



Maud Hart and Delos Wheeler
Lovelace Family Papers.

Copyright Notice:

This material may be protected by copyright law (U.S. Code, Title 17). Researchers are liable for any infringement. For more information, visit www.mnhs.org/copyright.

between the darkness and the light."

Geber tried to stare the old Magi down. This was worse than any Palace nightmare. On his choice depended, not the fate of these three, nor of the one they sought, but of his own fate into eternity. But perhaps he could force another to make the choice, and so himself slide from under the blame. He tried hard to stare Melchior down but he could no longer command the old compelling fire. He covered his face with his hands.

"If I do not go back, what becomes of me?" he asked in a muffled whisper.

"Only Ormazd has the answer to that."

"But who can I trust?"

"Trust yourself, Geber."

"There is no one who will even help?"

"A helper can do little, but here is one who will stand with you." Melchior bent his white turban toward the beggar.

Down on the ground in shadow the beggar beckoned.

Geber hesitated, as the camels had hesitated at every turbulent stream they had crossed. They had crouched and trembled and even had scrambled backward before flinging themselves into each frightening torrent as though flinging themselves to death.

Once on the safe, solid opposite shore they had changed. There, after a doubtful, testing step or so, they had swung away with bold strides which defied all adversaries ahead. What adversary could not be defeated by those who had triumphed over the peril which now lay behind?

Geber, too, crouched and trembled on his mount. Despair pinched his nostrils white when Melchior touched his own beast and moved away and the others followed, all except the Camel master.

The camel master

Melchoir's motioning hand had ordered ~~him~~ to wait.

The beggar beckoned again. "It isn't as though we had all night and tomorrow," he said impatiently.

Geber would have scrambled backward, if that had been possible; but then, as abruptly as the camels had hurled themselves at terror and seeming death, the hunchback forced his animal to kneel, and dismounted.

Once afoot, courage poured out of the solid earth to end his stooping. As the camels had taken a testing step, he stepped toward the camel master. He handed over his lead-rope, and when the camel master hurried after the Magi, Geber advanced toward ~~the~~ *his tattered companion* ~~beggar~~ with long, firm, bold strides.

"That's right," Peleg said, "You'll be better off, walking, wherever we go now."

you take the word back to Herod?"

will

"You mean no one will stop me if I start back?"

The hunchback's voice rattled like a stone down a cliff.

"No one."

"Do you trust Herod so much?" Geber whispered.

"He said he only wished to worship but do you trust that?"

"I said I would tell you when the sign came,"

Melchior said. "That was our understanding, Herod's and mine."

to

"Oh, so that's it!" Geber screamed. "You'll make me to blame. If I tell the fault is mine."

Melchior was silent. Geber covered his face with his hands.

"But if I do not go back to Herod, what becomes of me?" he asked in a muffled voice.

"Only Ormazd can give you the final answer to that question, but Peleg here is one you can trust." Melchior's white turban bent toward the beggar who beckoned, hesitated, ~~then~~ forced his camel into a crouch and got off.

Peleg

"That's right!" ~~the~~ beggar said. "Wherever you go, you'll be better off walking."

hear

~~Peleg~~ Melchior touched his camel and the others followed and Geber was left staring ~~uncertainly~~ at his tattered companion.

The four riders pressed on and came out of another canyon, and now they saw a big star in the east. Gaspar saw it

first. At least he spoke of it first.

"There shall come a Star out of Jacob and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel," Melchior replied..

They all fell silent. And the ~~Star~~ went before them, or at any rate it seemed to go before them. And in a little they came upon four shepherds.

One was playing softly on his pipes as he leaned on the windless side of a rock, and the others rose from where they had been drowsing at his feet. One of the others was a quiet man and one was an excitable man and one wore a yellow beard like half of a harvest moon. All carried heavy crooks and wallets and wore ~~thick~~ red-dyed sheepskins.

"I am Esrom," the piper said, "and this is Obed and this is Zorobabal and ... "

"... And I am Beor," Yellow-beard said, swinging toward Melchior. ~~"I brought the four of us to you at Jericho a while back. Remember?"~~ He was a man all of whose impulses urged him to be the leader. For a fact he always had been. But now he had yielded the leadership to Esrom. It went against his grain to do this, his squint told how much. But his meek acceptance of last place told how sure he was that Esrom was the appointed leader. ~~Only for this once, of course!~~

"We thought you might like to have us along," Esrom said to Melchior.

"You know, just in case," Beor added and Esrom waved his pipes in the direction of the Magi's travel, a gesture indicating the eagerness of the four to make themselves ^{helpful} handy, no matter

what the ^{used} case might be.

"You had best all come up on the camels," Melchior said. "It must still be quite a way."

The camel driver spoke and Geber's animal knelt and the baggage animals knelt and the shepherds climbed aboard and all started off again. White shreds began to sift down through the moonlight.

"I suppose," Gaspar said, urging his camel close so that he could speak to Esrom ~~without raising his voice much,~~ "that this is snow?"

"We don't have it often," Esrom said apologetically.

"It makes the night cold."

"Here! Take my sheepskin," Beor said.

"I can stand a little cold," Gaspar protested.

~~"I just thought a little extra covering might come in handy," Beor said.~~

Up ahead Melchior hunched his shoulders, and shivered. Beor was over in a flash, unbelting his sheepskin which was really two sewn together.

"Here!" He wrapped the warm thickness around the frail old man.

"But you will be cold yourself," Melchior protested. Beor, leaning over, tucked the pelt under Melchior's meager legs and close around his ivory ears. "Look!" Melchior insisted, "You're bare except for a loincloth!"

"I've gone bare ~~straight~~ through ~~snow~~ a lot

thicker than this little drib and drab," Beor laughed. "Besides, I wouldn't ~~be~~ ^{feel} warm if you were shivering."

"That which is pleasant to thyself, that do to thy neighbor," Belshazzar said, looking from Gaspar to Beor.

"But that is the other side of the second great thing I learned today!" Gaspar cried. "It is the saying of Hillel, the most famous Jewish teacher in Jerusalem, ^{you've got it} but/roundabout. As I heard it, it went, 'What is unpleasant to thyself, that do not do to thy neighbor.' It is Hillel's latest. Do you know Hillel?"

"Who doesn't know Hillel!" Belshazzar said. "His sayings are getting into the very bones of the Jews and of many more besides.

"And I never hear one of them," he added honestly, "without wishing I had said it first." He nodded enthusiastically. "What Hillel means, I take it, is that men should live like neighbors -- like brothers -- and what he means he says well; although a day may come when an even greater teacher will say it better."

The ~~Star~~ kept shining, brighter and brighter ahead, and Bethlehem, hugging its ~~lofty~~ hill, appeared ~~far~~ to the left. The travellers got along, hurrying now, but their way did not lead into the town. It led through newly sown fields and then dipped down into another canyon, but not a steep one like those near Jericho. It was a shallow ravine through which they ghosted until, finally, the ~~Star's~~ glowing light fell on a small, nearly hidden house with a lamp in the single window. And the Magi halted their camels and rejoiced among themselves.

"We have come to worship him," Gaspar said.

"Come in," Joseph said, and Elizabeth first gaped, then smiled.

Melchior ~~entered~~ sighed. He had not always been quite sure that his old bones would bear him to the end. His sigh told of his relief and gratitude. He gestured to the camel master and then the Magi and the shepherds passed indoors.

The camel master, tugging at the packs out in the windy darkness, thought that this was a strange place to find a princeling. But as he softly went in and came out and went in and came out and went in, with the three packs, he saw that the others did not, or at least were acting as one naturally acted in the presence of royalty. The room was very quiet and full of a soft light, perhaps from the moon, which glimmered on the tousled heads of the shepherds and on the three tall turbans. The turbans were not as majestically high as usual. The Magi, like all the others, were kneeling.

1s. Together we have ~~turn~~ written 30 books. But she has written 20

2x. I have written six. ^{of} three we have collaborated. ^{include}

Beside Rockne they ~~are~~ a biography ~~of~~ for boys of President Eisenhower and I am now a trifle embarrassed by the reasonably pleasant reviews that is getting. I wrote it in 1944

when our president was ~~nothing~~ more than the commanding general of the Allied Forces fighting Germany. ~~An officer in any army is~~

nothing to awe me. I was, ~~xxxxxxx~~ myself, a second lieutenant in World War One. ~~And when I wrote the life-story of General~~

Eisenhower back in 1944 I was carefree and casual, ~~as I thought I~~ could be, especially when writing for boys. Since then, however,

I have ~~revised~~ the book ~~four~~ times. Last time was last January, after the second Eisenhower inaugural. And when I read my story

over ~~then~~ I was a mite startled, as I had been in earlier revisions. Is this, I asked myself, a proper style for ~~a~~ man who

is the President of the United States?

In defense of myself I can say, at least, that no one has written in to complain.

About the third of my own books I have ~~had~~, I must admit, a few sour notes. About Journey to Bethlehem. ~~In~~ That was published

in 1953 and I did not mean to be overly casual. It is the story-- my version--of the trip Joseph and Mary took down from Nazareth

two thousand years ago. What ~~folks~~ readers ^{gumbled} complained about was my very modern idiom. One, ~~with~~ no intent to approve, called that

folksy. But about Journey to Bethlehem I hear less and less. It is out of print.

And people seem, generally, to approve of ~~two~~ ^{gumble} ~~xxxxxxx~~ more of my books, both juveniles. One is The Golden Wedge. It is

a collection of nine stories of the Indians of Nine tribes in South America before the coming of Columbus. For a fact I'd be pretty

with a 6th edit of
delivered 9 Jan

published
Hallen

wo

o-o-o-o-o-o

The snow had ended when the Magi and the shepherds came out again into the night.

Melchoir would not put on Beor's sheepskin.

"I can spare it," Beor said.

"The air is as soft as Savah's," Melchior murmured. From his high perch he held out a white-draped arm, in goodby or blessing or perhaps to tell Joseph who stood beside him to take good care of the two who had been put in his charge.

"We'll be getting back to our sheep," Esrom said and the shepherds went away.

The riders, and the baggage animals behind them, made grey clouds drifting through a now charcoal night. The star was gone. They got through the Valley of Trouble and over three brawling streams and were again at the Stone of Bohan. Th the shadow of the Stone two men waited with four camels.

"I think you should hurry," Peleg, the beggar, said coming forward.

The second man came forward. He, too, wore beggar's clothing. He wore, that is, a ragged loin cloth and sandals and a piece of burlap over his shoulders. He had a humped back.

"I did not go back to Herod," he said to Melchior.

"I know," Melchior murmured. Mists, lifting off the ground in herald of the approach of day, swirled about him. He seemed to skeap amid clouds of incense.

"Your people all are well on their way," Peleg said.

"He started them." He jogged his head toward Geber. "He told them, ~~andzhonzbaxkbnwzbxatxznax~~ that you had been warned not to return to Herod, so he said they were to depart for their own country by

insert P 141

"You're people all are well on their way," Peleg said.

"He started them." He jogged his head toward Geber. "He told them, ~~and how he knew beats me~~, that you had been warned not to return to Herod, so he told them to depart for their own country by a another way. He said you would know the new way. They're travelling fast, but he saw to it," and Peleg jogged his head toward Geber again, "that they left these fresh animals for you, the four best. And he had them fed and watered. They're all ready. They'll keep you ahead of even Herod's hunters."

and came out and went in, with the three packs, he saw that the others did not or, at any rate, were doing what one naturally did in the home of royalty.

Insert Page 140

147A

by the lamp in the room behind him. Over his shoulder a face peered, scolding, hospitable, impatient, all at once. It seemed to be saying, out only: "Men! Who else, at this time of night with people needing their sleep?" but also: "Well, you'll never get warm out there. Come in! Come in!" It was a face which could belong only to the snappish, stubborn, great-hearted Elizabeth who had drafted Judith to help move Mary from the inn stable.

Ambrose 1.

For the Progress-Bulletin. Release Nov. 16. Valley Church News.

From St. Ambrose Episcopal Church, Claremont.

ST. AMBROSE EPISCOPAL
CLAREMONT.

another way. He said you would know the new way. They're travelling fast. But," and Peleg jogged his head toward Geber again, "he saw to it that they left fresh animals for you. The four best. And he had them watered and fed. They're all ready. They'll keep you ahead of even Herod's hunters."

"Thank you Geber," Melchior said, and Geber knew he was not being thanked for his care of the camels. "Now what do you plan for yourself?"

"He is staying with me," the beggar said. "Herod's pack ~~doesn't~~ often go around looking for trouble with our kind. He knows the Guild takes care of its own."

At the "its own" Geber's hunched back seemed to straighten. He looked at Peleg and then at Melchior.

"Thank you, Ancient." he said.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Outside the orderly room in the barracks near the Joppa Gate only ~~one~~^{two} change seemed to have been made since the earlier meeting between the Primus Pilus Helius Naepor and Panthera and the Tribune Salvidinius Muso. Seemingly the same soldiers were dicing on the pavement, swearing the same oaths. But the time of day was different. The time now was late afternoon.

Inside the orderly room there was also^{only} one certain change. Naepor was as gross and soiled as ever, Panthera was as darkly sullen and the Tribune as immaculate and supercilious. But Nepte was missing. Panthera had found that other men noticed his yellow women too much.

"The Chief Eunuch says^{that by now} you should have found what Herod wants," Naepor said. "He is worried and I don't blame him."

"That little half-peacock, half-mouse is always worried," Salvidinius Muso gazed indifferently through the window. He did not intend to delay his bath very long just to hear about the Chief Eunuch's worries. With some of his two thousand denarii still unspent he could revel in a patrician independence.

"That little half-peacock, half-mouse," Helius Naepor said, "has good reason for worrying. Three Persian star-gazers have told Herod something new about this Messiah thing and Herod is hot to see the job finished."

"This isn't a job to be finished in a day," Muso said.

"If the Chief Eunuch thinks it is, let him make a try. He'll find out."

"And how have you found out?" Panthera asked. "You haven't made a single try yourself." He was taking more and more liberties with his patrician fellow-conspirator as their enforced intimacy ran on. "I'm the one who's been chasing all over the country."

"Except when you're spending your time with your Egyptian!"

Wouldn't you like to spend some time with her?

But that might have been too great a liberty. Panthera was glad he had held his tongue when Naepor's fist banged on the table.

stole

"~~cut~~ it, both of you!" Naepor said.

"Fighting with each other won't get us the rest of the ~~gold~~ *Chief* ~~sunuch's~~ *Sunuch's* money, and that's ^{what} all we all want."

The two men fell silent. Panthera brought out a jar of wine. Outside the window a dicing soldier shouted exultantly, "A Venus! A Venus!"

Three unbeatable sixes! Naepor drew from his pouch a set of crystal cubes, inlaid with gold, part of his loot after the great killing of brothers by brothers at Actium when Marc Antony and Octavian had ended the pact sealed at Philippi. He clicked them in the optimism which encourages every gambler to believe every ^{other} gambler will lose. Mister Lucky'll throw dogs from here on in. Tonight he'll have to borrow drink money. He filled a goblet.

"Why hasn't Herod put his ~~Galatian and German mer-~~ *from Gaul and Galatia* canaries into this hunt?" Muso asked, his ~~pink~~ *pink* face ~~sharpening~~ *growing sharper.*

"He won't use ~~sun~~ *them* unless he has to. He wants to keep clear of the whole thing," Naepor said. "It's the same reason ~~Tiberi~~ *The Chief Sunuch* has for not using his own bodyguard. He's especially anxious to keep clear because he is a Jew."

"The cohort would like to be clear of the whole thing, too," Panthera grumbled. "They smell something fishy. They know the legion is under orders not to rub the Jews the wrong way but that's just how they see me rub them with the

questions I have to ask. My second is beginning to ask me questions of his own."

"If you can't keep your optio in his place," Naepor said, "You'd better quit trying to be a Pilus Prior."

"I can keep him in his place," ~~Panthera said.~~
"But that doesn't keep him from thinking. A lot of them are thinking. A lot of them have friends among the Jews."

~~"Like Vedius Rusco!" Naepor was scornful. "You're not scared of Rusco, are you?"~~

~~"Me? You bet I'm not."~~

~~"I've noticed from your reports that you never go near Bethlehem. The fact that Rusco's villa is near Bethlehem and he might lock horns with you has nothing to do with your keeping away, I suppose?"~~

~~"Bethlehem is just one of a whole skinful of possibilities," Panthera protested. "Tibni-ben-Ginath said so himself. I just haven't got around to Bethlehem."~~

~~"Everybody says it's where you'll most likely find what you're after."~~

~~"It's just one of a skinful."~~

~~"Well, you'd better get around to it! You'd better get around to every possible. And fast! You're going to rub the Jews the wrong way even worse as soon as the news about these three Persians spreads."~~

~~Panthera was ^{brooded} still brooding over the taunt about Bethlehem and Rusco.~~

~~"Musco hasn't been near the villa since Lucienius tucked in there, but does that mean he's afraid of the Greek?" he asked sullenly.~~

"Well, the Jews will be even touchier when word gets out about these three Wise Men from Persia looking for a baby," Naepor said. "And, now you've mentioned Jews, how about the carpenter, Joseph? I've noticed, from your reports, that you haven't checked on him. Why not? Isn't he one of our best leads?"

"I'll get around to him," Panthera said sullenly. "I'll check on any job that gives us a chance to even up with Vedius Rusco. But if you want the truth, I'd have had to go right into the Rusco villa to get him. None of my men have been able to find out where he lives."

"I think the hunt ought to turn on Bethlehem," Muso said. "Everybody says Bethlehem is where we'll most likely find what we're after."

"Bethlehem is just one of a whole handful of possibilities," Panthera said. "The Chief Eunuch told us so himself. I just haven't got around to Bethlehem."

"Naturally," Naepor said. "That's near the Rusco villa, too. Don't be so afraid of Vedius Rusco, Panthera. He may not be Road Commissioner much longer. I hear that Herod is ready to put him in his place. And if the Emperor has to choose between one of his old comrades and a client-king who has shown himself able to keep Judea quiet, I know which one will lose."

"That's good news," Muso said; but Panthera was brooding over the taunts aimed at him.

"Muso hasn't been near the villa since Lucianus tucked
does that mean he's afraid?"
in there, but ~~that's a question~~ the Pilus Prior asked.

Helius Naepor eyed the Tribune questioningly.

"I don't go near the villa because I'm not wanted."

Muso said bitterly. "When Vedius Rusco put that Greek bastard ahead of me he as good as said where I stood with him."

"Do you mean you're giving up trying to marry the girl?"

"She's a nice little piece," Muso said ruefully, "and with all that money I'd marry her ^{tomorrow} in a minute. But there are other girls with money. And I don't ask where the answer is sure to be, 'No!'"

"How can you be sure if you don't ask?"

"I know she's fallen head over heels for the wonderful Marcus Seclator Lucianius."

"The wonderful Lucianius," Naepor said, ^{is} another reason for getting ^{around fast} a hump on. Any week now, maybe any day, he may be ending the free hand you have with the Eighth."

"You mean ... " Muso began, frowning.

"I ^{told you} mean that the boy wonder up from Egypt ^{was going to} is ~~turning out to be the General's idea of the ideal tribune and you're~~ ^{replacing you.} ~~much longer. He's learning too fast. He won't be kept there~~ ^{He would be kept at headquarters} ~~likely to be shifted to headquarters. He won't be kept there~~ ^{your place any day.} ~~much longer. He's catching on fast."~~ ^{He'll be shifted into}

"I'd like to ^{shift} catch him with the eighteen inches of a javelin head," Muso said.

"It might not be a bad idea," Naepor ~~said. He~~ was looking through the window to follow the fortunes of the dicers and suddenly laughed. "There he goes now. Why don't you go after him and do the job this afternoon?"

Muso shrugged ~~noncommittally~~.

Panthera was staring ~~sullenly~~ at the floor.

Neapor clicked his glittering cubes and began to think aloud in mocking calculation.

"He's on his big bay horse. It's late. That means he's done for the day and is going back to the villa. And he's alone. For once his black ^{sewer} isn't hanging onto a stirrup."

Panthera went to the window and sucked in an audible breath as he picked up the thought.

"He's leaving by the Joppa gate as usual. So Muso would have time to leave by a south gate, as innocent as a lamb, and gallop behind the hills and get set in plenty of time, ^{There's} ~~where~~ a clump of trees that I know of makes an ^{the} ambush, ~~as good as he could ask.~~ ✓

"But if he's smart he'll take help along," Neapor said, pushing his fat lips at Panthera. "He'll take, say, a Pilus Prior who'll have trouble, ^{for certain} sure as sin, if Lucianus joins the Eighth. With two the ambush couldn't miss."

"Now wait a minute!" Panthera protested.

"There's no time to wait! ~~Unless~~ you two want to go on being cramped by the boy ~~yonder~~," Neapor said. "He'll come into the cohort and see a lot of things that are wrong, and he'll put them up to Proculinus, and then you'll be in a ^{trouble} real ~~tight~~, both of you."

"Now wait a minute!" Panthera repeated. But he knew Neapor was right. He reckoned the odds and snapped his

I'll go along

fingers. "~~Um-in!~~" he said and looked at Muso who still scowled but rose reluctantly. Panthera threw open the door and when his orderly leaped up among the gamblers he said, "Horses! Mine, and the Tribune Muso's!" He turned back, breathing hard.

"Lucky the black isn't along," Naepor said.

"You two will have a better chance to do the thing right."

"I could do it alone," Panthera said.

"I hear he can really fight," Muso said.

"I wish I'd taken him on the day I tangled with Rusco."

"You might have come off better," Naepor agreed.

"Vedius Rusco had a lot of luck *that day!*" (u)

"Well, see to it now that Lucianius doesn't have luck. Hit him quick and hard and get back into the trees." (H)

~~who'll chase you if he has to push into where a dozen of your friends may be waiting?"~~

"Quick and hard!" Panthera repeated.

A knock fell on the door.

"There'll be your horses," Naepor said. "Don't hurry inside the city. Somebody later might add two and two. And anyway there's no hurry. He'll be slow getting through Joppa Gate and the market. You can make better time, for almost nothing except refuse carts ^{uses} the Dung Gate. Once outside the wall you can race and pick up the quarter hour you need."

"Quick and hard!" Panthera put into the words all his hate for Vedius Rusco and Salvidinius Muso's pink narrow face was equally eloquent of his two-forked jealousy of Lucianius. They went out. Helius Naepor at the window watched them out of sight. Then he went back to the wine jar and drank until it was empty.

Panthera and Muso made a show of dawdling through Jerusalem's streets but beyond Dung Gate, with a hill between them and the city, they rode so hard that the ends of their neck scarves floated out behind like those of Imperial couriers.

"We've made it!" Salvidinius Muso said when they came to the clump of trees, "He has to be still ^{North} ~~South~~ of us. I'll take a look."

"Let me!" Panthera said. "I've tramped the cohort around here until I know every inch of the ground. You might give yourself away but I can take a look and never show hide or hair."

He returned laughing silently. "He's coming. I didn't risk more than a squint, but he's coming."

"You're sure it's Lucianius?"

"In about three minutes that bay of his will clop around the side of the hill right in front of us."

"Fifty paces!" Muso estimated. "That's too far for a javelin ^{cast} ~~shot~~."

"A lot too far! The one who throws his javelin ought to be near enough for a sure hit. We don't want just to nick him. He might get away. We'll rush him."

He'll maybe get his shield up. But not any weapon. He'll just have to try dodging and while he's dodging one of us can get near and throw a javelin clean through him."

"Don't try for clean through," Muso said. "It might snag on a bone. And if we shove off in a hurry we might have to leave it behind. That would be as bad as signing our names. Just shove it part way into his belly and give it a twist coming out."

"Then the other one ought to put a sword into him, too, to make sure."

"Up where the neckhole of the breastplate leaves bare flesh."

In agreement on these technical details they nodded and Panthera urged his horse to the edge of the trees and Muso moved alongside and Panthera loosed his sword and so did Muso and each balanced his javelin. Muso said, "This might mix somebody up," and caught his neckscarf in his teeth somewhat to conceal his face and Panthera said, "Good idea!" and followed suit.

Beyond the trees the ^{and} ~~grassy~~ land stretched level and clear except for a few great rocks, to where the highway curved out of sight behind the hill. On the highway there were just about enough pedestrians and horsemen to make for a helpful confusion if pursuit developed.

"Six jumps and we'll be into him, full tilt," Panthera said, "He'll never know what hit him."

"I'd just as soon he did, for a second," Muso

said.

"Listen!"

"Get set!"

The head of a bay horse poked around the hill. The animal was barely ambling, and, luck of luck, Lucianius was looking to his rear!

"Now!" Panthera spurred, and his horse leaped. Muso spurred, his ^{usually} pink face ~~suddenly~~ as dark as clotted blood.

Lucianius was able to get his shield forward. Indeed at the loud hooves and two unexpected, masked enemies, he got his defense up with speed and skill. He spurred his own bay and skittered the animal so that only Panthera could come at him. But his javelin was uselessly socketed and his sword sheathed and Panthera was closing for the javelin thrust when Muso screamed through his scarf, not in battle frenzy but in warning and utter ~~amazement~~. *Dis may.*

"No, Panthera! No!"

Deborah in golden and Candace in silvered armor came riding round the hill, their breastplates reflecting the late sun. The sight was so unexpected and dazzling that Muso overlooked Micipsia, trotting alongside, until the black had strung bow, drawn arrow and notched arrow all in one fluid motion.

Deborah fumbled a little getting her sword but then she went for the thinner of the two masked assailants with all the enthusiasm of a hunting Diana, and Candace rode at Pan-

thera as boldly as a centaur's bride.

Neither girl had ever felt a wound or even a weapon blow in anger and so it was with all the confidence of innocence and inexperience that they charged the two most dumfounded assassins in all Palestine.

Panthera was too dumfounded to change the master plan. If he heard Muso's cry he gave no sign. He threw his javelin and the throw was good. The massive point cut through Lucianius' shield and into his arm. But then Candace, her autumn-leaf face ~~glowed~~ with savage ^{ly} fire, swung her sword at his ribs.

She swung through empty air. His horse stumbled away from her weapon and went down, one of Micipsia's arrows deep in its flank, a second in its neck, and Panthera was flung clear. And as he scrambled for the nearest big rock, Micipsia notched a third.

Muso was not too dumfounded to pull up short.

They might ambush Lucianius, but it was something else to take on the killing of the daughter of Vedius Rusco Philippicus. Mutely calling on all the Twelve to curse Panthera for his careless squint, ^{Muso} ~~he~~ thought fast and figured out what must have happened.

Deborah, with Candace along and Micipsia for protection, had ridden down from the villa to meet Lucianius outside the Joppa Gate. But just behind the hill all three had momentarily been cut off from him by some highway happenstance. A cranky donkey could have done it. A clumsy litter.

Dawdling

~~consideration for~~ pedestrians. It was as simple as that.

Muso jerked the scarf from his ^{face} mouth as Deborah charged him, sword swinging.

"It's a mistake, Deborah!" he shouted. "A mistake!" He threw his javelin down to prove his peaceful intention. To protect himself he only backed away. If they had been afoot the amber Diana might have got him. Mounted, ~~however,~~ he kept fairly clear and went on shouting, "A mistake! A mistake, Deborah!"

Even so, Deborah slashed at his shield twice before she pulled up crying, "Salvidinius!" In about the same instant the rampaging Candace paused, looked down at Panthera and exclaimed, "You?"

Lucianius had wrenched Panthera's javelin from his shield and holding the weapon ready, ~~to use~~ kicked his mount forward, to ~~ast~~ astonished and angry to notice the slow red leak from his forearm. And he and Deborah and Candace, all three, stared at Muso and Panthera until the girls began to beam in pride because of their own derring-do and then to giggle because the two culprits were still so dumfounded.

Lucianius grew more angry. He signalled Micipsia who had continued watchful, although the girls were still interfering with a clean shot at either assailant.

"Hold them, Micipsia!" Lucianius said and dismounting began to twist his neck scarf around his hurt arm, but more as a righteously indignant man might roll up

his sleeves than as an aid to his wound.

Deborah, for the first time, noticed the blood and got down from her own horse, ~~to help~~, full of small, tender, mothering sounds. Candace kept over the crouching Panthera, her sword just high enough to whack hard if he budged.

The bandaging ~~was~~ done, Lucianius turned on Muso.

"Get down!" he ordered.

Pretending an innocent embarrassment, Muso got down while Micipsia ^{kept} took a wary aim around Deborah and Candace.

"You're making a mistake, Lucianius," Muso said smoothly. "Almost as big a mistake as Panthera and I made." X

"Worry about your own mistakes, not mine!" Lucianius said.

"Holy Juno!" Muso cried. "Do you think I'm not worrying? But we did make a mistake! We were after someone else. And you can't blame Panthera for the javelin. He's seen you only about twice."

"You've seen me often enough."

"I pulled up, didn't I?"

"Liar!" Micipsia squeaked.

"Let me explain," Muso insisted.

"Perhaps we ought to," Deborah said. "Not to accept an explanation from a man who had the good sense to want to marry her seemed a bit unreasonable."

"All right, explain," Lucianius said grudgingly.

"Well, you haven't been in Jerusalem very long,

Lucianus, but you've been here long enough to know Panthera."

"I know him, all right."

"Well, as usual, Panthera is in trouble over a woman. But this time it isn't his fault."

"Go on," Lucianus said.

"Since Panthera and his Nepte came together," Muso said glibly, "he's been a changed man. You know Nepte, she used to be at the villa."

"I know Nepte, too."

"Well, then, you can understand why Panthera isn't interested, any longer, in any other woman, not even daughter a rich Sadducee." the niece of Tibni-ben-Ginath."

A
"The Sadducee's daughter?"

Muso nodded and Panthera, who had been listening with a confusion as considerable as the alarm with which he watched Candace's sword, began a smile.

"The Sadducee wouldn't let Panthera within a mile of his niece," Lucianus cried.

Panthera half rose, ~~protest~~, then dropped back with a grimace as Candace prepared to bring her sword down.

"But the niece," Muso said, "is so willing that Tibni-ben-Ginath hired a couple of toughs to get rid of Panthera for keeps."

Candace began to laugh unwillingly, partly in dishelief of the colossal lie, partly in amusement at the colossal invention.

"Are you saying," Deborah asked incredulously,

158-A

"Nearly all Sadducees are rich," Lucianius said. "But rich or poor, there isn't ^{one} a Sadducee in all Judea who would let Panthera within a mile of his daughter."

Panthera half rose, then ~~dropped~~ grimaced and dropped back as Candace raised her threatening sword and Micipsia, now ~~set~~ ^{his bow} in a position for a clear shot, ~~at once drew~~ drew the string of his ~~ready bow~~ and aimed an arrow.

"^{But} ~~It's~~ the daughter," ^{would} Muso said. "~~She'd~~ let. She is so willing her father hired a couple of toughs to get rid of Panthera for keeps."

Candace began to laugh, partly in scorn of the colossal lie, partly in amusement at the colossal invention."

"^{Are you claiming?} ~~Are you saying,~~ Deborah ^{stood, no less beautiful} asked, "that you thought you were ambushing this Sadducee's hired killers?" ~~She was so beautiful~~

"Just one," Muso said modestly. "A big fellow like Lucianius and riding a bay like his. And I can prove it. The Chief Eunuch of ^{Herod} ~~Herod~~ knows the whole story. If Lucianius says ^{see that} so I'll ~~sell~~ ^{swear} the chief Eunuch ~~to prove~~ before General Proculinius that I'm ~~telling~~ the truth."

"I can ~~just~~ imagine Herod's Chief Eunuch backing ^{up} you in such a story." ~~Lucianius said~~ ^{he said}

"He ^{is} certainly will." ^{This for a fact, was so certain} Muso was so sure now of the ground ^{that he knew the tribune} he stood on that he could smile in confidence. Panthera looked at him with admiration. "The Chief Eunuch will say I'm ~~telling~~ the whole truth."

"Well, I say you are lying," Lucianius said grimly. "I don't know what ~~xxxxxxx~~ Chief Eunuch ^{back you up} say ~~xxxxxxx~~ your crazy story is true, but I stand with Micipsia. You are a liar."

Dear Emma;

We have just learned about Louis and as always I am unable to say well what is in my thoughts. But I do want you to know, as best as I can manage, that Maud and I have you in our hearts and shall continue to have you particularly there until we may risk assuming that you have adjusted to such a change in your life.

I am now, as usual, doubtful of all these extra years science is allowing my generation. But they may have one virtue. They permit one more round. One more sock against an enemy sure to knock us out at the end. Coward though I have always been, and solidly whipped in every round so far, I still insist that the best for anyone comes in the moments, mighty few, when reeling back from an inescapable right, he manages to counter-punch hard enough to allow him to set up some small defense against the inevitable left.

Barbara reports that she is doing the New Testament piece you told us you had taken on. I gathered that there is an outside chance that one or two of the by-product of the job may knock you galley-west. It is, of course, unfair that you should have to stand up against your daughter while you are fighting a malign fate. But on the other hand it might stir in you just the needed spunk. As if you ever needed more spunk than you have shown!

Love from us both, and in this special time, much love.

Delos.

"that you thought you were ambushing the Sadducee's men?"

"Just one of them," Muso said modestly. "A big fellow like Lucianius and riding a bay. If Lucianius says so I'll call the Sadducee to prove before General Proculinus that I'm right."

~~"Liar!" Micipsia squeaked.~~

"I can just imagine the Sadducee backing you up."

"He will!" Muso was on sure ground now and smiled in confidence while Panthera looked at him in dawning admiration. "He won't deny a thing."

"Well, I do," Lucianius said grimly. "Micipsia is right. You're a liar."

Muso was in no position to make any protest but his pink face darkened at such a charge in Deborah's hearing and darkened more when she spoke up. ¶ "Nobody would believe such a story," Deborah said.

"I don't suppose I can tell Micipsia to put a couple of arrows into you," Lucianius said looking thoughtfully from Muso to Panthera.

"You'd better not," Panthera called and swung a warning hand toward a slowly growing group of onlookers.

"Watch Muso," Lucianius said to Micipsia and drawing his sword advanced on the Pilus Prior. "At least I can do one thing.●"

"All right," he said, pausing at Panthera's rock. "You wanted to kill somebody. I'll give you the chance. Get up! Let's see if you can kill me."

"Panthera can't fight!" Muso cried, half laugh-

ing, "Look at his foot!"

Through the ~~criss~~^{his} ~~crossed~~ straps of ~~a heavy,~~
~~leather~~ boot the flesh of Panthera's left foot and ankle
was puffed up like ^{leather} ~~stiff~~ dough.

his horse was shot
"He sprained his ankle when ~~that black scot~~
down by your black,
~~his horse~~," Muso said.

"Good!" Micipsia squeaked.

"Don't be too sure," Muso warned. "A slave
doesn't shoot a Pilus Prior down and go scot free."

"Micipsia will," Lucianus ~~said~~ ^{said} laughing
he told Panthera
"I guess we're even." / You missed me, but now I know where you
stand and you'll have a hard time getting another chance."

He turned to Muso. "Just for fun," he said, "will you tell
me what you have against me?"

"It was an accident," Muso said blandly, "We
mistook you for someone else."

"Pick up their weapons, Micipsia," Lucianus
said, and while the black, with squeaky chuckles, obeyed, Lu-
cianus turned to Deborah.

"Never," he said, "did I see even a veteran get
into a fight faster than you. I owe you my life, ⁽¹⁾ ~~as much as~~
~~I owe it to Micipsia.~~

^{Then} "We ought to hurry home ~~while~~ I can dress that
wound better," Deborah said, looking away.

She and Lucianus mounted, he a little clumsi-
ly because of his arm.

"Take the Tribune's horse, Micipsia," Lucian-

ius said. "Ride for a change. Those extra weapons are too heavy to carry afoot."

"You aren't leaving us here!" Muso protested.

~~"It's over a mile to Jerusalem, and Panthera can't walk."~~

R
Lucianius pointed to

~~the~~ ^{who, rather timidly} ~~few~~ travellers had gathered around ~~rather~~

~~timidly~~, because it was not always wise to gather around

Romans. ~~Lucianius pointed to them and grinned.~~

"Ask some of these for a ride."

"Ask me to fight you when my ankle is well!"

Panthera shouted.

"I'll think it over," Lucianius ^{promised} "but I'll certainly ask one thing ^{of you} the next time we meet. I'll ask for the story you two make up when you have to explain how two Roman officers let themselves get separated from sword, javelin and dagger."

Muso and Panthera in silent anger watched the four ride away.

"Does your arm hurt?" Deborah asked Lucianius tenderly.

"I'll be glad to watch you put another bandage on it," Lucianius said.

"Do you think the master will be pleased with the way we handled our swords?" Candace asked Deborah.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Naturally, Deborah welcomed Lucianius' wound once she was satisfied it would not kill him. Like any girl of her age she looked upon her two willing hands as the best possible tools for doing any job perfectly. In the past, sometimes she had had to ignore Bria's indulgent dissent and Bracae's surreptitious re-doing of perfection and her father's casual, surprisingly helpful hints, but such implied doubts on the part of her elders had not weakened her verdant conviction that when a thing was to be done she was the girl to do it. And now she was out to do it as never before! Never before had there been anyone she so much wished to impress.

When they rode excitedly into the villa she allowed Candace a fair half of the story of their first fight, blow by proud blow. The two girls told how they had charged, how they had forced their enemies to bite the dust. They told also how mighty Micipsia's bow had been, how mightily Salvidinius Muso had lied, how craven Panthera had looked behind his rock, and how heroically Lucianius had been ready to do battle in spite of

his wound. But after the bloody bandage was pulled off, and a better dressing was in order, Deborah took charge and became such a paragon of busyness that the Villa Rusco was turned topsy-turvy.

"Alongside her," Bria whispered to Bracae, "a lark in its bath hardly flips a wing."

But not Bria, Bracae or Rusco hinted that anyone else might do more for Lucianius better or faster. They were, all three, aware of what was happening. They all knew what it was to sink delicious fathoms deep in the ocean of young love. Watching Lucianius and Deborah they all harked back to their own first raptures and none of them did anything to break the current of rapture flowing between this pair. They only stood watchfully aside (and Candace, having brought hot water and cloths, stood watching Vedius Rusco.) They were all in the garden which had been turned into a dressing station, even Joseph. He was still working at the villa although the dining room had long been repaired and when he learned of the wound he fetched from his tool box a jar of thick stuff smelling of tamarisk and cedar.

"Somebody is forever chiseling a finger," Joseph said, "or sawing an arm, and this is wonderfully healing."

"We use a paste like that back home," Bria said approvingly after a sniff.

"Where did she learn so much?" Lucianius asked in awe and admiration as Deborah buttered the salve on his wound, and on her hands and dress.

Rusco gestured, as though saying, that's just Deborah for you, and smiled at her commanding nod when Bracae brought a drink mixed from powders given by one of his mystical, medical druids.

"Drink it!" Deborah ordered when Lucianius sipped and made a face. "Bracae and father always do after a wound. It's something to clean the blood."

Lucianius drank in misery and clamped his lips on the taste, so gamy that his stomach lurched.

"And you're to eat very little for a few days," Deborah said firmly. "Bracae and father always eat less." She gave his arm a last pat and wiped her willing hands free of Joseph's heavy, stinging balm.

"I'll eat just what you give me," Lucianius promised and she looked happily around asking the others to mark his desire that she, and no one else attend him.

"I'm planning it all out," she said, the light of love and ~~six~~ fifteen-year-old efficiency in her eyes. "I'll give you exactly what you need."

o-o

Rusco had been thoughtfully quiet for a few moments.

"You were right," he said to Lucianius, "to let the pair of them go."

Bracae nodded.

"They deserved killing, I guess, but I just

couldn't," Lucianius said ruefully.

"It wouldn't have been easy to do in cold blood," Rusco said.

Bracae nodded.

"And besides," Rusco said with a practical shrug, "There'd have been an inquiry. And Panthera's ankle would have made someone ask why a lame man was so dangerous that he needed killing. And of course no inquiry could pass over the death of a son of a patrician family. And some family friend might have asked you to prove that you didn't ambush Muso and Panthera."

The astounding suggestion made Lucianius laugh and laughter twitched the lips of his wound. He winced.

"Are you sure the javelin didn't cut a muscle?" Rusco asked.

"Flex the arm, Lucianius," Deborah commanded briskly as though the test had been next in her loving plan of action.

"It feels all right," Lucianius decided after a few wriggles.

"What I can't figure," Rusco said to Bracae, [✓] "is why Helius Naepor would permit ~~Muso and Panthera~~ such an attempt stunt."

Bracae was puzzled, too.

"What did the Primus Pilus have to do with it?" Lucianius asked.

"Everything!" Rusco said soberly. "He owns

Panthera. He made him and he owns him. And Muso is under his thumb, too. They might want to get rid of you but they wouldn't ~~attempt~~ ^{try} it unless Naepor gave the nod."

"But why should they want to get rid of me?" Lucianius said. "That's what I asked Muso. I know I'll be taking his place in the cohort, but his transfer, you told me, had been discussed before I even had been mentioned."

"That's true. He didn't satisfy Orfitus Proculinus. But Muso may hate you anyway. We saw quite a bit of him here while he was courting Deborah."

"Oh!" Lucianius said.

"And Panthera, of course, doesn't warm to this household. None of that, though, accounts for Naepor's interest. But I can think of one reason. As soon as you join the ^{Sighth} ~~Tenth~~, you'll step on Panthera's toes. And he and Helius have had things their own way there and the gods know what they've been up to." Vedius Rusco looked speculative.

"I know Helius," he said, "The worst of it is, I like him and I think that in a way he likes me." He was silent a moment. "Old Helius had it in him to be quite a fellow when he was young," he said.

~~He pulled himself out of this long train of thought.~~

~~"Yes, I'm sure Helius is back of the ambush. But being sure doesn't tell us what wrong trail he and Panthera are on except that it is probably something a lot bigger than the ambush and a lot worse."~~

In Rusco's mind the gross, slovenly Primus Pilus faded out and he saw the boyish Helius, strong as a bull, cheerful, with good and generous impulses which were not always carried through because he lacked that kind of strength. Even in those days he drank too much and he had had, also, a bad trait of wanting to be first, to stand above all rivals. He turned against friends who had, by luck or by hard work of ability won honors higher than his own. Yet even his envy had not come from an entirely bad source, Rusco thought. The young Helius had wanted not only to be a leader but -- most of the time -- to be a good and even a noble leader. If only he had tried a little harder, and had not turned so frequently to drink!

Rusco pulled himself out of this long train of thought.

"Yes, I am sure Helius is back of the ambush, But being sure doesn't tell us what wrong trail he and Panthera are on except that it is probably something a lot bigger than the ambush, and a lot worse.

He rubbed his chin thoughtfully. No matter what evil sprouted in Judea, its root was usually found in Herod's court.

"I have to go to court in a few days," he said. "About supplies for the new Gaza road. Maybe I'll pick up some hint there of what Naepor and his pack are after."

"I might find out from the legionnaires," Bracae said. "They pick up gossip as easily as a fish gets wet.

"Don't try, yourself, to find out," Rusco said. "Send someone who isn't known to belong to us. Helius would connect you with me. I don't want him to think I'm interested until I know what interests him."

He thought for a little.

"Maybe it would be even better to talk with some of the mercenaries. They swap gossip with the legionnaires and the fact that they'd been asked is scarcely likely to get back to Helius. Not, at least, until we learn what's in the wind."

~~"I'll start a man right away," Bracae said.~~

Deborah drew Lucianius to his feet.

~~"Right away, right away!"~~ (she scolded.) "What if Helius Naepor is scheming against somebody, and what if Salvindinius does hate somebody and what if Panthera does hate everybody? We've had enough talk for one day. Lucianius needs rest and quiet and warmth. ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ It's getting chilly out here."

"They've got something else on their minds," Bria said as Lucianius was led willingly off. "Woden give them joy!"

"And Anuku!" Micipsia grinned.

"Would your God give them a little joy?" Rusco said, turning to Joseph. "After all, half of Deborah's

Rusco's tone was light but his face was serious. The attack on Lucianus, a member of his household, had strengthened his feeling of impending danger.

blood is the blood of your people."

Joseph smiled. "Of course he will," he said. He went on.

"A Wise Man was in my house a few days ago,"

^{said} ~~Joseph~~ ^{a god he calls}

~~Joseph~~ "He worships Ormazd. He said that Ormazd does not draw a narrow line from the world to his heaven and say, On this road only will I bless. Instead he stretches his arms wide and says, Whoever you are, come to me by whatever road! I bless all! And I believe the Lord will ~~do no less for~~ your daughter and her Tribune. We call ourselves the Chosen People, but I believe the Lord chooses to watch over all men ^{of} ~~of good will."~~

bless

"Then even a man like myself who is supposed to die by the sword can hope for a little protection?"

"I don't like to hear you say such a thing,"

Joseph said.

Rusco's mind ^{went} ~~had gone~~ back to Joseph's remark about the Wise Man. A wise man! Ormazd! That meant he came from Persia. Could he be one of the Persian star-readers about whom news had lately been spreading? But what could he have been doing in Joseph's home?

o-o

"There!" Deborah said and stretched a rug over Lucianus who already, by her order, was stretched out on a couch in her father's study. "Isn't this better than out there in the cold with everybody except Candace chattering until you can hardly think?"

The garden had ^{not} ~~not~~ really been cold. The sun,

when it reached you, was warm. And anyway, Lucianius told himself, even if he had lost some blood he hadn't lost so much that he needed coddling. But this was certainly better. Looking at Deborah he decided that this was fine.

Deborah was, at least, as pretty a girl as a young man would find in a long day's march. Those who claimed her equal was not to be found in all Judea ran into counterclaims, of course, from young men in love with other girls all the way from Dan to Beersheba. But she certainly was inviting to the eye.

A hundred times more inviting, Lucianius saw clearly now, than any other girl he had ever known anywhere. A hundred? A thousand! All the other girls he had ever thought he fancied for a graceful shoulder, a mass of shining hair, a slim ankle, an arm of rosy ivory, a sweetly curved bosom, gentle eyes, a beguiling mouth, had vanished from his mind as though they had never existed. This was the girl of all the dreams he had ever dreamed. Not only had he never before seen such shining hair, so slim an ankle, so sweetly curved a bosom, an arm so moulded for kisses, never before had they adorned any mortal woman. Never, he was ready to swear, had even a goddess ever had such beauty.

Deborah had changed from her armor to a dress of the cut and color she liked above every other. It billowed all around in waves of soft green which made her foaming, jet hair seem more foaming and more black.

"You do like that color, don't you?" Lucianius said.

"Um-m-m-m!" Deborah's soft assent was also a

happy recognition of something in his voice. Welcoming it no less because she had been expecting it, she decided that her closer presence would not be too much of an encouragement and started to sit on an ^{cushion} ~~ottoman~~ alongside his couch.

"Back home," Lucianus said, "when a girl marries she wears a flame colored veil, so much of it that it goes clear around her."

Deborah retreated. Glowing from a sure conviction of what was coming and suddenly unwilling to have it come too soon she curled up on a big couch quite a distance away. Her favorite reverie had been of the moment when the man of her dreams would face her and say, to the accompaniment of appropriate gestures, "I love you. Marry me!" But this roundabout, less breathtaking approach, she saw at once, was going to be even nicer.

"Among us," she said, "among my mother's people, the bride is veiled in white and wears a robe of pure white linen." She could be roundabout, also.

"Oh, our bride wears white," Lucianus said. "The night before the wedding she puts on a long, white nuptial tunic. But she wears color then, too. She puts her hair up in a scarlet net. And in the morning she puts on a dress held at the waist by a girdle tied in a Hercules knot. It's over this that the flame-colored veil goes. I've been talking with the wife of General Proculinus," he explained.

"Our bride wears golden anklets with little bells, and a crown of myrtle blossoms," Deborah said. She re-

fused to ask why he had been talking with the General's wife. Matters were already going fast enough.

They both began to laugh. They were remembering how, at their first meeting, they had carried on in this same fashion but more than memory made them laugh. They were thinking, also, how instantly, always, they fell into accord.

"Our bride wears a flower crown, too," Lucianus said, "And her hair is put into six braids."

"Our bride is made sweet with scented, beaten oil after her bath," Deborah and then worried a little. Should I have spoken of that?

"Our weddings are always in the morning," Lucianus said.

"In the morning!" Our bridegroom isn't even brought to the bride's home until midnight. We say wise brides have their lamp^s trimmed and ready to light the groom in."

"We bring an ox-yoke," Lucianus said, "and the priest lays down the skin of a sheep he has sacrificed and the bride and groom sit on it and break the wedding cake." The corners of his mouth warned her against the cake. "It's tasteless stuff made from spelt, our poorest wheat. But it is important because it is an offering to Jupiter." He lifted the corners of his mouth. "Jupiter isn't the only one. Brides and grooms must make their manners to Juno and, of course, Ceres and all the other gods of the soil."

"Our bride," Deborah said, "meets her groom un-

der a flowered canopy, and he sips wine and then he raises her veil and gives her a sip and then they break the goblet. No one else ever uses it."

"Our marriage is expensive for the bride's father," Lucianus chuckled. "Or anyway for her family. She has to bring a wedding portion." The corners of his mouth said that he thought little of the practice. "If her father gives the dos the groom keeps it no matter what. But if another relative gives it the bride must have it back if the marriage breaks up."

"Our groom must give fifty shekels," Deborah cried triumphantly, "And it's the bride's, no matter what!"

"Well, our groom gives his bride a ring for her left ^{hand} ~~finger~~. Do you know that in Egypt a wedding ring is supposed to give immortal life, love and happiness?"

"Our groom gives a ring, too," Deborah said,
// And his family must have on hand lots of beautiful clothes. Because if guests come in ordinary wear they must be supplied all all they lack. And a procession, with lights and music and singing, escorts the bride and groom to their new home. And everyone throws white pomegranate and henna blossoms and there ~~is a whole~~ ^{and} ~~week~~ of songs and dancing."

"For our bride, too," Lucianus said. "Songs and dancing and everyone parades the pair home. And the bride carries a torch of white-thorn wood to ward off evil."

He decided not to go into the songs. Now and then the songs went, for a fact, pretty far.

"And the groom," he went on, "carries the bride over the threshold and as he carries her she says to him," ... his voice fell, ^v"where thou art Gaius, I am Gaia!"

"Um-m-m!" Deborah thought how wonderful she could make the words sound. "Why?"

"It's custom," Lucianius said. His ignorance made him apologetic. "I don't know why. But Gaius and Gaia are our commonest names."

"I know why!" Deborah cried. She was as sure of her wisdom as of her ability to do everything well. "She is making a promise. She is saying she will always be the same, will never change. ^u~~They both are promising.~~" Without thinking, she sampled the words, ~~her glow increasing,~~ "Where thou art Gaius, I am Gaia." And she found that Lucianius had drawn her gaze to meet his.

"Where thou art Gaia, I am Gaius," Lucianius said clearly, and regardless of her order to rest he threw off the rug and was at her couch before she could frown him into obedience. He cupped his good hand under her arm and lifted her to her feet.

"Oh, Deborah!" he said. "Oh, Deborah!"

-o-

One good hand was enough. She was so weightlessly willing that it took next to nothing to bring her close.

"Deborah!" he said and began to kiss her. It

was not practiced kissing. He was a young man of small practice, but his enthusiasm made up. Not only her ~~was~~ soft mouth but all her flesh responded as he learned his way on her lips, her eyes, her cheeks, her lips again, and her throat.

Deborah kissed back. She was past diffidence now and if she had been able to think she would have told herself that this was, truly, the perfect accompaniment to a proposal.

"Wear our veil, or your linen, or whatever you like," Lucianius said, "But marry me!"

"Whatever you want me to wear!" Deborah whispered. "I'll put on our flower-crown and I'll make my hair in your six braids."

They began to laugh again, once more delighted by how fully in accord they always were.

"Wear your anklets with bells and our woolen girdle," Lucianius said.

"And I'll trim my lamp and have it all ready," Deborah promised between kisses. "And I'll sit on your ox-yoke and sheepskin."

"And we'll break our spelt cake," he said against her soft mouth, "and your goblet."

"And you won't need to give me fifty shekels, or even one!" Deborah said when she had the use of her mouth.

"I'll give you all my shekels, and my denarii, too," he said, "And your father can keep his dog."

"And you'll carry me over the threshold?"

"I'll carry you all our lives. Oh, Deborah!"

"Where thou art Gaius, I am Gaia."

"We'll be married tomorrow," Lucianius said.

Deborah drew back. Tomorrow suited her, but she knew how Bria would complain. She could hear Bria now.

What will you eat? And do you think tomorrow gives time to invite the guests? And I need a week just to clean. And flowers! Where, in so little time? And wine! Who stores wine enough for a wedding on no notice at all? And what do you own that's half-decent for a wedding? What will you wear?

"What WILL I wear?"

Deborah realized the justice of Bria's objections. She didn't have a thing fit for a wedding. Not a thing.

"Not tomorrow," she said softly. "Not quite tomorrow."

"Day after?" Lucianius said.

"Well ... "

"Then when?" Lucianius cried. "When?"

"We really ought to let Bria have some say," Deborah said. "She'll be in charge. Of the feast. The guests. Everything."

"Who needs a feast?" Lucianius cried. "And why do we need guests?"

"You haven't even asked father yet," Deborah said. Bria was right. A girl couldn't marry overnight.

She had to have at least a couple of weeks. Well, at least one. Or at least three or four days. Or at any rate two. She had to have time to get proper things to wear.

"I'll ask your father right now!" Lucianius said. "He'll be on my side. He once told me that he married your mother after they'd seen each other only seven times."

"It was eight times!" Deborah said. "Bria said it was eight."

NB-(Make original conform to the following two Pars.)

Anna, the one who fasted and prayed day and night, was a great prophetess, famous all over Israel. Widowed as a girl, and old now she had never departed from the Temple since.

Simeon was even more famous, the holiest living man among his people. He was allowed a room in the bowels of the Temple and went there every day, declaring he had a promise that he would not see death before he had seen the long-promised ^{phesico} Messiah.

Joseph stood up. "Well, that settles everything, I guess. I'll be getting on."

"There's one thing more," Elizabeth said. "When you go to the Temple, leave all your goods in the little house. And come back afterward. Remember, Mary should have a good rest before you start north."

Joseph said that he certainly would see that Mary got a rest.

"And then," Elizabeth said, giving him a look, "you can get to turning out sickles again and bragging that they are better balanced than any other sickles in Galilee."

For once Joseph did not need to wonder whether Elizabeth was scolding or joking. He knew for sure. He had never, in all his life, claimed that his sickles were better than anybody else's; although, come to think of it, they probably were.

"You'll get the first one I make." He promised. "That's what you're hinting for, I guess."

o-o-o-

The silence of the night was enormous. It was an inkblack walk to the small house in which Mary was waiting, and even ~~by~~ ~~xx~~ ~~xx~~

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The small house in which Mary was waiting out the forty days of her purification stood where two shallow ravines met in a V. The path Joseph habitually followed, coming cross country from the villa of Vedius Rusco, met the eastern arm and habitually he turned at that point and followed the eastern arm home. Tonight, however, his mind was so full of secret tunnels, ambushes and girls trained in arms, to say nothing of some disturbing implications, that his absent stride carried him beyond the turning. Before he realized what he was doing, he had got well along a third ravine which cut across the top of the V.

"Well!" he exclaimed in exasperation and started to retrace his way, but then he reflected that it would be shorter now to travel by the western arm although, even so, he would be late.

"I think too much!" he said ~~carefully~~^{carefully}. He was not used to so much thinking. His rule was to clear ^{away} every problem at each day's end in order to start the next day free and easy. One day at a time, he always said. For months, however, so much had been happening that such clearing away ~~was~~ seemed impossible. How could a man clear away a continuing mystery? Now and then he tried

to tell himself that there was no mystery, only a dream, but too much evidence ~~was~~ ^{SEEMED} against him.

"Well!" he exclaimed again, "It certainly isn't a mystery that I am where I am. I just missed the turn-off. It's too bad. Mary expected me long ago, and Elizabeth and Zac^harias, too. By now we ought to have settled the whole plan for the purification."

The nearness of that ceremony filled him with satisfaction. Once it was behind them, they could get back to Nazareth and the good one-day-at-a-time life which they had lived before, and always would, the two of them. He corrected that. The three of us.

He turned into the western arm of the V and pretty soon began to look ahead over the ^{strange} unfamiliar terrain for the ^{home of} ~~the Temple priest Zacharias~~. He was approaching it from an unfamiliar ~~small flat-roofed house. It was always a little hard to find~~ angle and his confusion was the greater because ~~and especially now when the last of the dull sunset colors had faded leaving only the deepening shadows of trees and undergrowth. What with looking he did not watch where his feet were going and so, to his amazement, found himself stumbling over the legs of a half-score of ragged rowdies sprawled around a fire in a well-chosen covert made by clustering pines.~~

He knew instantly who these rowdies were. He was only surprised to find so many. Even though he had never before glimpsed more than a few, he knew them. They were the beggars who, for days, had been traipsing about his house, drifting past, slipping behind, loitering before, circling around, but showing next to nothing of themselves and never by the

slightest sign indicating any purpose.

The fire was the economical blaze which beggars regularly made. He had seen such fires all up and down Judea. It was so expertly laid that from any distance its faint smoke would be taken for the haze natural to the season. It was big enough to give the bit of warmth which was all a beggar asked but so small that it was practically invisible until you walked right up to it.

When Joseph walked right up to it, one lean, dirty man, wearing only a ragged burlap loincloth, drifted into deeper cover beyond the pines. Peleg for certain! So, Joseph told himself, he had been right in thinking that from their window he had half a dozen times spied the flitting shape of their part of the journey down from Nazareth. scrawny companion of the first leg of the Bethlehem journey.

~~The other beggars remained sprawled around the fire, except one who stood up quickly. This one was a hunchback. Joseph was mildly amused at a gesture so respectful, seeing that only he, himself, had appeared and he certainly didn't deserve it, and he puzzled over Peleg and was wary of the sprawling rowdies who now began to nudge one another in a ~~happy go~~ ~~lucky~~ admission that this surprise was a joke as much on themselves as on the tall intruder.~~

~~"He certainly never expected to bump into us," one said.~~

~~"Well, we certainly never expected him. He came in as soft as a leopard on a lamb."~~

~~"Lambs! Us?"~~

Throughout that brief companionship Peleg had seemed cringing, bragging, feckless, as you would expect a beggar to be. But now he was the apparent leader of this group. Beggars, everybody said, had some sort of guild. No one, except beggars, knew much about it. Beggars were a secretive lot. But perhaps Peleg was the leader. Or perhaps he was leading now because he had been the one to propose this ... mission ... or whatever it was.

Another mystery! Joseph thought. He wondered wgen again he was be a free-minded man without anything to ponder except, perhaps, the tricky grain of a piece of wood.

The other beggars remained sprawled ~~before~~ around the fire, exvept one who stood up quickly. This one was a hunchback. Joseph was mildly amused at the respectful act of rising, seeing that only he, himself, had appeared and he certainly didn't deserve it, and he puzzled over Peleg and was wary of the sprawling rowdies who now began to nudge one another in an admission that this surprise was a joke as much on themselves as on the tall intruder.

"He certainly never expected to bump into us," one said.

"Well, we certainly never expected him. He came in as soft as a leopard on a lamb."

"Lamb! Us?"

"Oh, no!"

"Oh, yes!"

"Baa-aa-aa!"

The comparison tickled the beggars out of all control. Only the hunchback continued quiet, watching Joseph. The others exploded.

They were beggars, with less than enough to wear and usually less than enough to eat, but with one possession they could afford to be as prodigal as the richest man in the world. With the richest they shared a wonderful inheritance which remained inexhaustible, no matter how much of it they threw to the winds. They were co-heirs of laughter and now they set about the delightfully impossible task of squandering their possession.

They tittered, snorted, giggled, chuckled, guffawed and finally burst into a hurricane. They were torn, they were all but dismembered by mirth. They beat backs, elbowed ribs, slapped thighs, swapped winks, swung arms, ~~licked legs~~, held sides, rolled, came up gasping and, at last exhausted, hung heads between their knees and let hilarious tears rain.

"Lambs!"

"Us?"

"Baa-aa-aa!"

And then the whole lot of them began baa-ing. "Baa-aa-aa!" like a whole woolly flock. "Baa-aa-aa!" breaking into new hurricanes of laughter and then "Baa-aa-aaing!" again.

It got to be funny to puzzled, wary Joseph also.

He did not laugh but he smiled. Here were no enemies. Here were not even neutrals. Here were ragged rowdies whose laughter, whose every utterance, every glance, declared their good will toward the man who had stumbled upon them.

"Peace be with you," Joseph said at last.

"Peace," one hilarious rowdy managed to say and then, as though remembering, stood up and touched hand to head and heart as Peleg on the journey had always done to the two he had seemed to believe were great.

The hurricane died down. The half-score fell silent. Joseph ~~did not speak~~ ^{kept silent.}, waiting for one of them to speak. ~~Something, some sign or word, certainly must come, but not from himself.~~ He had nothing to explain. ~~he met the gaze of the man before him, trying to win the victory,~~ ^{the} ~~which forces speech from the vanquished. And everyone seemed~~ ^{humble one who, alone, had not joined in the laughter.} ~~conscious that a wordless contest had developed between their spokesman and the big, weathered stranger.~~ ^{The man at last spoke in a cultured courtly voice, utterly out of place in this wild hideout.}

~~The beggar looked away, at last.~~

"We watched the Magi for a little and now we watch hereabouts," he said. His tone ~~was a mild rebuke.~~ It had ~~also~~ a finality which warned that nothing more, nothing, would be said, ~~and even warned that it might have been better if nothing had been said at all.~~

Joseph ~~was contrite.~~ ^{let it go at that.} In an atmosphere so warm and friendly, although strange, perhaps he ought not to have forced any speech. ~~Certainly he would not now try to force further enlightenment.~~ He smiled again and gave them all

hunchback's

peace again, and because the other man's last words had been a sort of dismissal he turned and went on his way.

But although the beggars were so reassuringly friendly he worried as he tramped through the now pervading darkness. Such a watch as they were keeping indicated unfriendliness somewhere. What was the unnamed shadow against which they were on guard? Was it fire? Thieves? Plundering mercenaries or legionnaires? That thing which, Vedius Rusco thought, the Primus Pilus Helius Naepor and Panthera and, perhaps, the Tribune Muso, were planning?

He resolved to say nothing of all these fears to Mary. Not that they would frighten her. Mary did not know fear. ~~Faith was all she knew.~~ Faith wrapped her safe from every storm. She was faith itself. She had noticed the ~~beggars~~ flitting^(s) around the house but she had been worried for the beggars, not by them.

"I wonder if they have enough to eat?" she often asked. She had thought one looked like Peleg. "And you remember how he crammed down everything we gave him! If they'd only come near enough to hear," she said, "or stand still long enough, I'd call them in to get warm by the fire."

Just thinking of Mary's serenity, made Joseph feel better and ~~he rejoiced when he made out the flicker of light which meant the little house ahead.~~ A rough noise, a dull saw on soft wood, sounded and a chunky donkey came up and brushed against him. In the same moment a thin, half-naked man drifted behind a distant knoll. His outline was

shortly he saw the lights from the home of Mary's cousin and her husband. The detour had made him very late. Joseph began to chuckle.

"Elizabeth will have plenty to say," he thought.

o-o-o

"Elizabeth was, indeed, instantly rebuking in that hoarse, warm voice of hers. "Here we are, ready to talk everything over, and you're an hour late.

Joseph said he had been delayed, though he said no more.

"Well, I suppose there's time for you to eat something before we begin."

"We'll finish soon," Joseph said. "I'll eat at home. Mary is sure to have something ready and waiting."

"We saw Mary this afternoon," Zacharias said. He was a large, good-natured, brown-robed man whose beard seemed to have been liberally salted and peppered.

"And was everything all right?"

"She and the baby were both happy as birds. Of course she'll be glad to get back to Nazareth."

shall
"So ~~wkkk~~ I," Joseph said. His mind's eye filled with a picture of their home. There never ~~was~~ such a comfortable house, Mary always said.

Well, at least he had made it snug. He had rolled the roof just before leaving, to pack the mixed clay and brush and grass tight against the rains until they returned. He remembered the cooing of the doves on the firm roof. He remembered the view of Mount Tabor. Mary liked that view.

"We'll start back as soon as the purification rite is done," he said.

"Not until Mary has had a rest," Elizabeth said. "Did it ever occur to you, she'd need a rest?" She gave him a rebuking headshake.

Joseph was never quite sure whether Elizabeth was scolding or joking. He wondered -- as he had wondered before -- whether Elizabeth would have developed a softer manner if she had kept enough fat on her bones to make her look softer.

There are some girls who start out like bony little boys and end up looking like bony men, or almost. In between they have a soft season and mory. But the struggle to complete this natural cycle seems to sweat away any briefly accumulated evidences of womanhood. Petallike skin roughens, inviting curves vanish, breasts which had been ample all but vanish. The marvel was that Elizabeth's eyes still were tender and melting, her thin face still had beauty and her gaunt figure was graceful still. But that manner!

"While we waited, Zacharias and I have been talking," she said. "Mary has said all along that she wants to go to the Temple on the forty-first day, because that's what the Law says."

Joseph nodded.

"Well, I know where she could get a helping hand if she should need one in the Temple that day. Judith will be there. Judith knows when Mary plans to go, and she told me she'd like to be there when Mary is. Her baby is only a few days older, you know.

"You remember Judith," Elizabeth went on. "The strapping girl with coppery hair who helped us bring Mary from Bethlehem? That stable!"

"I do remember Judith," Joseph said gratefully.

~~He doubted that Mary would need any help, but he didn't~~

He doubted that Mary would need any help, but he didn't say so.

"Not that they'll likely ever meet in that crowd," Elizabeth added. "Well, then, in only four days you~~ixi~~ and Mary will go be going up to the Temple."

Joseph smiled faintly at Elizabeth's easy use of the phrase so puzzling to Gentiles. "Up to Jerusalem!" When your Gentile spoke of going "up" anywhere he usually meant going north. But your Jew, whether he approached Jerusalem from the south, north, east or west, always said "up" because that was how he went. Up, up, up by paths and roads sometimes to steep for goats, to the citadel, city and Temple perched atop their two craggy mountains.

"That's right," he said. In just four days, he and Mary would make the easy trip to Joppa Gate, the steep climb, and the long wait in the golden Temple. Only those hurdles were ahead.

"We thought you could take care of the boy's redemption, too," Zacharias said. "I mean on the same Temple trip."

"I can see about it while Mary is waiting her turn in the Court of the Women."

"Zacharias has saved two absolutely unblemished turtle doves for Mary," Elizabeth boasted. "And a fine pair for Judith, too."

"If Zacharias says they are unblemished, they will be."

"What I don't like," Elizabeth said, "is that Mary will have to wait and wait. Waiting tires you when you've just had a baby."

"I can't do anything about the waiting," Zacharias said regretfully. "I couldn't put Mary ahead. With so many trooping up to Jerusalem to pay this latest tax, lots of people are killing

The season of

The final 1957 season for income tax payments is drawing.

in, and

"We thought you would take care of the boy's redemption, too," Zacharias said. "I mean on the same Temple trip."

"I can see about it while Mary is waiting her turn in the Court of the Women, Joseph shreed.

"Zacharias has saved two absolutely unblemished turtle doves for Mary," Elizabeth boasted. "And a pair for Judith, too."

"If Zacharias says they are unblemished, they will be."

"What I don't like," Elizabeth said, "is that Mary will have to wait and wait. Waiting tires you when you've just had a baby."

"I can't do anything about the waiting," Zacharias said regretfully. "I couldn't put Mary ahead. With so many trooping up to Jerusalem to pay this latest tax, lots of people are killing two birds with one stone and settling their Temple debts, too. The Temple is packed from dawn to dark -- Vourt of the Gentiles, Court of the Women, Court of Israel. I swear the Holy Place would be packed, too, if a double line of Levites didn't stand guard telling people to keep down where they belong."

"And every last Levite barefooted," Elizabeth cried. "I wonder how they keep their toes whole?"

"Even if you could put Mary ahead, she wouldn't let you," Joseph said. "She'd say that taking someone else's place wasn't any way to make a sacrifice."

"Mary," Elizabeth burst out, "wouldn't complain if you fed her thistles."

"There are beautiful things to see in the Temple," Zacharias said. "And wonderful people... There are Simeon and Anna."

~~Anna, the one who fasted and prayed day and night, was~~

by day that house was always a little hard to find. Joseph rejoiced when he made out the flicker of light which would be a lamp in the high small window.

A chunky donkey came up and brushed against him. In the same moment a thin, half-naked man drifted from behind a knoll. His outline was hazy, but the donkey brayed loudly in recognition.

Peleg again! Of course Briar would recognize Peleg, a friend since the journey to Bethlehem.

The shadowy figure disappeared at once but in spite of himself, Joseph began to worry again. He untied Briar's rope, trying to shake off the fears that suddenly circled like dark birds.

He could almost hear Mary's soft rebuke ... as he had heard it a night or two earlier when she sensed worry in his manner.

"You know the holy writings ... better than I do. You know the Lord says he is always with us."

"I know," Joseph had said, "'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in him will I trust."

He said the strong words now aloud and began to feel better.

"I must remember," he thought, leading Briar toward the house, "to say that to Vedius Rusco." Rusco, putting his trust in swords and secret tunnels! "I will say it to him."

"And I will say another part of that psalm Mary loves ... 'He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.'"

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"Gently!" the Chief Eunuch hissed at the slaves. "Gently! More gently!"

The bearers were even more nervous than usual. Herod's rheumy eyes were open and glaring. He had been glaring from the litter as he was carried up to the candle-ringed dais, and was glaring more than ever now during the perilous transfer from litter to throne-bed. He hated this monstrosity which servants, made inventive by fear of punishment, had contrived for his corrupted carcass. He hated it either as a throne or as a bed.

As a throne it certainly had little to offer except for great golden claws on the corners, and it displeased him as ^abed also. He would have chosen a Roman-style bed, narrow and high off the floor. That made a man feel truly like a king, above lesser men and nobly straight in the posture of dignity a king should assume even when resting. But to ease his agony he had to permit a bed which was virtually ^ahammock. On a low ~~elastic~~ network of interwoven cords, soft pads and softer pillows were stacked, and himself in the middle sprawling whichever way hurt

least/0

Audience and

He glared across the crowded hall ~~but~~ every-
 thing he saw annoyed him. He hated the fad currently raging
 among the women of his court. All of them, not only the
 courtesans who always did whatever they dared to gain atten-
 tion, but the wives and respectable concubines of his highest
 officers, and his own nine wives and two-score concubines --
 respectable, too, he hoped -- even ^{Tirzah} ~~Salome~~, had taken to car-
 rying tear bottles.

These silly Egyptian gadgets were ~~chafing re-
 minder of the state which he had never been able to wangle
 under his authority and now, because of his illness and age,
 never would.~~ Worse, they were appurtenances of mourning so
 premature that he had to suspect them. True enough, he had
 publicly hoped that all Judea would weep at his death and he
 was loading his dungeons so that immediately after that re-
 grettable event executioners could give cause for weeping.
 But the bottles seemed almost like wishful thinking on the
 part of their wearers. ~~Finally~~ ^{Also} they were invariably of gold
 and he preferred seeing that precious metal put to more profi-
 table uses.

of the Court

In point of fact the ~~Court~~ ^{of the Court} women were using
 gold for all sorts of profitless purposes. Their amulets,
~~shaped~~ shaped according to religious preferences, like
 bearded bulls, woman-faced cats, winged lions, jackals that
 were half-man, fish that were half-crocodile, crocodiles that
 were half-fish, falcons with paws and hippopotami with claws,

all were of gold. Their pet cats and leopards all wore gold collars, frequently inset with jewels. Their own hair was held in place by gold wire and pins and often was covered by caps of intricately joined gold leaves imitating the leaves of the oak, olive and a dozen other trees. Gold boxes held their kohl, gold bottles their perfume, gold shells their cosmetics, gold vials their aphrodisiacs.

Herod could not avoid the suspicion that some, at least, saw in so much gold a protection beyond even the accepted power of amulets. Gold was money. Happen you had to flee the Palace, as many had, a bag hastily crammed with gold ornaments would support you for a long time. If his sister had not been so deep in the fad, he might have done something about his suspicion.

The bearers had retired, ~~breathing hard~~ ^{panting} with relief from terror, and other slaves took their places while the Chief Eunuch cocked bony knees, ready to spring on them at the first slip. Two slaves with fans wafted aside the stench of Herod's sweat and breath, and two more, with whisks so light that even his tormented skin could endure them, dabbed at the flies which the stench drew. ~~Another~~ ^{The appointed} slave stood at the foot of the bed with the usual huge tray for assuaging Herod's appetite. It was piled high with baked duck, fattened on figs, brain sausage, roasted wild boar, mushrooms, asparagus, apples from far-off Etruscan farms, pastries, a half dozen cheeses and wines.

Herod motioned angrily for wine but when the cup was presented it brought a new irritation, and about this, also, he

could do nothing. He wanted glass, but his tremblings and convulsions were now so unpredictable that he no longer dared put glass between his swollen lips. His shakes and writhings had more than once left him with a mouthful of glass bits and, even though he spit and rinsed at once, hours of fear followed lest fatal shards had got to his insides. So he used gold, hating its ^{metallic} tasteless greasiness which no cleaning seemed to remove.

Tirzah

~~Salome creaked forward to report some ominous~~

Tirzah creaked forward to report some ominous news she had.

Soemus stood opposite. In length of service the Ishmaelite was the tyrant's oldest companion. The two were bound together partly by their shared memory of the queen whom Soemus had secretly loved and whom Herod had adored and murdered. But Soemus was bound also by a loyalty so deeply rooted in his nature that it had survived

[Faint, illegible text from the reverse side of the page]

"Gently! Gently!" the Chief Eunuch hissed.

The fly perished, beaten to death in mid-air by four assailants, and Herod's all-purpose finger moved. The tray-slave put a hand to the wild boar but the finger said "No!" and said an even more impatient "No!" to ~~Salome~~ ^{Tirzah} ~~impatient~~ ^{wild} to get her tale told. It kept beckoning to Soemus while rales clattered in Herod's chest as though to flee the corruption there.

"Yes," the ravaged man said, "I have found another. She is waiting."

The tyrant's gray face worked in an agony of expectancy.

"She comes, Herod," Soemus said and ~~himself~~ beckoned, and through a rear entrance unseen hands pushed a young ^{girl} ~~woman. She was pretty and~~ her body was virginal and unlike the court women all around she wore no gold and carried no tear bottle. But ~~her~~ ^{provided for her} dress was court-style and so revealing that as she advanced she blushed under the gaze of ~~the crowd~~ ^{the crowd}.

Hearing her steps Herod commanded with the all-purpose finger that she come closer and Soemus put candles behind the bed.

"There will be no shadows, Herod," the ravaged man promised. "You shall see her plain."

Half-sitting, half-lying, with eyes now closed, Herod moved his swollen lips. All knew the word he was repeating although he made no sound. "M^Ariamne! M^Ariamne!" Then defying pain, he did make sounds. He prayed, the

sounds stumbling from a throat in ruins.

"Oh, god! All gods! God of these Jews whose temple I rebuilt. Baal, to whom cheated Esau turned! As-tarte whom my ancestors adored! Thou Ormazd of the Magi! Ammon! Jupiter! Woden! Zeus! Mithras! Zalmoxis! En-lil! Let this, at last be Miriamne! Give back the life which was taken."

There was no other sound throughout the hall. The girl was a statue. Soemus held his breath, anxious for her, though not for himself. He ~~felt sure~~ ^{believed that} he was safe. No one else owned, as he did, exactly Herod's memory of the innocent royal victim of plots and counterplots and tyrannical jealousy. No one else could even hope to succeed in the doomed and haunted search. The courtiers were stiffly silent; and safely out of her brother's sight, ^{Tirzah} ~~Salome~~ only shook her wattles in impatience to tell her story. The Chief Eunuch strangled a cough.

At the end of the groping prayer Herod opened his eyes and looked into the young face lifted out of shadow by the candles' light. He looked and looked ~~again~~ and then in wretched disappointment spoke again in spite of pain.

"This ^Miriamne? This pot cleaner? Get her out of my sight!"

Soemus instantly gave the girl a little urgent push. To him she was almost ^Miriamne. ~~Like so many others through the years she was a reward which he desired even above revenge against the tyrant who had taken the first Miriamne's life.~~ ^{As so often in the past,} Almost, almost, he was seeing again the

girl whom he had worshipped when he was young. ^{Guardedly} ~~hiding re-~~
~~protection~~ ~~sentiment against stubborn Herod~~ he pushed the rejected
counterpart and did not relax until she was safely out of
sight, he hoped beyond recall.

The courtiers relaxed cramped joints and the
Chief Eunuch, ^{Tivzah} ~~Salome~~ and Soemus shifted to intercept Herod's
glance if he should open his rheumy eyes again.

He did open them. His wretched disappointment
was gone as suddenly as it had been confessed. He might be,
and was, old and sick, and a consuming fire glowed in his
bowels of such heat that it had burned through into sores
which not even the steaming springs of Callirhoe on the Dead
Sea could heal. ~~His breath was a morbid stench and his disease~~
~~had given him an appetite which even the constant presence of~~
~~the slave with the tray could only lull.~~ But now his will
took hold again, as it could and did sometimes, and his finger
commanded Soemus. When he bent close, three fingers pointed
up.

"The Magi!" Soemus whispered to the Chief Eu-
nuch. "He points to the sky, the stars. He asks news of the
Magi."

The Chief Eunuch whimpered, and his eyes im-
plored Soemus to tell the bad news. Soemus said flatly:

"The Magi have gone, Herod."

Herod's eyes glittered. The finger wrote
in the air.

"They neither brought nor sent a report,"

191

Soemus said. "They fled. They have left Judea."

grimacing with pain
Herod strained to lift his head. He looked to where Geber usually stood.

Tirzah in spiteful triumph.
"Geber has fled, too," ~~Salome~~ cried. Now, at last, her story could be told. "Didn't I always say we couldn't trust him?" ~~she added in spiteful triumph.~~

The finger commanded Soemus to ~~confirm Salome's~~ *Deny the astounding charges*

Applied reported.
"Geber has fled, there is no mistake," Soemus reported.

Tirzah
"He's turned beggar, believe it or not!" ~~Salome~~ cried. "But he's been seen. A beggar's rags won't hide that hump."

"It's the truth," Soemus said quietly. "My men report seeing a beggar who is, almost certainly, Geber,"

The finger curved. It became a leg-fetter.

"I said my men saw. They were not close enough to seize."

Tirzah
"And anyway," ~~Salome~~ cried, "just try to grab one beggar when other beggars are helping him! They stumble into your way like blind kittens. You can catch anybody but the one you want."

Slet original
Propped among his cushions Herod swelled with fury. His ~~gaze dared all who watched to follow the traitor's example.~~ *finger spoke to the chief Sumud, and the latter understood so completely that he was terrified.* Then, by degrees, the gaze grew crafty. He spoke again, in spite of pain.

"This rumored -- king must be -- very great."

Tirzah
"Of course he is!" ~~Salome~~ screamed. "Would the

192

the Magi and Geber otherwise flee rather than report?"

Herod sighed and his gaze upon those who watched was all kindness and amiability, and as though the Magi and Geber were really not important, his finger elected an apple and while the slave peeled and scraped it for the tortured throat, he planned.

He would find this king. He would tear Judea apart. He would uncover a thousand who would tell. And then he remembered. He already had one from whom he had ordered exactly the information he desired. Casually, to maintain his pretence of indifference, ~~his finger spoke to Soemus and that man of gifts understood.~~

"Tihni-ben-Ginath is not in the ante-chamber," his finger spoke to the Chief Eunuch and the latter understood completely and was terrified.

"I have had men searching night and day," the Chief Eunuch said, standing close and whispering, because this was a thing not to be overheard. "But up to now they have learned nothing."

Herod, still pretending indifference, lay in thought; then the finger moved again. The Chief Eunuch this time did not understand and looked appealingly at Soemus.

"I think he says that the chief of the searchers must be brought, so that Herod may find out why he is so slow in doing what he has been paid to do."

"But I cannot," the Chief said to Soemus under his breath. "The man I hired, nor either of his two helpers would come here and openly admit what they have been doing."

"Tell your master that," Soemus said. "Thirty-five thousand denarii are a lot to pay out for empty service, even

"He says you must send to the Temple for wine," Soemus told the Chief Eunuch. "And of course he means the best, the vintage from those green-white Hebron grapes."

The Chief Eunuch could not hide consternation. The Temple was full of wine, as it was full of gold. Five thousand great jars of the best wine in Judea. But who ^{before Herod} ever ~~heard of seizing~~ ^{had dared seize} any from the jealous priests?

"But the Temple will refuse," he whispered.

"Not now," Soemus said.

"What do you mean?"

"A new order has been enforced," Soemus said.

✓ The ceremonial vestments of the High Priest now are held by the commander of the Fortress of Antonia. After each wearing they must be returned. As long as that order stands the Temple will not deny the Palace even its best wine."

Herod smiled and his finger ordered dancing. He let himself be stuffed while his ~~round, red~~ mouth puckered over dancers and courtesans. The role of spectator provided one of the only three pleasures left to him. He could eat, sleep and watch. He watched and gorged and began to grow torpid. But the engine must serve until he had learned about the rumored king. Cursing ^{the ruler's} ~~Tibni-ben-Ginath's~~ slowness his finger summoned Soemus. It pointed to the Chief Eunuch and curved into another leg-fetter.

"He says," Soemus told the Chief Eunuch, "that if you want to stay outside the dungeons, get ^{your brother} ~~Tibni-ben-Ginath~~ here at once."

The Chief Eunuch's knees almost collapsed.

He had been repeatedly frightened this day. By dread of involvement in the Magi's flight, ^{by} Geber's defection, ^{by} the dangerous requisitioning of Temple wine! Now the ~~same~~ ^{hunter's} ~~absence~~ ^{absence} ~~of~~ ^{of} ~~his~~ ^{of} ~~tardiness~~ increased his fright. He appealed miserably to Soemus who dared stand firm when Herod would not be appeased.

Your Chief Eunuch is not

"~~Tibni~~ is the one to throw into your dungeons, Herod!" Soemus said calmly. "Not even a Chief Eunuch's ^{was} fingers can snap loud enough to hurry a ~~Sadducee~~ ^{the rank of} of ~~Tibni-ben-~~ ^{of} ~~Ginath's rank.~~" *The one who has been sent for.*

Herod moved his own one finger. That, the movement said, could hurry any man in Judea. He beckoned the physician. *And to the physician he explained* ^{(1) clear the hall, the king} "SOEMUS SAID TO THE CHIEF EUNUCH, "He wants to sleep for just a short time," Soemus explained, "and he wants to wake up with a clear mind. Whatever you give him, make sure of that or take the consequences."

Mumbling zodiacal incantations the astrologer-physician mixed a dose and Herod drank . . .

Fifty years ago, the tyrant recalled, a Roman general had killed thirty thousand Jews to keep Judea quiet. That number, he decided, would be a helpful precedent if any action of his own in running down this rumored king drew a criticism from the Emperor Augustus. More of a precedent than he would need! Growing sleepy he closed his eyes and calculated. He would not, probably, need to kill the half

came seeking, and Geber promised to bring back word of what they found, but they left secretly and Geber has broken his promise."

Vedius did not need this reminder of Joseph's wise ^{wisdom} ~~wisdom~~. He knew. He not only knew ~~something~~ that this Messiah had been born. He knew the Messiah's name, and his father and mother. He knew, he knew, and when he thought of the innocence ~~and~~ ^{integrity of} ~~integrity~~ of the woman and the man he was being asked to betray, rage made him breathless.

"No!" he panted. "No! By Jupiter, Ceres, Mercury ..."
He tolled off all the twelve. "... No!"

"What?"

Herod heaved up, glaring.

"Watch yourself, Vedius!" Soemus said recklessly.

"No!" Rusco panted. ~~"I wouldn't touch it!"~~
^{Herod signalled to Soemus, but the Jews with so slow}
"You refuse?" Herod cried, in spite of pain.

In regarding that the tyrant, himself, spoke

"Refuse?" Rusco repeated. A Roman of commissioner rank could refuse anything to a client king who could never rise to the privilege of Roman citizenship. But he would have refused anyway.

^{Herod's finger wagged furiously, but at the chief Eunuch}
"Herod says you must do this," Soemus interpreted, ^{the chief Eunuch}

"because peace is at stake. The Jews will not be pleased if Herod does not seek out and worship this new king."

Worship him! That was not worth answering, and Rusco was, in any case, too full of rage for speech. He knew his defiance might bring the tyrant's heel down in spite of all the laws within which Caesar Augustus sheltered Roman citizens away from home. But he could not commit this act of betrayal, not even if Herod's scrofulous finger aimed at the dungeons. He flung back

and something in him responded to the Roman's flame of righteous courage

his ~~head~~ head and stood erect.

Soemus bent impulsively to Herod's pendulous ear.

He liked Vedius Rusco, "He'll come around. ~~He was just hit too~~

~~suddenly. He likes Jews. One is working in his villa now. A~~

~~his son, a Jewish carpenter from Nazareth is working at his villa~~

~~carpenter, named Joseph. And probably Rusco's first thought was~~

~~right now. As your chief Jewish son, he has friends -- and by~~

~~marriage a relationship or two -- among the Jews. It'll cool off and~~

~~Jewish friends. But he'll come around. Give him time."~~

Herod's blood-shot eyes ~~looked Rusco over and look-~~

~~ed away.~~ He had wanted ^{to a long time} to get rid of this trouble-making road

builder ~~for a long time.~~ He looked to Soemus, to the Chief Eu-

nuch, to ^{Tirzah} ~~Salome~~, choosing his instrument of retaliation. He

made his choice. He beckoned and his sister advanced.

o-o

Audience

At the entrance to the hall, mercenary guards

made way hastily before another advance. Bracae's cough sig-

nalled, "Here we are!" Another voice, reedy but confident,

said, "Proculinus does not need to be announced." and the

He had been planning to do it soon. Only yesterday he had thought of using his mercenaries, but Rusco's defiance now spurred him to an immediate attempt.

It must be the one whom he could most rely not to betray him to the Emperor Augustus.

smallest, most arrogant feet in all of Caesar Augustus's twenty-eight legions began a hob-nailed strut along the marble floor. Heavier hob-nails hammered behind and two scuffing, bare feet brought up the rear. The general of the Tenth Legion, attended by an aide and a very needful slave, and followed by Bracae, was come to pay a call of state on Herod the Great.

Orfitus Proculinus was a rolypoly little man saved by only a handsbreadth from being a dwarf. He prided himself on being the best legion commander in the Empire. He certainly sweated the most. Fat beyond all rivals, because fatness made him man-sized in at least one dimension, he sweated if he so much as stood up and sat down. After the walk from the Palace gate he was running sweat and as he drew near to Herod's dais he thrust a hand behind his back.

The slave whose scuffing^{back} feet trailed his master's

The hand

Last

strutting boots, filled ~~is~~ instantly. He would have been ~~a zone~~ ~~gone~~ if he had not. He carried an armful of small thick towels, and his sole duty was instantly to provide a swabbing cloth whenever the hand of Proculinus reached.

Of course Proculinus swabbed himself. Face, ears, neck, armpits, arms, wrists, thighs and most of all the crotch between stubby, jelly-like legs. Every steaming part! Who else could swab, or for that matter do anything else, half so well?

In boyhood Orfitus Proculinus had dreamed of being a first rate fighting man. Too small for that, he had aimed in manhood at being the Empire's best general. In a day when most legion commanders treated their men like animals and got only an animal obedience Proculinus gave the Tenth more consideration, food and furloughs and fewer punishments than any other soldiers, and in return he demanded and received an unequalled efficiency.

He was, undeniably, the Empire's vainest general, and one of its most ambitious. Standing, he believed, head and shoulders above all rivals, he was cocksure that one day soon he would rise to the governorship of a province, at least. Meanwhile he did all that he could to rise. He had hurried to Vedius Rusco to show himself prompt in protecting a loyal Roman against Herod. How better could he advance himself with the Emperor? Contrarily, he could be counted on to show himself just as prompt against any disloyal Roman. If disloyalty had even been hinted, Vedius Rusco might have rotted his life

Copy all this cut was done by [unclear]

away in Herod's deepest dungeon for all of Orfitus Proculinus. But of course Vedius Rusco was not disloyal. None stood so high in the favor of Augustus.

"Hail, Herod!" Proculinus cried and planted his stubby, freshly swabbed legs in front of the golden throne-bed. His vanity made him delight in every excess of formality and the salute which he gave now was a masterpiece of proper recognition of his own lofty position and of the reverence due a throne.

Herod grunted.

"I trust, oh King!" Proculinus said, "that my visit, in the name of great Caesar Augustus, is timely?"

By now Lucianus, as aide, had ranged himself alongside Proculinus and so had the slave with his stack of towels.

"I guess we came at the right time," Bracae whispered, sidling close to Rusco.

"You cut it fine, but you're here when I need you," Rusco whispered back.

Soemus flicked an ironic congratulatory glance toward Rusco, ~~and the Chief Eunuch eyed Salome with mixed satisfaction and apprehension, afraid that he might have lost ground, but glad that Herod had picked her for whatever he had in mind.~~ Herod grunted again.

"My monthly report, oh Herod, goes forward to Rome," Proculinus said, coming down from the salute. "Today! But I could not omit the latest word of your unfortunate

illness. May I tell Caesar Augustus that it lessens?"

Vedius Rusco, perhaps as much in reaction from tension as from amusement, had to hold back laughter. In his youth he had believed that those in high places always spoke in high-flown language. But after listening to such men all over the Empire he had learned that mighty few did, and they mighty seldom. True, the written word tended to be flowery, but in ordinary give and take princes no less than slaves used plain speech, the kind which slips naturally off the tongue. That was why the vivid Greek slang, which fitted well into every occasion, was spreading everywhere. It was why a pat Egyptian word picked up in Alexandria was, within months, being overworked in Rome. It was why the Galilean hodgepodge of Syrian, Aramaic and Samaritan plus a legacy from long-gone Canaanites tempted sophisticated Jerusalemites even while they ridiculed Galilean crudeness.

At the end of Proculinus's peroration Herod grunted once more and aimed the finger at Soemus.

"Pain," Soemus interpreted, "in his throat makes it difficult for Herod to speak. But he is, he says, improved. He will, therefore, be grateful if you will present his profound respects to great Caesar Augustus and say that he is better."

Herod's finger moved spitefully toward Vedius Rusco.

"And Herod, the King, directs you to include in your report word that, in spite of many obstacles, he will

shortly complete an unparalleled hippodrome at Jericho ~~and will~~
~~name it~~ in honor of Caesar Augustus, [“]~~if permission is granted.”~~

"It will be my pleasure to take full advantage of the opportunity which Herod allows," Proculus said, licking his lips as though the phrases had been meat and drink. He was having the time of his life, but ^{he} was too aware of the value of time to waste much. He had accomplished the diversion for which he had been brought.

"I go!" he said, "With the permission of Herod ^I
~~must go.~~ must go. The Emperor's report must get off."

Herod grunted. Soemus was not needed to explain that the sound meant, "Go! And the sooner the better."

For the first time Proculus seemed to notice Vedius Rusco. His artless recognition was as much a masterpiece as his salute.

"Vedius!" he cried. "My friend, Vedius! If your business here is also finished do come with me. I've been wanting a long talk with you." He bent to Herod in a bow which was both a question and a ^{Roman} general's independent announcement of intention, ~~to go~~. "With Herod's permission, I shall take Vedius Rusco Philippicus with me."

Herod refused to reply by even ~~so~~ so much as a nod. Instead his finger aimed at the Chief Eunuch. Retaliation had been delayed but at least he would allow no one but a slave to grant dismissal.

"Herod willingly, and more than willingly, permits the Roman to leave," the Chief Eunuch said. His tone was impu-

dent even though his cringing shoulders implored Rusco to remember that the impudence had been commanded.

Rusco bowed, Proculinus held out a hand which instantly met the required towel. Framing flowery speech was sweaty work. He sopped, and with the others backed away from the throne and down the dais. Then they all strode past the barrier of javelins toward the entrance door.

Behind their retreating backs Herod's finger beckoned ^{Tirzah} ~~Salome~~, no mean interpreter herself. She hurried to another exit, wattles swaying in her haste.

9-0

Out in the courtyard Vedius Rusco motioned to a Palace attendant for his horse, and Bracae's, while Proculinus squinted at the mercenaries on guard like a fat little ^{Rooster} ~~fat~~ eyeing bears. His tck-tck-tck said that Herod's bears fell a satisfying way short of his own in the Tenth. As ~~his escort~~ ^{were} brought up horses for himself and Lucianus, two more attendants came from inside the Palace but they failed to join the group already on duty.

"You did a good piece of work back there, Orfitus," ~~Vedius~~ Rusco said. "You talked like an ambassador to the life."

"I flatter myself that I know how to handle a king," Proculinus said. His self-satisfaction was enormous.

"You got me out of a tight." Rusco said. "Many thanks!"

"Herod did look wild," Proculinus said. "I never saw him in such a state before. And just because you asked for help on your highways!"

"He had me in a state, too," ~~Rusco said.~~

"State or no state," ~~Proculinus said,~~ "he had to calm down when I reminded him that I am the Emperor's envoy in Judea."

Proculinus ~~he~~ smiled in practiced graciousness. "Won't you come to my quarters for a drink?"

"I'm sorry. I have a really urgent errand," Rusco said. He had. He must get to Joseph with a warning of this projected search.

Proculinus made a little masterpiece of the formality of a Legion general excusing a civilian officer. Rusco played his supporting role to the hilt. His smile and bow were solemnly appreciative and his courteous attention held until Proculinus's party had clattered away.

"It's too late to use the Joppa Gate," he said to Bracae then, squinting up at the sun. "We'd run into crowds ~~the way~~. Let's take the street of the Candlemakers down to the Dung Gate. Nobody will be using that now."

One of the extra attendants turned back into the Palace, the other trailed in the wake of Vedius Rusco's black but not unobtrusively enough to be overlooked by the old campaigner, Bracae.

"Proculinus got you out of a tight, but maybe not for long," he said. "There goes one fellow to tell the Palace we've started and here comes another to spot our direction."

"And losing this one won't ^{do any good} ~~help~~ if they really

mean trouble," Rusco said. "This one will have a few helpers, even though they aren't in sight."

"Just the other day," Bracae grinned, "Bria told me to start looking the other way when a fight came along. She said I was over-due to get my ears knocked down."

"Maybe we both are," Rusco said and ^{The will-know} elation gushed up ~~in him like a spring, as it always did at the hint of danger.~~ "We're being trailed, so I guess we can just about count on a mix."

He smiled at a recollection of the thing Joseph had said. How did it go? Whoso sheds blood, his own blood shall be shed? Well, he certainly didn't intend to let his blood be shed ... not at least while Joseph lacked that warning.

"Maybe you ought to go back for the General's drink," Bracae said, pretending worry.

"Let's keep going," Rusco said. "Whatever comes will at least be a change from road-building."

"How many do you think will jump us?"

"No matter how many, the quality will be poor."

"Not too poor, I hope."

"They certainly won't be legionnaires," Rusco said. "The Tenth doesn't work for the Palace except on Orfitus's say-so. And ^{it isn't} ~~they're~~ not likely to be any of the mercenaries on guard at the Palace today. That towhead is officer of the day and I think we can count on him to make sure that any of his men who are sent after us never catch up."

"So it should be just a pick-up lot from the

Palace," Bracae said comfortably.

"And if they jump us, it will be inside the city," Rusco prophesied. "Outside the wall we'd have too much elbow room to suit them."

With street fighting the likeliest prospect, they knew they need not worry much. They knew the pattern of street fighting. Two or three pedestrians would fall into an argument. This would explode into a slugging match. Ten or fifteen bystanders would turn the thing into a melee, blocking the street. A half dozen passersby would dodge and scramble until the interested, chosen victims were caught off guard. Then ^{Weapons} ~~daggers and javelins~~ would come out. Amid so much contrived confusion the victim really had the advantage if he refused to be caught off guard.

"Take off your cloak," Rusco said, and took off his own. "A cloak gets in the way."

They readied shields, daggers and javelins and ^{Rusco} ~~Rusco~~ ^{hoisted his sword and Bracae} laid his own long ^{blade} ~~sword~~ across his saddle.

"Remember to keep your head up," Rusco said. "How many times do I have to tell you that when you hunch those big shoulders of yours, the back of your helmet lifts clear from the nape of your neck and practically invites a dagger."

"If we're giving advice," Bracae grinned, "then you remember there are two of us. Don't go racing off to have all the fun by yourself."

"Watch out for somebody jumping off a balcony or

out of a window," Rusco said.

"And watch out for slings, too."

"Slings?"

"A Palace gang would probably include some of Herod's own Idumaeen sandfleas," Bracae said, pleased at having had the thought ahead of Rusco. "They're not as good slingers as the Benjaminites or those Balearic wonders, but they're good enough when the range is short."

The black and roan had brought them to the ~~wide~~ ^{busy} ~~street~~ ^{street} stretching southward through the Tyropoeon Valley. This had been taken over by the candlemakers, as every main street in Jerusalem had been taken over by some guild. Its clamorous, crooked length was jammed with shops where tallow and wax products could be bought, and especially candles, from cheap things smaller than good nails and selling at five for a mite, to decorated glories costing five denarii apiece. It was a wide ~~street~~ as Jerusalem streets went but now and then jutting balconies almost touched from opposite sides.

"It'll be from one of those that we'll be jumped," Bracae said.

"But only one man will jump," Rusco said. "The pack in the street is what we'll need to worry about."

"Well, don't forget I'm along!" Bracae said again. "Don't try to do it all yourself."

They rode ~~down~~ into the Street of the Candlemakers, Rusco leading, his knees guiding his mount at a waltzing walk, his shield poised, his right hand ready to reach for his sword.

"These horses haven't been in a fight for a long time," Bracae said, "I wonder if they remember their lessons?"

Up ahead two men clinched, struggled, wrestled and fell and a score more spilled around them in violent confusion.

This was it! Rusco got his sword out and was soothing his horse against the rising noise when he heard the familiar, dull chock of a slung stone. He looked back and saw Bracae sway, then slowly slide to the cobble stones. Bracae's roan did remember! It promptly halted so that enemies ~~must~~ must come at his master from only one flank.

"Holy Jupiter!" Rusco breathed. Answering to a hard knee his black halted at Bracae's other flank as the big man began to rise groggily.

"Sword!" Vedius Rusco shouted and leaped from his own saddle. "Sword and shield, Bracae!"

The command cut through Bracae's daze. His shield was still on his arm and his long sword lay within reach. Skull ringing, he got his weapon and stood up in the shadow of a wide balcony. He was still a little dazed.

"Vedius!" he bellowed. "Didn't I tell you not to go racing off ... "

"I'm right here, old bull!" Rusco laughed. "Right beside you. And here they come."

Bracae shook his head as the first wave from the melee rushed them. Both he and Rusco had their shields squared and stones from slingers in a second wave began to

strike the curved surfaces and shatter into bits and ricochet. From beyond the horses a dozen more assailants tried to charge but the animals, remembering their lessons well, reared with terrifying screams and struck with hooves like hammers and the dozen faltered.

Rusco glanced overhead. A man was just beginning a nimble leap from a balcony and as he came down his robe ballooned. Rusco got his sword up and the man spitted himself, his body jerking like a great muscle in torment. His weight turned Rusco's sword downward and he slid from it to the cobble street.

Bracae was mowing, mowing, mowing and on his quarter the attack was getting nowhere but the slingers were getting the range. A stone ricocheted off Rusco's helmet, a volley battered his shield and another struck on the laces of his breastplate. That really hurt and when one hit his shin he felt that he was fighting on one leg. Another volley rattled against Bracae's shoulders, spraying in all directions.

"W-o-d-e-n!" Bracae bellowed, an exhortation long-drawn out, like a piece of taffy. It was not a prayer for help. Bracae could manage without help if W-o-d-e-n would supply just a little more breath while he settled these sandfleas nipping at his great thighs. "W-o-d-e-n!" he bellowed and mowed away.

~~W-o-d-e-n~~ Rusco kept his shorter sword flicking in and out from beneath his shield, and between mowing/^{scythe}and flicking blade one crowding attacker seemed to impale himself as

as soon as another drew back to ^{to} ~~his~~ his wounds.

The pack began to waver and the slingers grew less accurate. They could see that scythe and flicking point would be at their own bellies if the pack wavered more. The first wave snarled and broke, and the suddenly uncovered slingers, feeling naked, fled too. Off on a flank one crafty enemy made a last try for victory.

"The Romans kill Jews!" he shouted. "The Romans kill Jews! Kill the Romans!"

It was a cry to bring Jews out of the very earth, but Bracae got a foot in the crotch of a dead assailant and turned the body over.

"Who said Jews?" he cried. "Look! Is this one circumcized? This lousy Idumaeen?"

Cry, "Romans kill Jews!" and you ~~were sure to~~ kindle ^d a fire of hate in most Jews who heard. Cry "Idumaeen!" and of any living thousand within earshot nine-hundred ninety-nine would instantly curse Herod. ~~Thousands~~ ^{This gathering} cursed now. The evidence was plain. The overturned body was that of a man of the despised people who had given Judea its tyrant.

Rusco and Bracae rode on to the Dung Gate and out into open country. No one followed, and they felt free to add up the damage.

The worst, Bracae swore by Woden, was the theft of his cloak, but in addition he was bleeding at one shoulder and a splitting headache made him groan.

"That very first stone got me," he said. "It

crowd

came in under my helmet and caught me right on the nape of my neck." He had said it before he realized what he was confessing. His jaw dropped.

"Didn't I tell you?" Rusco said, but he was too battered for much triumph. A stone had caught him half way between ankle and knee and for hours he would not be able to hide a limp. He had half a dozen bruises under his cuirass and blood was seeping from three dagger thrusts which the hardened leather and metal across his chest had kept from going too deep.

"Bria will fix you up," Bracae said. "And she's got some of that salve left. Joseph's, I mean. It's the best stuff I ever saw."

"Let's push along," Rusco said. But he was less anxious to get attention for his wounds than to reach home before Joseph left. Tomorrow was the day Joseph had said he and Mary would go to the Temple for the purification rite. Well, they had better not go! For that pair and their baby to go near Herod's Palace would be like walking into an arena full of hungry lions.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

High across the city the sun's first rays, reaching over the Mount of Olives, struck golden fire from the Temple and in a watchtower four hundred and fifty feet above the still dark gorge of Kidron Valley the Levite lookout raised a white-clad arm and blew on a golden trumpet.

His signal alerted the hosts below to their sacred labors which Moses had first decreed, which David had set forth anew, which Solomon had ^{increased} elaborated, which Zerubb~~al~~ had reconstituted and which now were continued under the half-mad Idumaeen convert who sat on David's throne.

The ~~division of~~ priests assigned for duty on this day, as they would not be assigned again for six months, ^{were} ~~were~~ already at their posts, barefooted, white-robed and unblemished as the Law required. Their ^{divisional} chief already had completed the torchlight inspection of the sanctified precincts denied to Gentiles and the captain of the Temple police had completed his own inspection of everything else within the four spiked walls that enclosed the entire Temple ground, twice putting his ^{penalizing} torch to the tunic of a ~~sleeping~~ sentry, ^{as was his duty} ~~as was~~ ^{caught sleeping} his right.

Now, in the Court of the Priests, the silver trumpets of three Levites echoed the ^{Sorcerer} golden warning and one priest crouched over the wood heaped on the Altar of Burnt Offerings and huffed and puffed at shavings stuffed down among yesterday's embers and a thin blaze licked upward and then a thin wisp of grey smoke. At the peak of sacrifice the wisp would grow to a thick, black, oily cloud.

The ^{Division} ~~Chief~~ Priest frowned. A red line divided the altar into halves, one for the burnt offerings which must be consumed entirely for the glory of the Lord, one for the sin-offering, the best of which, when well-scorched, might be hooked clear, to satisfy mortal appetites. The line should have been fresh but it could barely be made out. There would be grumbling! The people complained that all too often greedy priests ignored the line; especially at the end of the long, hard day. Tired then, and hungry, they aimed their meat hooks at the most succulent chunks; red line or no red line, lest they fail to provide a ration for their squad, and for themselves.

Strong attendants, who must keep clear the altar drain by which the hot blood spilled down to Kidron Valley, readied long pushers, already charred and darkly stained. More men of muscle inspected the big jars in which, as the day ran on, they would tote off ashes, entrails, and other refuse. The priests who dressed the sacrifices honed their knives on marble butcher blocks. Other priests swung arms to loosen the muscles with which they would hang the washed meats on hooks set into boards fixed to eight short pillars and, later, trans-

fer the meats to the fire.

Behind the Altar of Burnt Offerings stood a panel more than a hundred feet high. Under a bordering vine and grapes of solid gold it bore a picture of Solomon's ^{long-gone} Temple. Between the panel and the Altar stood the Holy Place with its Golden Altar flanked by the table of shew bread laid with a cloth of gold and ^{by} the seven-branched candlestick ~~Δ~~ x. Reverent priests already had trimmed the candles and brushed the Golden Altar free of yesterday's incense ashes and spread hot coals on the newly cleaned surface. Now ^{Another} ~~a third~~ priest set about the rite which had fallen to him by heaven-guided lot and from which he would be barred all the rest of his life. This was the envied, holy task of spreading over the coals fresh incense to carry prayers for all the people sweetly up to the Lord. ~~He~~

~~His priceless censor shining in the early light,~~
^{J H 2} ~~this priest~~ approached the Golden Altar. Behind him lay silence. Priests and all others within sight and sound were ^{now} prone, mutely praying with gratitude for past boons, with thanks for present blessings, and with hope for future mercies.

The chosen priest took care that his incense fell for the most part on the side nearest the Holy of Holies, that perfect cube behind the Altars and the vine-adorned panel which was empty of all save the Presence of the Lord, and as the cloud of fragrance drifted upward he withdrew, step by humble step, and the gold and silver trumpets blew again and the Temple organ played and the rich, united sound soared westward over Joppa Gate.

All to be thrown out and replaced with the
new Judith version

"It's opening!" Mary cried.

In the thirty-fifth year of the reign of the dying tyrant, Herod, and in the seven hundred forty-seventh year of the founding of Rome and a thousand years after David, Mary was going up to Jerusalem to regain the precious privilege of approach to the Golden Altar of the Temple.

It was early in the harsh month of Shebat, forty-one days after the birth of the son who, the Law of Moses said, had made her unclean (a daughter would have made her unclean for eighty.) He was held tight in her arms as she looked around, wide-eyed, from the back of the donkey Briar, which had carried her from Nazareth almost two months before. At her side Joseph struck his cinnamon-scented storax staff in marching rhythm. He would have been at her side in any case, as long as he lived he would be, but he was Temple-bound on his own duty, to buy the release of ~~her~~ ^{the} child from sanctuary service. The necessary five shekels were carefully folded into his girdle, patted often to make sure they did not fall out unnoticed. He had brought them all the way from ~~Bethlehem~~ ^{Nazareth} x

The morning was cold. The little snow which had fallen in the night ~~had not begun to melt except around~~ ^{was being churned by early} ~~the market outside the city wall at Joppa Gate. Here early~~ ^{arrivals} ~~arrivals were churning it~~ into a yellow mush in which Briar set his hooves with delicate disapproval. ~~The big~~ ^{Joppa} market was beginning to bustle. Accustomed as she was to the scanty wares

in Galilean shops, Mary ~~was~~ marvelled at the booths, all overflowing. And not just with homemade stuffs! Here were rarities hurried in from every land by merchants eager to share in the prosperity which Herod, like the earlier despot, Solomon, had brought to Judea. Here was everything and on every hand and at every price. Here a mistress might, for a ^{few} ~~three or four hundred~~ pennies, clothe a slave for a whole year and then perhaps from the same dealer buy herself a dress costing enough to clothe a hundred. Already market inspectors were on their rounds making sure that ^{each} / merchant would abide by the approved profit of one sixth of his cost ... unless, of course, a little something was slipped under the table.

But even the market could not hold Mary's eyes as the huge leaves of Joppa Gate swung wide and Briar ambled through. Hundreds trying to be first inside bumped him fore and aft but his stubborn legs held a straight course beside Joseph while Mary turned this way and that to look at the golden and ivory city.

Not that much of the splendor which she had anticipated was evident at first! Herod had made, on two hills, a city almost as magnificent as Rome on her seven but around Joppa Gate there was little proof of this. There was the gloomy citadel of David, an adjacent barrack, a huddle of laborers waiting to be hired, a dozen chained convicts shambling off, a narrow, cobbled street climbing up and up.

Mary yielded to the disillusionment which travel so often brings. "In Nazareth I couldn't wait to see this," ^{she said,}

but now it doesn't seem so much."

"Wait till you see the Temple," Joseph said.

"Just you wait!"

But how can I
"~~I don't know if I can~~ wait!" Mary cried, and

she squeezed the baby as though to share with him, even at his age, her anticipation.

Joseph looked down at her and marvelled. She hadn't a fear in the world even though she, also, had heard the warning which Vedius Rusco gave on returning from his stormy interview with Herod. ¶ About the warning Joseph and Mary had agreed there was nothing to be done, although Joseph, of course, had seen at once how it tied in with the watch kept by Peleg and the other beggars.

"We won't come to any harm in the Temple!"

Mary had said.

"It isn't as though anyone were looking for any particular baby," Joseph had said doubtfully.

"We came safely down to Bethlehem. And we'll go safely up to Jerusalem."

Joseph had smiled. "You make it sound as easy as driving a nail."

But her serenity and faith had made him feel easier, and he remained easy now, even though it wasn't with him as it was with her. Not exactly! Now and then, because of what Vedius Rusco had said, he did feel a touch of dread.

They moved out from under the shadow of the five strong towers of the citadel which had defended Jerusalem for centuries. The cobbled street climbed and its shal-

low steps, which had saved camels many a slip, now saved Briar. At either curb lop-sided huts of the poorest of all the city held one another up.

Mary rode along, smiling on everyone, and everyone smiled back. Or almost everyone. Hundreds walked before and behind them, some carrying pigeons and turtle doves and even sheep and lambs.

"The Temple is tough," Joseph ^{said} ~~remarked~~, "about accepting any sacrifice^d except the ones it sells. The Law says 'any unblemished sacrifice,' but people say that the only unblemished ones the priests approve are the ones they make a profit on."

The road forked. The right tine, less a street than a cramped slot, curved among the lop-sided huts to connect, after a quarter-mile, with the crowded, smelly Street of the Candlemakers ~~that ran through~~ ⁱⁿ the Tyropoeon Valley. Joseph and Mary and the hundreds bearing sacrifices, ~~and hundreds more,~~ took the left tine.

This climbed past Herod's palace. The mighty walls, slowly weathering to rose and ivory, and the hard, sharp-eyed mercenaries on guard before the gates, revived Joseph's dread and Mary did not stop Briar for a better look. Her face sobered.

Now why, she wondered, should a man who commanded all this, all this safety and luxury, ~~and an army,~~ ~~too,~~ be frightened because another baby, ~~even a special baby,~~ had come into the world? Although he was a king she pitied him.

"Herod is sick to death, isn't he, poor man?" she asked.

Joseph nodded, but said nothing.

The cobbled road continued to climb and sometimes, ahead, it seemed to narrow until Mary doubted they could get through before it closed up like a sewn seam. But it was still narrowly open at the summit of Jerusalem's western hill. It levelled off then and Mary could look across the wide bridge which spanned deep, steep Tyropoeon Valley to connect with Zion, the eastern hill, and with the street which ran on to the great spiked wall of the Temple rising defiantly under the gloomy fortress where the High Priest's vestments were under Roman lock and key.

To the north and south along the western hill there was now proof aplenty of the grandeur of Herod's Jerusalem. The new mansion of the High Priest! The Sanhedrin's impressive council chamber! The ornate homes of merchants waxing richer and richer and of Sadducees, Pharisees and Herodians, all new and almost all dwarfing the old, ^{un/empt,} abandoned palace of the ^BHasmonaeon dynasty whose leaders Herod had executed.

The crowd was thickening and Briar was increasingly stubborn against so much jostling. Joseph pulled the donkey to one side and stopped.

"Let's look around," ^{ll} he said. "And not just at the Temple, either, but around at the whole city."

Almost impregnable, Jerusalem lay on its two

hills, lay balanced on two fingers of rock at the end of the great plateau which began within sight of Mary's own Nazareth. With so many new buildings shining now under the sun it was truly Jerusalem the golden.

"Think of it!" Joseph said. "This is a place that has stood against conquerors almost since Abraham. First it was little Uru-salem, the hill of safety, an outpost against the Pharaohs. Then it was the chief ^{town} ~~city~~ and holy place of the Jebusites. Then David won it and Solomon adorned it. Nebuchadnezzar tore it down and Nehemiah rebuilt it. It and Babylon and the Greeks' chief city were great together. Now Babylon and Athens are gone. Today it is great with Rome." He looked to where Roman spears ^{in Antonia} glinted above the impregnable ^{walls} ~~ramparts~~ of the city. Almost impregnable, said the spears, enjoying their moment as Babylon had enjoyed hers. "And it will still be great when Rome has fallen."

"Look!" Mary cried. "Is the Temple afire?" Above the spiked wall a black cloud was rising, ~~high~~

"Micah told them it was enough to love mercy, to do justice, and to walk humbly," Joseph said. "But they still believe the Lord is pleased by the burning of rams and tens of thousands of rivers of oil."

A white-robed Temple attendant came searching along the bridge. He was one of the Levites, priestly aides since the years in the Wilderness where the whole tribe of Levi had been set aside for this service.

"There can't be two like you," he laughed when

he sighted Joseph. "Zacharias told me how you'd look. I'm to take you where you must go."

Joseph protested that the Levite and Zacharias shouldn't have bothered.

"If I were you," the Levite said, "I'd eat something now. This bridge is a lot better place than the crowds will leave you anywhere in the Temple."

"Of course," Mary said, and got out bread and cheese and figs, and fed the baby also while the Levite waited smilingly.

And then there were two to get Mary and the baby, on Briar, through the pushing, shoving crowd and across the bridge. And glad to be across and beyond the ripe odors which were still heady even though thinned out after wafting seventy feet up from the clamorous Tyropoeon Valley~~X~~

They all came to the Temple's main western gate, and the noisy, grumbling but good-natured press of worshippers -- young and old, the poor in tatters of burlap, the rich in warm shawls and immaculate robes -- went into the bedlam of the huge outer court where Gentiles, also, might stand.

Mary slid to the rough pavement and smoothed down her blue robe and stood close to Joseph. Behind, from outside the Temple wall, hoarse shouts rumbled out of the Tyropoeon Valley.

"I'll be back as soon as I've stabled the donkey," the Levite said, and hauled Briar away.

"They say this place holds a hundred thousand," Joseph said. "But I think that is only on the great feast days, Passover, Pentecost and the Feast of the Tabernacle."

¶ On the eastern side of The great Court of the Gentiles ~~was widest on the south, narrowest on the west. On the east stood Solomon's Porch. At least some said it was the proud monarch's very justice seat, although doubters insisted that in all Jerusalem nothing had survived the savage destruction of Nebuchadnezzar. The lofty Sanctuary blocked off the north side of the Court but on the other three, colonnades shaded promenades for all who came, whether to meet friends or gossip or perform religious rites or admire or only⁺ satisfy idle curiosity. On the west the colonnade reef provided an easy avenue along which the Legion could rush from the Fortress whenever trouble threatened. The colonnade pillar~~ which three men with joined hands could scarcely encircle, provided shelter for money-changers[¶] now crying for the business of all within earshot.

Each money-changer sat against a pillar on a padded stool with a big money-box on either hand. One box held only shekels and half-shekels of Temple coinage. The other, in many compartments, held alien money, Greek, Roman, Tyrian, Persian, Egyptian, Syrian. The Temple rejected these because they were stamped with the likenesses of bulls, owls, hawks, horses, and kings and emperors, and violated the com-

mandment against graven images. Temple coins bore only the seven-branched candlestick or a palm branch, or a lily, or Solomon's Temple.

A curly-haired Syrian sidled up to Joseph. "I know the only honest money-changer in the Temple," he whispered.

"I got my Temple shekels long ago when a money-changer came to my village," Joseph explained.

The Syrian kicked in rage. Small dealers had cut into the Temple trade for years by setting up shop in big towns before important feast days, but lately they had been going to even small places, and all the year around.

A crafty man whose speech resembled that of Jerusalem except for a queer accent tugged at Joseph's sleeve.

"Have you got your ticket?" he asked confidentially.

"I don't need one," Joseph said.

"Ah! A Galilean! You're lucky I found you, my friend. Probably nobody else in all this place could understand the lingo you talk."

"I know I don't talk like a Jerusalemite," Joseph said meekly. "But ..."

"You think me a Jerusalemite!" The tout was delighted. "How my accent must be improving!" He dropped his voice to a whisper. "The fact is, I'm a Jew from Egypt, Alexandria." His ^{amazing} ~~crafty~~ look deepened and he waved toward Solomon's Porch where priests stood beside pens and cages which held

sheep, cattle and birds all feeding in calm unawareness of imminent death by sacrifice. "Of course, my poor friend, you need a ticket!" He waved again toward the porch. "Everybody who sacrifices should do it by ticket. You buy it from one of those. But you need me. I can tell you where you can get the best price."

"But ... " Joseph began again.

"Now don't try to tell me, my poor, poor friend, that you intend to bring your own sacrifice! Just imagine thousands of sacrifices being brought by thousands of worshippers, ~~and adding to the~~ ^{this} mob! ~~The jam~~ would be so thick nobody'd ever get up even to the Court of the Women, let alone higher. Nobody with sense brings his own sacrifice. He just chooses from the samples those priests are showing and buys a ticket and hands the ticket to the proper priest at the Altar and the priest makes a proper sacrifice from animals and birds that are ^(Slaughtered) ~~waiting and are brought in~~ as needed."

"I'm sorry," Joseph said, "but we don't need any ticket. One of the Temple priests has already taken care of our sacrifice."

The tout began to wail over time wasted when he might have been elsewhere making an honest penny, but his complaint was cut short ~~and he was brushed aside~~ by the returning Levite.

Again there were two to shield Mary, this time on the walk toward the elevation from which the golden Sanctuary looked down on the great court. The Levite led the way,

but after only a few steps he stopped to stare.

"She never swings her dugs in here unless Herod wants a thing," he said under his breath to Joseph. "What is it now?"

"Who do you mean?" Joseph asked, and Mary, also, looked around ~~curiously~~.

"Herod's sister!" the Levite said scowling, and concealing the movement in the folds of his robe wagged a cautious thumb.

A short distance off ^{Tirzah} ~~Salome~~, herself shielded by four anxious slaves, was flouncing through the crowds.

"So that," Joseph said, "is the princess of the Idumeans!" For all her silks and jangling gold necklaces and jeweled bracelets she looked more like a harridan up out of the gutter, but she was a harridan who made him remember Vedius Rusco's warning and he could not help a worried glance at Mary.

Mary was looking, gently, at ^{Tirzah} ~~Salome~~. "I guess that even a princess can't escape trouble," she said. "Because only trouble almost beyond bearing could make anyone look like that."

The Levite scowled more darkly and angling away to take his charges farther from ^{Tirzah} ~~Salome~~ led on to the massive balustrade guarding the sanctuary elevation. Plaques at all thirteen entrances warned ~~stagnly~~ in Greek, Hebrew, Latin, Egyptian and Syrian:

LET NO ALIEN ENTER WITHIN THE BALUSTRADE
AND EMBANKMENT ABOUT THE SANCTUARY --
WHOEVER IS CAUGHT MAKES HIMSELF RESPON-
SIBLE FOR HIS DEATH WHICH WILL FOLLOW

~~And the Temple police were sharply questioning all who seemed
even remotely ineligible, even many who were Jews as plain as
day. But none questioned Joseph and Mary. They had the Levite.~~

Within the balustrade they faced the Temple buildings, so elevated that from the Court of the Gentiles necks had to crane if eyes were to see well. A high wall offered a second barrier and it was by this wall's gates that worshippers reached the sanctuary proper. The Levite would have taken them around to the Gate of the First-born.

"We'll use the Beautiful Gate," Joseph said. "You must see it, Mary. Besides it lets directly into the Court of the Women and the trumpet-chest to catch your purification pennies is just inside and just behind is the gallery where you'll wait while I fulfill the redemption."

They came to the Beautiful Gate -- two massive doors of shining brass, four or five times as high as Mary's home in Nazareth and three or four times as wide.

"It takes twenty men to swing those doors open in the morning and shut them at night," Joseph said.

~~"Mary said."~~

The gate stood at the top of broad, alternately white and blue marble steps. They took off their sandals, climbed, and passed through and Mary paused uncertainly be-

cause there were thirteen trumpet-shaped chests, each guarded by a severe, white-robed priest.

"What do I do now?" she whispered.

"Yours is the third one," Joseph said. "It's for purification fees only." He ^{patted} ~~touch~~ed her ^{shoulder} ~~cheek~~ in encouragement.

~~Twice a day the fees were divided, half to pay for sin offerings, half for burnt offerings.~~

"I just drop my money in?" Mary whispered.

"Show it to the priest first," Joseph said.

"He may claim you could afford a lamb instead of just turtle doves, but I don't think so; and of course you know you'll never see the doves Zacharias has picked out. Take the ticket ^{the priest} ~~he~~ gives you and wait in the gallery. The redemption ceremony won't keep me ~~away~~ long. It's just two prayers and the payment. But it is performed in the Court of the Priests and women aren't permitted there so I'll have to take the baby. I give him to the priest and the priest gives him back when I pay."

"He nursed just a little while ago," Mary said.

"He'll be as good as gold."

"You'll be all right in the gallery," Joseph said. "It's a good place to watch. You can see ^{across} ~~over~~ the men's court clear to the Altar of Burnt Offerings. Hang onto the ticket the priest gives you. You'll need it."

Mary hesitated. Over by the third trumpet the priest was frowning in her direction. Joseph ^{patted} ~~touch~~ed her ~~cheek~~ again.

"Now give me the boy. And don't let that sour-face over by the trumpet bother you!"

Mary gave a pat or two to the precious bundle and handed it over. Joseph settled it in both arms, fearful that one would not be safe enough.

"Will you watch until I'm in the gallery?" Mary whispered.

"I'll be right on this spot," Joseph promised.

Mary walked to the trumpet. Her gaze met the gaze of the stern priest, and she saw that she had had no need to worry. He hadn't been frowning at her at all. It was something else, maybe just the sun in his eyes. She dropped her pennies, and the priest did not even hint that she could have afforded a lamb. He gave her a ticket and she walked, smiling, to the gallery and seated herself behind the lattice and smiled more warmly as Joseph and her son went on their own errand.

~~The priest at trumpet Number Three caught her eye and raised a reassuring hand, as though her smile had been for him, or as though he were giving a blessing.~~

*R. P. Love
with
Jud. M.
J. J. J.*

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

"He didn't cry, did he?" Mary asked when Joseph returned, still carrying in two careful arms, the son he had redeemed with those long-guarded shekels.

"~~Some did, but~~ ["]not this one," Joseph said, giving the baby to Mary with a [≡]puff of relief. "Have you been all right?"

"I've been fine. When I dropped the pennies into that trumpet, I thought the priest was scowling at me. But he wasn't."

"Everybody in the Temple is scowling today," Joseph said. "I ran into Zacharias and he told me why. Listen!"

Over the noises all around, even over the uproar in the Court of the Gentiles, fresh shouting from the Tyropoeon Valley buffeted the Temple, rising and falling and rising again before it slowly died.

"Chariot races," Joseph said, "in Herod's amphitheatre. The Sanhedrin and the High Priest, too, protested when Herod built the thing. They said that thousands betting, cursing and shouting over gladiators and runners and charioteers so near the Temple, would be sacrilege. They've been protesting ever since. And

whenever games are held all the priests scowl because they feel Herod is deliberately insulting the Temple. And who can blame them?"

"You told me once," Mary said, "that Herod need not have been so hated in Israel; that he might almost have been loved if he had been just a little kind. Why does Herod find it so hard to be kind?"

Joseph shook his head. He might have an answer, but it would be one involving ideas and the wording of ideas did not come easily. Ideas did. Often he was full of ideas about goodness, kindness, mercy, love and the faith which Mary possessed in such abundance. But not the wording. He found himself hoping that Mary's son might have such ideas and the words, too. But as for himself! He flung out a hand.

"I remember a thing," he said haltingly. "Abigail said it. She said it before she became David's wife. It was when she fed and encouraged him. She said that the Lord would make him 'a sure house,' because he fought for the Lord and because evil was not found in him. But some kings never have a sure house because they are evil and never fight for the Lord. I think Herod is such a king."

"It shouldn't be so hard for him to be a little kind," Mary said.

"It's almost time for you to go," Joseph said. The organ was beginning the hymn which called mothers to purification and trumpets were calling through the late afternoon. "It's almost time for the incense to be lighted."

"Tell me again just what I do," Mary whispered.

"Well, you cross the Court of the Women and climb the steps up to the men's court and the gate opens and you go in."

"Not into the Men's court!" Mary protested.

"Not exactly," Joseph smiled. "Just beyond the gate is a wicket. It stops you. But you'll be close enough to see everything that happens at the Golden Altar."

"I think I have it right," Mary whispered. "I stand there with the baby and with all the other mothers and their babies. And the trumpets blow and the organ plays and the chorus sings and the priests chant and the incense is scattered on the Golden Altar."

"That's all!" Joseph smiled. "And ^{when} ~~as soon as~~ the incense cloud ^{is risen} ~~begins to rise~~ you are all through."

"But my ticket!" Mary said. "I'll still have my ticket."

"No you won't," Joseph laughed. "A station man will take it from you as soon as you reach the wicket."

Mary smoothed down the baby's hair, and smoothed her own braids and stood straight in her blue dress embroidered in yellow.

The organ summoned loudly.

"You'd better hurry," Joseph said.

Mary drew her veil and walked across the blue, rust-red and white marble of the Court of the Women. She held her son proudly among the other mothers, young and old, and as

she walked her serenity grew because her son had been given to the Lord and received back from the Lord. She climbed to the Court of Israel, the other mothers with her, their naked feet whispering up the marble steps which now were cold in the sunset chill.

A priest behind the opened gate smiled, and a station man, one of the lay representatives of the people, ~~smiled~~ gestured each woman to a place. Mary found she had a place in front and, just as Joseph had told her, a station man took her ticket although not as though it were important. He dropped it into his pouch without so much as a look.

Right up against the wicket Mary could see everything, could rejoice that she was sharing everything. And rejoice she did. In the trumpets, the organ, the singing, ~~Levites~~, the priestly benedictions and finally the incense floating above the Golden Altar. It was for her and the other mothers that prayers now were floating in a fragrant cloud upward to the Lord.

As the cloud faded she smiled at the flax-haired young mother who stood next.

"Wasn't it wonderful?"

"Wonderful!" The young woman said. She was hardly older than Mary. "It was worth the trip up from Bethlehem and ten times more."

"Your baby behaved beautifully," Mary said.

They all retreated down to the Court of the

with him Zacharias, looking

unfamiliar sub

Women. Joseph was waiting and their Levite guide. ~~impressive in his ceremonial linen coat, girdle and cap.~~

"Simeon has sent for us," Joseph said, not trying to conceal gratification.

"Simeon!"

It was a thing to be called by Simeon, that just old man who worshipped and prayed so constantly that for his worship and his waiting for the Messiah a cell had been set aside down in the bowels of the Temple!

Many cells, vaults and rooms had been chiseled out of rock deep in the Temple's bowels. Safe ones for the treasure of gold and silver. Huge ones for the stores of wine, olive oil and grain. Dry ones for the making and repairing of furniture. Airy, warm ones for the Temple's library, five million scrolls, it was said, containing the wisdom of Judea from the beginning. There were scores of interlocking tunnels, one of which led even to Antonia.

Proud to be called by Simeon, Joseph and Mary followed ~~the Levite~~ ^{Zacharias} down a stairway into the murky underground and, feeling as though they had entered another world, hurried along a tunnel dimly lit by occasional wall-lamps. It was so narrow that Mary kept her elbows spread lest a ragged finger of rock reach out from the wall and hurt the baby. As they hurried they were brushed by a hurrying priest. Their tunnel was the one leading to the Fortress. The return of the priestly vestments was a shame which had to be kept from as many as possible.

~~The Levite~~ ^{Zacharias} stopped before a door. "Here is

Simeon," he said and left them.

O-O

They went in diffidently, Mary first. As she entered, the baby stirred and blinked. It was a very small cell, lighted by a lamp and an overhead grating. It was furnished with a mattress and a blanket. And Simeon was a very small old man.

All men and women, if they live long enough, come finally to those years which erase sex, temperament, even humors. They are not old people. They are merely old. On first sight they have no more identity than crumpled papers left so long out in the weather that all original markings have been scoured off. They are only tracks left in the dust by Time's trailing finger. Simeon was such a crumpled paper, such a track. Above his dry, thin body his face was only two tiny bright buttons among tangled wrinkles, a bare suggestion of nose, ears worn almost to vanishing and a mouth almost sunken out of sight.

And yet, even on such crumpled papers, even in the least of Time's trailing tracks, something may be read. There is that which, on second sight, reveals the true self, a character which shines through. Looking closer we do not say as we had said at first, "The poor, poor old!" With a sense of triumphant ^{Discovery} ~~realization~~ we say, "Why, here is virtue! Here is goodness!" or, sometimes, "Here is beauty!"

As Simeon took three short stiff steps -- he

needed no more to cross his cell -- Mary said to herself, This is truly a good man. And Joseph said, Isaiah must have looked like this when he called on our people to walk in the light of the Lord.

Mary gave the baby into Simeon's arms. He did not take but only received, and he looked down, and the baby blinked ^{up} at him.

Then Simeon turned his eyes upward as though the grating had been a window facing Jerusalem, or even Heaven.

"Lord," he said, "now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace." He fell silent and ^{Joseph and} ~~so did~~ Mary and Joseph, ^{waited} ~~at at last~~ ^{Simeon} he drew an old man's breath, inhaling in slow stages as though each was the last his strength could manage.

"According to thy word," he said, and paused again.

"For mine eyes have seen thy salvation," he went on, "which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel."

Mary looked at Joseph who put his hand on her arm.

Simeon turned toward them and raised his wrinkled old hand, and gave them a blessing and then he said to Mary, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign that shall be spoken against."

Mary was ^{very} still, and the old man leaned forward looking at her closely with his bright old eyes.

"And a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also," he said. I do not know, Mary thought, what he means. But if my soul really is pierced, Joseph will help me and if Joseph is not with me I'll just have to do the best I can alone. And the Lord will help me always!

Simon said something more, about the thoughts out of many hearts being revealed, and he gave the baby back. Mary pressed the warm bundle against her heart.

Outside, in the tunnel, another step sounded and Anna came into the cell. At first Joseph saw only something like a crumpled paper, long out in the weather, but then he thought: Here is beauty!

Anna had had great beauty and its halo remained. She was of the tribe of Asher whose women always had been the most beautiful in Israel, the only ones entirely worthy to be the brides of kings, and among her generation she had been the most beautiful, ~~of all.~~

She looked at the child in Mary's arms, and she too gave thanks, as Simon had done, unto the Lord.

o-o

Another step grew plain, ^{strong} a hurrying step.

"Joseph!" ⁽¹⁾ ~~He said~~

Zacharias bustled in behind that heartily salted and peppered beard. ~~He looked impressive in his ceremonial~~

~~linen coat, girdle and cap.~~

"You have spoken with them?" he said to Simeon.

"And you?" he looked to Anna.

"Yes!" Anna said. Her voice was the ~~brittle~~ snapping of a thin, dry reed.

"I ... " Zacharias was apologetic, "I must take them away."

"We have spoken with them," Simeon gave permission.

"Will you come?" Zacharias said to Joseph.

"Yes, but ... "

"We must hurry!" ~~Zacharias said.~~

"I'll carry the boy," Joseph said to Mary.

Almost pushed by Zacharias they gave quick, embarrassed nods to the old pair, in apology for the precipitate departure.

Out in the tunnel Joseph would have turned back toward the stairway.

"Not that way!" Zacharias said. He looked to Mary. "Do you think the baby can be kept from crying?"

^{but to make sure gave her son}
"Of course," Mary said, ~~and gave him~~ her breast.

"We must be very quiet," Zacharias said.

"What is this all about, Zacharias?" Joseph asked.

"I'm not sure, not really. Except that Herod is behind it."

Mary moved closer to Joseph until she could touch the rough sleeve around his hard arm.

"Herod?" Joseph said.

"Well, his sister! His hag of a sister, ^{Tirzah} ~~Salome~~,
is stopping to talk with some of the mothers coming out
of the Temple."

"You're not taking us to her?"

"Of course not!" Zacharias ~~was indignant~~ "Of
~~course not!~~" He checked a hoot of laughter. "Imagine
what Elizabeth would say if I did!"

"Where are we going?"

"A little ahead this tunnel branches off and the
branch leads down to a house in the Street of the Candlemakers.
You can leave that after dark and be just a family going home
like hundreds more."

They heard steps far behind ~~them~~ as they came to
the entrance of the branch tunnel, then voices.

"Keep going!" Zacharias whispered. ~~"Don't look back!"~~ He
looked back. "That was the hag! I couldn't forget her voice.
Does she dare come down here to trouble Simeon, [?] ~~and Anne?~~" He
urged them along the descending level.

~~"Briar is still where~~ ^{did} ~~the~~ ^{but Briar} ~~Levite~~ ^{stabled him,"}

Mary whispered to Joseph.

^{I don't know} ^{Joseph said} "Can you get us a donkey, Zacharias?" Joseph
~~asked.~~

"I'll get your own animal," Zacharias said.

"And you'll be out of Jerusalem in no time."

Sacrifices

Above in the Court of the Priests the long day of was ending. At the washing place behind the Altar of Burnt Offerings priests were beginning to scrub tired hands and aching feet and the clean-up crew was sloshing water over stained marble tables and the floor. The final contingent of worshippers began to drift back to the Court of the Gentiles, tired fathers, mothers, babies. The touts tried for no more profits but instead stood in nooks counting their day's gain. The money-changers, each by his own column, closed their coffer, awaited the arrival of porters and guards. Beggars sifted slowly through the crowd.

High on the four hundred and fifty foot watch-tower a white-clad Levite raised a golden trumpet and blew a lonely twilight note.