



Maud Hart and Delos Wheeler Lovelace Family Papers.

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beard. Eben heard him muttering, "The Circus Maximus! The Circus Maximus!" All Jews knew that uncounted brothers had had to fight in Rome's notorious arena. Jews had fallen there fighting against foes armed with nets and tridents, with swords and daggers, with shields and spears. Jews had died there on fiery crosses. Jews had died there fighting other Jews.

Eben plodded along in silence but Jared's muttering continued.

"What are you saying?" Eben said.

"I did not cough on the Tower," Jared said, "to land us on the Circus Maximus."

This could have been apology or regret. Eben knew it was neither. They reached the Compound's gate, and the Corporal's spear knocked.

^{gate}
The Corporal's spear butt ~~pounded the Compound gate~~ and it swung open upon an alert inner guard. Beyond the guard, at least a thousand prisoners stood, sprawled, sat, lounged, slept, gossiped, picked at vermin, dined after the Roman fashion. Some were wounded and most were dirty but a considerable number were, plainly, strong enough to make gladiators for the Circus Maximus or any other arena.

All turned with excitement as the newcomers were pushed inside, and many of those not standing sprang to their feet. Newcomers meant news of the siege and of the Holy City. The excitement swelled when Jared and Eben were recognized. There were cries of disbelief and loud dismay. Those prisoners who had once fought willingly for Simon cried in derision.

"Look! This pair is as low as any of us." one said.

"Get us on our way to Jericho," Eben said to Jared. "I do not like some of the company here."

"We haven't much time," Jared made his swollen mouth say.

He had seen how many were fit to be gladiators. A consignment with Fancy Toga in charge was probably already waiting. And, no doubt, transports also, at Caesarea. The chosen ones might be started off any day, fitted with welded neck rings, chained, and on their way to Rome.

"If we break for Jericho," he said, "it ought to be soon."

"Well, do we dig under, climb over, or break through?" Eben said, trying to make nothing of walls twice as tall as he was, and four times as thick.

There was no more time for talk. Prisoners were pressing in all around, wanting the latest news from stricken Jerusalem. One, a leathery little man, bore himself with such spirit that he easily found elbow room. Not old, although graying, not young either, he looked indestructible. Down each leathery cheek a gully -- no mere wrinkle --- cut from the corner of each eye past his mouth which was less a mouth than a seam. He asked no questions but kept an ear unmistakably cocked.

Garments were rent when Jared and Eben told of the Temple's destruction and men moaned over Ananus's death and turned hard looks on the Simonites. But these drew together and gave back looks equally hard.

"Those Judases would betray even The Anointed," Eben said, giving them the name of one who, his generation of Christians had been told, had betrayed their Messiah into enemy hands.

Jared and Eben found a cleared spot in the shade of the wall, and flung themselves to the ground. Neither spoke, and Eben wondered whether Jared shared his deep discouragement. It was one thing to fight, when you

knew you had skill and courage. It was another to be penned like an animal headed for slaughter --- perhaps in the Circus Maximus. When Jared sat up abruptly, Eben expected a discussion of means of escape but Jared had a different problem on his mind.

"Eben!" he said. "We heard from Simon that the Romans will strike against Masada and the Community and perhaps other places."

"And I believe him," Eben said. "Titus will want no pocket of Jews left to surprise his soldiers after the Upper City falls."

"And that may fall soon. Oh, Simon must have food hidden and of course he knows where to find water. But his best men will leave because the Temple has been destroyed and they will not wish to fight just to help bandits keep their loot."

"He won't be able to hold out long," Eben said.

"That is what troubles me," Jared said. "I must warn the Community. Our Scrolls, all the truths which the Brotherhood has gathered up over almost two hundred years, lie in the Library where one Roman torch could fire them. And most of the Brothers do not know how to fight. They have no weapons; they are old. I must warn them, and ---" he hesitated, wishing to be as honest as he could be --- "some others. Eben could you fetch Amos's women out of Jericho?"

"I guess I could," Eben said. But inwardly he shied away from the errand. Two women all the way to Jamnia! And one a girl! Ten lambs would handle easier. You couldn't bounce your staff off a girl when she skittered away, as a girl would.

"I'll be back before you're much past Jerusalem," Jared said.

"Keep north! On the by-road that leads through the Valley of Sorek. I'll find you."

"I'll be watching," Eben said. "But first you've got to get us out of this pen."

"I will," Jared said. He sprang to his feet. Looking at the tall, hard body, the defiant angle of the cropped, black beard, Eben thought, as he had often thought before, that it was strange a monk should be such a magnificent fighting man. He had said so once to Jared, and Jared had answered shortly, "My father was a soldier."

But he had said no more and Eben had questioned him no further. He knew almost nothing of Jared's life in the Community beyond the fact that the Scrolls were in his charge and that they were precious to him. He sensed, too, that Jared carried some secret burden. But he did not know what it was.

"I'll walk around," Jared said. "Maybe I'll hear something that will help."

A knee bumped Eben's shoulder as he sat alone, against the wall, with the sea of prisoners washing around him, and he looked up and saw the leathery, indestructible little man who had listened silently to the story of Jerusalem's disasters.

The little man stooped and drew a fish in the dust and brushed it quickly away.

"In this packed pen," Eben said, "a man's standing place is his seat, so won't you sit down?"

The little man sat down beside him and they looked into each

other's faces, rigid with controlled emotion.

"How did you know?" Eben said.

"I knew when you were called Eben. I have heard of Eben."

"And who are you, brother?"

"I am Elias. I was a follower of Peter."

"Peter baptised my grandfather," Eben said. His face shone.

"It was on the Day of Tongues. My grandfather had come to Jerusalem that day, with some hides."

"The day the Holy Spirit descended!"

"I wasn't even born then. But he often told me about it. I am of Bethel. And you, brother?"

"I have lately come from Rome."

"From Rome? Did you know Peter?"

"I did."

"Rome must put a man in fear for his life if he is willing to leave it for Palestine today." Eben said.

"We are not much safer in Rome," Elias said. "But I left because I was given a mission. I bring a Writing for James who is known in Rome as our leader in Jerusalem."

"The brother of The Anointed is dead."

"So I have learned. But someone will be in his place."

"Our people put off choosing for fear the new leader would also be persecuted," Eben said..

Jared came striding through the crowds and Eben explained him to Elias.

"He is not one of us but you can trust him."

Jared sank to the ground beside them. His sober face told of a fruitless errand.

"Jared," Eben said, "This is Elias. He is of my belief."

The leathery little man touched hand to head and heart.

"And are you also of Bethel?" Jared said.

"Elias is from Rome," Eben said. "He knew Peter, one of those who walked with The Anointed."

"One of the very first," Elias said.

"I have heard of Peter," Jared said.

"And do you know the Romans crucified him?" Elias said.

Jared and Eben nodded. Word of the execution had long since reached Judea; Peter's bitter followers had broadcast the crime to strengthen resistance against Rome which had committed it.

Eben explained the little man's mission to Jared.

"Where can I take my Writing now?" Elias said. "Perhaps to another of our centers? Ephesus, Alexandria, Antioch?"

He had already carried his ^{Writing} all the way from Rome, a harrowing succession of voyages from port to port --- Neapolis, Syracuse, Knossus, Rhodes, Salamis and then on a long slide south, Tripolis, Sidon, Tyre, Caesaria. And near Jerusalem, which he had thought ^{to be} the end, he had learned ^{that} James was dead and the city besieged. Then he, himself, had been captured. But now the little man braced stoutly for further hardships and Eben and Jared looked at each other with admiration of such resolution.

"Perhaps Amos might advise you;" Jared said and explained the school at Jamnia.

"Jared and I should be there soon. Come with us," Eben said.

Supermarket
25% COTTON

He was pleased by Jared's interest.

Elias looked at them oddly.

"What is this Writing?" Jared asked. All writings were of interest to him because of the Scrolls.

"I am forbidden to say, except to one like James."

"Where do you keep it?" Jared could not see where anything could be hidden on Elias's nearly naked body.

Elias looked around. It was almost time for the evening ration of food and most of the prisoners were on their feet, already forming in line some distance away. Nevertheless, he kept his voice low.

"I hid it near Bethel," he said. "There I learned that the siege had encircled Jerusalem, and while I puzzled about how to reach James (that was before I heard he was dead) the Romans seized me. But I hid the Writing first."

"You hid it in Bethel?" Eben asked. "Bethel?"

"Just on the outskirts." Elias said. "Why?"

"Because that is where I was born," Eben said. He smothered a laugh. "Well, that settles everything! Bethel is only a few miles north by east of Jamnia. Jared and I have errands first, but travel with us. We will get you there."

Elias stared at them, and again his expression was odd.

"You speak freely of travelling, my friends," he said --- in a real whisper now. "But do you know that a whole cohort is on guard here?"

"We know," Eben said. He did not feel as carefree as he sounded.

"Do you know that the talk in the Compound is that the strongest of us will be sent soon to Rome to be gladiators? Probably not me. They

think I am old, and they do not know how strong I am. But certainly both of you. They say the consignment may be started within two days."

"While I was walking around," Jared said, "I heard that a transport would sail soon."

After a pause, Elias bent his head so that his voice, coming from close to his chest, was very faint.

"Simon's men have weakened the north wall. They plot a breakout tomorrow night."

Jared looked at Eben and Eben looked at Jared. The darkness on Jared's face lifted and on Eben's candid countenance a broad smile spread. He remembered how unobtrusive the little man had been in the crowd, standing silent with one ear cocked. He leaned toward him.

"Now I begin to see how you kept so long clear of enemies on the way from Rome," he said.

Jared rose, his eyes shining. "Isn't it," he said, "almost time to eat? Come on. We'll need all our strength." He patted Elias's bony shoulder. "Keep close to Eben and me," he said, "and we'll all get to Bethel, and to Jamnia, too."

Superase
25% COTTON

AKnow

The next day the three moved separately among the prisoners, Jared and Eben trying unobtrusively to get the lay of the land outside the walls. They met for the evening meal and at sunset, after eating, Jared walked away from his two companions and knelt, facing north toward Paradise, and his lips moved.

With the coming of day and night I will enter into His covenant.

"He is one of a Brotherhood which always prays at this hour," Eben said. "And at sunrise, too."

"I too must pray," Elias said. "For my Writing to be safely delivered, Pray with me, Eben."

"I will, And I will pray also for a dark night," Eben said.

An overcast sky did follow sunset, and as the light faded the three made showy preparations for sleep, against the south wall of the compound. The plan Jared had settled on was simple. He rehearsed it now in a low voice.

"When Simon's crew crashes the north wall, the noise will draw the guards and we'll get over this south one without anyone seeing."

"At least we ought to," Eben said.

"It will be easy," Elias said, as though scaling walls were nothing to him.

The Simonites were gathering slowly near the north wall, and in the ~~g~~growing darkness the guards did not seem to mark any significance in the changed grouping. The crowd thickened.

"When our time comes," Jared said, "you stand on my shoulders, Eben. That high you'll easily get a hand on the top of the wall. Then get your lame leg over and dangle an arm down for Elias."

Superwash
25% COTTON

"I'm not heavy," Elias said.

"Watch out for guards on the far side," Jared said. "They'll also be running toward the crash. But one might look up."

"And as soon as Elias gets a leg over," Eben said, "I'll dangle down an arm for you."

"Don't forget that a man can snag a leg between two logs of this wall," Elias said. "Let's not get hung up there like medals on a legionnaire's breast plate."

They fell into silence. Over at the now invisible north wall, a hoarse buzzing grew louder and a slow grinding sound mingled with the buzzing and then an enormous crash drowned out every other sound. Jared put his back against the south wall and locked his fingers to form a stirrup.

"Up!" he said and Eben stepped to the stirrup and to Jared's shoulders and reached mightily and got to the top of the wall.

Over at the main gate a sentry cried an alarm and a corporal roared and then Roman rage and Simonite curses shrilled bedlam everywhere. Jared grasped Elias at the knees and hoisted and the indomitable little man kept upright and seized Eben's dangling arm and Eben swung the light weight upward.

"Now you, Jared," Eben whispered.

A dust cloud billowed over them, carrying the echoes of the crash, as Jared grasped Eben's hand and half walked up the wall until he, too, could get a leg over. Roman rage and Simonite curses swelled louder. The three men squirmed over the wall and hung by their arms like sacks.

"Drop all together," Jared said.

"Ready," Eben said.

"Ready, Elias?" Jared said. "Drop!"

"Of course I was ready, but I was short of breath," Elias said. He scrambled ^{to} his feet among the heaps of earth which had been piled up in digging the walls' post-holes.

They slid into the night while the wild hullabaloo behind the ~~walls~~ continued.

A shadow loomed and Elias butted it just below its middle and it fell and became a writhing legionnaire.

"You're fast, Elias," Eben said. Jared took the helmet off the butted Roman and banged the bared head against a rock.

"Now we have weapons," he said. "Elias, take his spear. I'll take the sword. Eben, look for the dagger."

They slid once more through the darkness, helped by the crafts which Jared and Eben had improved in the Jerusalem fighting. But Elias showed himself, perhaps, the craftiest of the three. They trotted warily through the night, keeping south of Jerusalem, whose ghostly towers loomed more and more to their left.

The clamor back at the Compound died down and they caught the vast stink of the City, borne on the night wind; it seemed a septic brew of the corruption there. Jared stepped up his gait, and little by little the bedlam behind them lessened, and the stink, too. Elias had trouble keeping up, and Eben motioned Jared to go slower. They did not regret the lost time. Elias had bought it when he charged the legionnaire outside the Compound wall.

They saw ahead the low outlines of a little village, asleep on the calm breast of the Mount of Olives. Eben knew it and could not wait to tell Elias.

"Bethany! Bethany, Elias!"

GILBERT

Supercase

25% COTTON

"Where the Messiah parted from the Eleven!" Elias stopped, and knelt on the hard earth.

Eben knelt too.

Jared waited silently until they rose. Then all hurried on.

Now they could talk freely and Jared explained to Elias the errand to Jericho which Eben must undertake alone.

"I will go with him," Elias said.

"I will be glad to have you," Eben said.

Jared went over with Eben the instructions the priest had given them for finding the two women, instructions which Jared and Eben had learned by rote before destroying the paper.

"I will join you and the women this side of Emmaus," Jared said.

"I know of Emmaus, although I have never seen it," Elias said.

What follower of the Anointed did not know of Emmaus? It belonged in a story that Christians told over and over. Two disciples had been walking to Emmaus after hearing that the Anointed was risen from the grave, and talking of this marvel, they had been joined by a stranger who continued to the village and took bread with them. When he broke it, they recognized him. He vanished before their eyes and they returned to Jerusalem to tell the Eleven.

Elias, indeed, knew of Emmaus!

"East of Emmaus!" Jared said. "When you are getting near the town but before you take the downward trail."

"But when?" Eben said.

"Around noon, after the second night. Listen for this."

M.E. man

Jared whistled, a partridge call, not the soft, comforting note with which mother partridges, all summer, rounded up their young, but September's warning, short, brittle, sharp.

"When you hear that, it will be either the bird or me. Answer the same way." He embraced Eben, touched head and heart to Elias, and strode southward.

Eben called after him. "Wait! How old is the daughter of Amos?"

"Fifteen, I think. Almost sixteen!"

"Sixteen! She should have a husband. If she had a husband she wouldn't be making this trouble for us. Why isn't she married?"

But Jared was out of sight and sound.

Jared came, after a journey through darkness, in sight of the Community buildings crouching beside the Salt Sea. In the flushed East, a ring of sun had appeared, and he could hear faintly the morning chant of the Brothers. He lifted his own deep voice and, when the sun became a dazzling circle, he cried as the others would be crying, "We thank thee, Oh Lord!" and flung himself to the ground.

Have I ever been away? Was the siege only a dream?

Rising he laid his sword in a rock crevice ... the Priest of Aaron disliked the sight of weapons ... and pressed on toward the Watch Tower which rose above the complex of small buildings. He pictured what would be going on within the walls. Now, whoever was taking the Overseer's place would be giving out the day's tasks. Now, because of the Rule, silence would be settling over the courtyard, over every building, colonnade, stable, shed, pasture, rocky field. All would be as quiet as the wind-swept graveyard where row on row of Brothers lay, facing the north.

How swiftly Romans could demolish it all! Netophah, too. I must see her and warn her.

Worry, fatigue and guilt beset him together, now that his journey was ending. But as he drew near the Tower, a smile broke across his face. Not far ahead, in the now clear morning light, he saw the Chaste One, propped against his favorite rock, and Jared hurried forward in spite of weary legs.

"Jared!" The Chaste One's face glowed. But after they had embraced he said, as though they had parted only moments before, "The Commentary goes well but no Commentary is easy and to make this one worthy is almost more than I should attempt. Perhaps Hillel should have done it, or Johanan should do it now."

Pressing as was his errand, Jared took time to frame his reply. He knew his best thought was expected, although the Chaste One's doubt was denied by his look of undeniable contentment. Jared could see that he had set his gentle heart on this deed for the glory of the Lord, and wild horses would not have pulled him away from it.

"A commentary by Hillel would have been by Hillel," Jared said. "One by Johanan, only by Johanan. Neither would be your commentary."

The Chaste One nodded at this truth and closed his eyes, but not in sleep. His lips moved, shaping, revising, happily building his own commentary.

Jared went on into the main courtyard and through it, in search of a jar and water. He must purify himself with a lustral bath before mingling with the others, even before seeking out the Priest of Aaron with his alarming news.

He observed the rule of silence and did not glance at the Brothers he passed, but they could not conceal their excitement at their Keeper's sensational, unexpected return from war. And since the Discipline forbade speech they communicated as was usual in such situations. Without even a sound, pantomime said all that was needed:

Jared --- has returned --- is wounded --- but still seems fit --- seems older --- seems tired --- who was never tired --- is thinner --- thin? Gaunt! --- looks hungry --- hungry? Famished! --- and worried --- worried? Haunted!

Climbing toward his cave with his filled jar, Jared heard a loud call and turned to see a Novice.

"Keeper of the Scrolls! I was told to tell everyone so I must tell you, although I had not known you were expected. At the evening meal there is to be a Meeting of the Many."

"Thank you, Brother," Jared said. "And will you say to the Priest of Aaron that I have urgent need to speak with him?"

"I will, Keeper." The Novice's eyes were bright with the encounter.

"I am going now to bathe. Then I will go to him as soon as he can see me."

"I will let you know." The Novice raced away.

Jared went on, and his cave greeted him with a familiar, dry, briny smell. It was hard in this quiet peaceful place to realize the danger which threatened. He reminded himself:

The Fifteen must be warned. And I must see her and tell her. And I must join Eben after the second night.

GILBERT

Supernase

But fatigue weighed him down. When the novice returned, bearing food and fresh garments, Jared was asleep in the cave. Exhausted, he slept on and the Novice did not wake him but sat at the entrance, waiting. After all, the message was only that the Priest of Aaron would see no one until evening. He was at prayer.

When the Novice had delivered his message and gone, Jared put on the fresh apparel --- the white tunic, robe and sandals -- required by the Rules for the evening meal.

He was disturbed that his warning to the Priest of Aaron must be delayed by a Meeting of the Many. These were held after the evening meal and usually for matters of great moment. They often dragged on interminably. It would be black night by the time he could report the Roman threat and explain the plan he had worked out for hiding the Scrolls. The actual hiding could be done after he returned from Jamnia; Jerusalem had not yet fallen. But preliminary preparations should be started now. Every Brother should be told his own part.

And I must meet Eben. There will be little time for Tamar.

There was time before supper to visit the Scriptorium which he yearned to see. The sun, sliding down behind the cliffs, brightened the stone buildings. A small, welcome coolness had come into the air.

^{Said} He hurried along the colonnade and, when he entered, the Attendant smiled a welcome. He was alone, for the Masters who usually knelt at the old tables were preparing, with baths and prayer, for supper.

"Has all gone well?" Jared said. A question about the business of the Community was, of course, allowed.

"Our days never alter."

"Then no thing of moment has happened?"

"Well, the copying of the Isaiah scroll has been set back," the Attendant said, " the one you gave out before you went off to Jerusalem."

Jared turned to where several tables, set end to end, formed a continuous surface for a leather strip as long as three tall men. Weights held it unrolled. It was stiff, cracked and worn and had been often mended with patches glued to its underside, where they would not cover writing. Its faded script was hard to read at best. Alongside, a new roll awaited the copying but that had been only begun.

"What caused the delay?"

"The Fifteen decided other work was more urgent."

What other work? The copying of such a Scroll had always come first. And in knowledge of the writings of Isaiah, no one in the Community could compare with the Master who had been set to this task. What was he doing now? Digging out rocks?

Trying to conceal his indignation, Jared nodded and went out. Perhaps he might have done more good if he had never gone to the siege!

In the twilight which stained their white robes purple the Brothers were gathering outside the Assembly Hall. They stood in reverent silence. To partake of this supper, Jared knew, one should have not only the body cleansed and the garments fresh but the thoughts, too, purified. He tried to forget his resentment at the decision which had sent a Master copyist away from the work he did superbly well. He was, Jared reprimanded himself, growing too critical of the Community.

Notice:
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your old page 308

Was not the chief trouble that so many of the Fifteen and all in authority were old?

If you would break with Tamar and play your proper part, you might be able to help that. The Attendant is a young man of promise. There are others who could be built up.

Slowly he approached the waiting line.

The Brothers stood in the usual Tens, in a column according to rank with a space left at the head for the Fifteen who had not yet arrived. At the end of the line Jared noted, startled, that one young Brother stood alone. His head was bowed over his bulky chest. Heber! It was big, good-natured, timid Heber!

Heber, apart? Of course, he was always getting into trouble. Just scrapes, usually. But this kind of separation was imposed only for a most serious sin; it was perhaps the occasion for the Meeting of the Many. I wonder what he has done, Jared thought with concern as he joined the Fifteen who were moving now into the space reserved for them. The snowy-bearded Priest of Aaron was the last to come. He gave Jared a kind, fatherly glance as he led the way into the Assembly Hall.

The Fifteen sat down first, and then the rest, in their groups of Ten, a priest to each group. The baker brought in loaves of bread, and the wine, and after the Priest of Aaron stretched out his hands and blessed them, the silence was broken by all, giving praise to the Lord. The bakers gave a loaf to each man, and the cooks gave to each a plate of beans, flavored with a little lamb, and the meal was eaten in silence, broken again at the end with prayer and praise.

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

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See my notes on Thud

Clarify

The meal tonight, Jared noticed, did not have its usual spirit of reverence. Too many disruptive glances were turned on Heber. He was not served food. He had been given a stool half way between the podium at the front and the common benches, and his shamed head still hung on his chest. Once he lifted it and his eyes met Jared's with a fearful appeal.

After the bowls had been sopped dry, the Priest of Aaron went to the podium and the tables were pushed out of the way and the rest of the Fifteen went to benches along the wall. The others stood, all except Heber, still on his lonely stool.

Candles were lit, but not many. More and more, light hurt the eyes of the Priest of Aaron. Even one small candle seemed to him to be surrounded by a halo whose rays were painful. One Brother, Jared remembered, said that his grandfather had gone blind after being distressed by such halos.

As erect on his podium as he could manage, his head tipped forward for better seeing, the old man looked around the room until all were alert for his words, and then turned toward the accused.

"Stand Heber!"

Heber stumbled to his feet, still looking at the floor.

"This is the accusation," the Priest of Aaron said. "You are charged, Heber, with going to a woman in violation of your vow. Will you say you are innocent? You have permission to speak."

Heber lifted his head then and looked anxiously all around.

"I have tried to keep the Discipline," he said. "You all know how hard I worked at the farm."

"Will you say you are innocent?"

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"I have fought against ..."

"Will you say you are innocent?"

"Ah, have I done so very much, even if I did it?"

"Will you say you are innocent?"

"I thought I was stronger than I was." Heber's round face twisted with emotion.

"Then you have broken the vow?"

"But only with one woman."

A sigh drifted through the Assembly, expressing shock and surprise, the pity of many and the secret envy of a few. The strain throughout the room became so palpable that the Chaste One was roused from his meditations and looked about.

"You broke the vow?"

"But only lately."

"You broke the vow? Say it!"

"Yes, I did break it." Heber's wet eyes pleaded. "But ..."

"You are no longer permitted to speak."

A sudden recollection caused Jared to grow cold with guilt. There was a wife on the oasis, and perhaps daughters, too. And he had never thought of cautioning Heber, of guarding him. He had even praised the young man's interest in working at Ain Feshka.

Heber's admission had ended the questioning and Jared, sitting with the Fifteen, nerved himself for what must follow. Now would come the cursing and the casting out. According to ancient tradition, expulsion was not enough. The expelled one, stripped of the narrow security of the

Community, must also be cursed.

Before the cursing, it was customary to take a vote of the Fifteen and Jared thought with consternation that he would have to declare himself. No, he would be spared this! The Priest of Aaron was not turning toward the

GILBERT

Supercase

25% COTTON

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"Yes, I did break it." Heber's wet eyes pleaded. "But ..."

"You are no longer permitted to speak."

The cold denial ended the questioning. Jared, sitting with the Fifteen, nerved himself for what must follow. Now would come the cursing and the casting out. According to ancient tradition, expulsion was not enough. The expelled one, stripped of the narrow security of the Community, must also be cursed.

Before the cursing, it was customary to take a vote of the Fifteen and Jared thought with consternation that he would have to declare himself. No, he would be spared this! The Priest of Aaron was not turning toward the

Fifteen. He was omitting the vote, doubtless because --- since Heber had confessed --- it would be meaningless. Jared breathed deep with relief.

Then his heart contracted. The Priest of Aaron was calling his name.

"Jared!"

Jared did not move. He had not dreamed that the cursing would be given to him. He had, it was true, made himself ritually clean. But he was just back from months of fighting. How could he be held sufficiently pure in spirit and thought?

"Keeper of the Scrolls!" the Priest of Aaron said. "You have exalted yourself against the Sons of Darkness. Now curse this culprit out into that darkness."

Slowly Jared rose. His very blood seemed to have been turned to guilt, but his bearded dark face, although it looked darker above his white robe, gave no sign of his emotion.

Uncomprehending --- and why should he comprehend? --- the Priest of Aaron tossed his white beard impatiently.

"Come, Jared! Quickly! Do this which has been laid upon you."

Jared walked slowly toward Heber. Tradition required that the one who cursed should halt just short of the one to be cursed and count to seven, a number of power, and then begin the cursing in traditional phrases set down in the earliest days of the Community.

Jared stopped short of Heber but he did not count to seven. No number could have given him any feeling of power. He stepped to Heber's side and turned toward the Fifteen, and his great guilt now was plain in his face, and in his shoulders, and in his hands which hung loose, as though

emptying themselves at last, of his secret.

The Priest of Aaron drew back in astounded disbelief.

"You, Jared?"

"I, too."

"Not you, Jared?"

"I."

A murmur swelled among the Tens and even among the Fifteen, louder than the sigh Heber's confession had evoked, and different. To shock, surprise, pity and envy were added the anger of deep betrayal. Jared could hear the shattering of pride in him.

He turned his face and looked at them but turned back to the Priest of Aaron. He could not face the Chaste One's stricken gaze.

"You have broken the vow, Jared? You?" the Priest of Aaron still repeated.

"I have broken it."

The old man grasped his beard and throat.

"I should not have granted you permission to fight against the Romans!"

"Before the fighting at Jerusalem, I broke the vow. I am no better than Heber, nor as good. I cannot curse him."

"Indeed you shall not, you son of Belial!"

At first taken aback by the confession, the Priest of Aaron now became the merciless accuser. "Indeed you shall not!" He flung his right hand high. "But I can. First you, faithless Jared! Then the other!"

Jared pulled himself to his gaunt height, and the Priest of Aaron after a pause began to intone solemnly.

Suprase

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"Accursed may you stand forever, Jared!"

As this, the first formal sentence of excommunication, died away the Brotherhood responded, as all earlier generations had.

"Amen," the chorus, blending into a single voice rolled up to the ceiling and echoed there.

"Accursed may you stand in all your guilty works!"

"Amen."

"May the Lord make a specter of you!"

"Amen."

"May he send you to destruction!"

"Amen."

"May you suffer in eternal pits of darkness."

"Amen."

"May all your prayers fall back from heaven like heavy stones!"

"Amen."

"May He refuse to pardon your iniquities!"

"Amen."

"May his angry countenance be lifted upon you in vengeance!"

"Amen."

"May the fire of his judgment burn you to eternal damnation!"

"Amen."

"May you receive no peace from the mouths of all who stand in the
Light!"

"Amen."

"May all the corruption of your broken covenant cleave to you!"

"Amen!"

"May the Lord bar you forever from all the Sons of Light!"

"Amen."

The last unforgiving chorus echoed from the high ceiling of the Assembly Hall and died away, and the Brotherhood stood in silence waiting for the accursed one to go.

Jared had faced the Priest of Aaron throughout the cursing. At his side Heber now awaited his turn. Jared touched the bulky, young, shoulder in fellowship and walked to the door of the hall. There, abruptly, he wheeled and extended his arms toward the cold faces.

"There is a thing you must know!"

The Priest of Aaron levelled an expelling arm, and although separated from Jared by almost the width of the Assembly, it seemed to push him toward the exit.

"The Legions are coming to destroy Masada and they will be here soon!"

The arm seemed to push harder.

"Brothers, make the Scrolls your charge. Without delay, hide the Scrolls!"

No one replied to the imploring voice.

Driving through the silence as through a wall, Jared went out and shut the door behind him. He stood in the darkness, his ears now slowly filling with a faint drone that came from the caves where one Brother out of every Ten was maintaining the unbroken reading of the Scrolls. The night was so serene that it seemed unmarred by the bitterness he had felt in the

Hall. He looked over the barren peaceful plateau with its low, quiet buildings. He would never see them again, never walk along this shadowy colonnade, never cross the broad courtyard to dip his jar into a purifying well, never so much as enter the Library, a looming bulk in the starlight.

"May God bar you forever from all the Sons of Light," the Priest of Aaron had said.

Well, then, he should no longer wear the apparel which united him with the Sons of Light. He laid aside his white robe and tunic, and in his loin-cloth walked past the Chaste One's rock to where he had hidden the sword he had carried from the Compound. He regained it and started toward Netophah.

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In the same serene starlight, Eben and Elias awaited a safe moment to get over Jericho's wall, rising a hundred paces ahead above a tangle of shrubs and young trees. They had reached the City of Palms at dawn but had put off attempting an entrance until nightfall. Elias, in whom caution had become a prime habit, had nodded approval of this plan when Eben pointed out the peculiar daylight hazard.

"Even if we could get over unseen, every step I took inside the city by day would be a risk. Some of the Egyptians must have been at Jerusalem when Jared and I were. Any patrol, or just a passing soldier, might recognize me."

He hoped he was not making himself seem to have been too important in the Jerusalem fighting but Jared would certainly be remembered ^{by} in many and he had always been at Jared's back.

He and Elias had hidden from enemies and the fierce heat of the day, among thick oleanders and willows on what once had been a farm. Man's

earlier possession was marked now only by two crumbling roofless rooms and a ragged honey palm. Abandoned farms were everywhere on the Jericho plain, the owners slain or driven off by bandits.

Eben had cut willow branches for them to sleep on. Both welcomed the rest. Beyond Bethany, taking full advantage of the darkness, they had travelled hard. Now, however, they were rested and hunger, although growing sharp, was at least not accompanied by thirst. Whenever they had stolen out of their torrid concealment for stealthy surveys of the countryside, they had drunk, lapping the water from their palms like Gideon's men, at a nearby brook.

Not far from their hiding place ran the Jerusalem road, as hard and smooth as though it had been built yesterday instead of in Great Herod's long-gone reign. Inside the massive walls rose gleaming towers, and during daylight Eben had pointed out to Elias the shining citadel built by the tyrant to honor his mother. Now the bright parapets of this were blotted out by darkness. Only the city's proud palms could be seen against the sky. A few dim gleams of lamplight escaped from upper rooms. Outside the main gate, closed since sunset, a patrol loitered under torches, giving off loud talk and laughter.

"That's exactly the careless watch Egyptians always keep," Eben said. "But careless or not, they are too near the place where we must climb."

"Should we have pushed through the gate with the sunset crowds?"

"The same Egyptian who might recognize me inside, might see me go through."

"The longer we wait here, the more likely the pursuit will be to

GILBERT

catch up." Elias said.

"Jared did not tell Cotta we were coming to Jericho."

"But hunting so many who fled from the Compound, the pursuit will fan out in all directions. Some may already have joined that guard at the gate."

"I know," Eben said. "The sooner we get Amos's women out the better, but I do not think we should try the wall --- yet."

He felt worried and uncertain. The responsibility that Jared had put upon his shoulders weighed him down. It was so much greater than the responsibility of looking after the Bethel flock. He had dreaded from the beginning the task of shepherding these women, especially the young unmarried one. Yet the wife and daughter of Amos must somehow be brought safely out of this dark menacing city.

Eben was not worried about how well he had followed Jared's plan up to now. He had done well enough or Elias would have objected, but he was accustomed to Jared planning all the way. Getting over the Jericho wall without Jared seemed, all at once, a monumental undertaking, and Elias's warning of pursuit brought up afresh the danger of being recaptured.

He remembered Jared's battered mouth muttering, "The Circus Maximus."

"Elias," he said, "did you ever see Jews fight in the Circus Maximus?"

"Of course not," Elias said. "In Rome, all Jews, Christians or not, keep away from the Circus if they can. And the Circus is far, far off." His tone was gentle for he knew what must be in the mind of this companion, young enough to be his son.

His tone comforted Eben, and he had also a comforting thought. Even if they were caught, they might go unrecognized and not be returned to the Compound, tagged for the Emperor's spectacle. They might be sent to grow wheat in Egypt, or to a farm in Thrace, or even to the mines of Hispania.

He had another, deeper thought. He might be killed.

And I would not lie long in my grave. The Second Coming of the Anointed is near; all Christians know that. I will be with him in glory, and so will Elias.

Worry and uncertainty left him, and he jumped to his feet and laughed.

"What is there to laugh about?" Elias did not speak in disapproval. He was always pleased by Eben's ready laughter.

"Walls," Eben said. He laughed again and jerked a thumb toward the night-dimmed walls of Jericho. "First Jared and I went down one. Then you and Jared and I went up and over another. Now you and I are going up and over this one and later tonight we'll go over it again, pulling two women."

Elias, too, got to his feet.

"Let me go first over this one," he said.

"Why?" Eben was still laughing.

"Whichever goes first is most likely to be captured. And if you are, who will guide Amos's women? But if I am, I'll manage some sort of yell and you can get away to make a new try at helping them"

Eben pressed Elias's arm as he might have pressed Jared's. "I'll go first," he said. He was not standing back while someone else did what he,

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had promised
himself, ought to do. "You have your Writing to think of. You shouldn't take an extra risk. Besides, I have told you the directions to the house, and the signal. You could get the women out alone as well as I could."

Elias sat in silence.

"I'll cover your back and you mine and neither of us will be caught," Eben said.

After another silence, Elias nodded. "All right," he said, "but Eben, you spoke of the Writing. I have been thinking about that, too. You have told me how to find Amos's women, if I must; and I should tell you how to find the Writing." He touched his girdle. "A map is in here. It would not be hard for you to make out. You know Bethel. You remember the palm tree?"

"Of course," Eben said. Everyone in Bethel knew the great palm under which, according to ancient tales, Deborah the Judge once had sat.

"It is marked on my map by a leaf. It is a guide to the hiding place of the Writing. If anything happens to me, will you see that the Writing is safely delivered?" A helpless look came over Elias's face and he added, "Somewhere?"

Eben choked at the thought of being entrusted with Elias's treasure.

"Of course I will," he said. "I will deliver it safely to one of the churches if it costs me my life. But Elias! Perhaps I should not bring you into this danger here at Jericho!"

"Danger?" Elias said. Helping a woman and girl out of Jericho was not a very great danger; not compared to dangers he had surmounted, his squared shoulders said. "The Holy Spirit is guiding us, we know that. It has been planned, to have two of us face this mission instead of one. And

now two of us are entrusted with the Writing, also."

In a new silence they realized that the loud talk had ceased. The gates creaked and ground together, and they saw that the men and torches were gone inside. Elias looked at his tall companion with a smile.

"Let us now share getting over that wall," he said.

Eben led cautiously through oleanders and scrub to the vaulting, thick, precisely layered courses of limestone. He heaped up rocks for Elias to stand on and raise his shoulders so that from them Eben could reach the top of the wall. Elias gathered broad fronds that had dried and fallen from palm trees.

"Good," Eben said, all the more admiring because he had not thought of the ruse himself.

"It just might keep an Egyptian from noticing a pile of rocks that said someone had gone over."

Like Jared in the Compound, Elias locked his hands. Eben stepped into the stirrup and clawed the limestone courses for balance. The little man's wobbly shoulders were not Jared's but Eben stretched and caught the top and Elias's palms on Eben's sandal soles gave a last boost and Eben was up. He lay flat, leaned over and dangled an arm and Elias caught his hand and Eben hauled and Elias was up.

Like lizards they wriggled along until they were looking down into a shadowed, open space and beyond that to a street.

"We're where we ought to be," Eben said.

Elias hung his spear down as far as he could reach.

"Try not to make a noise," Eben said. "A clink'll be heard through half the town."

The spear dropped into soft earth. Elias, lowered by a wrist, dropped as soundlessly. Then Eben hung by one arm, as from the Miriamne Tower, and dropped and they ran for the street.

"No one's in sight," Eben said. "Come on," and they padded silently over deserted cobblestones.

It was understandable that the street should be empty. Jericho was a pleasure city for Titus's army as it had been for someone ever since Herod had rebuilt it. After sundown, however, citizens were safe nowhere except indoors and the Egyptians were out only long enough to joggle in litters or jog from one holiday house to another. Of course, there was always the risk of a patrol.

"Now go right," Eben said.

"How do you know one street from another?"

"I have been in Jericho before." He added abruptly, "Quick! Into this alley."

The alley was no part of the route, but Elias, with the instant response of a man long on the dodge, swerved with Eben into a narrow passage and then a deep doorway.

"Safe!" Eben's whisper was jubilant.

The distant click of hobnails which had alerted him grew to a military tramp, and a four-man patrol marched past. As the tramp began to die away, Elias eased his hold on his spear and Eben turned nervously to warn him against scraping the metal point on the lintel of the doorway. It was

Eben who could have used a warning. His dagger, loosened by the drop from the wall, slid out of his girdle and clattered loudly on the doorstep.

The click of hobnailed boots changed to instant, total silence. It revived and returned slowly, more ominous at every step. Eben retrieved the dagger, dismayed by his blunder, *and whispered.*

"Follow me!" he ^{Said} ~~whispered~~, and ran. ¶ He turned right at the second street, left at the next and there, with Elias unshakeably at his heels, stopped to listen.

"I don't hear them," Elias said.

"Teach me how to carry a dagger when you have time," Eben said.

He paused before a row of low, flat-roofed houses, all shuttered, dark and silent. Eben counted, then stopped before a door. Here, a faint light came through a small, high window and in spite of his antipathy for his assignment, the feeble light filled him with pity.

"Those poor women will be glad to see us," he said, and rapped in the agreed-on pattern.

Waiting for a response, Eben began to grow nervous. He looked down the street which was too narrow to let in more than a trickle of light. It was so silent that his knock seemed to echo. Or did he hear a distant hobnailed click?

Elias turned his head sharply. He too, Eben could see, felt it was urgent to get inside.

Behind the door they heard a slight, rasping sound, a bar being cautiously slid clear.

"Who is there?" a whisper asked. "Is it you, Jared?"

"Open!" Eben said. "Hurry!"

The door opened a crack and a woman looked out. At sight of them, her face filled with terror and she drew back.

"Bandits!" She gasped and tried to push the door shut but Eben, aware because of the calamity which might follow a door slam, shoved a preemptory shoulder into the crack and pushed inside. Elias followed. The woman darted toward a curtain which cut off part of the room. The wall lamp showed her hair to be richly red.

Eben closed and barred the door and listened, and Elias stood close, listening too. There was no sound outside. Behind them, however, skirts rustled and Eben whirled barely in time to face two women fully resolved, especially the younger of the two, to knife him and Elias in the back.

The younger one, also, was redheaded and her furious rush out of the alcove had loosened her hair which showered down all around her in glowing abundance.

Each woman held a knife suited to her resolution, a heavy blade, easily long enough to run nearly through a man. The mother was moving against Elias; the daughter charged Eben like a young mare, grey eyes blazing, round breasts heaving, her intention to kill or be killed so unmistakable that Eben was aghast.

Trying to knife me after I've come all this way to save her from Egyptians!

"Catch the other one, Elias," he said, and cuffed the girl's knife-hand aside and wrapped her in his big arms. She twisted and writhed furiously.

He had thought, once she was subdued, to tell her who he was and why he had come but the unexpected softness of her hair, and all her softness close against him, and the sudden discovery that she was almost as tall as he was, distracted him and for a moment he only hugged harder. In the heady silence he heard Elias saying what he, himself, ought to have said as soon as they got inside.

"Jared sent us! Jared sent us!"

Elias was not trying to catch anyone, just standing with his hands at his sides, smiling at the older woman and her knife. Hearing Elias speak and seeing his kind, worn face, even a frantic woman could not think he was a bandit. This one lowered her knife and began to cry.

"I should have known. You had the signal. It's all right, Abigail."

She looked at Elias beseechingly. "We have been very frightened. An Egyptian has been hunting for my daughter. Of course you are not Egyptians. But there were two of you, and neither one was Jared ..."

"Eben couldn't take time to explain outside," Elias said. "We thought we were being followed."

"We might have killed you!"

Eben loosened the prison of his arms, and the girl broke from him and ran to embrace her mother.

"Now, now!" she said, patting and smoothing. Her mother's distress had changed her into that combination of girl and woman common to fifteen. The two bright heads pressed together as the mother's tears flowed.

"She will be all right soon," the daughter said. Eben, already

burning with embarrassment, noticed miserably that she addressed her remark to Elias. She did not even look his way.

Presently the mother dried her eyes. She was a well-proportioned woman, a trifle plump, and plainly struggling to regain a dignified manner.

"We gave you a strange welcome," she said. "I have not even asked your names. But you must know that I am Rhoda, wife of Amos." At that, she lifted her head proudly. "And this is Abigail, my daughter."

Elias bent his head and Eben did the same. He diffidently named himself and his companion, explained Jared's absence and stopped. Elias warmly took up the story and told of Miriamne Tower and the Compound, and the journey from Jerusalem and the long day outside Jericho. And now Eben, although he did not look, could feel Abigail's gaze. Rhoda, too, was looking closely at their big yellow-headed rescuer. He was, she thought, barely past being a boy and yet so well thought^{of} that Jared, her husband's friend, had entrusted him with this mission. Both men were grimy and wore no robes but how could she have thought they were bandits?

"What you have gone through!" she said. "Let me get you something to eat. It is not what we will offer you in Jamnia when we reach my husband's house. But we give it gratefully."

Hungry though he was, Eben shook his head. "First, we need to hear more about your Egyptian. Isn't that right, Elias?"

Elias nodded gravely.

The women told their story together, first one speaking and then the other. A few days before, an Egyptian had seen Abigail leaving a neighbor's house. She had run back inside, and the neighbor had barred the front entrance and Abigail had escaped by a smaller door at the back,

and although the Egyptian had pounded, the neighbor had not unbarred until Abigail was safely away.

Elias leaned forward. "When she had to unbar, what did she tell him?"

"That Abigail had been a stranger to her," Rhoda said.

"And seemed to be light in the head," Abigail said.

"He went away," Rhoda said, "after looking around, but today he came back, asking questions all along the street. 'I am looking for a redheaded girl,' he said at every house. 'Do you know where she lives?'"

"No one told him, but they got word to my mother. We knew he would come here, and it would be no use just to bar the door."

"That is no help in Jericho against an Egyptian of Titus's army."

"So my mother made herself look like a slattern. And when he came, she told him she had never heard of me."

"Where were you?" Eben said and for the first time Abigail spoke to him directly.

"Out in the alley with my knife," she said. Mentioning the knife, she blushed, and Eben wondered how he could have thought that a girl so young and beautiful needed to be grabbed to keep her from harming anyone. He should have been gentle. But the whole thing had come so unexpectedly. Besides, he was not used to handling a girl, although he was not eager to confess that even to gain forgiveness.

"The neighbors all seem to be your friends," Elias said.

"All. They are all of our people. And they know who my husband is. Besides, Jewish women protect one another against the Egyptians, when

they can. Not one of them would betray us. But, of course, a child might answer his question for a penny. Perhaps, already has."

"He may come back tonight," Eben said, and in the apprehensive silence which followed he realized that now he must try to plan as Jared would have planned. He said, "Was he of high rank?"

An Egyptian of high rank might return with help enough to make an overpowering search.

Rhoda and Abigail shook their heads. They had seen enough auxiliaries to know a common soldier when they saw one.

"Good!" Eben said. "Do you, too, have a back door?"

"Yes," Rhoda answered. "These houses are all alike. Doors in front and behind, and the back doors open into an alley."

"I'll show him, Mother," Abigail said and as she led him behind the curtain, Eben was flooded with relief. She would hardly be allowing him this close again if he had offended unforgivably.

He inspected the back door and looked around, while she watched with confiding grey eyes. Hanging from the walls and rafters, he saw some clothing, and when they had rejoined the others he said to Rhoda:

"You and your daughter had better put on your extra tunics and robes. Until the sun comes up, it is going to be cold."

"And perhaps we should start as soon as you are ready," Elias said.

"Not until you eat!" Rhoda said. "Why, you can't have eaten since you escaped from the Compound!"

She and Abigail rushed out bread, figs, wine, a little cheese, and

eating hurriedly their first food in more than twenty-four hours, Eben and Elias outlined their route. It developed that the women knew the country they would travel. Beyond Emmaus, they knew a dozen small towns, strung out like boundary stones. The first would be Gederah.

"I was married in Gederah," Rhoda said. "And from Gederah, I know every step to Jamnia."

Eben clapped Elias on the shoulder. "And from Jamnia," he said, "Jared and I will go with you to Bethel."

That compelled an explanation of why Elias had to go to Bethel. The women looked awed at hearing of his treasured Writing.

"But what will you do with it after you have it again?" Rhoda asked.

"That is why he is going with us to Jamnia, first," Eben said. "He wants to consult Amos about it."

Tears came into Rhoda's eyes. "Of course," she said.

Abigail took her mother's hand. "My father is a great scholar," she said. "He is second only to Johanen."

"And a noble man," Rhoda said.

"I will be honored to have him advise me," Elias said, "even though he and I do not hold the same beliefs."

"Elias and I are Christians," Eben said and explained the new word.

"Christians or whatever, my husband will know just what you should do," Rhoda said, seeking to be as tolerant as she was confident. "Now Abigail and I will get into those extra clothes."

The women went behind the curtain and emerged looking plumper than when they had gone in. Rhoda put all the left-over food into a bag and Elias slung the bag over his shoulder.

"Take those knives you almost killed us with," Eben said, and Abigail blushed again. "You probably won't have to use them, though."

"If we have to, we can," Rhoda said. Many a matron of her people had fought; fighting was permissible even for the wife of a priest, given a great enough peril.

"Deborah led an army against Sisera," Abigail said.

Elias chuckled. Even Eben, although less learned, knew that Barak had figured in Israel's storied assault against her Canaanite foe.

They were all jolted by a sound from the street, heavy footsteps followed by silence. Eben slid alongside the window; then, keeping away from the lamplight not to be betrayed by his shadow, he motioned the others to go behind the curtain and followed.

"It looks like your Egyptian," he said. "You go out first, Elias, with the women."

A knock fell on the barred front door.

"The lamp will delay him for a while," Eben said. "He will think you are sleeping and will try to wake you."

Elias opened the small, rear door, as the Egyptian knocked again, more imperatively now. The alley showed empty in both directions, and he led the women out and Eben closed the door silently behind them.

As the men hurried Rhoda and Abigail along the dark lane, they caught the sound of a crash back in the house. The lamp had ceased to deceive.

"He will waste a little time looking around," Elias said. "Let us make the most of it. Once he starts to follow, he will travel faster than we can."

Through dark streets and darker alleys, Eben led the way toward the wall of Jericho. Their sandals made almost no noise but tardily they knew that almost none was too much. Behind them sounded the beat of running feet.

"Turn right at the next corner," Eben said to Elias, "then straight to the wall. Here, take my dagger and let me have your spear. Now run, the three of you!"

"You may need me," Elias said.

"Run!" Eben said and, as they ran, he flattened himself against a house wall and looked back into the blackness from which they had come.

The beat of the pursuit grew louder. Eben gripped the shaft of his weapon. The Egyptian, breathing heavily, burst so suddenly out of the gloom that Eben's first thrust missed, and the Egyptian had time to square away and swing his sword. Eben sucked in his belly, and the sword point swept harmlessly past, and Eben thrust again, a savage blow at the neck. That spitted the runner who hung suspended long enough to reveal dimly his big yellow face and gaping jaws. He strangled and fell.

Eben freed his spear, snatched the dead man's weapon and raced away.

"He will never point out the direction we took," Eben said when he came up to the others at the wall.

He spoke triumphantly and felt that he had the right to do so.

The Egyptian would not hunt down another maiden of Israel. But, as usual with Eben, the aftermath of victory was depression. He wondered if he would ever kill without guilt and fight without fear. Why was he never coldly bold like Jared?

He felt with his foot until he found soft earth and thrust the spear deep to scour it clean of the Egyptian's blood.

"We ought to get over," Elias said and again backed up to the wall and locked his hands into a stirrup.

Eben mounted and reached the top. Rhoda and Abigail came after, aided by Eben's outstretched hand. Eben reached down and pulled up Elias. Then, as the men had done earlier, all four flattened out like lizards until they were sure no liers-in-wait lurked among the shadows below, ^{and} then descended.

Eben handed Elias his spear and regained his own dagger and took time to look about, checking directions and planning.

They would go west and, at first, do no more than keep north of the highway, but then the trail, winding up through shrub and over rock, would begin to come plain. The stars made more light than he would have chosen but scattered trees gave some concealment, and for this all were suddenly grateful.

They heard a horse on the highway, galloping hard from the direction of Jerusalem. Horse and rider became plain and passed them and halted at Jericho's southern gate, and the rider shouted and hammered commandingly with his sword hilt.

"Only a courier riding on the authority of Rome would dare ask that the gate be opened to him at this hour," Eben said. But now, in the

face of new danger, he did not feel uncertain. Looking at Abigail, he resolved grimly, that if the pursuit had indeed come close, he would manage somehow to keep her and her mother safe until Jared joined them.

"Maybe," Elias said, "something has been learned about Rhoda and Abigail."

"If that is true..." Eben began thoughtfully, but wise Elias did not need to think.

"If that is true," Eben said, "the quicker we get out of here and on to Jared's bytrack, the better."

Rigid in a trough of sand, Jared stared up at Netophah. Its walls were plain in the starlight, and he had been watching for several hours. He sat as hard and silent as a stone although within him a savage turmoil boiled --- anger at himself, anger at the Priest of Aaron, anger at his shattered life.

Earlier, nearing the gate, he had found fresh tracks of horses --- four. That almost had to mean a Roman patrol. The Compound Commander --- and Cotta --- would have fanned out patrols like locusts. Probably one was spending the night at the Inn and would go to the Community, come morning. Cotta, Jared reflected, knew that he belonged to the Community, and a patrol on its way there might easily turn aside to search the Inn. He had wormed back down the hill to hunker in a trough and, just as dawn was breaking, four Romans rode out of the main gate and turned, not toward the Dead Sea but toward Jerusalem. Perhaps, Jared thought, he had not after all been the reason for their visit.

I'd better talk to Obal, he thought and went to the gate. The watch dogs raised their usual snarling clamor and the gate keeper looked out.

"Oh!" he said. "You!"

"What were the Romans doing here?"

"Looking for you. That was the second lot of them to come looking for you. You should have used the little gate. Now the women will know you are here." He paused slyly. "The Romans are willing to pay money to know when you come. And you can't trust women."

And I can't trust you. The thought came like a knife thrust. Jared said nothing but walked toward the kitchen.

The three women were up from their pallets and the pallets tucked among rafters. The one with bright cheeks looked at him searchingly; the others did not glance his way. He knocked on the door at the room's far side and presently it opened and Tamar stood behind, her green eyes bright, a night lamp on one kitchen wall turning her hair into a gleaming black waterfall.

Jared seized her in his arms, pressing his head against her hair, but after a moment she drew back to look at him.

"Your mouth, Jared! Your poor mouth!"

"I was struck but it is almost well."

"Thanks be to God," she said but she looked at it doubtfully; his lips were still swollen. "And thanks be to God that you are here. Four legionnaires have been looking for you. I have been so anxious. They said you escaped from the Hinnom Valley Compound."

"Many of us did. There was a break-out."

"How is it at Jerusalem?"

"Almost ended. Now there is talk of a drive against Masada. I came to warn the Community."

"And me?" Tamar asked, but not resentfully as she would have asked if the time for quarrelling had come. She lifted her face sweetly, ready if he wished it to return to his embrace.

Jared took her into his arms again, but not yet with passion. He was seeking comfort from the loneliness which engulfed him because he no longer belonged to the Community. He no longer belonged anywhere.

"I love you," Tamar said over and over, sensing what he wished to hear.

After a long time he released her. Just as he was not ready for passion he was not ready, either, to tell of his expulsion. She would be glad; that made the telling hard. She would be glad.

"Go and bathe while I get you something to eat," she said.

Jared unbuckled his sword and went to her bedroom where he found water and cloths. He was stretched out on her pallet, clean and somewhat relaxed, when she returned with food.

"How did they ever get you into the Compound?" she asked, and while he ate he told of Johanen's request, of the bearding of Simon, of Titus's handshake, of Elias, of the escape and flight.

"They are hunting us, of course," he said. "A great hunt, probably; so many men escaped. And an agent of the Emperor is with Titus seeking men for the Circus Maximus. The hunt is directed, I feel sure, by

Titus's right-hand man, a Primus Pilus named Cotta."

He saw, in her suddenly thoughtful green eyes, that she had met or heard of Cotta. Or perhaps, he thought, she was just filing his name away in a mind which stored every detail likely to help her maintain herself in the Inn. She knew what he was thinking. Pulling away his empty plate, laughing, she pushed him down on the pallet and flung herself beside him, shaking her black hair across his face, caressing him, asking for kisses in low tender words, until he had kindled, and would further kindle her into slow, skillful surrender.

They advanced together toward ecstasy, her light fingers spelling out her pleasure now and her greater pleasure to come. Then they were riding the great familiar wave, each surge flinging them above the world, out among the stars where the farthestmost cluster burst; and then they receded and were filled again with the dread familiar to both of them.

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Tamar dreaded the certainty that he would leave her again, and Jared the need to tell her his news. They lay close in an unease almost equal to the ecstasy they had just shared.

Jared spoke first.

"Who was in the patrol?"

"Three legionnaires and their corporal. They are going now to the Community, I suppose. And of course you have been there. You would not come to me ahead of your precious Scrolls."

"I no longer have any Scrolls."

"You no longer ..." Tamar sat upright.

"I no longer belong to the Community. I have been expelled,

cursed out into the darkness."

"They learned about me!" she cried. Her voice, although tender with pity, held also the note of joy he had dreaded.

He lay silent.

"My poor dear one!" she said, putting her cheek against his beard. "I will make it up to you. We will be so happy. You will come not to regret it."

"I do not regret it now," he answered roughly. "I despise them all."

But not the Chaste One! Nor many, many others known since childhood. Did he truly despise any of them? Or did he long for them, even though their curses still echoed in his ears?

"We will go away," Tamar said. "We will go first to the Great Sea. The Legions have not disturbed any cities there. All the coast people have made submission. From Gaza, Ashkelon or Caesarea, we will take ship. We can live in Crete, in Cyprus, in Babylon! Thousands of our people never left Babylon and we will find all the friends we need. There are a hundred cities where Titus would never think to look, even if bigger matters did not press him ..."

She felt his hard body resist. It had always happened so in the past, when she tried to woo him away from the Community, but now he was done with the Community, and the Community with him. Now, why did he resist?

"I haven't enough to pay for passage," he said. "I have only a few shekels. You know that."

"I have enough to take us away, and you will make a place for your-

self wherever we go. There aren't many like you, Jared."

He muttered to himself. "At least it would be living. I would not be a lost man among other lost men. Not ashes heaped away with other ashes."

"Then we will go?"

He shook his head.

"I must meet Eben. You know the promise to Amos. Eben has done more than his share already, and so has Elias."

Pride stung Tamar at this rejection. Her tone, when she spoke again, was cold.

"When will you come back?"

"How can I say? Simon is still holding out. The towers will soon fall, as I have told you, but then the Eagles will be going to Masada."

"And through Netophah," she said. "But you have no thought of Netophah and me. I am not as important to you as Eben and Elias and the women of Amos."

Jared could not bring himself to say that she had always been able to take care of herself, but this was true and Tamar knew it.

"You think I have friends who will help me," she said. "Well, my father left me friends, and I would have been a fool not to make more."

"I must get away. Another patrol will come."

"Go! I told last night's corporal nothing. But why should I keep anything back from the next?"

Then because he was alone among so many hunters, and because the Brotherhood had cast him out, and she had so berated him, she softened.

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"You need not leave with only that sword. We have arms and armour. Take what you need from the chest. I'll have a bundle of food made, and ask Obal to saddle a horse."

He was glad to have her out of the room. It was hard to keep his hands away from her when she was that close. He chose a light breast-plate, a small round shield, and was pushing a dagger into his sword belt when she burst in.

"Reba has gone! She has taken my horse. My own horse! And Obal is sure she has gone to recall last night's patrol."

Yes, Jared thought. If Obal had not sent her, at least, he had not stopped her. Reba! She would be the bright-cheeked one.

"Do you think she has followed them to the Community?" Tamar's voice shook.

"The Romans," Jared said, "did not go to the Community. I saw them ride off. They took the Jerusalem Road."

"But the Community is where you would be most likely to take shelter. I suppose another patrol has gone there."

He did not answer.

Almighty God, they should not have expelled me. Who will face that patrol? How long before the Scrolls will be in flames?

He shook himself in agony.

"What will you do now, Jared?"

"Not fight lions for Roman pleasure! Let me think!" His tone was savage.

Obal knocked and sidled in, his mouth trembling, his lashless

eyes avoiding Jared's.

"How long has the woman been gone?" Jared said.

Obal mumbled that he was not sure. Knowing that Jared and Tamar must know that he had either let her out, or absented himself so he would not see her go, he sought a change of subject.

"I don't believe she will be back," he said. "She was with the Corporal last night. She is a woman always in heat. She will probably be meeting him somewhere and will stay until he casts her off. May that be soon."

Tamar ignored this. "The horse we must give you, Jared, isn't much for speed but it is strong," she said.

"I have it saddled and waiting," Obal said. He looked timidly from one to the other.

Poor old Obal! He was not, Jared knew, truly old but he had been old --- old and defeated --- from birth, and he was torn now between fear and loyalty. He feared Romans who could imprison, whip, brand, even crucify. Yet he would not desert his mistress whose bounty kept him out of a hateful, hating world. He had only partly betrayed and now was eager to make that betrayal come to nothing. Jared gave him forgiveness, the more willingly because he himself needed so much.

"They'll be back any time, Jared," Tamar said. "Shouldn't you hurry?"

"I have a plan," Jared said. "Let me look around."

He went out through the courtyard, Tamar following, and Obal waddled ahead to throw open the big gate, and they all peered out. They

drew back quickly. Four horsemen were in sight, and while they looked the patrol dropped down into the trough of the last great billow of sand between them and the hill of Netophah.

Tamar was close to tears. "What will you do, Jared? Where will you hide? They will be here long before you can get away."

"I'll stay and welcome them. I've thought of a trick," Jared said, and laughed. The need to outwit the Romans challenged his mind and absorbed his energies, and the wine of danger drowned the echoing curses of the Brothers.

"Bring out my horse, Obal," he said, and took Tamar's arm and hurried her back to her own quarters.

"When you are inside," he said, "bar the kitchen door and all the other doors and be sure the small gate is barred. That will delay the patrol and I will need time."

He dropped her arm and started off at a run.

He has already forgotten me, Tamar thought, but in that instant he returned and caught her in his arms and kissed her eyes and throat and mouth.

"You will come back from Jammia?"

"Arent we going to live in Cyprus? Or Babylon?" He looked at her with bright black eyes and kissed her again and ran back to the courtyard.

Tamar did not know whether to be happy or fearful, hopeful or angry, whether to laugh or to cry. She barred the kitchen door and then her own doors and the gate and for want of anything better to do, began

tidying up the disorder Jared had left behind.

Obal stood with stooped head beside a square, sturdy beast which would at least be able to lope all day.

"Take her to the foot of the east hill," Jared said. "Find a place between two dunes, good and low, and tether her. And stay there until I join you. But first give me your robe and staff."

Obal handed them over.

When gate-keeper and horse were gone, Jared pushed through the big gate and hid his armor and weapons, except for the dagger. Returning, he put on Obal's robe and the dogs nosed around him uneasily. They recognized Obal's robe and Jared's scent and finally lay down, as though saying that since they were on good terms with both they could not go wrong if they accepted the two, combined.

Jared closed the gate and went into the alcove where it was Obal's custom to drowse between arrivals. He wrapped himself in the blanket there and waited.

Hooves rasped in the sand outside, the dogs clamored, and someone knocked softly. Jared, blanketed to his eyes, opened the gates.

"Is he still here?" The Corporal looked down from Tamar's horse.

Obal was right, Jared thought. The woman had been left behind and would be hiding somewhere --- nursing her reward money, perhaps.

He gestured toward the kitchen and the Corporal and his men dismounted. The Corporal put a finger to his lips to warn the gate-keeper against any noise. Jared reached for the horses' reins.

"Tie them to the hitching post by the hearths," the Corporal said. "I want them ready. This business won't take long."

He thumbed two of his men back through the gate and around to the north entrance where the small gate was, and with the third man he went on quiet boots to the kitchen door.

Jared led the horses to the hitching rail where he made a great fuss about fastening one after another and, as soon as he was left alone, he cut all four saddle girths. And the bridle along each horse's face. A Roman might ride saddleless but who could guide his mount with a cut bridle, in the oceans of sand outside? As an afterthought he possessed himself of two of the javelins the Romans had left behind, then slipped through the big gate, closed it, dug up his weapons and went on down the hill.

Obal looked up in palpable fear, sure that Jared planned to seek revenge for his betrayal. But Jared spoke calmly.

"I'm going to try to frighten their horses into bolting," he said. As he talked he tore strips from Obal's tunic and fastened a gag around the unresisting Obal's mouth and tied his hands and his feet.

"Tell them I swore I'd cut your throat if you let out a squeak," he said.

He made a slight slash across the fingers of Obal's right hand. "And say you grabbed at my dagger and got this."

Mounting, he rode back up the hill and with Obal's staff harried the dogs into an outraged clamor and the horses at the hitching post reared in alarm. They broke free and Jared herded them pell mell through the open

gate. He hated to see Tamar's handsome horse go but it was safest so. Left behind, he would only provide a mount for the Corporal. Perhaps, this way, he might find his way back.

Jared galloped down Netophah's hill and the sound of pounding hoofs brought the two legionnaires, posted at the north gate. They were supposed to watch for a man on foot coming out of that gate but what about this rider?

"Halt!" One man called just to be safe. And the other also cried, "Halt!" And they floundered forward through the sand. Jared urged his mount to extra speed and one legionnaire cast a spear. However, the horse was going briskly and the spear fell short in the sand.

The legionnaires ran after him but the sand engulfed their boots and they gave up and shouted in rage. They were torn by indecision. Should they stay and guard the gate as they had been told to do? Or should they follow? But this rider might be the very Jew they had ridden so hard to capture. He was big enough to be. They staggered in sand around the wall to the courtyard where they had left their mounts in safe keeping.

Tamar had her rooms fairly well in order when someone knocked at the kitchen door. She stood still, and the knock came again, louder, bolder. She opened her own inner door.

"What is it?" She tried to put into her voice the long-suffering patience which the knock of a servant at an inconvenient time might call up.

"The Corporal Valerius!"

"Wait just a little." Now she tried for a modest intimation that she must have time to put herself to rights.

But he knocked again sharply and at last she opened the door.

"Where is he?" Valerius said. Backed by a stout helper, he was plainly ready to do his best against the redoubtable Jared.

"There is no one here," Tamar said. Her green eyes were wide with surprise.

"The prisoner who came here after escaping from the Compound! Jared! Where is he?"

"Oh, he is gone!"

"Gone?"

Tamar leaned toward him and the nearness of her flushed and lovely face caused the Corporal to swallow.

"He came demanding food," she said, "and I could not refuse, being alone except for a few servants. I tried to think how to send word after you, and then I heard the gate-keeper ride off and I was sure he had gone to call you back. I hope you have brought back my horse?"

The Corporal looked away from the disarming face.

"You could have asked your servants to help you hold him," he said.

"Call on my women servants to do the work of legionnaires? As soon as he left, I bolted myself in. How did you happen to miss him?" She resolved to strengthen her position. "Would you have me tell the Primus Pilus Cotta, the next time he comes here, that you and your men maintained no look-out?"

"You know the Primus Pilus?"

"Tell him," she said, "if you report to him that he will be welcome again at the Inn in Netophah whenever he chooses to come."

The Corporal Valerius looked dismayed.

"Of course we maintained a lookout. But we saw nothing. Was this Jared mounted when he left? A horse? A camel? Or was he on foot?"

"How could I know? I remained here, as I have told you. But he was armed when he went through that door." She pointed to the kitchen exit.

Valerius shifted uncertainly. He ought to hurry this search elsewhere, perhaps question the old gate-keeper. He jerked. That silent blanketed man who had let them in today was not the waddling old man he remembered.

"Have you more than one gate-keeper?"

"Only Obal. You must remember him."

The Corporal was ready to groan in despair when they both heard a din in the courtyard, and a shout, and the barking of dogs.

"Mars and Mithras aid me!" the Corporal said, calling on one of the old gods, and one of the newest, and he rushed out of the kitchen door, followed by the man he had brought along to help.

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As the Commander of the Hinnom Compound entered to report, Titus was standing in the sleeping tent which he used also for official business. He usually stood to indicate disapproval and neither his informal attire nor the unexpected --- it was midmorning --- presence of the Princess Berenice

lessened the Commander's worry.

Berenice, on a couch piled with pillows, was enveloped in a prismatic, silken mist. But even an added, heavy necklace made a total so nearly nothing that the Commander, inspite of worry, had trouble keeping his gaze on his General.

It was a blazing, boldly made affair of jewels and sculptured gold, parading Berenice's preferences among Egypt's pantheon: Thoth, measuring time; Set, speaking for evil; Ranna, the lively darling of harvests; Nekhbet who, although female, was always shown as a vulture; Khem, explicitly the god of generation; cunning Iris; Bubastis, her cat-headed daughter; and Maat, the Virgin, whose boast that no man had lifted her garment, Berenice did not aspire to match.

The Commander had never before seen a necklace of such value and he was notorious for his cupidity but it was Berenice who held his guarded gaze. Guarded because Titus did not tolerate more than a glance at her and also because Berenice herself, it was said, could be wilfully resentful. She might, sometimes, seem to delight in tormenting men, but no gazer could ever be sure when she would angrily order him lashed. The Commander, therefore, was discreetly looking away from the Princess when Titus spoke.

"Your report!" he said. His familiar tight smile was missing.

"Two hundred and four prisoners escaped," the Commander said. "Thirty-two of these were run down and killed, one hundred and twenty have been recaptured, forty-three of them wounded. Fifty-two are still missing."

"Seventy-five dead and wounded," Titus said. "At that rate, I

shall soon have none at all to send back to Rome. And of course the missing include the two I want most?"

"Jared and Eben are still being hunted."

"You brought the names of all at fault for the breakout?"

The Commander presented a tablet, and his hand suddenly trembled so that the tablet shook.

"This list is correct?"

"Three names were on by error. They have been scratched."

Titus's expression added that error to the sins of the Compound Commander and motioned the Princess Berenice to take the tablet. A space below the names was blank.

"Write," Titus said.

Berenice motioned in turn and a serving woman who had hurriedly cleared a light table of remnants of food, fetched it to the couch. Berenice picked up a stylus and gave her general a fleeting smile.

"The guards named above," he said, and she began to write, "will be given ten lashes apiece. Those over the rank of recruit will be reduced one grade. All will be kept at their present Compound duties, but for ten days their wine ration will be cut off. An equivalent of vinegar for Posca will be added. The legionnaire, Maro, who brings this, will be given twenty lashes. He may not be considered for promotion for one year."

The word, "legionnaire" told the Compound Commander that he had been shorn of his hard-won rank, but he did not wince, and when he heard "twenty lashes" his trembling stopped. He had got off lightly. Titus

had crucified centurions accused of the escape of prisoners. Thankfully, Legionnaire Maro received the tablet and backed out of the tent.

"Fetch the Primus Pilus Cotta," Titus said to the guards at the tent entrance.

Cotta stood at ease and his lean face was impassive when confronted with Berenice's allurements. He had encountered her in Titus's tent before and always stole an appreciative glance or two. But of late his dreams had centered on the green-eyed mistress of the Inn at Netophah. Also he too noted that Titus's glance was hard.

"I have sent that bungler, Maro, to less than he deserves," Titus said. "See that a new Commander of the Compound is named. Now answer me a question"

Cotta waited in silent obedience.

"Why?" Titus said, "have so many --- on the trail before the dust settled around the Compound's fallen wall --- failed to find two peasant Judeans?"

Cotta wondered how plainly he dared answer. He had served the full 20-year enlistment required of every male Roman, and more. For eighteen years he had been a centurion, for twelve a Primus Pilus. Twice he had won the Corona Civica. He could, it was true, be stripped of all rank, even executed. But he was Titus's chief aide. It was doubtful that Titus would wish to lose him. He dared give the General's hard look back.

"I was born in Samnium, O Caesar," he said. "I hunted in every forest there, climbed every mountain, marked hideouts for miles

around my father's farm. I have been away, with the Eagles, for twenty-two years. But drop me in Samnium today, give me the head start Jared and Eben had, and three or four hundred Jews would be hard put to run me down. So why should Roman hunters this quickly run down Jared and Eben who were born here?"

"You mean the damned pair will never be caught?"

"Our men need time."

"A life-time?"

"Days. A week. Perhaps a month."

"What has been accomplished so far?"

"One patrol almost caught up with Jared. And I think some are now on Eben's trail."

Insert to Merian: page 288 must be changed to conform with the next few lines.

Searchers had gone north, Cotta explained, where Jared had hinted that the women of Amos were hiding but it had been a false scent. Another searcher had come back from Jamnia, Amos's home, with word that Jericho was, more likely, the place to look for the women. So Cotta had hurried a courier to enlist the assistance of the brigadier in command of the frolicking Egyptians. Discovery of a slain Egyptian in the quarter where, rumor said, Amos's wife and daughter had been living, as well as an empty house, told the hunters that they were too late.

It had not been hard to trace a party of four over the Jericho wall. And, luckily, such a party had been sighted.

"But Jared was not one of them," Cotta said. "A beggar told the

patrol that around dawn he had seen two men and two women. One of the men --- bulky and blond --- was probably Eben. The other answers the description of an older man, named Elias, who, we know, was with Jared and Eben in the Compound. At any rate, he was certainly not Jared. The four should be tracked down before they reach Jammia."

"What about Jared?"

Another patrol, Cotta said, had just missed Jared at the small Inn at Netophah.

"Corporal Valerius of the Compound Guard left the Inn when he should have stayed. He admitted that Jared had tricked him."

Cotta did not add details of his conversation with Valerius.

"I give you the Inn mistress's very words," Valerius had said. "Tell the Primus Pilus Cotta, if you report to him, that he will be welcome again at the Inn at Netophah whenever he chooses to come."

Cotta had admired the "again", a deft rope to hold the corporal back from a field in which his superior might claim priority. Cotta had resolved that he would shortly ride down and invite Tamar for evidence of her implied friendship.

"If Valerius left too soon, how did he learn that Jared came later?" Titus said.

"Servants at the Inn, looking for a reward, called Valerius back. But Jared tricked ~~him~~ ^{them}."

"How?"

Cotta, almost admiringly, described Jared's masquerade as gate-keeper and his doings with the bridles and saddle-girths.

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"Break Valerius, also," Titus said.

To the surprise of both men, Berenice spoke.

"But what turned the pursuit to such a small inn?"

"It is close to the Community," Cotta said.

"Has Jared a woman at the inn?"

Trust her, Cotta thought, to ask that!

Berenice had addressed him directly, and he dared look at her directly through the prismatic mist.

"A woman owns the inn at Netophah. Jared may know her," he said.

"Of course!" Berenice gave a quick, remembering chuckle. "Of course! I, also, know of the Inn-mistress at Netophah."

Cotta "Tch-ed!" under his breath. Name of Mercury! Name of every god of guile! This little piece knew everything. But everyone said she was worth as much to Titus out of bed as in it. Her spies, and Agrippa's, missed nothing.

Titus turned to Jared.

"Do you know her?"

"I saw her once. You will recall that I inspected the Inn for you when I was on the ration detail."

"Do you think she had a finger in Jared's escape?"

"No. In his being there, perhaps."

"If he pleased her," Berenice said, "she wouldn't hesitate to help him. And he may have. This Tamar has her choice among all who travel the Incense Road. But you saw Jared. Although, "she added, smiling to herself, "my women seem to favor the other one, the big, golden beard-puller."

Titus tried one of his rare jests.

"If she is so much of a woman, why have our Romans left her to a Jew? Have our best tried?"

Berenice's smile grew sly and warm.

"I hear that Tamar makes her own choice. Some women are like that, deciding for themselves."

Titus pushed out his underlip and Cotta saw that, after all, his general was like most men. He, also, had trouble with his women. He turned abruptly to his aide.

"How did we leave things?" he said. "You had Eben out of Jericho and Jared away from Netophah..."

"The best chance to pick them up is when they come together again."

"How do you know they will come together?"

"The promise to succour Amos's women came from Jared, up to now, Eben alone has had them in charge, but Jared will surely rejoin him."

"Then what are your plans?"

Cotta hesitated. How much dared he promise? Separated or together, Jared and Eben were in their own country.

"Patrols have surrounded the Community," he said, "in case Jared returns. But the Brothers are all on his side and there are endless caves to hide in. I doubt he will be caught at the Community."

"When we finish with the Upper City, I'll do something about this Community," Titus said. "But a Jared joining Eben with another man and two women alone shouldn't be hard to find."

"It isn't as though they were going to be on a highway," Cotta

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said. "They'll be inching along, always in cover or near it. But they must end up in Jamnia and Jamnia is being watched. So if we don't catch them before..."

Cotta paused, weighing the request he felt he must make against the demands of the preparations afoot for the last assault on Jerusalem.

Titus waited.

"We need more men," Cotta said. "to set up a screen. A big enough one will snare them. We need two more cohorts."

Titus had learned the power of displeased silence and his stare was very displeased.

"One might do," Cotta said.

Titus continued to stare.

"Those retired veterans at Emmaus," Cotta said. "There are at least eight hundred of them."

"Retired veterans would have to volunteer," Titus said, but his stare softened.

"Six hundred might," Cotta said, "if they were promised good pay and rations."

Titus nodded slowly. The veterans were, more than likely, short of money. Many were married, to women from back home, or to Judean or Samaritan or Galilean girls. The disorders in Palestine had caused practical fathers to consider honorable marriage with a legionnaire preferable for their daughters to what might happen otherwise.

"And it isn't as though they were risking a big, crippling fight," Cotta said. "They will be hunting, chiefly, just three men."

"Yes," Titus said, "they should concentrate on Jared and Eben although, with such a screen, you may pick up some others. As for Amos's women, I do not need to tell you that they should be allowed to go to their home safely."

"I understand," Cotta said. *He fully agreed with the order.* The two would be in danger from Roman soldiers, auxiliaries, bandits, every moment until Titus's protecting order could catch up with them. *and only* ~~But Cotta agreed fully with the order.~~ Any harm done to the women of Amos would rouse Jews everywhere.

"I will get off to Emmaus myself," he said. "We can have a new cohort, knowing just what to do, on the hunt tomorrow."

Berenice watched him go with an only half concealed annoyance. She had preened for two men without reward and her vanity was especially rubbed by Cotta's failure to risk so much as a last glance. Walking restlessly about the tent she was grace in miniature. Behind the prismatic mist, bosom and shoulders were deliciously curved, hips were slim but round, legs tapering.

Ordinarily, the sight would have been enough to win Titus. But he had been aware of her attempt to play on the desires of Maro and Cotta and, moreover, he had not completed his plan against the Upper City.

"Tell the tent guards that I do not wish to be interrupted through the rest of this morning," he said.

"I think I'll go away until you have done with your Upper City," Berenice said. A swift horse, a swaying litter might be a cure for this restlessness.

Titus almost protested. He liked her near; she was often helpful.

GILBERT

Supernatural

But she was a constant temptation, when so readily available.

"Where would you go?"

She gave her little, clear, always somehow bawdy laugh.

"I haven't thought. Jericho might be fun or Sebaste's shops."

"Go to Sebaste," Titus said. "And afterward, go on to Caeserea, if I finish here soon enough we can meet there, and sail to Rome together. If I am kept here too long, come back."

"You want me back?" she said, to let him know that she had seen he did not want her now.

"You know what I want."

"But you will let me go to Sebaste, and then send me on to Caeserea?"

He laughed. "Hurry back after Sebaste."

"I wouldn't get far in what is left of today." She was not too eager to leave, now that she had aroused his interest. "I'll leave tomorrow morning, or the next."

Jericho, the starry night and a grey dawn lay behind and now, with the sun overtaking them, Amos's wife and daughter trotted breathlessly between Eben and Elias.

"Must we hurry so?" Rhoda asked.

"I am sorry," Eben said but did not slacken his pace. He could not get out of his mind, and neither, he knew, could Elias, the beggar they had seen at sunrise. He had been burrowed in on the warm side of a rock, but their steps had roused him, and he had raised a shaggy,

unkempt head to stare.

Elias had called a soft, reassuring, "Peace!"

"Peace!" the beggar had mumbled back, but he had continued to stare.

"If a patrol ever comes on that one," Elias had said, "he could give a good description of us all."

So when they came in sight of a by-track leading up into the hills, Eben turned off and held to a false course until the beggar's rock was far behind them. Then, turning again, he worked back to the path upon which Jared had planned to rejoin him.

To the women this appeared to be a meaningless, helter-skelter trace, climbing through scrub and shrub, but Eben was sure of where he was going. They ascended always, keeping north of Jerusalem's towers and always ahead rose the Judean mountains. These began at the Plain of Esdraelon and continued well below Jerusalem, so that whoever purposed to get from Jericho to Emmaus had to ascend before descending. The path ran low on the northern flank of every rise of ground and so was hidden from the great highway to the south, and Eben kept close to copses, gullies, canyons, caves and all other gouges in the earth into which hunted men --- or women --- could vanish between two breaths.

So could wild animals. Eben pointed out to the women, almost too late, the tail of a vanishing fox. There were not so many beasts as there used to be, he said. Prowling bandits, scouting legionnaires and homeless Jewish men and women made these hills less safe for animals than formerly. But once, as the party toiled onward and upward, they

glimpsed the muzzle of a wolf, and once the sun caught the tawny coat of a leopard on a distant rise.

At last Eben said it was safe to stop and rest, and Rhoda dropped down gratefully in the shade of some fir trees.

"From now on," Eben said, "we will rest often!"

At each stop, he explained, he or Elias would find a vantage point and look ahead and plan another advance if the way was clear or lie low if it was not.

"I'm going to go up now and look," he said, and Abigail, who had dropped down beside her mother, rose.

"May I go with him, Mother? I would like to see where we are," she said, and Elias found fir trees for himself, a respectful distance from Rhoda's.

Rhoda looked after them. She liked Eben; he was such a young man as Amos would have wished to have for a son if the Lord, in his inscrutable wisdom, had not denied them a son. The lack of one had always been a grief to Amos but it made him treasure Abigail the more.

"She will give us fine grandsons," he often said when Rhoda mourned because she had borne him only a daughter.

Eben and Abigail climbed to the crest and looked down. There seemed to be no undue activity on the highway below nor ⁱⁿ the east where a silvery line slashed through the plain --- the Jordan ending its plunge down from distant Galilee. Away from the river, like an emerald on Nature's outspread hand, Jericho stood among her battlements, towers and palms. Farther off, the purple hills of Moab made an eastern rim for the

25% COTTON

bowl in which the pleasure city lay.

"So that is why we have to climb so much to get west of Jerusalem!" Abigail said, although she knew this perfectly well.

Eben explained in great detail. He explained everything in detail for explanations allowed him to turn and look at her almost as much as he wished.

When nearing the mountains, she and her mother had shortened their skirts half way to their knees by tucking them into their girdles. Abigail reminded him of the girls he had seen in harvest fields, gleaning and swinging sickles. She had taken off her veil, and her uncovered hair was a glowing, russet swirl. Her gray eyes were clear and bright, her lips moist, and her cheeks pink from exertion. Concentration on Eben's profound geographical and geological explanations firmed her round chin. Eben's heart beat faster, he was aware of an over-all, suffusing warmth. How much prettier she was than the girl his parents had found for him, or thought they had, up in Bethel!

He finished his explanation but Abigail was silent, and the suffusing warmth left him and consternation made him cold. Had he stared? Had he offended her?

"Perhaps we had better go down," he said. And they went, both silent now.

Back with the others, Eben tried to think only about the task in hand. He thought of the beggar, and of what Elias had said, "He could give a good description of us all." He remembered Elias's earlier remark, that the courier they had seen might be bringing word of Amos's women.

If he had, of course, patrols would be looking for two men and two women! Eben ran his fingers through his sun-burned hair. He had thought earlier that such a party as theirs would be reasonably safe. No women had escaped from the Compound. Well, again he must try to make a wise plan without Jared!

He looked at Rhoda and Abigail who were listening serenely. These were affairs for menfolk to worry about, Rhoda's relaxed pose said. Abigail's eyes were trustful.

"If you two could make yourselves look more like men," Eben said, "maybe that would help." But studying them, especially Abigail, he realized that this would be hard. "And perhaps we ought to string out a little."

"Single file, and wide apart," Elias said. "You go first, Eben, to find the trail. Abigail and Rhoda should keep just in sight of one another. I'll take the rear."

Eben smiled at the women reassuringly.

"Don't worry," he said. "If we meet enemies before we meet Jared, Elias and I will stand back to back. The two of us can handle whatever comes."

"There won't be just two," Abigail said and tossed her head. "My father says that one of our leaders calls Jews bold. And that couldn't have meant just men." She looked around for her big knife. She had put it down before going with Eben but now found it.

Admiration filled Eben. Forgetting that Elias had made a plan of march he seized her hand, and started off.

Rhoda looked displeased. What might Amos say to one of that strange sect, Christians, walking along with Abigail, holding her hand?

"Wait!" Elias said. "We are going to string out."

Eben halted but he still held Abigail's hand.

"Besides," Elias said. "I have a thought." The sun on Abigail's hair had prompted it. "Could the women wrap up their heads? Not just in veils. But to make them look more like men, I mean at least from a distance."

"We will tear up one of the extra tunics and make turbans," Rhoda said. This woman's task, at which she could show competence, was welcome; but then she remembered they were wearing all the tunics, and glanced meaningfully at Abigail.

Elias understood.

"Eben and I will look around a little," he said.

Elias sat down where he and Eben would have a long view into the distance from a shelter of myrtle trees. The clustering branches with their dark, lancelike leaves cast a welcome shade while the sun's heat drew an aromatic fragrance from the dried bluish-black berries still clinging to the branches. Eben sat down, also.

"Since Jericho," Elias said, "we have skirted several villages but you have not gone into any. Will we go into any until Jammia?"

Eben was puzzled by the unexpected question.

"We may have to go into one or two," he said. "The food Rhoda put into your bag will not last all the way."

"Will anyone go into Emmaus?"

"Jared may wish to, or have me."

"All the way in?"

"Far enough to look over the situation there. It would be safe enough. Emmaus is a Benjaminite town, and I know many in it, and so does Jared."

"If you are known in Emmaus, you could be known to enemies as well as friends," Elias said.

"I suppose so."

"But I have never been there and so no enemy could recognize me. I should be the one to go."

Elias's tone was one of triumph. Eben looked at his companion closely. Elias must have a special reason for wishing to go into Emmaus. Of course! The Anointed had gone into Emmaus after rising from the grave. What follower would not wish to go there?

"It may be all right for you to go," he said; "Jared will know."

Jared must decide. But it would be a great thing for Elias to go into the town where the Anointed had revealed himself and had broken bread with two disciples, the day after the crucifixion.

Elias saw that Eben had discovered his secret. He smiled ruefully.

"All right," he said. "We will talk it over with Jared."

"Emmaus may not be entirely safe, even for Jared or me," Eben said. "Legion veterans have been settled there, a whole colony of them. To go into Emmaus now is almost like going into Rome."

"I got into Rome when I pleased, and out of it, too," Elias said.

"Eight hundred veterans are now in Emmaus."

"I could go in and out if there were eight thousand. I got all the way from Rome to Judea."

In Judea you got caught, Eben thought, but he did not point this out.

Elias said no more and Eben knew why. Elias's desire to walk where the Anointed had walked, perhaps to stand in the very room where the Anointed had broken bread, was great but not so great as his duty to complete his mission.

The little man turned to Eben with a loving smile.

"You and I have never broken bread together as the Master told us to," he said.

"In Judea," Eben said, "we do it seldom now. It is a danger to meet together in this time of trouble. The Romans are a danger and many of the priesthood are against us."

"Let us break bread now," Elias said.

He dropped to his knees, and so did Eben, and when they rose Elias took a loaf from the bag Rhoda had packed. He wrenched off a morsel and gave half to Eben.

"This is his body, given for us," he said, and they ate.

He took a small skin of wine from the bag.

"This is his blood of the new covenant," he said.

"Which was shed for us," Eben said. And each in turn drank of the dark wine which tasted of the oak-bark and smoke used in tanning the skin.

They were proud to be speaking words which had come down to them from an earlier generation, words which went back to the wonderful days when Jesus, the Anointed, had walked and talked among men.

Eben looked around the place where they were sitting and Elias nodded reassuringly.

"Yes, he is with us," he said.

"I know," Eben said. "He promised that wherever even two were gathered ^{together} in his name ..."

"There he would be," Elias said.

The scent of the sun-warmed myrtle berries grew like incense in their nostrils and they sat reverently still.

At last Eben spoke.

"The first time I ate the Lord's Supper," he said, "I was with my grandfather. He took me from Bethel to Jerusalem to the house of Mary, the mother of the Mark you knew in Rome. Her house was a meeting place."

"Where is she now?"

"There is a report that the Simonites robbed and killed her, but others say she escaped from Jerusalem and set out for Rome."

"The mother of Mark would be made a deaconess if she reached Rome," Elias said.

"The mother of Mark in Rome!" Eben said. "How our people have scattered! To Damascus. Alexandria. Antioch. Ephesus. Corinth. Athens ..."

"And wherever Christians go, the church goes," Elias said.

"Do you realize, Eben, that we are the church? You and I and all of us,

men and women, who follow the Anointed. Each of us has his special work, and now mine is to deliver the Writing, unless ---" he looked at his companion ---"you are to deliver it for me."

"I will if I am called on," Eben said.

They sat a little longer in the shade of the myrtles, warmed by the bond that held them and all Christians together. At last Elias got to his feet and Eben followed, and they went back to where Rhoda and Abigail were waiting.

Leaving the desert for the hill country, Jared slapped his mount and sent it cantering off in surprised freedom. It would amble and browse back to Netophah or run across a glad new owner. And he, himself, on foot, was less likely to be seen before he saw.

This was at dawn but he made no sunrise prayer. ¶ All night he had kept to the east of Jerusalem since the Romans were massed most heavily to the west, preparing for the assault on the Upper City. He had to expect some Roman patrols, of course, and possibly bandits, but he knew the region's hideouts and, he thought, if any Roman or bandit could catch him, he deserved to be caught.

He moved like a fox or a wolf, but not like a leopard. Leopards came at you screaming, but you never knew a fox was around until the tops of a few bushes swayed. Wolves, also, were scarcely seen, unless craftily playful. Scarcely seen, on his own part, Jared glimpsed a gray head poking out from low scrub, tongue lolling as though in laughter --- a wolf playing hide-and-seek but vanishing before you could get off the quickest stone.

Through the night, he had been aware of a growing fear for Eben, Elias, and the women, and a growing sense of guilt. Had he, by going to the Community and Netophah, put them in too much danger? It had not seemed too much, yet he had, in fact, asked Eben to fulfill a promise which he, himself, had made. The Scrolls, he had felt, were simply more important, and he had not dreamed that he would be barred from taking charge of them.

"All I can do now, is get to Emmaus," he told himself, and pushed ahead along the rocky trail.

In late morning he came to a lookout and crawled up. Jerusalem, south and a little east, was smoking and, no doubt, stinking still. The Jericho highway was stippled with travellers, and he glimpsed at least one patrol. Only the polished gear of legionnaires could reflect the sun so brightly. Elsewhere, also, among trees and in ravines, he caught those bright reflections.

Well, Cotta would not be fooled forever by the hint of a northern trail! And of course the hunt would not be for himself and Eben alone; many had broken out of the Compound. Yet he found himself urgently anxious to meet Eben. It was near the appointed time. Around noon, they had agreed, and overhead the sun said almost mid-day.

He turned west and, moving from cover to cover, came on a faint path bending west over the mountains. It was the path he was seeking. Eben, Elias and the women ought to be somewhere ahead. Shortly he knew for sure that they were and breathed deep in thankfulness. He had discovered the imprint of a broadish sandal and of a smaller, nar-

rower one. Amos's wife, whose feet had widened with the years, and Abigail, the daughter! Shortly other prints, of heavy boots, told him something else. The women and the men with them were being followed!

Jared began to track the trackers. He dipped into the underbrush, returning to the path only to make sure of his direction, and after a time he sighted a Roman soldier sitting with his back against a limestone ledge, big hobnailed boots outstretched. The pursuit's rear guard, resting tired feet!

Jared closed on him. A boulder sheltered his first, quiet advance; for the next he used a dead-and-down pine whose branches were still thick with dry needles; then he got closer, behind a low dense bush. From under this, a little bird suddenly fluttered. Now, he needed one long leap; he could see the feet again. No, only one, and it was not stretched out as before. It was not now the slack, tipped-on-heel foot of a man at rest. It held the ground squarely. A foot ready!

Jared grimaced. The agitated little bird had done it! Of course a legionnaire would come alert at even so trifling a sign.

Jared picked up a rock; this victory must be won without bloodshed or sound. If his quarry's comrades came back and found evidence of murder, they might pursue and keep him from joining Eben.

Rock in hand, he shifted clear of the bush and dived for the exposed foot. The astonished enemy, attacked where he least expected, swung a sword at Jared's back, missed and was upended, with a crash and hoarse grunt. Jared brought his rock down, and the helmetted head drooped

insensibly.

A finger on the Roman's neck felt no throb. To make death seem accidental, Jared picked up a stick, pried at the limestone ledge, and worked loose an outcropping. It cascaded satisfactorily over his victim and thereafter Jared had only to clear away the traces of his own presence. Killed by falling stone while resting, said all the remaining evidence.

The sun was blazing so brightly that no present eye, save that of the dead Roman, could look at it. That eye stared with a wide boldness which made nothing of sun, or, even, death. Jared pushed on hoping that, if he did not catch up, Eben would cautiously make camp until they could get into Emmaus and find friends. They would need friends to get past the retired legionnaires of Vespasian's colony.

On a chance, Jared made the agreed-on partridge call, sharp, short, brittle, a mother bird's warning to her young. It was a safe sound. It would not mean anything if a Roman overheard, except possibly that there might be meat for an evening meal.

The call came back.

"That's Eben, all right!" Jared laughed in relief. He repeated his own call and, laughing too, in relief and pleasure, Eben came up out of underbrush not far ahead. They grasped each other's shoulders.

"Where are the others?"

"Up ahead. I had been leading but I came back, looking for you. And your mission? Was it successful?"

Jared's glowing face darkened. He did not speak.

Eben tried to fill the silence.

"The women cannot walk as fast as we ought to go," he said. "So I told them to push along while I came back to see what was moving behind us."

"A Roman patrol is somewhere near," Jared said. He told of the single legionnaire. "He was not out here alone."

"Come on!" Eben raced off, sick with dread. If a patrol had slipped past, it might even now be preparing to close in on Elias, Rhoda and Abigail.

A shout lifted in front of them. They heard Abigail scream.

They were running hard but, like a runner in a relay race, Jared passed a javelin to Eben. It was one of the two he had taken from the Romans at the Inn.

"Javelins first!" he said. "Then swords!"

Eben led in a loop through a mass of trees and Abigail screamed again and ~~they thought they heard Elias shout,~~ and Jared and Eben came in sight of three Romans who were blocking the narrow mouth of a cave. Hearing brush crackle, the Romans turned. All hurled their spears but their startled aim was bad. One spear fell short at Jared's feet; the second flew over Eben's head; and the third, partly because Eben dodged, only grazed his arm. The dodge also caused Eben's javelin to miss, but Jared's thrust deep into a leather breastplate and one man fell.

The remaining pair yelled in fury, drew swords and got up shields.

Eben settled into place on Jared's left. The Romans yelled

again, this time warning each other.

"They recognize us," Jared said.

That was good, Eben thought; and recognition of the two who had earned fame at Jerusalem did seem to confuse the Romans for a second. One made a feint at Jared. The other's heavy boot tried to stamp on Eben's sandalled foot. Eben's sword swung and the boot drew back and Eben, legs stretched like open scissors, drove at the Roman's belly.

Amazement spread over his enemy's face, before it drained white and he crumpled.

Jared had had to give way before a shower of blows but finally his opponent over-reached and went off balance. Jared seized the chance. He hammered the Roman's shield and the man backed off, and an inch of unprotected neck showed between helmet and collar of breast plate. Jared thrust at the mark. The Roman spun, staggered, and dropped under a crimson splatter and was dead. There was no need to administer a finishing blow to either of the others. Their first wounds had been mortal.

"Eben!" Abigail came flying from the cave. "Oh, Eben! Elias ..."

Eben and Jared rushed into the cave. Elias lay on the rocky floor, and even in the half-light his slack figure said that he was dead. Rhoda was kneeling alongside, weeping.

"He died for us! He died for us!" She kept on sobbing even after Abigail helped her up, so that Eben might examine the gaping wound.

"It was a spear," Eben said. He shook his head slowly. He could not quite accept that any spear had been able to reach the resourceful

little man.

"A Roman spear!" Abigail said. "Elias sent us into the back of the cave. He hoped our headcloths might make the Romans believe they faced three men, and that they would be cautious and hold off --- perhaps, until you came. But he kept close to the entrance to stand guard, and a Roman found him."

The small, staunch messenger was stretched out as though in weariness after his long, long journey. Rhoda had closed his eyes. They will never now look on Emmaus, Eben thought. He loosened his friend's girdle and took out a folded parchment.

"He told me where to find this," he said to Jared. "It shows where his Writing is hidden. I promised I would deliver it if anything happened to him." His voice broke. "I should not have left him alone."

"I should not have let him take my place." Jared's voice was muted, low.

Eben put the map into his own girdle.

"But if his Writing is delivered," Jared said, "that will be what he wanted most in the world."

"I will deliver it."

Abigail had led her mother into the rear of the cave, but the men could still hear her sobbing. Jared went to her, and welcoming him provided Rhoda with a diversion which checked her tears.

"Amos sent word that you would come," she said. "We thank you, Abigail and I, and Amos will thank you."

"Thank Eben and Elias," Jared said. "They were the ones who

brought you safe out of Jericho."

Elias's name started Rhoda's tears again. Abigail motioned Jared to leave. She will soon be all right, I'll take care of her and Jared returned to Eben and they went outside. The sun had disappeared behind dark clouds.

"They look like rain, but it is early for rain," Jared said.

"Rain would be hard on the women," Eben said. "It would make walking difficult, and they are already tired."

They spoke in matter-of-fact voices, as though concerned over nothing except the change in weather, but Eben's heart had not been more sad since he found his father and mother slain by Romans. He could see that Jared, too, was shaken.

"Rain or no rain," Jared said, "we must get away before more legionnaires show up. We have to make sure they find nothing."

He and Eben carried the bodies of the Romans deep into a gully, covered them with stones and brush and swept the trail with brush.

"We must find a better burial place for Elias," Jared said.

"Another cave. He is too likely to be found in this one."

The region was full of caves, and they found one they liked because it had a high, deep shelf. When they returned for Elias's body, the women were sitting beside it. A clean cloth had been laid over the face.

"There was no water for a washing," Rhoda said, "and no spices for wrapping. But we tore off another piece of tunic to cover his face."

Her tears were gone; doing something helpful had calmed her.

"We have found a cave fit for a rich man's sepulchre," Eben said.

He stooped for Elias's dagger and put it into his own girdle beside the map. He slung Elias's bag of food over a shoulder. Then he took Elias's bony shoulders, and Jared took the feet, and they carried the body gently away and laid it on the shelf in the burial cave and pushed it far back, out of sight. Eben felt to make sure that Rhoda's clean cloth remained in place.

Jared's dark face was set in self-reproach and sorrow.

"The next world," Eben said, "is what was important to Elias. The Anointed rose from the dead. And when he returns --- any time now, it is promised --- a trump will sound and all the dead will rise, and Elias is sure to be among the first."

"There should be a prayer. We should kneel and pray," Jared said, but he could not. May your prayers fall back from heaven like heavy stones.

"The Anointed, himself, gave us a prayer," Eben said. And, kneeling, he prayed as his grandfather had taught him. Some of what he would say was not exactly suitable, but he would say it all anyway. It could not harm.

Our Father which art in heaven. Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.

So far it was good for any man, dead or alive.

Give us this day our daily bread.

But what need did Elias now have for bread?

Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

Elias surely had forgiven everyone in debt to him, but if he

owed any debts, he would, of course, like to have them forgiven.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Well, Elias did not now need deliverance from evil, but it was all right to ask that he be kept from temptation, although temptations seemed unlikely in the new life he had just begun.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever.

Amen.

Making the final declaration of faith, for Elias as well as himself, made Eben feel better. He rose from his knees, his face serene.

Jared had not knelt. He had not even bent his head. Yet he prayed every day at sunrise and sunset! Eben could not understand it, nor the look of despair and bafflement in Jared's black eyes.

Eben touched him, but Jared did not speak, and for once it was Eben who planned.

"We must clean up the other cave and get started," he said.
"Those clouds look more and more like rain."

The black clouds brought on a twilight although it was still early afternoon when the four set out again. Even in sunshine, however, their way would have been dim. When they got over the mountain they found pines so thick down the western slope that they descended through deep shade over a yielding, murmurous carpet of fallen needles.

They walked in single file; Jared went first, Rhoda, walking behind him, was thinking of Amos. Not of Amos, the scholar --- learned and devout --- ever trying to live by the ideals of the ancient prophets. It was of a husband

... she thought now. She went back to the early days of their marriage and, tired as she was, smiled to remember her deception then. All the time she was away in Jericho, there had been no wife to keep a tempting tray of food handy to his groping fingers. She had worried about that, but she was not worrying now. After Emmaus --- why, they would be almost home! Soon she and her dear love would be reunited. She would be taking care of him again. In spite of scratches on her legs, because of the tucked-up skirts, and a gnawing in her stomach --- for she had not eaten since early morning --- Rhoda smiled again.

Abigail, trailing after her mother, was smiling, too. The sadness occasioned by the death of Elias had blended into tender admiration of Eben ... his courage; his thoughtfulness in finding a proper grave. Abigail remembered how, that morning, he had caught her hand, just after it had been agreed they should walk in single file. He had not dropped it, either, when Elias called. She could feel his hard palm still. She could feel his arms when he had caught her, dropping down from Jericho's wall and when, back in the house, he had hugged her to keep her from killing him. Killing him? She grew faint. What if she had even wounded him --- one so ^{so handsome,} strong, with hair the color of wheat at harvest. She turned to make sure he was safe, and he waved. He must have been watching her. He waved again and she waved back and wished she might take off her turban since he was walking behind and a girl's hair was prettier than a cloth around the head.

"I will take it off at Emmaus."

Emmaus was in Eben's mind, too. Elias had longed to go to Emmaus! Crushed by his sandals, the needles underfoot sent up a thin aroma, and Eben

remembered the smell of myrtle berries when he and Elias had shared the Lord's Supper.

He put a finger to his girdle to make sure of the map and wondered where he would take the Writing after he had got it from the hiding place at Bethel. He and Elias had once discussed likely Christian centers. At Alexandria, Elias had once said, there were many Christians but they were being ground down by the Egyptian priesthood. In Ephesus was another strong church but that city's pagans had turned against Christians because Paul's preachings cut their profit from the sale of statuettes of the Roman goddess, Diana. In Antioch also, it was rumored, Jews were being persecuted. Antioch, however, might be the best place. He could not take the Writing back to Rome. Elias's whole purpose in bringing it here was to make it known to Christians outside Rome.

I will do just what Elias planned. I'll ask advice of Amos.

Amos! This brought him around to Abigail and he wondered again, as he had many times since locking her in his arms back at Jericho, how to win her father's approval of their betrothal.

It did not seem odd to be dreaming of betrothal as he had never dreamed when his parents sought a bride for him. He had known Abigail less than a day but where else in all the world could a man find another girl like her. Bright as the noontime, luminous as the dawn, a star!

But was she, like a star, unattainable? Would her father, who certainly was able to choose from the very best, give her to a shepherd from little Bethel whose only recommendation was his defense of the Holy City and who, on the other hand, although a Jew, was one of the disapproved Christians?

"Of course not!" Eben set his jaw. "I will not hold her hand. I will not put my arm around her waist. I will do nothing except take her home to her father."

But at that moment Abigail, whose tall, slender figure he was regarding in grim renunciation, turned around, and, before he knew what his right hand was doing, it waved and waved again and she waved back.

Renunciation gave way to hope. After all, he was a good shepherd. Perhaps Amos could be persuaded to like him; He thought Rhoda did. He was glad that he was not pledged to celibacy as Jared was.

He frowned. What was the matter with Jared? What had happened at the Community to keep him from joining in a prayer for Elias?

Jared was trying to forget the moment of laying Elias in his grave.

Why? Why? he asked himself, striding beneath the pines in steps adjusted unconsciously to the pace of the women. Why had he not been able to pray? Although he was no longer a Son of Light, he was still a Jew, and any Jew dared to pray to the Lord.

He had committed, he acknowledged, a great sin. He had broken his vow. But how could he not have broken it, enveloped by that passionate fire encountered at Netophah? And had he not paid for it over and over? By his loss of peace, by remorse, by the gnawing fear of being discovered, and in the end by the terrible cursing, disgrace and expulsion?

Looking back, he saw how how completely his life had centered on the Community. For more than twenty years he had lived in serene confidence that for him everything was bounded by the Community's walls. And then he had had the Scrolls, a loved and sacred duty.

continue in same dir

*M. E. L. L.
Remember you are
a Jew in
the end
we are
Jews.*

Now, however, the Scrolls had been taken from him. The foundation of his house of life had been destroyed. He must find another and build anew.

He thought of Tamar, the sweet, faint song of her bracelets and anklets, the scent of her dress, her strong but yielding body. He remembered how she had urged that they go to far off cities. He remembered her words.

You will make a place for yourself ... There aren't many like you, Jared.

It was true. In spite of his broken vow, he knew himself to be strong.

In reaction from despair, Jared began to plan. Which places had she named? Crete, Cyprus, Babylon. He too longed to see them. And what a companion she would be!

When would they go? When Jerusalem fell? But then, perhaps would come the attack on Masada, and before Masada the Romans would turn off to raze the Community. Titus, Simon had said, did not like such brotherhoods of Jews.

Once again Jared struggled through a nightmare in which the precious Scrolls, bearing holy truth, were used to feed supper fires.

But the Scrolls are no longer my concern, he almost shouted.[!] They are of the Community, and the Community has rejected me.[!] I could not go back to protect them, even if I would.[!] As soon as we get the women to Amos, I will return to her, and we will get away ...

But before Jamnia came Emmaus, and before they came too near that crowded place, they ought to have their meal. Jared halted, and the others soon joined him.

Beneath the pines they ate all the food they had ... the flat loaves of Rhoda's last baking and the figs, dates and cheese Jared had brought from Netophah. They drank the last of the wine, and started off with fresh strength.

The pines began to give way to low brush. The slopes grew chalky again, and the distant Great Sea was visible at times. Immediately ahead, under a sky heavy with clouds, they glimpsed the Valley of Aijalon. Aijalon, where Joshua said to the sun and the moon, "Stand thou still," was revered by all whose forefathers had come out of Egypt, and when Jared, Eben, Rhoda and Abigail caught sight of its depths, they all bowed their heads. Rhoda, a scholar's wife, said a psalm, chanting softly, not to be heard by a prowling patrol.

"Praise ye the Lord ...

"Praise ye the Lord from the heavens, praise him from the heights"...

"Praise the Lord from the earth, ye dragons and all deeps;

"Fire and hail, snow and vapours, stormy winds fulfilling his word;

"Mountains and all hills, fruitful trees and all cedars;

"Beasts and all cattle, creeping things and flying fowl;

"Kings of the earth and all people, princes and all judges of the earth;

"Both young men and maidens ..." and here her glance turned to Eben and Abigail ... "Old men and children.

"Let them praise the name of the Lord ..."

They came in sight of Emmaus ~~obviously full of busyness~~ although it was still far off.

"Now," Jared said, "we must find a hideout where you three can wait

revision: Is this from the Bible?
not in, check to quote it.

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25% COTTON

while I go down and look around!"

"Why not just skirt Emmaus after dark?" Rhoda asked. The smallest delay in getting to Amos fretted her now.

"We will need food again before we reach Jamnia," Jared said. "Besides, I want to find out, if I can, what the Romans down there are planning."

"Let me go," Eben said. "You know I have friends there." He would not say so in front of the women, but the visit to Emmaus was full of risk.

"You have the Writing to deliver," Jared said, "and I have friends there too." Besides, it was time he did his part.

"Amos has a friend there," Rhoda said. "His name is Heth."

Jared's face lighted.

"I know Heth," he said. "He is the one I most hope to see."

"You will find him, no doubt," Rhoda said. "Anyone can take you to him. All Emmaus knows Heth."

They found a cave which began as an innocent-looking opening in the slope facing Emmaus but, deep inside, led to another cave. The entrance to the inner one seemed no more than a crack but, squeezing in, they found a lofty hollow with water-stained sides.

"All this was made long ago when the earth shook," Jared said, "Afterwards rains soaked down from above and left these stains."

"Amos says that once the earth shook so hard that the threshold of the Temple moved," Rhoda said. She was proud to be able to share in a discussion beyond most women.

"When the Anointed was crucified," Eben said, "the earth shook. And

the very curtain of the Temple was torn in two."

"Unless the rain comes in torrents, you could not be in a better place," Jared said. "Now keep well hidden until I come back."

"Calling a partridge warning?" Eben said.

"Not at night," Jared said. "I'll be a nightingale."

"That's better," Eben said. "And nightingales don't leave for Persia until winter comes."

"Why not?" Abigail was wide-eyed at such wisdom.

"Nightingales do not like our winter," Eben said, trying for an offhand manner.

Jared took with him only the dagger got at Netophah. Any farm worker --- and he proposed to be one --- might stick a dagger in his girdle. He started down hill under storm clouds. Ahead, however, above Emmaus, a shaft of sunlight broke through the overhang and poured brightness over flat mud roofs and plaster walls. As he drew nearer he saw that it glittered also on many armed and armored groups.

The retired legionnaires in battle gear? Jared checked his stride. Titus seemed to have mustered most of the colony. Could it be for the assault on the Upper City and Simon's tower? Filled with his resolve to get away with Tamar before that happened, Jared winced, but he put the complication aside. Getting into and out of Emmaus without recognition except, he hoped, by a friend like Heth, would require all his wits.

Nearing the village he took on a farm worker's tired stoop. And, since military goings on would disturb the average farmer, he glanced around

apprehensively. Passing one of the grain pits bearing signs which said they had been requisitioned for Roman use, he looked sour and walked wide.

The dusty streets were crowded and at the village well a group of women who had filled their jars had paused to gossip. Loitering, taking a long time to find a mite for a blind beggar, Jared heard that the colony had been called on to furnish a cohort for special duty, on terms that made the wives jubilant. He did not hear what duty, but he did hear the name of Cotta. The Primus Pilus himself had come to muster the cohort. Whether he was still in town or had gone back to Jerusalem, the gossips did not say. Jared smiled ^{wryly?} humorlessly at the thought of himself and Cotta perhaps in Emmaus together.

He walked on, a stooping black-bearded farm worker, resentful of Romans but curious about them, too. His watchful black eyes took in every passerby. Once or twice he caught a startled, recognizing glance from an acquaintance who, with Romans all around, did not make an overture. Only a crony of Simon would expose him, and none of those who looked hard in Emmaus was a Simonite.

Walk on and on in the little town and you ran into almost everyone who lived there. Jared walked and walked and finally he saw Heth's tall, stately form. He worked his way toward it and fell into step beside his friend.

"Peace!" he said.

Heth turned his head and for a moment his widened eyes demanded how a man in his right mind who was being hunted by Romans could think of coming into a village full of them. Then he said, "Peace!" and touched head to

GILBERT

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hand and heart and they walked on casually together.

"Heth!" Jared hardly moved his lips. "I need help. I ask in the name of Amos and his wife and daughter."

Heth kept calmly silent until they reached a little island of emptiness in the narrow street, then he too spoke softly.

"Whatever I can give is yours," he said. "For Amos and Amos's women, of course, but for you, too Jared. How dare you risk coming here?"

"I need to know what patrols may lie in wait between here and Jamnia. Besides, those you named need food. And a hiding place for tonight."

"Where are they now?"

"With Eben." Jared told of the cave.

"I'll try to find out what waits ahead," Heth said. "And I know a good hideout, but we should not go there in daylight. I'll give you directions and meet you after dark."

"I'll fetch the others then."

A triumphantly sly look spread over Heth's face.

"And in spite of the Romans who act as though everything in Emmaus was made for their bellies, I can get food. I will bring it."

Jared had taken Heth's arm in friendship and now Heth felt an urgent pressure. The big man looked coolly around. Three Romans on horseback were blocking their way, not for personal reasons but because Romans blocked streets when they chose to. The three were talking earnestly. All were legion officers and both Heth and Jared recognized one.

Some warning thunder rolled and Jared looked up at the sky.

"I must get back to the others," he said and slowly turned his

back on the Primus Pilus Cotta.

"While we walk," Heth said, "I will give you those directions."

"But first," Jared said, "tell me, if you can, why the colonists are being called out?"

He waited, dreading to hear of an imminent attack on Simon's towers.

Heth stared. "You mean you do not know?"

Jared shook his head.

"They are to hunt down the men who escaped from the Hinnom Valley Compound. Especially you and Eben. You will need help from more than me to keep out of the net they will throw."

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High over the hill which roofed the double caves, thunder rolled hollowly. Next Eben, Rhoda and Abigail heard a brushing sound, as of a great broom sweeping above them, then closer at hand came a thin drip, drip, drip. A trickle of water was creeping down over the old stains on the wall.

Eben shouted. "Rain!"

"Jared will be caught in it," Rhoda said.

"Poor Jared!" Abigail said. "If my father had known the trouble we would be to you and Jared, I wonder if he would have asked you to fetch us from Jammia?"

Eben stropped his hands as though to dust off whatever little he and Jared had done.

"We are in for a wait," he said. He spread on the cave floor one of the cloaks the women had brought from Jericho. "Try to make yourselves comfortable."

Abigail responded with an ingenuity which startled her mother. She placed Rhoda politely at one end of the robe; seated herself in the middle, and motioned Eben to the space at her other side.

What forwardness! Rhoda thought, and looked at her daughter severely. Abigail, however, was busy removing the cloth from her head and shaking out her abundant hair which even in the dimness gave off a ruddy shimmer. She turned and smiled at her mother but Rhoda was only partially conciliated.

Wait until we get home, she thought! The long day's journey had tired her; she had been prepared to drowse, and now she must hold herself erect and awake. But that was not easy. Her eyelids drooped. Perhaps it would be enough to keep them half open. Or even shut them. She could take a peek now and then. All along Eben had shown himself a very responsible young man. She swayed and her shoulders sank in blessed comfort against the wall.

It was not the widest of cloaks and, as Eben settled down, his thigh touched Abigail's, insulated only by the thickness of their garments. His loins caught fire and he wondered if the same fire burned in her. She dropped her hand on the cloak and he dropped his own over it. Inexperienced with the strange glow, they sat in silence, enjoying the new pleasure of just touching each other. Now and then, Eben's hand tightened but Abigail felt she had already gone far enough and her hand did not reply.

The hollow explosions of thunder and the steady sweep of sheeted rain made a cover for voices and Eben began to talk softly. Softly suited the langour he felt he shared with Abigail. He told of his near betrothal to the girl of Bethel, making it clear that the idea had been entirely his

parents'. He told of his parents' death and of how the girl's father had cancelled out the betrothal.

"What was her name?"

"Dinah."

"Didn't she even try to stop her father?"

Abigail's soft voice rose a little and Rhoda, who had been half listening, came awake. She understood the import of Abigail's words.

She and her daughter had discussed more than once this family problem of betrothal. A father's decision was, naturally, paramount. But she and Abigail had agreed that an adverse decision could usually be dealt with, if mother and daughter took steps.

The memory of those loving talks made Rhoda feel a trifle more lenient about the seat Abigail had chosen and the hushed, confidential voices. Perhaps the child really thought she was in love. Perhaps she even had a wild idea of becoming betrothed to this young stranger.

Rhoda felt herself almost defending the prospect. Eben was, it was true, only a shepherd; he was also a Christian; and they barely knew him. But Jared knew him well. Besides, he had done them a great service.

"Dinah was probably glad to be rid of someone without land, money or clan," she heard Eben say in a cheerful tone.

Abigail gave a scornful sniff, directed at the girl of Bethel. Not making a protest against a decision sure to affect her whole life! Rhoda had told her of grandmothers, yes, great-grandmothers, who still mourned the loss of the right young man, and this Dinah had surely joined such mourners.

"She will be sorry all her life," Abigail said, and showed by

similar to
a previous thought
At Rhoda's, P. 360 F11.

unmistakable pressure that the hand in Eben's belonged to a girl who knew how to value him. His fingers closed so strongly that Abigail's knuckles cracked but she did not withdraw her hand, even though he opened his in instant contrition.

Outside, another clap of thunder boomed.

"This is going to be the big rain we need," Rhoda said, glad of an excuse to remind Eben and Abigail that she was nearby.

"It has come so early it probably won't last," Eben said.

Abigail sighed over her mother's interruption of such pleasant sitting, just sitting cozy and warm and close. She threw off her languor, stirred and got to her feet. It probably was a good thing to show that she was able to break the spell. Eben rose, also. Thunder boomed again and the trickle grew a little louder.

"Oh!" Abigail said and put a hand to the top of her head. Her fingers came away damp.

"The rain is coming in here!" Rhoda cried.

Eben, too, felt a splash.

Water was flowing down the cave wall in a sizeable rill now and promised to grow. He hastily urged his companions into the outer cave. That was still dry and its floor sloped to the main entrance so that any water spilling from the inner cave probably could be avoided merely by sitting on the high side, against the wall.

"I hope no patrol pokes in here for shelter," Eben said. "And I'd like to hear a nightingale call."

The rain continued, with interspersed rolls of thunder, and water began to flow from the inner cave across the floor of the one now sheltering

them. It widened steadily. Without ever reaching where they sat, knees up to chins and garments wound tightly around the women's ankles, it grew into a brook.

Eben wished heartily for Jared's return. So much water rushing out of the inner cave was ominous. It must mean that a lake, or nearly one, had formed in a depression on top of the hill and was draining through.

The brook widened and deepened into a small flood. It poured across their cave and out of doors. Suddenly a trembling shook, it seemed, the whole cave, the whole hill inside which they huddled together, and then the forward section of the cave began to quiver. Abigail clutched Eben.

"The rain has split the hill!"

Eben leaped to his feet. He knew better. This was a real shaking of the earth, far beyond anything a rain could have caused. It was not the downpour which had split the hill, although the hill most certainly was splitting.

Now Rhoda cried out. "Look, it is falling!"

The forward section of their cave was, truly, tilting away before their eyes. It moved with majestic deliberation to the accompaniment of a harsh, rending sound, as imbedded rocks were wrenched out of the matrices which had held them for generations.

The speed of the breakaway increased. The rending split their ears and the whole forward half of the hill plunged pell mell, leaving great stones behind, seemingly poised in mid-air. Then, slowly turning over and over, they fell, thudding to earth in the dim, rain-filled light.

Less than half of the cave broke away. Enough was left to protect Eben and the women from the rain and from the worst of the blustering wind,

although before them now, instead of a slope, there was a precipitous drop down into the valley leading to Emmaus and its distant flickering lights.

"Knives!" Abigail said. She pointed to the ledge where she and Rhoda had put their knives, beside Jared's weapons.

She was wonderful, Eben told himself, another Deborah, thinking of weapons in the first instant after surviving a falling hill! He took her hand.

"This was truly a great earth-shaking," he said. "Just like those at the Temple. But it is over and we have nothing to worry about." He wondered why he tried to reassure them. Rhoda did not seem to need reassurance; Amos had told her about earth-shakings. And Abigail needed no more than a gentler cracking of her knuckles which he now gave, while continuing to listen for a nightingale.

It was raining heavily and Jared was still a long way from his companions when the earth heaved under his feet and the hill began to slide. He saw the front of the slope slowly settle and bulge. After that, there was time for only an unbelieving breath before the hill opened up like a reluctant oyster, squeezing out clots of earth, rocks, uprooted shrubs, crumbling, peeling off, breaking up, pulling apart, the whole ceasing to have any form or unity, its fragments falling far and wide.

Jared was terrified. Eben, Rhoda and Abigail might be among the hurtling fragments. Any seeming flying rock might be the body of one of them, tumbling into the pastures along the hill's base. He began to run.

He was, himself, too far away to be in danger from the leaping

rocks. Only the rain beset him. But as he ran, he looked for victims wherever the tumbling debris had come to rest. Then, the rain eased and to his relief he saw, against the unbroken remainder of the cave far above, three tiny figures. They were safe.

He slackened his pace but shortly quickened it again because he saw, near at hand, beneath muck and rock, something suggesting a body ... one leg exposed to the knee and a shin guard dangling, and then another leg so oddly positioned that it could not be the partner of the first, yet it was, and finally a hand grimly clenching a sword, a Roman sword.

Jared went close and began to scrape carefully, not so much to prevent any new slide --- the stuff was now too wet to slide --- as to avoid injury to the one he was rescuing. He came to a man, buried so deep in mud that he must surely have choked to death without help. He was unconscious, breathing noisily, but even as Jared cleared away the last of the mud, he gasped and tried to move.

"Don't hurry," Jared said and slipped off a dented helmet and pounded the man's back to make him cough. A gob of mud spewed from his mouth. Jared turned the streaked face to catch such rain as was still falling. "Easy, now!"

The man sat up. He blinked, got his legs free, and mumbled.

"Who are you?"

"A friend, if you like, I was passing and saw a leg in the mud and I followed up and found you."

"Where is my horse? I was riding a horse when a whole mountain came down on me."

"If you had a horse, you haven't one now."

"Wait!" the Roman said. "You are a Jew?"

Jared smiled, not denying it, for he had been using the hybrid speech common when a Jew and Roman talked.

"Why didn't you finish me off when you had the chance?"

"I should have?"

"Put you in the muck and a Roman out there and he might have."

"You would have given an enemy a fair chance, I think."

"I might have! Maybe." The Roman's eyes measured his rescuer.

"Do you live in Emmaus? I don't think so. You are from the Jerusalem fighting."

"I was for a time."

"A Jew who fought us at Agrippa's and Manassah's walls, now catches me with no wall between and saves my life."

The Roman stared, then held out his hand. They gripped, not as enemies, to gain an advantage, but as men having a common basis for respect.

"I am ..." Jared began.

"Don't tell me who you are, I think I know." The Roman shook his head in warning. "But I can tell you who I am. I am Julius Celsus, Pilus Prior of the Fourth Cohort of the Tenth Legion. I have been in Emmaus to help turn time-expired veterans into hunters of some prisoners who have escaped from the Hinnom Valley Compound. You know the Compound, I suppose."

"I saw it often from the walls of Jerusalem,"

GILBERT

Superase

Merian.

"I helped the Primus Pilus Cotta organize the veterans and now,
I go back to Jerusalem. The prisoners escaped night before last."

"They've had time to get anywhere."

"Two are supposed to be near here, or in Jammia."

Celsus got slowly to his feet, shook dollops of mud from his legs,
and experimentally twisted his neck.

"Every bone hurts," he said. "Seven thousand devils have worked
me over. But nothing is broken. Now if only I had my horse!"

"Your horse is gone, probably buried," Jared said. "Forget him
and go back to Emmaus. You have something to celebrate, my friend. You
are alive and whole, even though your gods threw a mountain at you."

"Come back and celebrate with me!" Celsus flung an arm around
Jared's shoulder. "If you had not hauled me out of a grave of mud, the
gods would have let me smother. I owe you my life." He looked at his
rescuer closely again. "By Mithras! You'd better not come. You're
big enough and that beard is black enough to make you the very one ...
But I do not say it. I do not believe it. You saved my life. Which way
are you going?"

"Up this hill, what's left of it."

"We may meet again," the Pilus Prior said, "and if we do, I'll
not forget what happened here."

He offered his hand once more, and Jared took it, ^{and they parted} then the Roman

GILBERT

*Merian: I think you have the page, but
since I find your name on it, I send it.*

25% COTTON

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He offered his hand once more, and Jared took it, and they parted.

As Celsus dwindled in the direction of Emmaus, Jared went on up the hill. Birds were twittering and singing. The cessation of rain had left the entire sky a luminous green; and the leaves on the shrubs, the

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25% COTTON

hollows full of water, even the mud and the piled-up rocks glistened in an unearthly light.

Jared climbed as fast as he could through the wild confusion. The women were waving and Eben scrambled down to meet him, his muddy face creased by smiles. They climbed up to where the women waited and Jared looked around.

"Aren't any of you even scratched?"

"Half of the cave stayed in place for us," Rhoda said.

"Eben backed us up against what was left of it and we just watched the flood pour by," Abigail said.

"Who did you run into below here, just now?" Eben said.

"A Pilus Prior who has been helping Cotta muster the Emmaus veterans, to hunt for the Compound runaways."

"For us?" Eben blew out his breath.

"He recognized me but I don't believe he will give us away!"

Eben threw up his hands.

"Did you meet Heth?" Rhoda said.

"I met him. He is truly a good friend to Amos. He will meet us after dark, at a hiding place to which he has directed me."

Jared turned back to Eben, his black eyes narrowing. "I saw Cotta."

"Did he see you?"

"No, I was with Heth, and Heth throws a big shadow."

The women laughed, but Eben shook his head in wonder. It was the Holy Spirit helping them!

After a moment he said: "Why is Cotta using the colonists to hunt for us? It must mean that all regular troops are needed for the attack on Simon, and that the attack will come soon."

"I doubt that," Jared said. "Anyway Simon could hold off the Romans for a time."

"Simon?" Eben said. "He may fall apart at the first strike." He was bewildered by Jared's opinion, so different from what he had heard him express a hundred times, in the past.

"The towers will hold," Jared said.

He looked up at the sky where the brilliant green had already faded into a mouselike gray and he picked up his weapons.

"It will soon be dark enough to meet Heth," he said. "Let's help the women down. The storm has left many hollows full of water. We can all wash off our mud."

The hiding place was a grain pit on the western edge of Emmaus, and Heth was waiting for them in the darkness. After whispered greetings to the women, who were well wrapped in their robes, he presented a parcel of food which Eben put into the bag Elias had once carried. Waving off thanks, Heth stooped and slid the grain pit cover aside.

Rhoda looked down at the black hole in disapproval; she whispered to her daughter. "There will be rats down there."

Abigail squeezed her mother's arm. Her heart was too filled with love to have much room left for fear.

The men were talking in hushed voices.

"Are you sure the Romans will not come to this pit for rations tonight?" Eben said.

"It is set apart for Jews," Heth said. "Of course Romans would take from here if their own pits ran short. Romans take from everywhere. But I am told they have plenty. You must be gone before sunrise, though. I will come for you."

He looked into the pit.

"There is a ladder at the side," he said. "A rung is missing near the bottom. Mind that."

Eben clambered down into darkness. The loose grain was almost like quicksand, and he floundered before gaining an unsteady balance. Rhoda went next and Abigail followed. He helped them both past the missing rung, trying to be unaffected by the touch of Abigail's hand. He must keep his mind on what was to be done. After Jared joined them, Heth called down.

"I will come back in time."

They heard the heavy cover dragged back into place.

Jared, his feet grinding softly in the yielding grain, took the ladder from its wall hook and laid it flat to provide them with a firm seat. Even so they grew miserable. Sitting on rungs was bad enough but the pit contained barley, and scratchy husks and prickly bits of beard worked inside their garments like so many ants. Rhoda's dignity was offended almost beyond endurance.

"This was the only hiding place Heth could offer," Jared said.

"Oh, it's splendid!" Rhoda said. "And maybe there won't be any

rats at all."

"Give me a hand, Eben," Jared said and the two men pushed the ladder against the nearest wall. With that at their backs they all sat more securely but no one really rested. The women did not even try to sleep. The silence was intense and seemed worse when it was broken by faint creaks and swishes.

"Suppose a Roman does come," Eben said. "What do we do?"

"Seize him before he can cry out," Jared said.

"If a Roman comes," Rhoda said, "see to Abigail and me."

Women of Palestine, barring those who married Romans and a few like the bright-cheeked servant at Netophah, considered themselves better off dead than in the hands of invading legionnaires and their auxiliaries.

Abigail shuddered and Eben's arm went around her. She dropped her head to his shoulder.

Rhoda, sitting next to her daughter, knew what had happened but the talk of a Roman coming and its reminder of the peril in which women moved through this embattled land had changed some of her ideas. I do not know what Amos will say, she thought, but I believe a strong husband would be Abigail's best protection as our country is today. In other times, she admitted, she might have preferred a more affluent son-in-law, from a strong family and more numerous clan, but nowadays such things meant little compared to resourcefulness and courage. Eben's valor was proven, and if he was Abigail's choice, he was Rhoda's also, even though now she felt she must cough gently to draw her daughter back to decorum.

Overhead, the cover of the grain pit was dragged clear.

"It isn't time for Heth," Jared said, and fear gripped them all.

A Roman voice above said something in impatient command, and two fat legs dangled dimly down into the hole and kicked around for the ladder.

"The Jews have taken the ladder away!" It was a great, good natured voice, belonging to the legs.

"Drop, then!" said the impatient voice. "Grain makes a soft landing. And take the rope. I'll drop the scoop and bucket after you."

Eben had worked his arms free of Abigail and, with Jared, had wriggled to where the man in the pit-opening would land. They were in position when the fat legs and fatter torso plummeted down with mock groans and grumbles, as though dropping were a good joke, and Jared caught him and Eben's powerful hands cut off a shout.

"A single sound and we will kill you!" Jared pressed the point of his dagger against the man's ribs.

"Did you make it all right, Serenus?" said the impatient voice.

"Tell 'em you did," Jared said.

"I'm fine," Serenus said and chuckled. He seemed to enjoy a plight that would have dismayed most men.

"Then here comes the stuff. Get started."

A scoop and a leather bucket plopped down and, in silence --- the dagger still pricking his ribs --- Serenus tied rope to bucket, scooped bucket full, jerked rope and watched his first load hauled up.

"Our pits ran short," he said. "This is for the cohort going a-hunting."

"If he makes any louder sound, Eben, choke him," Jared said.

"Are there only two of you?" Serenus said. He did not indicate any awareness of the women, silent, frozen, against the far wall.

"What difference does it make? Two or twenty?" Eben said.

"Two is a number we've been hearing a lot about since the wall toppled at Hinnom."

He scooped another bucketful and sent it up.

"Maybe you've heard too much," Eben said.

"I've heard plenty." Serenus chuckled again, still full of fun. "Enough to make me think I know one of you and maybe both." Laughter made his voice loud and Jared hissed for a quieter tone.

"They can't hear us up there, and you'll be glad about what I have to say. I think that this afternoon one of you stopped at a landslide."

"Rain, landslides and earth-shaking stopped us all," Jared said.

"One of you did a thing there."

"Maybe one of us found a Roman buried in the muck and sent him back to Emmaus and now maybe wishes he hadn't."

"Don't wish that. The Roman you helped owes you a debt."

"And now pays it by gabbing all around town?"

Serenus sent up another bucketful.

"His gabbing made you a lot of friends. You saved a centurion who never sends men across a river while he sits safe on the bank. The whole Tenth owes you a debt."

"You getting tired down there?" the impatient voice said.

"Tell him 'No!'" Jared said. "We'll spell you." He caught the scoop, filled the bucket, jerked the rope.

"Little chores like this don't tire me!" Serenus told the voice above and chuckled.

"How much grain do they want?" Jared said.

"A lot. They've got a relief waiting for me and they figure to tire us both out."

"Then you are going to wind up the strongest man in the whole Roman army," Eben said.

Buckets rose out of the darkness through a cloud of dust and prickly bits. Scooping, jerking, Jared wondered how long the women would be able to choke back coughs.

"How about it?" the impatient voice said.

"How about what?" Serenus bellowed and slapped his fat thigh. This was the best joke since he had enlisted. Here he was, lolling in grain, while someone else was doing the work that his comrades above thought he was doing.

"Do you think you're Hercules?"

"Who says I ain't?"

"Give the word and we'll drop your relief."

"Who needs a relief?"

Eben took Jared's place; the buckets continued sailing up and Serenus, wagging his head in admiration of such Titans, relaxed and explained a few matters.

"I'm not a veteran. I am of the Tenth, in the Pilus Prior Celsus's cohort. Most of us are going back to Jerusalem after the veterans start off."

"Why Jerusalem?" Jared said.

"No idea," Serenus said. He went on pointedly, "The hunt will be mostly for two men heading toward Jammia, perhaps with two women. But they needn't worry."

"Why not?" Eben said. "Roman veterans must be good hunters."

"Oh, sure, but they're good fellows too! They won't go out of their way to pick up the Jew who saved Celsus from smothering in the mud. Celsus has spread his story all around Emmaus. Celsus is the best." His voice fell to a low confidential tone. "I'm just like that with Celsus." He extended two fingers, tight together; then chuckled to warn that a joke was coming. "I march along right beside him. I carry the Standard."

"You're just the man for it." Eben said. "You're big enough twice over."

A jangle of exclamations floated down.

"He does think he's Hercules!"

"Maybe he's drunk? How much did he pour into that big fat belly at the Pilus Prior's party?"

"Maybe we ought to send down the relief whether he wants it or not."

"Oh, we have almost enough now!"

And after a few more loads the impatient voice called.

"Grab the rope. We'll haul you up."

Pressed against the wall, in trembling silence, the women had

been listening intently. They could understand enough of Roman speech to grasp what was happening. Now they saw an end to their ordeal and Rhoda felt tears springing and Abigail's trembling quieted a little.

As they looked in glad relief toward the center of the pit where, any moment now, fat legs would begin to move upward, they caught sight of a pair of small gleaming eyes which seemed to be fixed on them. Baleful eyes, down at grain level. A rat!

"Oh-h-h!" Rhoda cried and started to clutch her daughter but instead clutched her own mouth. In the silence which followed, her faint cry seemed to swell, and echo.

Jared and Eben stared up at the mouth of the grain pit in complete dismay. If Serenus wasn't allowed up, a dozen would come down.

Serenus caught the rope. "'bye, you two!" he said and with a last chuckle spoke to the darkness of the back wall. "'bye girls!"

He sailed up, fat legs dangling as before.

Jared and Eben stood helpless. ~~If he wasn't allowed up, a dozen might come down.~~

Above there was a hilarious, incredulous chorus and the pit cover slid home.

Rhoda began to sob. "It was a rat, but I should not have cried out."

"Don't worry," Jared said. "Probably he knew all along that you were there. Besides, I trust him."

But if the men with him are told that women are down here, they could not all be trusted.