of the Holy House. They stared at it through a could of smoke rolling from the Altar of Burnt Offerings in the center of the Court of Priests.

The Altar was a pyramid of unhewn rock. Once, late in each year and again before Passover it was whitewashed. But it had not yet received this second cleansing and was grimy as well as reeking.

The priests around it had begun their day in immaculate ~~wx~~ white robes. Now, however, these robes were stained with smoke and smeared with blood.

Some priests were roping animals for sacrifice, hauling on the ropes until the beasts were against posts, forced to stand motionless awaiting the killing knife stroke. Others, at big stone tables, were cutting up the butchered animals, washing the portions and tossing them onto hooks set into broad, upright boards until the smoking Altar had room for new sacrifices. Another group stood beside channels cut into the floor of the court and with long pushers forced the thickening waste blood toward two openings, like wide nostrils.

"Below those holes it falls into wide chutes that take it into Kidron Valley," Heth said.

At the Altar, more Priests were forking the meat of sacrifice onto either side of a worn red line painted down the Altar's center. The portions to the right of the line would burn away to the honor of the Lord. Those to the left, after little roasting, would be forked clear of the fire to feed the Priests.

Jared was glad the Community did not offer burnt sacrifices. He remembered what Micah had said:

Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousand rivers of oil? What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God?

The smoke drifted into his eyes and the grimy, white robed figures blurred and he walked past them and climbed the twelve steps. Heth followed.

The door of the Holy place was closed. He had known it would be. Only the priest chosen by lot each day might go in and he on the

one day only. And never again in his lifetime might he be chosen again, or enter again.

And Jared might never pass the massive gold vine adorning the door which barred him from ever entering. Within, all Jews knew, however, stood a great gold candlestick, and beside it a table on which each chosen priest placed new shewbread and from which he took away the bread of yesterday. And between them was the golden Altar of Incense on which the chosen priest burned precisely measured amounts of stacte, onycha, galbanum, myrrh and frankincense.

Somewhere behind the Holy Place, sealed off by its veil, was the Holy of Holies. Only the High Priest might entere there and he only once a year.

"In the Holy of Holies," heth said, "is the very Ark that Moses brought out of Egypt." His voice was reverently hushed.

Jared had heard otherwise, although he did not say so. The Chaste One had told him tha, probably, the Ark had been destroyed or carried off centuries before when Babylon's raider king, Nebuchadnezzar, had pillaged Jerusalem. The Holy of Holies, the Chaste One was almost certain, and so were many others, was empty--except for the presence of the Lord.

Jared knelt on the porch and Heth knelt beside him and then they went back down the twelve steps in silence.

They got back to the crowded Profane Courtand through the gate in the west wall against a tide still flowing full to take advantage of the remaining hours of sacrifice. They crossed the Tyropoeon bridge, the view lovely to Jared's desert eyes. The towers,

turrets, palaces and mansions, the trembling green foliage above garden walls, the occasional glimpses into gardens ablaze with color...

I'll tell Tamar about this.

Heth pointed out the palace of the High Priest Ananus.

"Every night the poor fill the basement under that overhanging porch. The High Priest invites them in to sleep and he feeds them besides. He is one who tries to do right in the eyes of the Lord.

They went along the crowded street although a narrower way alongside was half empty. But this was for those who had sacrificed and no other Jew would think of using it.

Farther on against the City wall three great square towers rose. Heth pointed, naming them.

Hippicus, Phasaelus and Miriamne. They will be strong bastions if Jerusalem is ever beseiged. Herod built them to guard his palace. His great grandson, Agrippa, lives in the palace sometimes now."

Ahead, on their right, a street branched off toward the palace and just short of it ~~the street~~ Heth pulled Jared away as a half dozen liveried horsemen trotted out ~~of the branching street~~.

"Agrippa must be coming. Make yourself small. His bodyguard would ride you down and never care as much as a mite."

Marcus Julius Agrippa, Herod II, Tetrarch of Batabea and of Trachonitis with Abila and Toparch of Julius, Tiberias and Tarichea did come. Sitting his mount like a sack of castoff clothes, pudgy, fortyish and with a face so bloodless that Jared wondered what he ate, he rode with half his main bodyguard before, half behind. His horse was a handsome but ambling nag chosen because it was not too

restive for his ill-balanced body and as he ride his eyes flicked around for enemies.

"I don't believe he trusts even his own guard," Jared said.

"He likes Caeserea better than Jerusalem," Heth said. "and so does his princess sister Berenice." A pause and then he went on. "I know that in Egypt a royal brother and sister lie together but in Judea such a thing is shameful. Even when they are Idumeans."

Obeying the Discipline, Jared offered no unkind opinion. He found Heth's gossip a puzzle. Hadn't Heth said earlier that Berenice had taken up with Titus? But it was all as remote as the vast palace and its towers were remote from the Community's humble, sundried brick buildings.

When the guards and their treasure were out of sight Jared and Heth set off again and came to the Joppa Gate.

"Well," Heth said. "You've seen the Temple but not all of Jerusalem. You haven't seen what is underground. Down below there's another whole city. Tunnels and caverns that serve as houses and long narrow black passagewaysthat are crowded streets. Thousands on thousands live underground. Of course most of them are starvation poor or else afraid

to risk daylight.

"I've seen enough," Jared said. The oily smoke was in his mind as well as in his eyes. It would be good to get out of the City. "How about the lesson you are to give me?"

"The lesson? Of course!" Heth said.

* * * * *

They got through the Joppa Gate and then across the hard Roman road paved with yard square blocks of stone. It ran all the way northward tp Damascus and beyond. Then the climbed the far slope of Hinnom V alley.

Rephaim Valley came next. Giants had once dwelt in Rephaim. The ghosts of the giants still did, Heth said, although you wasted time looking for them unless they were looking for you.

"Maybe we could have the lesson here and risk having them find us," Jared said, but Heth shook his head.

Across Rephaim they bore west by north from the Rubin on a trace no better than the one they had followed to Jerusalem. It led to Emmaus and, beyond, toward Jamnia.

"It isn't much travelled," Heth said. "In no time it will turn up a quiet place for your lesson."

When they came to a solitary terebinth spreading its branches tentwise he stopped.

"We shouldn't take too much time," he said, "You ought to get on, and besides a noise kept up too long might draw someone we'd just as soon not meet. But it won't take long to show you what I remember of what the colonists showed me."

He took stock of Jared's hard arms, the width of his shoulders and the solid taper of his sun scorched legs.

"Do you wrestle?"

Younger Brothers, when far away from the eyes of their elders, often tested one another, Jared admitted that he tried a fall now and the n.

"How often did someone get you down?"

"I won my share."

"The colonists," Heth said, "Say a good wrestler makes a good swordsman. Both aim to beat an enemy after speed has got him off balance. Of course strength counts, too, and you're strong enough."

He nodded.

"You'll learn quicker than I did if you'll pay attention."

Jared was ready to pay attention and the Community's inbred habit of discipline would help.

discipline would help.

"The colonists," Heth said, "Say go slow when you can until you've got some measure of your man. You'll be going, sooner or later, against legionnaires and auxiliaries and I've watched them all. An Egyptian comes at you like a snake. A Numidian rises as though he and his horse were one. A Balearian slinging from a hundred paces is harder to dodge than a club at your head. A Gaul is as big as a Rephaim giant but slow. And, of course, a legionnaire's weaknee is that he thinks he's the world's best.

Heth became thoughtful.

"The colonists say one of our weaknesses is staying with the sword's edge. The point, they claim, is faster. Here! I'll try to show you."

They had only Heth's sword, dagger and his smallish, round shield and Heth gave a sword-lesson first.

"The colonists say you almost always have time to draw but you practice drawing against the once-in-a-life time when you haven't. Practice until you draw as you breathe. Like this."

Heth's left hand grasped his scabbard to tile his sword hilt for a neat meeting with the right hand which was sweeping over. But Heth's grimace acknowledged that even now he wasn't neat enough. He tried a few times more and did little better.

"The colonists say a sword should come out of the scabbard as smooth as butter. You try."

Jared got into Heth's baldric and belt and tried. And tried. Until Heth nodded.

tried! Until Heth nodded.

"You're better already than I," he said. "When we finish I'm going to give you the sword and dagger. Practice whenever you can."

"But you need them."

"There are spares in Emmaus," Heth said. He was confident. "And I've done enough favors so that some colonistx won't object to doing me one or two. Now let's try toe dagger."

His left hand slapped the dagger sheath against his left thigh. Again the hilt was tilted so that the right hand, sweeping over, closed on it. He drew again, not however as neatly as he would have liked. He drew a dozen times, but always with a head-shake of self disgust.

"You try," he said to Jared.

Jared slapped, fixed, tilted, swept and closed.

"It seems to be a business of timing, rhythm and balance," he said.

"It helps, too," Heth said, "If the inside of the sheath is not too tight, not too loose. And, of course, practice helps."

Jared's mouth set. He would practice. Oh, he would practice!

"Well! The colonists say the next part of the lesson is one of the most important. It is this. Don't fight like a lump on a log. Back up! The colonists say this can mean your life. If it will help back up one step. Or three or four! No matter of somebody thinks you're a coward. The colonists say old soldiers back up but new ones haven't the sense to.

up but new ones haven't the sense to."

Until now Jared had accepted the colonists thinking, notwithstanding that it turned him away from the Brotherhood's counsel of peace. But now he was being told to turn away from that secret self-portrait which lies deep in the heart of every young man. He had never, consciously, acknowledged the portrait. The Discipline had kept him from that. But how often, imagining the Brothers one day marching against the Sons of Darkness, had he not unconsciously painted himself plunging to victory? Now he was being told to retreat.

But when did Josephus's bold Jew retreat?

And yet! And yet!

"You just might bring an enemy exactly where you wanted him if you backed up a little, at the right time," he said.

"Just 'til you got your chance to gut him or slit his throat," Heth said. "Now I'll try to tell you what they told me about the parry."

High parry! Low! Half! Point up! Down! Advance!

With both sword and dagger.

"But never," the colonists say, "try to parry when your enemy's weapon is a ball and chain. Thrust then! After his swing passes. Or back up and be glad you're able to."

They practiced parries. Jared learned that, for a parry, the dagger might be held in any number of ways. Except as an extension of the fingers. Then you went in for the kill. For one parry you held the dagger at right angles to the hand to turn an enemy blade or, even, stop a killing thrust with the dagger hilt.

enemy blade or, even, stop a killing thrust with the dagger hilt.

"An," Heth said, "practice using the dagger in the left hand to help the sword in the right. You'd hardly believe how one helps the other."

"I think I'm getting it," Jared said.

"Now the thrust," Heth said. "It's the meat of everything. And, the colonists say, practice 'til you can thrust just the length of a finger or all the wal. Often the shortest little thrust will do the job. Sometimes, though, you have to reach to the limit. But never reach so far you lose balance."

Balance. That was where the lessons of wrestling would help, Jared thought.

"After thrusting, always try to be sure-footed, ready to sidestep, advance, go back, or farther back," Heth said..

And, as with wrestling, in such shifting,advancing, backing, the hips could be a big help.

"Keep them free to twist, turn," Heth said. "A small twist may be all you need. The colonists say if a man no more than turns at the right time a sword, dagger, spear, javelin or even a ball and chain will miss. And the littlest twist may bring your enemy just when you can stick him."

Heth ran his tongue over dry lips.

"I haven't talked thos much in a dozen moons."

But he had finished. And, he said quite confidently, he had told all he remembered from the colonists' lessons. Jared was ready to stop. Now he would like, as the Chaste One had advised, to

ponder.

"You are a good teacher, Heth."

"The colonists poke fun at me," Heth said. "I'm such a slow learner. Sometimes I felt they were willing to teach me only because they were sureI'd never be able to do much with what they taught. But you will."

"I may get past my first enemy. I'll send word."

"All Emmaus knows where I live. I'ts only a little town."

Heth stopped. Both had heard a rustle. Jared pointed toward a man who stood somewhat concealed under another terebinth. He wasmed big and menacing enough to to be a robber chief but he was only a shepherd. Younger than Jared and yellow-haired! And, at second glance, with so cheerful a face that it dissipated the natural first thought of robbers.

Like all shepherds he wore a sheelskin dyed a villainous red. And at his waist, his leather belt was inset with a score of iron studs. It could be a weapon almost as dangerous as a ball and chain. Even panthers retreated from a shepherd's belt. The usual sling and full pouch hung from the belt. The sling suggested that he was a Benjaminite. Benjaminites, at least some, were as good with a sling as a Balearian.

The stranger carried the usual staff, crooked to hail silly lambs out of potholes and heavy enough to do duty as a war club. Shoved inside the studded belt was a dagger, almost a sword.

Heth and Jared knew, however, that the edge of a shepherd's sword was oftenest used on the hard cheese and stale bread

which, probab ly, filled his pouch.

"Don't stop!" the stranger said. "I was learning a thing or two. I think!"

"We've finished," Heth said. "But come on! Come on! If you're going our way we'll go together."

The stranger looked back, another evidence of the caution which had parked him under the concealing terebinth, then raised a hand in cheerful acceptance.

"This may be a good meeting," Heth said to Jared. "If this big yellowhead is going your way he'll be good to have along on a strange road."

Jared was not sure. He knew the dangers of the road to Jamnia, and Heth had especially mentioned Romans. But nonRomans had shown. Nor any bandits, either ! And there was an advantage in travelling alone. He was tired of talking.

If Heth, as he had said, hadn't talked so much in a dozen moons, this was even truer of Jared who had begun to see how pleasant the Community's silence could be. Also, he wanted to ponder. All day the Mistress of the inn at Netophah had woven in and out of his thoughts.

However, as the shephard came forward, he felt that he had seldom seen anyone so ready to be liked--and to like.

Heth touched hand to head and heart and gave his name and place and Jared's.

"I am of Bethel," the shepherd said. "I am Eben ben Naher."

"The sling said you were, likely, from some Benjaminite place. The

place. The sling looks used."

"No vulture, eagle, wolf or hyena gets my lambs," Eben said; but he laughed to say they should not take that boast too seriously.

"This morning," he said, "I led a score safely to the Temple. Everyone unblemished." He was sober now, not to seem to make light of so serious a thing as Temple business.

Still serious, he stooped and sketched something with a finger in the dust. Drawing erect, he slid a sandal across the sketch but Heth and Jared had seen. It was a fish.

To Jared the sign, symbol, device --fish or whatever-- meant nothing. But it meant something to Heth. He looked from Eben to Jared and chuckled.

"You!" he said to Eben. "And you!" he said to Jared. "In one day the two of you. It wouldn't happen again in a thousand."

"He must believe you're very different to put you alongside me," Eben said to Jared.

"I am of the Brotherhood on the Salt Sea," Jared said. He was mystified.

"<u>That</u> brotherhood?" Eben said. "Well, a Brother from there might well be called as different as a Christian, I guess."

"A Christian?"

Jared grappled with the word, trying to remember where he had heard it and what he had been told about it. Then he remembered.

Only a little while ago a few Brothers and an overnight

guest had talked of a half-forgotten prophet (forerunner, seer, way-preparer) no one had been sure exactly how to call him who had stirred up Temple leaders many years before.

"Christian?" Jared said. "From Christ, the Anointed one!" You've changed the Greek of it to describe your prophet's followers!"

"We follow a leader who was crucified but returned and later ascended," Eben said. "And then he sent back one we never have seen but is always our help."

"Why don't you tell him who gave you that Christian?" Heth said.

He dropped down in the shade of the terebinth and the others followed.

"Pagans of Antioch gave it," Eben said. "They are great for nicknames. I have heard that a man is seldom among them for a day before he's got a nickname."

"Just the same," Jared said, "It is strange that pagans of Antioch, given to black magic as all the world knows, have put their nickname on your Anointed."

"It is a strong name," Eben said. "Some of our leaders say that in time we may be called by it all the world over."

"But the fish you drew?" Jared said. "If it was a fish. What has that to do with your Christ or Christians?"

"It is our sign to strangers who may be Christians to make themselves known."

"But you brushed it out before anyone could see it!"

"Not anyone who is one of us. Those who are not sometimes set upon a Christian. So we brush out the sign before troublemakers can tell too easily."

"What if a troublemaker can tell?"

"Well!" Eben said. "If a troublemaker does come at me I take his first blow and turn the other cheek fornhis second. The anointed told us to." His voice was surprisingly cheerful for one planning to take two blows.

"But if a third comes?" Jared said. He was sure that in the Community few except the Chaste One would turn the other cheek.

"Well!" Eben said. "A man shouldn't have to take more than two, do you think?" His question was a plain warning to troublemakers to expect tit-for-tat.

"With that staff, sling and almost sword, who'd expect you to take the second?" Heth said.

He got up. He had, he suddenly realized, left his grandsons longer alone among Romans than he liked.

"I'm off," he said. "I'm overdue at Emmaus as it is."

Jared jumped up and began to take off the sword.

"I told you that was a gift," Heth said, "And the dagger, too. You'll need them more than I before Titus is done with us. Besides the colonists will fix me up. I'll only need to remind two or three of favors I've done them."

He smiled in large confidence and set off at a stately walk. But while Jared was still struggling to reply in gratitude he looked back.

"I'll be waiting for that word!"

"He doesn't know it," Eben said as Heth continued toward his grandchildren, "But he thinks the way the Anointed told Christians to."

"How were you led to follow your Anointed?" Jared said. "If he's the one I think he is he was crucified before you were born, long before."

"My grandfather was a follower when the Anointed walked among us."

"Where are you going now?"

"I am Bethel's shepherd. I must replace the lambs I sold. I'm fornSorek and Charishim. The grass has failed on both valleys and the price of lambswill be down."

Jared nodded in satisfaction. He need not travel alone and he was glad. He was noq quite sure that this shepherd would be a good companion.

"Charishim is out of my way and I must hurry," he said. "To Jamnia. But we can keep together as far as Storek and I'd like to."

He smiled and, as usual, more with his eyes than his mouth.

Eben tossed his staff into the air and grinned back.

* * * * * *

Jared and Eben pushed steadily westward. T he Riber Rubin flowed again on their left, now joined by the south branch but still

But still did not hold enough water to splash over the biggest rocks in the gorge it was following to reach the Great Sea. Trees and shrubs now and then dwindled to almost nothing so that at intervals the two young men had a clear view all the way to the Valley of Sorek dappled by shadows of clouds afloat in the late afternoon sky.

"I think I'm alright with a sling," Eben said, breaking a long silence, "and with a dagger and with this." He swung his staff. "But I watched you for quite a time and you seem to have something special about the way you use a sword. Although how can that be and you one of the Brotherhood?"

"I have only the few things Heth got from the Romans settled in Emmaus," Jared said. "I never had my hand on a sword until today."

His approval of Eben was growing. Heber, long ago, would have blurted out a question about Heth's cryptic mention of waiting for a word; and although that involved no secret Jared liked Eben's reserve. On an impulse he told of the broadsheet back in Jerusalem.

"Although Heth says it is nothing but lies," he ended.

"Just the same, the legions are coming south after pillaging Galillee," Eben said. He spoke slowly and thoughtfully. "They've set up a new camp at Sebaste besides their old one at Caesarea and a full legion from Damascus has squatted down in Tiberias on the Sea of Galillee; and everyone says Tiberias could join on two or three days with Sebaste and Saeserea and all three could be at Jerusalem's in no time."

They walked on, both considering this.

"These things Heth got from his Romans," Eben said. "What

are they?"

"I'll try to show you if we come to a place with good cover."

They went on, Eben expectantly, Jared keeping his thoughts on his mission. They found no good cover and finally were dipping down into Sorek Valley. Below them a flat-roofed house of sun dried brick had been built into the slope and at first sight of them a farmer hung a mattock over his shoulder and silently awaited their approach, and his wife in the doorway reached for a staff propped against one wall of the house.

"They're not very friendly," Jared said. "or do you think Romans have made them leery of every stranger?"

"I'll ask about lambs. That might warm the man up."

The farmer was lambless. In all liklihood, he said, the whole valley was lambless. Egyptian auxiliaries from Caeserea had galloped through that morning taking nearly everything and giving due bills. But Rome never really paid. The Egyptians had ridden on south after taking all they could uncover. The farmer added, more in scorn than anger, that they had butchered the lambs on the spot.

The scorn puzzled Jared but Eben laughed in comprehension.

The woman, when Eben laughed, put her staff back against the house wall.

"Auxiliaries, being mounted, do the foraging for the legions," Eben said. "The raid south through one line of villages and towns, then back through another. These Egyptians raid for themselves whenever they dare. They keep butchered bullocks, lambs, goats, fowl -- even eggs--until they reek. Then they eat everything with onions. But the

legionnaires are not meat eaters, not often. They stay with vegetables, bread, wheat, a little lard, some vinegar. What meat they eat they want smoking fresh. So in Caesarea they'll turn up their noses at what was butchered here carried south and then all the way back north by those yellow sons of Belial."

"How Roman stomachs manage on vegetables is a miracle," the farmer said. "I wouldn't make it through a day on the stuff. The world knows it takes meat to make muscle."

"The Romans seem to be proving their muscle," Jared said.

The farmer shrugged And, his contempt for Romans and scorn for Egyptians having been registered, he grew friendly.

"Don't try to go fathher this late in the day. Spend the night here. There's stew with goat meat.

"And I baked today," the woman said. She moved clear of the staff.

"I'd get to Jamnia too late today to do any good," Jared said.

Eben nodded to say that he was ready to stop.

"We'll be in your debt," Jared said to the couple. "and if there's any work to do before the stew or after we'll be glad to do it."

~~"We'll both sleep better for a little work," Eben said.~~

The farmer, half-apologetically, said that an opening in the roof parapet should have been made long ago. Then donkies, driven off Sorek's slopecould come onto the roof and trample and thresh grain spread out there. But the opening would be a lot of

of work.

"We haven't done a thing all day," Jared said.

"Except walk," Eben said.

After the opening had been knocked into the parapet and the stew eaten, the two stretched out on a grassy place behind the house. The grateful farmer and his wife would have put them in the guest chamber on the improved roof but Jared and Eben wanted to be where their early start next morning would disturb nobody.

"We won't know if the ground is hard or soft," Eben said. His ready laugh was convincing. "We've come all the way from Jerusalem. We'll be asleep before we stretch out."

Jared nodded. As a matter of fact, however, Eben started talking at once; and they both talked until the stars began to twiknle out. The temperamental opposite of his new friend, Eben promptly told hisnwhole life story to Jared.

In Bethel he shepherded the village sheep. His grandfather had taken Eben, as a small boy, into Jerusalem to be baptized by Christians there. His parents had spent his eighteenth year trying to find him a wife. A betrothal had been almost arranged when legionnaires raided the village and killed his father and mother. Eben wept, telling how he had discovered their bodies when he came home with his flock. But he became his usual cheerful self in reporting what followed. He had lost everything to the Romans and the father of his almost betrothed had turned off, as a son-in-law, a penniless orphan who was also a member of a dissident sect.

"So I am still unmarried and growing older every day,"

Eben said.

Jared not only was more reticent, but he had less to tell. Still, drawn out by Eben's volubility, he told it.

"Do you mean you have never been really out of the Community until this journey?" Eben said. "Why, you began that only yesterday.

Jared agreed, but told no more.

Eben finally slept but Jared thought about golden Tamar. He ought, he thought, to forget her until he returned to keep his promise and tell her about Jerusalem and, at last, he did, in sleep.

Sleep was short. He was awake before the sun rose and, while Eben slept on, he went off to pray as usual.

As they started away Eben spoke regretfully of the Egyptians' slaughter of lambs but he was sure he would find all he needed in Charashim.

"If this farmer understood the Egyptian lingo," he said, "They weren't planning to return by Charashim."

The countryside continued to descend but the soil which on the previous day had been chiefly sand and shale was now black loam. The trees were bigger and brush more plentiful. The trace they had followed since parting from Heth was a plainer, though narrow, road beaten by many feet , and this morning brought more feet to the task. Eben looked at the thickening procession indignantly.

"I wish we could get in anyway one lesson."

"We need better cover," jared said. "We don't want to put on an ope show and draw a crowd. But can you explain something. Look!

Romans and Judeans all going peaceably to and from Jamnia! But yesterday Egyptian foragers would have butchered us if they had seen us. Why has this bloody aggression left Jamnia untouched?"

"They say that Titus, like Vaspasianus, needs Jamnia to receive supply ships from all over. Caesarea isn't enough. Jamnia goes untouched so long as Jamnia leaves Titus's supply ships untouched."

"Probably Jamnia's new school is part of the covenant," Jared said. "As long as Titus permits he can hope his ships will not be hindered."

"Isn't that our cover?"

Eben pointed.

"It may be the last chance for my meat strong muscles. I turn off for Charashim in just a little."

Jared came out of his speculation, looked and nodded and they turned toward a pungent cover of spicy storax, fragrant myrtle and waxy azaleas all combining into a shield from the procession along the road.

The lesson went well. Eben was apt as well as eager. A dagger came naturally to him and he had already used a crook somewhat as a sword against wild beasts. Point forward! So that he did not need to break a bad habit in order to improve a thrust.

He and Jared took turns with the weapons as Heth and Jared had.

"This isn't too hard," Eben said. "I expected you'd show me trickier stuff. But I'll tell you the truth, you're better."

"I had a headstart."

"No! I think you'll always be better. Just as I think you'd outwrestle me even though I'm bigger and, I guess, at least as strong."

"No! I think you'll always be better. Just as you'd outwrestle me even though I'm bigger and, I guess, at least as strong."

"Better that we both start thinking about how we can beat Romans. Only lots of practice will let us do that."

Back on the road the traffic grew thicker. They jostled and were jostled down a long slant toward a narrower, north-south road crossing theirs and curving southward out of sight around a hill.

"This way!" Eben said softly and touched Jared and stepped into a thicket. "Armor! Carts! Hear them?"

In his own desert if a jackal howled Jared pretty well knew the beast's direction and distance. He pretty well knew any sound and where it came from. An admiring Brother had once said that if a rabbit hopped on the far side of a dune Jared could tell the length of the hop. Here, however, hills instead of wastes and trees and brush instead of outcroppings sand confused his ear. When Eben touched him he had heard no clink or creak and after they took cover he still heard none.

"From the south!" Eben said. "Listen!"

Jared at last did hear, and as other travellers began to hunt cover he held his breath to hear better.

A horseman trotted from behind the hill and now every traveller scurried. Titus had decreed a little Pax Romana for Jamnia but who dared count on any Roman to be other than merciless and murdering if it suited him? And this armed, armored rider was clearly some sort of soldier of Rome and so, certainly, would be any who followed. And more would follow. Legionnaires or auxiliaries always ran in packs, like wild dogs.

Two more riders trotted from behind the hill and two more and Jared recalled that the Century had come to the Community in much the same formation.

Now something like panic set in as travellers tried to make themselves small.

About a hundred horsemen, all told, trotted from behind the hill. Half rode before and half behind a score of carts piled with wineskins, casks, sacks, bags and raw meat. Four men, one naked, stumbled along behind the last cart, their arms jerking with each steps because the ropes that bound their wrists were hitched to the cart.

"Why prisoners?" Jared said. "Horsemen want to make speed. Prisoners afoot slow them up."

"Whoever tries to resist foragers is seized for punishment in Caesarea," Eben said. "Look at the naked one. How he must have tried."

Dark streaks criss-crossed the naked man's back. Jared's stomach turned over. He had never before seen blood drawn by a whipping and dried black.

The horsemen rode without saddles but each straddled a blanket. Each had two javelins against his right thigh .

"A socket for javelins is sewn to the strap that holds the blanket," Eben said.

A round shield hung at each rider's back and now and then a horse shied or pranced bringing into view his master's scabbarded sword and thin dagger and, when the sunlight struck right, some of the

yellow faces gleamed as though they had been polished, then dusted.

"They are the Egyptian auxiliaries who yesterday were in Sorek," Eben said and gasped at a flurry behind the last cart. He would have leaped from their thicket if Jared had not wrestled him back.

The four prisoners had slipped their ropes. In a unison which must have been planned they dragged the four nearest riders to the ground, seized and drove four javelins home, then began a dry defiant screaming and set themselves to receive a score of other horsemen who hauled shields into place and rode in.

"Don't just stand and be killed," Eben said. "Run! Run!"

"Running isn't in their plan," Jared said. "They wouldn't outrun horses. They know they'll be killed but before they are they'll kill some snakes."

Egyptians come at you like snakes. Heth had said. And the horsemen, truly, were writhing, spinning, darting like snakes and soundlessly except for the dull beat of hooves in the thick dust of the road.

Three of the Jews were ridden down but before they fell they struck back. The fourth drove a second javelin under a round shield, whirled clear of the charge slashed a dagger across another rider's belly and was going for a third when half a dozen Egyptians hacked him down and plunged their mounts over his body like so many donkeys threshing grain.

The commanders of the threshers came racing back as they began to reform. He surveyed the dead in silence, gestured furiously

as though asking why a hundred Egyptians could not keep alive while finishing off four Jewish prisoners and gestured again, scornfully, to say that no one of his own inept dead was worth burrying. Then he rode back to the head of his column and signalled; and the carts and pairs began to move forward.

"Four who had been bound got free and killed nine who had been free always!" Eben said. "You practice, Jared and so will I. And if the Romans come against Jerusalem and the Temple let's meet there. I'll stand at your back and you at mine. And all Palestine will call us such men of valor as these four who have just died, or even as those of great Joshua."

Jared looked warily after the vanished Egyptians. Horsemen could easily return.

"The Romans will not come against Jerusalem. Everyone says they won't. And you must get to Charishim and I to Jamnia."

"Just the same, Jared, if Jerusalem is attacked I want to stand at your back and I want you at mine."

Jared took fire, liking Eben more and more.

"And if there is fighting I want you at my back," He said. He spoke slowly, to be surely understood. "When the fighting reaches Jerusalem and the Temple we will meet there."

Practical where Eben had been only exuberent I he set a meeting place.

"We will look for each other each noon at the Huldah Gates."

Eben looked eastward as though he could see the Huldah Gates.

"And if we find ourselves inside the Temple and can't get

out," Jared said, "we'll meet at the south balustrade of warning."

Solemnity replaced exuberance in Eben.

"Of old," he said, "so the Book tells us, the greatest oath was when a man placed his hand on a man's thigh and they swore. Abraham swore so. And Jacob. I am ready to swear so."

Jared's dark face flushed. He stepped forward.

"I swear so," he said.

"And I swear so," Eben said.

They drew back as from a sacrifice. But once a thing had been done Eben was always eager for what came next.

"Now," he said, "I must find what farmers of Charishim have spare lambs."

"And I must get to Jamnia, " Jared said.

The walked down to the blood-soaked cross road and buried their dead, others helping, and Eben took the Charishim turnoff.

* * * * *

The doorkeeper of the Jamnia school was apologetic, as always, when he had to break in upon Amos. Amos, splendidly bearded plump and preoccupied, sighed in regret at the interruption to his studies and in guilt at the selfishness which his regretacknowledged. But, of course, he nodded.

"Show him in."

He had never kept the Overseer waiting and no more would he this new Brother undoubtedly seeking something which the poor tools of the straitened Salt Sea Community could not make or its

meager stock supply.

Amos seldom denied himself to any visitor. He was not puffed up because the School had put him in charge of its precious stores. He was humbly aware that he was not of the stuff that makes storekeepers. He had never aspired to be anything but a scholar since the morning his father dripped honey onto his soft, six-year-old lips to sweeten the beginning of learning. But from his earliest days he had tried to serve the Lord with all his heart and all his sould in every way asked. Next he served Rhoda, the wife of hisbbosom and Abigail, the daugghter of his heart. Naturally, Rhoda came Before Abigail. It had always been Rhoda and Rhoda and Rhoda and only after that Abigail.

He had never told this to Abigail. She was unwed. Once she was, herself, a wife in whom her husband rejoiced, he would understand without any telling.

Amos had married at nineteen. He had met Rhoda only a trifle earlier and until he turned to her he had scarcely thought of marriage. Abigail was born in their first year. They had hoped for a houseful of children but when the midwife told Rhoda she would never bear another and Rhoda wept, Amos had cheerfully reminded her that they already had each other and Abigail too. He was aware that he was unlike some hhsbands in this; he would certainly have loved a son; but Rhoda was the center of his life.

When they settled down in their first home Amos had been starvation this and he remained so for a while. He had always been as indifferent to food as he was devoted to study. A drink of water when he got up in the morning. A few figs, some bread and watered wine later. And toward evening soup with sometimes a little meat,

more bread and watered wine and, now and then, some dates or more figs---that was about all. Naturally he didn't grow plump.

After Abigail came Rhoda realized that this failure was causing gossip.

"Well! They won't say much longer that I starve my man," she said.

Her mother had made her a cook who did not need to apologize to anyone and they aroused her to rebellion. They were older wives who look for faults in brides and were sure Amos failed to fatten up because he'd got a poor stick for a wife.

Amos continued his meager meals, smiling on the wife of his choice and the daughter of his heart. But while he studied Rhoda slipped in with a tray. She placed this close to his hand and how could his fingers not hrope when his nose was so tempted. Pungent bread, savory lamb, succulent chicken, sweetmeats, figs, dates and raisins and, in season, apricots, pomegranates and grapes.

Amos all unknowingly achieved rounder and rounder curves and was not aware that from time to time he needed a larger, longer robe. Rhoda complacently provided a new one whenever her measuring eye warned that his ballooning front was hiking the hem of the old one too far above his sandals.

Thus it was a distinctly rotund Amos who rose to greet the Community visitor. Since he was accustomed to the little Overseer he was as shocked as Tamar had been. This long, bardless, black eyed young stranger bore himself less like a Brother than like a new Joshua. He seemed made to swing the sword that hung from a baldric

and strike with the dagger in his belt.

The shock was not, however, enough to delay the nod which told the doorkeeper to fetch what was offered in welcome to every traveller.

"Is the Overseer ill?" Amos asked then, after Jared had named himself.

"Worse than ill."

Jared told soberly of the Optio's blow.

"I cannot believe it," Amos said. "He was too full of life. Sometimes he almost danced for joy over what he found in our warehouse."

"Sometimes he seemed almost to dance when the Community's work went well," Jared said.

"And now you have taken his place?"

"I am only the Keeper of the Scrolls. But today I am on the mission that would have been his."

"You are as welcome."

"Even though, like the Overseer, I come wanting something?"

"Our warehouse doesn't have everything. The Romans keep us short, often of what we most need. But I hope we will have what you are after."

The doorkeeper came back with a basin of water and a towel and later with a heavier tray than he had ever brought for the Overseer. This huge newcomer certainly would have a bigger appetite. When Jared had eaten he told his story and Amos's eyes shone at the Keeper's enthusiasm over the Enoch Scroll.

"We have your parchment," he said. "We will go to the warehouse now. Then to my home. You'll stay the night, of course."

Jared had thought of beginning the return journey this same evening. But a rest and an early morning start might be better, especially since he would be taking an unfamiliar, more southerly road. He accepted with thanks.

"At home," Amos said, "we will be by ourselves. my wife and daughter are are with my wife's mother. She is ill in a town nearby. I am sorry you'll not meet them."

"Perhaps next time," Jared said.

"Make the next time soon."

Rhoda and Abigail, Amos thought, would like this young scholar who seemed also a man of valor.

On the way to the warehouse, through twisting streets, Jared began to feel an uneasiness surprising in a city which enjoyed the peace of Titus. Townsmen an, an occasional warier townswoman, were walking wide of alien seamen straggling up from the harbor.

The seamen had made port so recently that they had not lost their sealegs and rolled alongm sometimes spraddling almost from gutter to gutter. Their tanned faces, and some so black they couldn't tan spelled out many origins. All were barefoot with hard soles which clapped noisily on the cobblestones. They wore caps stretched down to their ears. But between ears and soles nothing covered them but sweatrags at their necks and loincloths. These last provided folds for the coins sailors bring for fun ashore.

"I'd expected these fellows would be already at work under

the orders of the Centurion Cotta," Amos said.

"The Centurion Citta?"

"The Primus Pilus of the Tenth Legion. Titus has it up out of Egypt. He is proving so resourceful that Titus uses him for everything."

"What does an officer of the legions have to do with seamen?"

"These are off newly arrived supply ships. Cotta will divide the cargoes among Roman camps at Tiberias, Sebaste and Caesarea. These seamen want to get into the city, as seamen do after a long voyage. But Cotta wants them for the unloading and to break up the cargoes into three lots."

"Couldn't Cotta put men of Jamnia at the work?"

"Jamnia might be less friendly to supply ships if her own men had to unload them," Amos said. "Titus wants Jamnia friendly. There is Cotta now."

They had come to a wide, central plaza, the town meeting place, Jared decided. At one side, to the right of Jared and Amos, a resplendant mounted Roman was watching legionnaires herd reluctant seaman. He was tall and so erect that he seemed taller. His inlaid armor was polished and its gold and silver gleamed and a crimson cloak floated brightly over his horse's rump.

"Titus's officers wear their best, even a helmet with a ceremonial crest, in Jamnia," Amos said. "I think they try to match the splendor of the dress of the chief Temple priests and of our princes."

It was not the mounted officer's gleaming armor that drew Jared. It was the assurance of his narrow mouth and the resolution of his erect body. He had never seen a man so sure of himself.

"There is a legend among the legions," Amos said, "of a centurion who lived a hundred years ago. The greatest of the Caesars saw so much in that Scaeva that he promoted him over all others. The talk now is that Cotta already has had as much honor from Titus and is sure of more."

Jared studied the Roman who might, himself, become a legend, then looked away tonwhere Cotta had suddenly looked.

Across the plaza a seaman was trying, and pretty successfully, too, to dodge three legionnaires whose spears were pricking him back toward the harbor. He was scrany and he limped but he dodged and sidestepped foxily and with a fixed, disarming grin.

He was trying to get far enough from the spearpoints to wkeel and scurry off to the pleasures for which he ached after so long aboard ship. And, except for the ankle which now and then turned his grin into a grimace, he might have made it. But finally the fox was boxed. Only his eyes had freedom though he still squirmed . At last one exasperated legionnaire reversed his spear to knock the elusive quarry quiet.

The heavy butt did not fall. Cotta had called out. The trio closed and pricked the seaman toward the unloading.

"Now!" Amos said and skipped into an alley while everyone was watching captors and captive and then into the warehouse.

"Men to unload the ships," he said when safely inside, "are

so needed that you, who could do twice as much as any seaman, might have been questioned and when they found you were not of Jamnia pressed into the work."

Jared shook his head at the prospect which Community ignorance had kept him from foreseeing. The need for men might have delayed for days his return to the Community and to Netophah.

"What did Cotta say to make his three ease up on that dodger?" he said.

"We've but together a language that most of us understand but this time I caught only retiarius."

A retiarius, Jared knew, was a gladiator who dought nearly naked, but with a trident and net, against a fully armored and armed opponent.

"My guess," Amos said, "is that Cotta was telling the three not to risk crippling a man who might be very good with a trident and net."

"Let that ankle mend and he might be great," Jared said.

"Lately," Amos said, "there have been reports that Titus is going to build a compound to pen up the strongest prisoners taken in his aggression. They'll be for a spectacle in Rome to celebrate his victory over Palestine."

"He hasn't won his victory yet."

"Romans believe they never lose."

Jared looked around the warehouse and forgot Rome.

What might seem meager to Amos was richness to Jared. The Overseer, he thought, had had reason to dance. They found parchment

and nearly everything else that Jared needed and started back to Amos's house.

"rest a while, if you like," Amos said. "And then we'll have a quiet meal and you can tell me about yourself. You don't seem the kind that usually turns to the Community."

"There's not much to tell about me," Jared said. "But you should tell me of the School. The Brothers will want to know about the School."

* * *

Jared peered up from the bottom of Netophah's western slope to the little gate in the inn's west wall. The stars all were out and the moon, too, except that it was behind a cloud. In Jamnia he had reckoned that after a night's rest and an early start he would fetch Netophah in two days and a night and part of a second. This moon and these stars said that the second was less than half over.

"The gate will be locked," Tamar had said. "But if you knock I'll let you in. If you went around to the great gate the dogs would wake the whole household."

Thinking of her again, as he had thought almost all the way from Jamnia he could not doubt that she had meant she would not mind being roused.

He climbed the hill and knocked. No answer! But he had not expected one instantly. He knocked again and he heard an inner door open and through a crack in the gate saw a candle come toward him across the small terrace. Tamar was holding it and when she opened

the gate her eyes glowed in the candle light. Her hair hung thick, thick around her shoulders.

"You have come back to tell oe about Jerusalem's wonders," she said and laughed and Jared flushed in a suddenly mounting excitement.

She put out her free hand and he took it and they went into the room where she had received him before and she set the candle down and their other hands clasped.

"You did not forget,"she said.

"How could I?"

"You have weapons. But left with only a staff."

"A friend taught me a little about using them, then gave them to me."

"They must be heavy. Take them off. An, I'll find food."

He laid the sword, baldric, dagger and belt on a table.

"I'm not hungry," he said. But he was --he realized-- starving for the glowing girl before him.

He put a hand on her golden arm and, under the loose sleeve, moved it to her shoulder and she flung both her arms about his neck.

* * *

The bones, blood, flesh and sinews which made up the long body now quiwtly wide-eyed (an Awakener would be wide-eyed so near dawn) was possessed by two men. One was the Keeper of the Scrolls who would shortly be hurrying back to the Community, his mind closed to everything but his successful mission and the duties ahead. The

other had a min, equally closed to ev erything but Tamar, And now this other marked, with continuing enchantment, Tamar asleep under a mellow beam from a wall lamp in the adjoining room.

One of the women must have stolen in!

It was impossible, Jared was sure, that Tamar could have roused, risen and gone and lighted the lamp. Even asleep he had been too aware of her not to have known if she had left him even briefly. He had been keeping motionless so that she might not waken but now she turned and touched his face as though to make sure she had not dreamed.

"Don't you ever wear a beard?"

"My wisest counsellor advised me against o e."

Her fingers told her that he was smiling.

"All men wear beards! Except you and, of course, some Romans."

"I don' t speak for Romans. But I was told not to because long ago a great king told his soldiers not to."

"Why?"

"Shave off the handle by which an enemy may seize you," the king said. "And his soldiers did and went on to conquer the world."

His voice had been merry but now sobered.

"It is time for me to go."

"But you will come back?"

Whenever they had awakened through the night their talk had come around to when he must go and when he would come back. She had had his promise over and over but he gave it again.

"The cave I sleep in has two entrances. I can leave after

after dark. I'll come."

Her hands turned his mouth to hers.

"Do not go."

They kissed.

"I am pledged," he said.

She knew that pledges must be kept. Her slansmen would not have held this lonely inn if they had broken theirs. She herself was pledged. To Obal, to her three women, in a way to all travellers. She had continued to importune Jared because his voice, even when he refused her, said what she wanted to hear over and over.

She had learned long ago what it was to be desired. Jared, however, desired her as she never had been before. And she had never given herself as she had this night. She had married only because her grandfather had wanted to make her secure.

"I'll see you on your way," she said.

"Lie warm. This is the way I want to think of you."

"No!" She leaped up, laughing, her hair cascading. "I want to think of you striding across the desert, up and down the dunes and up again.....but on your way back to me."

He settled his baldric over a shoulder, buckled his bent and made sure his dagger was firmly sheathed, and they went out to the little gate. He held her close, then turned down the hill going headlong over limestine patches and outcroppings and up and down wind-r uffled crests. Tamar watched. He waved as he veered east and she waved. The sun got up and he grew small among the sandy wastes.