

John
A
Novel

By
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Ndala

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Note

Nothing in this novel is to be construed as an attempt on my part to say that homosexuals should be allowed to be priests. Just as there have been married priests (even the Rock was married), there are good reasons for the Church to require priestly celibacy. And though it is true that there have been many good priests who were homosexual, in the present age, there are very good reasons for excluding those with strong homosexual tendencies from the priesthood.

With that said, I want to point out that there is no evidence that John really had any homosexual tendencies. I “extrapolated,” if you will, from the genius he showed in his writings that perhaps his artistic skill could be, as it often is, associated with a homosexual leaning; and this afforded a basis for struggle, which is necessary in any work of fiction. It also allowed me to say what I think is the correct doctrine on the subject. For those who disagree, all I can say is that objective reason seems to be in my favor. I find it not at all surprising that the official doctrine of the Catholic Church is consistent with what can be concluded from objective reason, as, for example, I have pointed out in *Modes of the Finite*.

I also gave him the characteristics of one with Asperger’s Syndrome, something that apparently some geniuses had.

I will say in the epilogue what in the novel was based on evidence from the Gospels and what is the result of my own fevered brain.

One

Sometimes he wondered if he was just one person. There was, for instance, the John he hated—most of the time: the one who boiled with rage and got into fights, and who found one of his most satisfying “magic moments” in the feel of his fist against flesh, and the sound of the special thump of it, and the cry of pain—especially the cry of pain—when it happened, and who even enjoyed, in a strange sense, the feel of another’s fist against his chest and even his head, as long as he was winning the battle.

Then he did not feel the pain; that came later. In a fight, he felt like the real, true John, and it was only later, when he saw the damage he had done, and his playmate crying and running home, that he realized that this was not, could not be himself, not really. He did not want to cause pain and suffering—except in the midst of the fight, or perhaps at the beginning, when his mind saw everything through a red haze.

That same John was the one who would be doing something that was going badly, and would reach a point where he would scream and throw things and break whatever he was building, and then sit there crying about it. On these

occasions, his father would say, "Very well, John, you have broken your toy. Now you will have the task of fixing it as well as you can. You cannot do anything else until this is done."

"I cannot! I cannot!" he would scream, stamping his foot.

"You can try as hard as you are able," his father would return, "and then go on with whatever you were trying to do with it."

"But it does not *work!*"

"Then you may leave it—*after* you have restored it."

"I cannot!"

"Prove it to me by trying. But I want proof, not simply sitting there and ranting."

Which of course would cause a further rant, which his father would contemplate with maddening calm, and then say, "The sooner you start, the closer you will be to finishing."

And John—even *that* John—knew, after weeping and screaming, that it was no use; he would be able to do nothing but survey the wreckage he had made and make gestures at fixing it. And he also knew that if he could not fix it, after a few hours of continued defeat, he would be given a reprieve. It was unfortunate that his father was a fisherman; it gave him infinite patience, something John knew he eventually had to learn. But he hated it.

As time went on, his brother James, four years older, could often spot when a tantrum was coming, and would get himself behind John and grasp him in a hug, trapping his arms so that he could not move. He would scream and kick, but James was safe behind him—and there was something about the feel of James's body against his that was magic in its own way, and often, after a struggle, brought the crisis to an end.

“There. Is it over?”

“I suppose,” John would say sulkily, not willing to admit that James had subdued him, and not knowing whether he hated him or loved him for it. There was something strange going on there, which he did not understand, and did not trust.

And sometimes, especially when he began to become a man, he contemplated going into a tantrum just to have James grasp him; but he suspected somehow that there was something wrong with this, something dangerous, and he never dared deliberately to attempt it. There were enough occasions when he became frustrated and lost control that he did not really need to pretend doing so. He never spoke of this mysterious feeling, and could seek no guidance about it.

In any case, he hated that John, the John he wished, in his sane moments, did not exist. But there was also John the fisherman, though for a long time he was too young to do more than play at fishing, with James in the little boat that Joseph and Jesus had built just for them, when James had become a man. James rowed at first, because he was bigger, and John, who was only nine at the time, could not manage the oars yet, even though the boat was tiny; so John took the—also tiny—net as they went out onto the “Sea” of Galilee, which was really a huge lake, following their father Zebedee (but not too close, because he was seriously working, and the fish were not to be frightened), so that he could keep an eye on them.

And John—clumsily, it must be said—threw out the toy net, as he had seen his father do in the big boat with the hired hands—and once he had actually caught two fish in it! “I did

it! I did it!” he cried, and James shushed him from behind (John was in the bow, and James, of course, was facing the stern) and his father and the others made angry “Quiet!” gestures from the big boat. It seems they had run into a huge school of fish and they too were making an enormous catch. That was one of the most magic of his magic moments. He never forgot those two fish. Yes, that John was the real John.

Or was it? There was—or were—also the John of the other magic moments: those strange times when he lost himself completely in something—or perhaps *found* himself there, or found something that engulfed him.

In the draper’s shop, for instance, that his mother took him to one time when she had to go to buy some cloth for something she was making, which was a material she could not spin herself. The colors! The reds and blues and that reddish purple that he saw in certain flowers!

He stood entranced, and reached out his small hand to feel the cloth—which was so soft and smooth; it was the tactile equivalent of the colors his eyes saw. And there was even some velvet there, a lovely green, furry thing, like a grassy field made of threads. He lost himself in the sheer sensation, and had to be dragged out of the shop by his mother, looking back at the rich profusion he was leaving behind. She said to Zebedee that night, “What a strange, strange boy! Who ever heard of a *boy* being entranced by cloth!”

And once he went to the market where they sold flowers, and it was the same, except the shapes and the smells!—so different from the smells of the lake and fish, which were magic in their own right—added their dimensions to the colors and textures, and John—*that* John—was transported. Whenever

they were at the market, he would wander over to where the flowers were sold, and drink them in as much as he could. His mother looked on with wonder and a touch of worry—which was alleviated when he came home with a black eye and bloody knuckles, and replaced with a different worry.

And there was, of course, the magic time of watching his boat (James's too, of course, but that did not count) be built. How the carpenter carefully sighted along the boards to be sure that they were straight, and showed his son Jesus where to put the curved ones so that they would match the curvature of the hull and not put strain on the wood; how the two of them—cooperated is the only word—with the wood and the other materials rather than fighting them to make them do their will, with the result that they helped the boat come together, as if this was what the wood itself wanted.

Joseph, John observed, discussed things often with Jesus, who was a couple years older than James, but still beardless; and it was usually a real discussion, not simply teaching the boy but getting his opinion, and frequently following it—though Jesus never acted as if he were teaching his father. It was just that he seemed to see things that his father did not notice.

When the boat was nearly done, Jesus called John over as he was placing a plank in the center of the bottom, above the ribs, for the sailors to use to keep their feet out of the bilge. “This is the John board,” Jesus said, showing him where it was going. “When you get into the boat, you step on this board, lest the boat tip, and then go along it to that one up there (pointing to the bow), where you will man the net (putting just the slightest emphasis on “man”).” And the board became magic also, something John recognized whenever he entered

and felt it beneath his bare feet.

Joseph's wife Mary (and *she* was magic) came down from Nazareth while they were busy with the boat, to supply their food and other needs. John's parents let them stay in his house rather than the tent they had brought, or having them traipse all the way up the hill back to Nazareth every day. It made things the least bit cramped, though their house was larger than most, as befitted their prosperous position in Capernaum, but they all got along well, and the evening meal was full not only with talk of fishing and the size of the catch, but of the boat and how it was coming along. The women, of course, compared notes on how to supply the food and clothes, and on the best way to care for the house and the animals (the carpenters' donkey came down with them—and Mary rode him back when she needed something or other—but the other animals were left in Nazareth, where the neighbor tended them.)

John, who was not exactly shy, but who had a hard time with other people (especially groups of people), found Mary very easy to talk to; even more than his mother. It was not that she understood him (no one understood him, least of all himself), but she accepted him absolutely, and acted interested in what was going on in his head. He mentioned to her his experience at the flower market, and the draper's shop, and, unlike his mother, she did not act as if he was "strange," and let him go on and on about the different pieces of cloth, and how they were magic, until finally his mother came by and said, "John, that is enough! Let the poor lady rest a bit!" and then, turning to Mary, she remarked, "He would keep you all day, once he starts on one of his favorite subjects."

John's face flamed with chagrin, but Mary said, "No, it was very interesting, really; I had something like the same experience, and it brought back to me the first time I went to the florist. I nearly could not breathe! And the smells!" It made John feel as if he was not really alone, and perhaps was not very strange after all, or if he was that it did not matter. He too got lost in smells, and not only the smell of flowers: the smell of the water in the lake, or the rain, and even the smell of fish, the smell of the wood of the boat, the smell of earth after a rain, the smell of the grain during harvest. He would stand there in the field, breathing in the green blood of the cut wheat and the grass for the animals in winter, and marvel at it—and then go into the barns and granaries, where it had transformed itself into a new, ripe something-or-other; and he could understand how the oxen would want to eat it. (He tried eating it himself, and was suddenly glad he was not an ox.)

There were sounds, too, that pulled him into them, and took him into a different world, where his body was only a shell and his spirit was in its proper element, whatever that was. Something as apparently simple as the lowing of cattle off in the distance, punctuated by the barking of a dog, with the obligato of the birds flying above, the soft percussion of the horses' hooves in the dirt of the road off at a distance, with a whinny every now and then to answer the dog. It fit together somehow, and it *meant* something—something even more mysterious than the psalms in the synagogue.

And those made him cry, sometimes, because they had words, and the words *did* mean something—something infinitely beyond him—and occasionally the tune and the notes of the lyre and flute said the same thing, and he was over-

whelmed. He could not stand it.

“John! Hush!” whispered his mother, as he broke down in tears that he tried to keep silent. And she would shake her head at the strange, strange boy, and thank the Master that he was basically an obedient boy, or he would have been impossible to rear.

John once overheard her discussing him with Mary, who said, “Fear not. He will do well. He will perhaps do well at many things. From what you told me about the synagogue, you might consider having him study to be a rabbi. I suspect that he will not be happy, finally, as a simple fisherman.”

“But he loves it!”

“True. But it satisfies only a small part of his soul; his soul, I think, is *very* large, and as he grows and learns, it will satisfy him less and less, or I am much mistaken.”

“A rabbi! We *do* know Annas, who looks some day to be the head of the Sanhedrin; he is very well connected. I had never thought of such a thing! Do you think he could do it?”

“Try teaching him to read, and see if he takes to it.”

John did not hear what his mother replied, he was so excited at the prospect of being able to decipher the scrolls with their strange marks. That was the magic of magics! But how would he learn to read? Who would teach him? His father could read but a few words, and only the words he needed for his fishing business, and he could barely decipher “Hear, O Israel, The Lord your God is the only God” because he knew what it meant, not because the words spoke to him.

Everything spoke to John—the landscape, the smells, the colors, the sounds, and now marks on papyrus would begin to speak! And with real words! Words that one heard with one’s

eyes! Incredible!

But he said nothing about it, especially to James, who might be jealous; he was the elder brother, after all, and it might all come to nothing. But he hugged it inside himself, and longed for it, especially on the Sabbath in the synagogue, when the music and the words spoke mysteries to him.

Two

The **LEARNING TO READ** did not happen at once, however, and as time went on he almost forgot about it. After he became a man at age thirteen, he began to be big enough to row the boat, and occasionally took over the job from James, whose father had told him to share the tasks so that both would know all about fishing.

James was, truth be told, considerably less awkward than John, and the net that got thrown out by him more and more often brought in fish, rather than sinking in a lump to the bottom and having to be hauled out empty, as happened so often with John. He *was* improving, but there was no question but that James was a natural fisherman in a sense that John was not, much as he liked the occupation.

The boat, though really still a toy, was a chore for John's young muscles to manage, and he woke up that first night crying from the pain in his arms and chest. His mother gave him a drink of a concoction of willow bark boiled in vinegar which seemed to lessen the pain, and let him sleep. The next day, the two young men went back to their previous roles, which they kept for two or three days, and then switched back.

After several sessions of this, John did not ache so much when he came home; and he swelled with the pride of teamwork when they brought in a pail of several fish that “they” had caught. James, who was fond of John, joined in the fiction that they had done it all together, and John glowed.

All that rowing made him strong for his age—he was fourteen now—and it became less and less arduous as time went on (they never went far from home, actually; their father left them now, and went off to the promising spots by himself with the hired hands). And a year or two later, there was talk that the boat was getting too small for the “real fishermen” that they were, and that Zebedee was thinking of finding a used boat for two that they would be able to manage.

But John’s mother had not forgotten what Mary had said, and had ambitions for John that went far beyond what John himself had dreamed. She pictured him as the advisor to the head of the Sanhedrin, to a successor (perhaps twice or thrice removed) to her distant relative Annas. And, in the way of women, she managed to make Zebedee think that his youngest son was perhaps cut out for greater things than fish, and so one day a neighbor, who could read, took John aside after he came home from fishing and asked him if he would like to learn the alphabet.

John, of course, leaped at the chance, and the wax tablet became a new magic for him, as he wrote the letters and erased them with the blunt side of the stylus, saying their names over and over to himself and the sounds his tutor told him they said.

But with John, learning was not always a one-way street. “Why is this a letter?” he asked once, pointing to the *aleph*. “It says nothing. Are letters not supposed to *say* something?”

“Well, it says nothing itself, but it stops what comes before it. You will see.”

“I do not understand.”

“Be patient. You cannot learn everything at once.”

Then there was the *teht* (which looked almost exactly like the *mem*) and the *taw*, pronounced the same, as were the *kahf* and the *kofh*. “Well, not *exactly* the same,” said the tutor, and pronounced them very carefully—exactly the same, as far as John could tell. “Why have two letters that say the same thing?”

“Because there are two, that is all.”

“But it makes no sense.”

“Simply learn them.”

“But it makes no *sense!*”

“Do you wish to learn to read, or not?”

“Of course I do!”

“Then learn them.”

And John muttered to himself, “But I want to *know!*” but he had enough brains to keep silence, because it was obvious to him that his teacher did not know, and would never admit that he did not know why these things were so.

And this was all well and good, but it was not *reading*. He got so he could recognize all the letters, and give the sounds they made (when they made any), but it took him a while to put them together and make words out of them.

Especially because, “Where are the other letters?” he asked when the neighbor sounded out words.

“The written letters are only the closed ones. The open ones you have to supply yourself.”

“That is silly! Why not write them all down?”

“They do in other languages, but this is the way we do things.”

It struck John that “the way we do things” was not necessarily the best way, though his tutor obviously thought so, especially when he scornfully remarked, “And the Greeks and the Romans even write backwards!” John had a suspicion that whoever invented written languages was half a fool, no matter what the language was.

But as time went on, he began to puzzle out the words, and then sentences, and could decipher even some of the Scripture. When, after a long time, he first picked up a scroll (the neighbor, who was very wealthy, had quite a supply of writings) and did not know what it was, and then actually read a few words and recognized them, that he was actually reading a psalm, he almost fainted with joy.

He was, of course, fishing during the day all this while—which had stretched into years. His father had found a two-man boat that looked decent and given it to them, taking the old, tiny craft and putting it as a kind of museum piece beside their house, with their miniature net draped over it. He “could not bear to sell it,” he said, and proudly showed it to everyone who came to visit.

It was hard work rowing the larger craft, but John did it with a will, knowing that now it was real man’s work, and not something one did simply for practice. James became quite adept with the net, and John developed a knack for rowing that made little disturbance of the water, so as not to scare away any fish; so their roles became fairly well fixed—and John “went from strength to strength” because of his work at the oars.

One day, when he was about fifteen, he saw at the fish

market one of the twins of another fishing business, a boy of about his own age, who seemed to be wanting to strike up a conversation, but did not know what to say. "Where is your brother?" he asked.

"Oh, he is talking to a rich person who sits on the shore every day under a fig tree and does nothing. He is learning to read from him."

The tone of his voice did not prompt John to volunteer that he also was learning to read in his time off from work, and so he said, "I am John, Bar-Zebedee."

"My name is Samuel. My brother is Thomas."

"And your father is...?"

"Oh. Sorry. Malachi."

"Ah, yes. We have heard of him. We are partners, you know, with Simon and Andrew Bar-Jona, and they have spoken of Malachi as quite skilled."

"He is. We have our own boat, but he takes the big one with the hired hands. We manage, but of course our business is not as large as yours, with two families."

"Yes, we do rather well. Today's catch was not a particularly large one, but most of the time, we bring in many fish."

"Well, but I must go and help my father. It was a pleasure to meet you."

"The pleasure was mine. I hope we will see each other often."

"I am sure we will. Peace." And he left. John got the impression that he *would* see more of him, because he seemed to be somewhat jealous of the fact that Thomas had a friend (and a rich one) and he did not. "I may not be rich," John said

to himself, “—at least not *very* rich—” (he was proud of the fact that they were quite prosperous), “but I know how to fish, and I will wager Thomas’s friend does not—and *I* know how to read, also!”

And sure enough, Samuel passed a few moments with him the next time they happened to meet at the market. He was not a very loquacious individual, and John had to carry most of the conversation, discussing different places for finding fish and different techniques for catching them, and so on. But he found Samuel quite an attractive person: strong and muscular like himself, because he also did the rowing in his boat.

And they seemed comfortable enough in each other’s company, and John was glad to have a friend who was not a partner in his own business, with whom he could speak without feeling that he was being taught something by his “elders and betters.” True, they never tried to lord it over him, but the fact was that they *were* older and more skilled than he was, and, like most people, could not keep themselves from giving advice even when the advice was obvious and clearly already known to the target of it.

This fact that John was not really as good a fisherman as most of the rest of them (he *was* better than two or three of the hired hands, to be sure) made the business rather less attractive to him than he thought initially it would be. This was, of course, exacerbated by the progress he was making in reading, which was becoming more and more magical as the days and especially years went on, and reading became more and more like listening to someone, and less and less like decoding a puzzle.

One day, he was reading Ezekiel, which he had never

heard before in the synagogue, and was completely entranced by the fantastic imagery of the animals with four different faces and wings, and wheels within wheels, and the sapphire throne with the amber humanlike figure sitting upon it, with a rainbow glowing about him. "How glorious!" he said aloud, prompting his mother, on the other side of the room, to pause with her distaff and say, "What?" whereupon he answered, "Oh, it is nothing; simply something that I was reading." She glowed as if there were a rainbow emanating from her.

She was convinced that John was going to be a great scholar, and was subtly insinuating as much to her husband, trying to induce him one day in the not-too-distant future to see if he could study with Annas, perhaps, to become a rabbi. He could not, of course, be a priest, because they were not of the tribe of Levi, let alone descendants of Aaron; but there was nothing preventing him from becoming learned in Scripture. Because here he was, teaching himself!

John devoured the book of the prophet, if one can say "devoured" to someone who had to puzzle painfully through practically every word. But every word was magic, and worth the effort. When he finished, he asked his tutor if there was another book of the same sort, and the tutor answered, "Well, you might be interested in Daniel. There are some rather nice adventures in it."

So he began on Daniel, and found out about the three young men who were ready to brave a fiery furnace rather than repudiate the Master, and who were miraculously saved; and then how Daniel interpreted the writing on the wall, and then there were more fantastic visions. John was enthralled, and determined to do something like that himself one day.

And when he met Samuel a few days later, he said confidentially, "I know what I am going to be when I get old enough!"

"What?" said Samuel.

"A prophet! A great prophet like Ezekiel or Daniel!"

Samuel laughed. "You sound like Thomas. He never said he wanted to be a prophet, but he thinks he is going to be a scribe or a law-expert or something."

"Well, why not?"

"Why not? Us?"

"Why not indeed! David was merely a shepherd, and they are a far lower class than fishermen. And Amos, I think it was, was a dresser of sycamores! Can you imagine someone shepherding trees?"

"Who is Amos?"

"One of the prophets. I read something he wrote the other day, and my teacher told me about him."

"You read?"

"I—well, I am learning. But the point is—"
The world is full of people who want to be scholars!"

The tone of contempt (jealousy?) of this stung John a little, and he said, "What is wrong with it?"

"What is wrong with fishing?"

"Nothing. But the *point* I was trying to make is that what we are when we start out matters little. I see no reason why Thomas could not be a scribe or a law-expert, or why I could not be a prophet. One never knows."

"Oh, I suppose I have no problem with it. And in a way, I am rather proud of Thomas. He seems to read well, and perhaps will do great things some day. I hope so."

This was rather a long speech for Samuel, and John could see that he was really more proud of Thomas than he admitted, and so he said, "So now you have two people, a brother and a friend, that you will be able to point to some day and say, 'I knew them when they were but fishermen.'"

Samuel did not answer for a while, and finally said, "I truly hope so."

"What? I something wrong?"

"Oh—it is nothing."

"There *is* something wrong!"

"No, not really. I think. I hope not."

"Tell me about it."

"I cannot, John, I cannot. It might be nothing at all. Perhaps some day I will tell you."

And that was that, at least for that day and several other days. Samuel was clearly worried about something, and apparently something connected with Thomas, but John could elicit nothing from him. He thought about it while he was fishing with James, but not knowing what the problem was, he could find nothing to satisfy himself.

In any case, the next morning, he had a new worry. He had had a dream that night, in which Samuel came to him and told him about Thomas, and then hugged him and, instead of weeping on his shoulder, held him tight and looked earnestly into his eyes. Their hips were pressed together, and John experienced what is called a "wet dream." He had had some before this, of course, but this was the first time that he had paid attention to the fact that the one who in the dream caused the explosion was a man.

His father had haltingly told him about such things, but

it was in the context of women, which set John to wondering if something was wrong with him, and what he had done to bring it about, and what he could do about it. There was nothing effeminate about Samuel; he had no mincing ways, and was strong and bigger even than John.

John was aware, of course, of effeminate men and boys; some of them were quite conspicuous in their delicate movements (and, it must be said, in their ogling of muscled boys like John). They disgusted him, and it shocked him to think that he might at heart be one of them.

He could not consult anyone on this; he burned with shame and chagrin even at the thought of bringing up the subject. The only thing he could think of was to pray over it, and to redouble his efforts at developing his manly body.

Three

The day after he confronted this problem, however, a new complication emerged, when his father told him and James, “The hired hands of Simon and Andrew are sick, and they need help. I told them you could go out with them. Do you think you can manage? It will be serious work, you know.”

“Of course we can,” said James, and John echoed the sentiment, with a mixture of elation and trepidation. He was almost sixteen, and growing fast (and getting somewhat less awkward), at that age where one is convinced of one’s own ability, and at the same time afraid to test it.

And they would be in the same boat with Simon and especially Andrew. Simon, the older brother, was considerably shorter than Andrew, who was positively huge, with an enormous chest and arms like a blacksmith. Neither had paid much attention to James, and especially to John, whom they both thought of as nothing but a boy, but Andrew seemed friendly enough, and John immediately took to him. Andrew looked down at him (John’s head reached his chest, and said, “So you are the scholar.”

“Well, I read a little.”

“Zebedee tells me you will not be with us much longer; you will be going to Jerusalem to study to be a rabbi.”

John’s eyes widened. His father had told him nothing of this. “Indeed?” he managed to say finally.

“Oh, has he not told you? He knows that Simon and I are going to Jerusalem next month, and he asked us if we would mind taking you with us, so that you could be introduced to—someone named Annas, I think he said.”

“My mother is some kind of relative of his.”

“Who is this Annas?”

“I know not, for certain. I think he is a priest, and even in the Sanhedrin, and I think some kind of important person there. My mother thinks he might be able to help me, I believe.”

“Well, if your father has not told you, do not mention that I spoke of it. It may come to nothing.”

And John kept his silence, thinking that communications were probably going back and forth, and so the whole matter was doubtless still up in the air. But that day, it was doubly hard to concentrate on the fishing; the future kept getting mixed up with what he was doing, and he did not acquit himself particularly well.

Because there was another distraction, also. He was standing right behind Andrew as he rowed, making the nets ready for James and Simon to cast, being sure there were no tangles, so that the nets would fall into a neat trap for the fish. And, since it was a hot day, they had all stripped for comfort. As he straightened out the nets, he could not help but notice Andrew’s immense back, with its rippling muscles, and there

was a magic about it—a magic rather like that he felt when James used to come and hug him to keep him from breaking things in one of his tantrums. But this, especially with his recent discovery, was a magic that was not something to be cultivated, he was certain.

He felt no desire to *do* anything specific with Andrew, beyond, perhaps, hugging him; he had in fact no notion of what a man would do with a man; but he was convinced that if he gave in to the desire, he would discover things that he definitely did not want to find out. But the fact was that there was a kind of vague longing about the whole matter, and it was extremely strong; he had to fight himself to make everything seem perfectly natural.

And after the day was over, Andrew, walking beside John, put his huge, sweaty arm on John's shoulder, with his hand grasping the top of his arm, and pulled him over to himself. "We make quite a team, do we not?" he said, with a smile.

"Well, I tried," John managed to say. He found it difficult to breathe with Andrew holding him thus; it was a dangerous, possibly fatal, new magic that stirred him greatly.

But Andrew, fortunately, did not notice anything. He gripped his biceps, and said, "Perhaps you could spell me at the oars every now and then."

"I would—I would be happy to do so, if you think I could."

"Oh, I think you could manage very well. If you can row your own boat by yourself, you can, especially with that arm of yours, do all right with this one, unless a storm comes up."

John glowed; he could not help it; but the glow made him very nervous. But again Andrew did not see. He gave him

a little punch in the shoulder as he parted, and said, “We will see you tomorrow also, I think. The two you are replacing said they were getting better this morning, but they will need at least another day or two.”

That night, John found it difficult to fall asleep. Not only did the prospect of going to Jerusalem to start a new life fill his mind, the feel of Andrew’s arm across his shoulder and his grip upon his biceps kept intruding on his consciousness. It was as well he had worked so hard; his fatigue finally conquered the distractions. And, to his great relief, he found that he did not have one of his dreams that night.

The next day, John also went out with Simon and Andrew, and this time did a bit of rowing in the calm waters after they had reached their destination. John knew, of course, how to ply the oars in such a way that there was minimal disturbance to the fish; and Andrew clearly knew how to arrange the nets so that they could easily be cast. He did not say that he was giving John the job of rowing so that he could take the job John had and expedite the number of fish caught, but the number itself spoke volumes to John. He sighed, but such was life.

Once again afterwards, Andrew rested his enormous arm on John’s shoulder and remarked at what a good team they made, saying that probably that was the last day they would be thus together, and that, though he hoped no one would become sick again, if ever anyone did, he knew whom to look to for help. James was also there, and received what he said with affectionate understanding, and they went on to the market to sell their catch.

John was quite concerned about how he felt when

touched by someone like Andrew. The men obviously made nothing of it but a gesture of friendship, but to John it was much more—but not something he could understand, and definitely something he was afraid of. He began to be convinced that there was something wrong with him, perhaps connected with how flowers and colors were magic, which did not seem to affect the other men the same way. It worried him greatly. But again, he felt he had to keep it to himself. Perhaps it would go away in time. Perhaps everyone went through a stage like this—though no one ever seemed to mention it. But that might be because they too were ashamed to speak of it. He might be normal after all. At least he did not mince about.

—But it turned out that he was not the only one who was worried. He saw Samuel in the market, clearly distressed; he barely answered when John greeted him.

“What is it, Samuel?”

“Oh—nothing.”

“No, there is something very wrong. You can tell me; I am your friend. Perhaps I can help.”

“I doubt if anyone can help.”

“Try me.”

“It is—no, I cannot.”

“Is it something about Thomas?”

Samuel was silent. John had clearly hit too close to the mark. “Is he ill?”

“No. No, not ill, exactly. But—”

“But what? I will tell no one.”

Samuel looked at him, his eyes full of tears. “It is just—John, I am so worried about him! He is—he is such a great man in so many ways; he reads every night, and reads

well! And—and he knows so much, but—” and he broke down in sobs.

John did not know what to do. He stood there with an expression of extreme distress on his face as he watched Samuel try to recover his self-possession. When he had quieted down, he said, gently, “But what?”

“But he—but he—Oh, John, he drinks! At first it was nothing, or not much, but he—that Nathanael must be buying wine for him! He never has any money, though we earn much from our father, and he uses my clothes; he must be spending it all on wine—and he has been drinking more and more. I am sure of it; he thinks I do not see him even in the boat taking a drink out of a pouch he carries under his cloak. I row, because he *used* to be much better at casting the net than I, but now—and so I am facing the stern and he is in the bow, and so he does not think I can see him. But I do, often. And it is more and more often. And he is destroying himself! I can see it!

“A while ago, something happened, maybe one of his friends said something, because he no longer speaks clearly, and he—he—*staggers* when he moves sometimes. Even Abba notices it, and he never sees *anything*! But he will not admit that he is drunk, and says nothing to him. He caught him once drinking years ago when he was a little boy and whipped him, and thinks that that was enough, and that he had quit for good! He is blind!

“But anyway, I guess a friend said something, and he apparently stopped. But it was horrible! The least little thing made him furious, and—and I could see that he was *trying* and I put up with him as long as I could stand it—several days—and finally I told him that whatever he was doing, he had

better stop before we all went mad.

“And it *was* better for a while. But he has gone back to it, and now he is even worse than he was before! I am just frantic! I know not what to do!”

John was shocked, not least by this long recital from someone who normally said little more than three consecutive words. It must indeed be terribly serious.

“How *dare* he!” he cried. “Does he not *see* what he is doing to you—and I am sure to the rest of your family?”

“He cannot see it, I am certain. John, he is a good man at heart; he has no idea what he is doing to himself! I am at a complete loss! I love him so much—he is my other self, after all!—I would give my *life* if I could save him!”

“Nonsense!”

“I mean it! I would die happily, if I knew that he would no longer be the slave of this demon he has inside him!”

“Have you told him he must stop? Have you told him you know?”

“I—I have not had the courage, John. He might go back to being what he was when he tried to stop before, and he was simply impossible! Or he might—I know not. He probably will deny that there is anything wrong! I am sure he does not see how terribly serious it is! His hands shake now so that he can hardly hold the net!”

“You *must* confront him! You *must* tell him that all this must stop, and tell him that you will do anything you can to help him do so! You *cannot* let him destroy himself and *you* also. I can see it! He is ruining your life!”

“I cannot do it! I cannot!”

“Nonsense! You *must*! Who else will do it?”

“No, really, John—”
 Listen to me, Samuel. Listen. The next time you go out in the boat—tomorrow—
 John—“Tomorrow! You must! You know you must! Tomorrow, as you are about to start out, you ship the oars, and turn to him and tell him that this must stop, that he is wrecking his life and will kill himself and destroy you and your whole family. Make him see how *serious* this is. He is probably blinded by his drinking and cannot see it. But tell him that you will no longer be a party to it! If he does not stop, and *now!* you will denounce him to your father and tell your father to—to disown him, or something, to not let him work for him again, to let him go and beg for his own food!”
 John, how could I do that? I *love* him! He is my *brother!* How could I stand to see him *begging?*”

I do not mean that you must actually *do* it, merely *say* it. He *must* see that this is a matter of life and death, for it *is!* *His* death, because if he goes on thus, he will kill himself. If not directly from drinking, he will cause some terrible accident, and you will both drown! But what you *can* do is grab that pouch of his that he has hidden in his cloak and fling it into the sea!”

“How could I do that?”

Simply *do* it! You know where he has it hidden. Reach over and *take* it! And throw it away! I *will* not have you both be lost because of him, and because you were afraid to *do* something!”

“But—” He paused.

“Samuel, you *know* that something must be done *sometime!* And every day that goes by will only make it worse! You *must* show him how *serious* you are! How serious the whole situation is!”

Samuel looked at him, and said softly. "You are right, I know. It is much worse now than the other time he tried to stop. Soon it will be impossible; I can see that."

"Then it must be done now! You can do it; I know you can!"

"I wish I believed that."

"You know you can. *I* know you can. Fear not. I will be praying for you."

"We are not very religious, but—but if I ever needed prayers, it is now!"

"Fear not. The Master loves us, and he will do what is best for everyone. You will see."

"I would I had your faith!" cried Samuel. John was rather surprised that he had it himself. But he *did* believe that somehow or other God brought good even out of evil.

"Now go. All will be well. You will see." He put his hand upon Samuel's back as he turned, and then Samuel, his head hung down, walked away without a word.

All the others had long since gone home, and John himself turned homeward, still full of fury against Thomas, who had caused such distress to his very good friend. He hoped that Samuel would have the courage to do what he had urged—and it never occurred to him that it might possibly not be the wisest or even the right course.

Not then.

That night he prayed very hard that Samuel would be given the strength and the wisdom to say what needed to be said, and especially to do what needed to be done: to destroy his supply of wine. He had heard of people who drove themselves mad with wine, and saw things and people who

were not there. This must not be allowed to happen!

It took him a great while to go to sleep that night, and the next morning, he longed to go over to the place where he knew the twins moored their boat and see what happened, but he had to work. It turned out that it was another day—and, he was told, the last day—in the boat with Simon and Andrew, and he rowed once again, after Andrew had brought them to what he thought was a promising spot.

They did not catch quite so many fish that day, and John was glad that he was at the oars, so that the catch could not be his fault in any way. He was still learning, and needed practice the older men had; he was still just barely sixteen, and even James was younger than most of them, who were in their twenties—some, Simon, for instance, even thirty-one, he had heard. Andrew told him that he himself was twenty-five, almost ten years older than John; and John *felt* himself a child beside them.

But in any case, he was going to be a prophet, not a fisherman, and so if he were less than perfect at it, it would not matter in the long run.

All this took his mind off Samuel; there was too much to do. But when they reached the market, and Samuel was not there, John wondered what had happened.

Four

BUT THIS WAS AGAIN PUT OUT of his mind at the evening meal that night, when John's father told him that Andrew and Simon were going to Jerusalem in a month or so (which John already knew, of course), and that he had arranged for John to accompany them, and while he was there, to see Annas, with the possibility that he might next year begin studies to be a rabbi. "I have had communications with him, and he seems to think it might be achieved. If you would write for me a letter of introduction that I will dictate, then I can sign it, and have you bring it to him. You can be my scribe."

John burst with pride. "I will do my very best, Abba."

"I am sure you will; and it will be satisfactory. I may even tell him who took down the letter."

John could hardly contain himself. A whole new life! His mind was filled with impossible visions; he pictured himself an old man, writing down revelations of winged creatures and seas of glass.

But his reverie was shattered by a neighbor who came in to tell them that Samuel and Thomas were missing, and that Malachi was looking for volunteers for a search party. John

leaped up, and James and Zebedee joined the neighbor. It was already dark, and they went to the boats, with the idea that an accident had happened on the lake.

But before they got far, someone shouted from the shore that the search was over. John's heart leaped, and then sank when the man shouted, "One of them is dead—I know not which, they are so the same. They were found on the shore."

"Is the other one safe?" John shouted, hoping that it was Samuel. But what happened to Thomas?

"Malachi found them, and he is saying nothing. He wishes no assistance. He says that he will take care of it himself. We are to go home, he says. He is, of course, devastated."

So they re-anchored the boats, and went back to their houses, wondering what had happened, and why Malachi did not want their help. At least one of his sons was dead, and the other must be injured or something. No one could understand it

—but John.

He very much feared that Samuel had followed his advice that morning and confronted Thomas, and that they had fought—and Thomas must have killed him.

He tried not to believe it. "But how could a drunk kill that strong man?" Surely Samuel could not have killed Thomas! He would never have done such a thing; he had said that he would give his life if it would save Thomas! No, it must be Samuel who was dead. But it must have been an accident! Thomas would not *kill* his brother for telling him what he needed to be told! Something else must have happened.

And John kept inventing useless scenarios, as one does when one knows no facts and simply is trying to make sense

out of something that cannot make sense. He even once railed against the Master for letting such a thing happen. “How could you permit it? You say that you love us and wish the best for us! How could *this* be the best for anyone? For *anyone*? Samuel, the good brother, is dead, and the drunk still lives. And I will wager, has drunk himself into insensibility, and his father found him thus, and could not face the disgrace of having anyone else see him in that condition! And *now* what will happen? It is the worst of the worst!”

“And it is *my* fault! If I had not been so furious, and had let myself *think*, I could probably have seen that the very *worst* thing to do would be to confront a drunk so suddenly with what he was doing—and in a *boat*! I actually told him to do it in a *boat*, in that little two-man boat they had, ready to tip over at the slightest carelessness—and I told him to grab the pouch and fling it into the sea! It would have been bound to upset the boat! How could I have been so *stupid*?”

And these and similar thoughts went marching through his mind the whole night, and when he rose the next morning, they were confirmed by the rumors that had spread. It seemed that Samuel and Thomas were found on the shore near where they were accustomed to anchor their boat, and the boat, and even the oars, had drifted up beside them, the boat, some said, overturned, while others said it had been righted and beached.

Thomas, it was said, was naked, and was completely drunk, with an empty wine pouch of some sort over his privates. This was attested to by a companion of Malachi, who only caught a glimpse of the situation before Malachi bellowed for him to leave immediately, that he would see to everything himself and wanted no help, no help at all.

Before he was driven away, the man got the briefest of looks at Samuel's head, with a huge ugly gash on it; it seemed to him that he would have to have bled quickly to death.

Those who had known or suspected that Thomas had a drinking problem understood and sympathized with Malachi, who they later watched from a considerable distance (out of sight of him) put a covering over Thomas and carry him, all but a corpse, the short distance to their house, after which he came back for the body of poor Samuel, and took him inside also. He then came back, and some said righted the boat and put the oars inside it, and wept over it as he beached it properly.

And then went in. They saw him no more that day.

The following day, which happened to be a Sabbath, they did not, of course, go out to fish; but they probably would not have gone in any case, in sympathy for the tragedy, which had stunned the whole fishing community. While at the synagogue, they heard that the funeral for Samuel was to take place on the morrow. Zebedee, of course, said that he and his family would attend.

John doubted that he would have been able to go out fishing that day; he doubted that he would ever be able to go fishing again, or do anything else. He spent both days moping and cursing himself.

But for some reason Jesus's mother had heard of the accident, and, because of the ties she had with Zebedee and the boat her husband built, she came to the funeral. She of all people was the one John could talk to about this, and when he saw her at the side of the congregation, he thanked the Master for bringing her there. She would know what to tell him; she

could make some sense out of this disaster, if anyone could.

After the ceremony was over, she made, in her quiet way, to return to Nazareth, merely offering—like everyone else—brief condolences to Thomas's parents (Thomas was not there; John wondered if he were ill—or still drunk). They obviously were not to be consoled; the jolt they had received was so great that they were numb and could barely speak, and merely wanted to get everything over and done with and return home.

John had already seen them, and, incapable of saying anything, merely held a hand of each and looked tearfully into each face, turning away before he broke down completely. The mother's face spoke volumes, but the father was like flint, and merely grunted whenever sound was called for. Everyone did what had to be done, because it had to be done, but did no more, the parents because they were incapable of it, and everyone else not to cause any more distress than absolutely necessary.

As soon, however, as he saw Mary leave the parents, he went up to her and said, "Might I speak with you apart for a moment, my lady?"

"John, is it? My goodness, you are a man indeed, now!"

"It is John—or what is left of him."

"What is the matter? Come, let us go over here and sit on this bench."

They sat down, and John looked around. "Do you think anyone will hear?"

"No one is paying any attention, and they are all going off to their homes. We will be as private here as we could be anywhere."

John looked down at his hands, and said nothing.

“How can I help you?” Mary said soothingly.

“I know not if anyone can help me; but I must speak to someone, and you have been so kind to me.” He lapsed into silence again.

“What is it, John? Is it something you did?”

He looked into her face, and suddenly tears gushed from his eyes, and he blurted, “Oh, my lady, I—I think I killed him!”

“Samuel?”

John wept. She waited until the storm was over, and said, “Why do you think that?”

“You see, I—the day before, I—he told me that Thomas drank, and—and I told him that he must confront him and take his pouch of wine and throw it into the sea, and—and it seems he did do so, and—I should have *realized* that confronting him in that tiny boat would upset it, and apparently it did do so and hit Samuel on the head somehow, they say he had a big gash on his head and must have bled to death from it, and if I had not been such a *fool!* it would never have happened!” He burst into tears again.

Mary waited patiently once again, and then said, “Would you say that Thomas killed his brother?”

“Do you mean do I think he tried to murder him?”

“Or wanted him dead. It seems likely, think you not, that it was an accident because they were struggling over the pouch of wine?”

“It must have been so. Thomas would never *kill* his twin. If Samuel threw it into the sea, Thomas probably jumped after it, and that was what upset the boat.”

“Then you would not say that Thomas was guilty of

killing Samuel.”

John thought about it. “No, of course not. Not really. Of course not. It was an accident.”

“Then how are you guilty of killing him?”

“It is not the same!”

“Why not?”

“Because I put them into the situation where the accident could happen! I should have known it would!”

“Do you think Samuel himself might have foreseen that struggling in that small boat was very dangerous?”

“Of course he *might* have; but he was so concerned that it probably never occurred to him!”

“Then you do not think he was to blame for his own death.”

John began to see what she was trying to say. “You mean that even though he *could* have foreseen it, he probably—certainly—*did not* foresee it, and no one would hold him guilty of bringing about his own death. And so—” he lapsed into silence.

“And so,” she finished, “even though you *could* have foreseen what your advice would bring about, you *did* not do so, and so why should you find yourself guilty of his death?”

“Because I was counseling him what to do. I *should* have thought that it might happen, and not told him to seize the pouch in the boat.”

“Perhaps we can say that. If you had calmly thought the whole matter through, you would have given different advice; so what you were guilty of, it seems to me, is rashness, not murder. You had no idea what the consequences of your advice might be, because you did not think them through. You are

young, John, and young people do not see that actions—and advice—have many consequences, and not only the ones one desires or intends.”

“I would I could erase the whole thing!”

“Often and often, John, we do things and wish afterwards that we could erase them. But what is done is done. The first thing that one should do in such a situation is to learn from it to try to prevent it from happening again; and to do that, one must know what wrong it was that one actually did. In your case, it was giving advice—or, I would say, acting in general—without paying attention to the consequences. So when you are tempted to act without thinking, stop and examine what you plan to do, and say, ‘What is likely to happen if I do this?’ And only after thinking, act.”

John paused and thought. “What you say makes sense. But will I be capable of doing it?”

“Ah, that is another story. Perhaps not always. But what one should do is try. The Master does not ask for success, but that we try. And *if* we try, he can bring good out of what we do.”

“You mean that he could bring good out of this? One brother dead, and the other still a drunk?”

“One never knows, John. You see, I believe—I *know*—that not one thing happens in this world that is not under the absolute control of the Master, and that he loves us, and if we try to serve him, whatever we do will finally turn out to be the best thing that could have been done.”

“I cannot see how this could be best for anyone!”

“Perhaps not, but the Master can. He knows what he is doing.”

“I do not understand.”

“Well, this mistake of yours—for it *was* a mistake, not malice—will make a difference in your life; it *has* made a difference in your life. You came to me, and we have made *some* sense out of it. And you no longer need accuse yourself of killing your friend. You had some part in what led to his death, but it *was* an accident; and the Master knows how to manage accidents. You will see eventually.”

John was silent. He still did not really believe it.

“Be careful, John,” she said. “One often wishes to take blame upon oneself because he wishes to think he is in control of everything. And we are not. The Master is the only one in control of everything; and we must recognize that we are not the Master. He does not expect us to know everything, because he is aware that only he knows everything; and that is why I said that he does not expect success, but that we try. What are we? Feeble insects crawling about before him, but insects that for some reason he loves. He knows that we are but insects, and it is for us not to pretend that we are more.”

He thought again. “I suppose that you are right.”

I understand from your mother that soon you are to go to Jerusalem, to see about studying to be a rabbi.”

“Yes; in a month or so.”

“Jesus has gone into that area. He also is about to begin a new life. It may be that you will see him there; and if you do, he will be able to help you in a way in which I cannot.”

“A new life?”

“If you see him, you will find that it is indeed a new life.”

“You are being very mysterious.”

“Well, I do not wish to reveal anything prematurely. It

will become obvious soon, I think.” She stared off at the horizon. “I rather think you will meet him. But we shall see.”

John did not quite know what to say. He sat in silence for a while, and then finally said, “Well, I do not wish to take more of your time. Thank you for paying attention to me; I could not have told anyone but you.” As he said this, they rose, and went to the place where her donkey was tethered. She undid the bridle, and mounted.

“Fear not, John. Trust the Master.”

“I will try, my Lady.”

“As I said, that is all he asks. Peace.

“Peace.”

Five

John was, in general, considerably calmer after this, but every now and again—usually with no warning—there would be a spasm of agony and self-hatred, and he had to say to himself, “It was an accident!” and try to shut off the futile argument that inevitably ensued. He found he could not put it behind him; what was behind him, he began to realize, was destined to remain with him as part of the self he was making for himself, and his task, apparently, was to act like an oyster and somehow build a pearl around the irritating grain of sand, so that it no longer cut into him, and even might somehow become an ornament.

But it was a superhuman task, and he asked the Master’s help—or rather, asked the Master to do it for him, and to give him the strength to cooperate with whatever the Master had in mind in building the pearl.

When he got to this stage, he would scoff at himself, making metaphors out of horrors, and the event itself would come back into his consciousness, until he could find something to do to forget it. “You are putting too many burdens on the Master’s back,” he told himself. “He has greater things to

do than bother with an insect like you.” But, he reflected, Mary had said that he was an insect that, for some unaccountable reason, the Master loved; and perhaps he could bring sense out of the mess that his life seemed to be turning into.

But, of course, since he was to go to Jerusalem for at least a week, and, who knew? perhaps for good, he had preparations to make. There was the task of writing the letter that his father—very slowly—dictated, reading it over and correcting the mistakes with his teacher, and having his father sign it with his mark, and folding up the papyrus and stowing it carefully with his things to be taken. His father had suggested in the letter that if Annas approved, John should stay in the school for a week to see whether it suited him and whether he was suitable for it; and then he was to return home and ponder the whole situation for a month or so before making up his mind.

John chafed at this, though he said nothing, because he was convinced that a few hours would be sufficient for him to decide whether to devote his life to being a rabbi, in which case why waste a week and then another month as a fisherman again? But Mary’s advice came to mind, that he was too prone to leap to decisions, and would have to give thought to the consequences of what he did—and “after all,” he said to himself, “it is my whole life that I will be deciding. I cannot do that without much thought. My father is wise. Perhaps I will need even more than a month. I will have to ask her.”

But the journey to Jerusalem, at least, was settled. “And perhaps Annas will not want to keep me even for a week,” he thought, not really believing this; he seemed to be able to make friends easily with older people. But in any case, there

were the few clothes he would bring, and the discussions with Simon—well, with Andrew—where the three of them would stay.

They had apparently some complicated legal matters about how the business would belong to both families, and they wanted to consult those they knew in Jerusalem. “And you know how lawyers are,” they said—John did not—“and we will be lucky if we are through all the complications they can make in merely a week. So on our part, it will be no problem if you stay a week at this school of yours; you might even have to wait for us, though I hope not more than a day or two. And of course, we can see a few sights that we do not visit during the festivals, if you would like.” John of course agreed. Why not? If his whole life was to change, he might as well make the hinge-time as pleasant as possible.

In one of these sessions, Andrew happened to remark that he had heard that there was a hermit who had come from the desert and was preaching by the Jordan river near Jerusalem, and bathing people in the river “for them to change their way of thinking,” because the one who was anointed to be the successor of David was apparently on his way to assume the throne of Israel, or some such thing.

“Do you think that there is anything to this?” asked John, “After so many years—centuries?”

“Who knows?” was the reply. “The Prince must come sometime. Why should it not be now?”

“Of course, why *should* it be now? Everyone has been saying this from time immemorial.”

“But would it not be exciting if it were to happen in our time? What would we do? What would it be like?”

“True,” said John. “It would be foolish simply to dismiss it.”

“And he does say that we must change the way we think.”

“And you say he bathes people?”

“In the river. It is a symbolic way of washing our past off us, and making us ready for the future.”

John was silent. This had a meaning for him that Andrew did not realize. He wondered if it would be possible for him to change the way he felt about men, and also to have his role in Samuel’s death somehow washed away—at least from his way of thinking—and he could begin life again somehow.

“So I think,” said Andrew, breaking into his reflection, “that we should at least go and see this John—”
“Is that his name? John?”

“So I heard.”

“Then by all means we should go to see him.”

“Oh naturally, if he is called John, then anything he does or says can only be wonderful!” And he punctuated this with a playful punch on John’s shoulder. John enjoyed those punches much more than he ought. He returned this one for the pleasure of feeling his fist hit Andrew’s shoulder. Andrew smiled.

They then resumed discussing more of the practical details of their trip, which was as much of an exciting adventure for Andrew and Simon as it was for John. They very rarely left Galilee except to go to Jerusalem for the great feasts such as Passover, when, it seemed, the whole country emptied itself out into the Temple environs as it recalled the wonderful event of the escape from slavery to the Egyptians and the passage on dry land through the Red Sea. And at those times, there were such

crowds that strangers like them were overwhelmed, and wanted nothing more than to get back to the comparative sanity of Galilee, where people were not treading on each others' heels, and elbowing each other out of the way, and especially did not speak with strange accents hard to understand. Some even spoke Greek, not Aramaic.

But something was bothering John, and he knew not what to do about it. He had heard nothing whatever about Thomas, and seen nothing of him either. He had seen his father in the boat with the hired hands, going through the motions of fishing because one must eat, but not being very successful, it seemed, with the catch. Thomas was not there helping him.

Where could Thomas be? And in what condition? Was he, John, responsible, in his rashness, not only for the death of Samuel, but for the destruction of Thomas? He had to do something, but what? And how?

He could not bear the thought of it, and one afternoon shortly before they left, he made the trek up the hill to Nazareth, and knocked on Joseph's door. Mary answered. "John!" she said in almost a whisper. "Excuse me, please, but Joseph is not well, and is sleeping and I do not wish to disturb him. Could we talk outside? Would you mind?"

"Not at all, my lady," John whispered, as she closed the door. "Fear not," she said in a normal voice, "he cannot hear us out here. Now what is it that brings you up here with that worried look upon your face?"

"My lady, no one has seen any sign of Thomas since the—since the accident—and I am very concerned that something may have happened to him! If he too dies, I do not

think that I can bear it!”

“I would Jesus were here. But you are going soon to Jerusalem, is it not?”

“Yes, my lady, in two days. But—”

She let the pause hang in the air for a few moments. “I think,” she said, “that you will meet Jesus when you are down there. He should be near where a man named John is preaching.”

“I have heard of him. We plan to see him after I have spent my week at the school of Annas.”

She pondered. “I think that all will turn out well.” She pondered silently again. “Yes, I am sure that—I will see what I can do; but I am confident that no disaster will come out of this, though there may be difficulties to be got through.” She closed her eyes, and spend another short time in thought, or in prayer. “Yes. I think something can be managed.”

“But how will you get word to Jesus? Will you go there yourself?”

She smiled, as one who knew something she could not reveal. “Fear not. You go to Jerusalem as you arranged, and afterwards go to see John; he will be at the Jordan River somewhere nearby. Jesus will find you, or you will find him.”

John was totally bewildered by this. “I hope you are right, my lady. And you think he will be able to help me?”

She smiled, considerably more broadly this time. “Of that I am certain. You will see. Fear nothing. Now, you must have many things to do to prepare. Go, and have trust.”

What could he do? It was all very mysterious, but she sounded very convincing, and so he kept telling himself that there must be something to it, and he would have to trust her.

But what did *Jesus* have to do with it? The carpenter. But then he remembered how he felt when Jesus was building the boat for him as a little boy, how there seemed to be a kind of bond between them, and how even Jesus's father seemed to look up to him, young as he was at the time. There *was* something about him, he remembered.

But what?

But the last-minute preparations and the prospect of a whole new life crowded out the worries John had, and soon the day of departure was soon upon them, and they began their journey, each carrying his own few items in his own backpack. John had been selecting things, but when Andrew came to help him, he kept saying, "Do you really think you will need this?" and John would ponder and think, "Perhaps not," and leave it behind. His mother fussed that he should not discard so much, which determined him to do so, saying that Andrew did not think he would need it.

"But you can certainly use it there!" she would exclaim, and he would say, "But I do not *need* it there, and if I do not, why burden my donkey (referring to his own back)?"

His mother expostulated, but Andrew had told him that this was one of the differences between men and women on their travels. Women wanted to bring everything they could use, and men wanted to bring only what they could not do without. And since John was a man, he of course went along with what Andrew advised.

And during the first day of the trip, he was glad he did. Granted, it was not as hot as it would be in the summer, but it was warm enough, though the Passover was a month ahead of them, and everything was wearing its spring green now, and

getting ready for the sultry days ahead. It was not a time to be overburdened.

They decided that they could make better time if they went straight through Samaria rather than following the Jordan River valley through the “Arabah,” as they called the green strip that divided the mountains of nothing but dirt on either side. It would be hotter, and they would have to climb the mountains from Jericho to Jerusalem at the end. “And there will not be much danger,” said Simon, “if we go through Samaria, because there are three of us, and we present a rather formidable aspect.” Certainly Andrew and to a lesser extent John did. The Samaritans, descendants of the Philistines and other hostile tribes, had no love for Judeans, even those semi-Judeans who were Galileans, and the feeling in general was returned with interest by the descendants of Jacob.

“Besides,” added Andrew, “we should reach Sychar by nightfall, and there they let us drink from Jacob’s well, and are even willing to sell us food. That was why we did not pack so much.”

And so they trudged along at a rather brisk pace; they were all in good physical condition, even Simon, who did not do much rowing. John was a little worried that his legs were not exercised as much as his arms, but found that in rowing one did use one’s legs more than one thought, and he had no trouble keeping up, even with Andrew’s long strides.

As they expected, no one bothered them—in fact, they saw few people, since most were busy on the farms—and they were able to refresh themselves at the well and sleep after buying provisions in Sychar. No one even expressed curiosity about them; the Samaritans knew who they were, and wanted

to have as little to do with them as possible once they had taken their money. They slept out in the open, not even having bothered to bring a tent, and fortunately it did not rain.

As they reached Jerusalem, they went up into the Temple to pay their respects to the Master, and then agreed that they would meet there a week later and established a corner where they could be found. John then left the other two and, with some trepidation, found his way to the High Priest's palace, where Annas was dwelling.

He stated his mission to the slave girl at the gate, and gave her the letter from his father. She led him into an anteroom, which to John was huge and sumptuous, though he later found that it was vastly eclipsed by the actual dwelling of the priest that he was led to. As he went, he looked about himself in awe.

An awe which increased as he was ushered in to the chamber of the High Priest himself, who did not rise from his elaborate chair, but beckoned John over, held up his hand and said "Peace."

John, knowing nothing of protocol, went down on one knee as he said, "Peace" in return, and Annas placed his hand on his head. "Rise," he said, and John stood before him rather sheepish.

"But you have just come from traveling, have you not?"

"Yes, Master," said John.

"I think, before I take you to meet the other students, that it would be a good idea if you took a bath, and perhaps gave your clothes to Hannah to wash. You see, you advertise a bit too strongly that you are a fisherman." John, who had, of course, no idea that he stank of fish, suddenly reddened and

could find nothing to say. "Think nothing of it," said Annas kindly, and rang a small silver bell on a table at his side. A young woman came in, and Annas told her, "Would you conduct him to the bath, please, and take his garments and also give them a bath." Turning to John, he said, "Where is your luggage?"

"Here," said John, taking off his backpack. Annas laughed. "Aha! A seasoned traveler, then."

"No, Master, but one I came with is."

"I see he must be. You can stay a week in what you have there?"

"That is what he told me."

"Well, we shall see. But while your clothes are being cleansed," he turned back to the woman, "Hannah, whose tunic do you think would fit him best?"

She looked at him. "He is larger than he first appears, with that chest and those arms. Perhaps that of Daniel."

"Then while he is bathing, would you be so good as to ask Daniel if he could lend one of his extra tunics to a weary traveler for a day or so? I am sure he will not mind."

"Yes, Master," she said. "This way." Annas called after them as they left, "Use soap. Use much soap." and she nodded, with a grin. John wanted to sink through the floor. *She* certainly smelled wonderful, he noticed, and, now that he thought of it, so did Annas. It added to the magic of the moment.

"In there," she said, opening the door to a room with no windows and a small pool. A lamp off in the corner near a fireplace provided sufficient light. "You will find the soap on the shelf over there. I will close the door and be waiting here."

When you are ready to bathe, hand me your clothes and your pack—keep whatever you wish to retain, for I will be going through it to see what must be washed.”

“There is nothing,” said John, and then thought. “Well, a pouch for my money, I suppose.”

“You can leave that on the shelf over there while you bathe. When I have found a tunic for you, I will knock thus,” and she rapped three times on the door, “and hang it on this peg here. Do you have a comb for your hair?”

“Yes, I have a small pouch with those things also.”

“Keep that as well. There is a glass there in the corner by the lamp. One cannot see perfectly, but it is enough to make oneself presentable. Peace.”

Six

“peace,” said John, and she left. John grabbed a bar of soap, which he had never before used (though his mother had something of the sort that she used for washing clothes; it had to do with lye and fat, for John remembered her making it once, and asked what it was for. “But do not wash yourself with it,” she had said, “for it is far too strong. I have something which is quite mild that I use for myself occasionally, but men do not really need it, provided they take care in the stream.” John hoped that the soap he had in his hand was the mild variety.

He waded down the steps that went into the pool, and dipped the soap into the rather warmish water and rubbed it over himself, marveling at the suds it made. He scrubbed himself thoroughly, hoping to rid himself of the odor he could not smell because of familiarity, and even soaped his hair and his nascent beard thoroughly. There was some kind of scent added to the soap, and he had hopes that that would cover any residual fishiness that had probably worked itself into his pores over the years.

There was also a towel on the shelf, he discovered as he

emerged from the pool, and, shivering, he dried himself off and rubbed it over his hair, and then went to the corner where there was a glass in which he saw his own face clearly for the first time. (He had, of course, seen his reflection in water, and he knew that his mother had a glass she used and cherished, but he himself had never actually looked into a real mirror before.) He was happy to see that the water did not lie; he was quite good-looking, even with his hair a mess.

He took his comb, and put what order he could into his curls (his hair was always rather unruly). Not for the first time, he wished that he had straight hair like most of the men around him; but he knew that in some eyes, it was a sign of beauty. He got most of the tangles out, and thought that he would be able to deal with the rest when his hair was quite dry (it was still a bit damp, despite much toweling); he was reasonably presentable, in any case. "As long as I do not stink any longer," he said to himself.

He wondered how long he would have to wait for his borrowed tunic, when he turned toward the door, and saw it hanging there. Hannah had hung it while he was washing himself. He had not heard her knock; he was probably making too much noise splashing about. She probably wondered why he was taking so long—"Or perhaps she could smell that it would be a major task. I hope I completed it," he said aloud to himself.

The tunic almost fit him, except that it was a bit tight through the chest, and when he had got it on, he wondered what he should do, and finally went to the door and opened it, and sat on a bench inside.

Presently, Hannah appeared, and said, "So you are ready,

then. Yes, I see you are.”

“Do I still stink?” asked John.

She laughed. “You did not *stink* before, but it was clear that you were a fisherman. Now no one would know. But I have left some oil in your room that some of the students use on festive occasions—oil of nard—which you should be careful of, since it is quite, shall we say, potent. It would have overcome your fish smell of itself; but it is better to be clean and smell of soap, think you not?”

“I will use it very sparingly, if at all.”

“It is well; you do not really need it. Did you notice it on me? And the Master?”

“Ah, is *that* what it was? I would feel as if I were a king!”

“Kings do indeed use it. But, as I say, be niggardly with it, or you will smell like a fop, not to mention that it is very expensive.”

“Oh, dear! I hope I have enough to pay for it.”

“Oh, no! It is a gift from Annas, who was concerned that you might think that he was reproaching you for making your honest livelihood—and in my opinion, he was tempting you, perhaps, that there might be advantages in the new profession you are choosing.”

“I must remember to thank him. Am I to see him now?”

“I am to take you to him as soon as you are ready. But first, I will show you your room, where you can put those things you are carrying (the pouch with the toiletries; John had his money-pouch fastened round him inside his tunic). “You will find your pack there—which still advertises your occupation somewhat, but will lose its—distinctiveness—as time goes on.”

And she opened the door to a small, rather Spartan room, with a bed, a seat, and a table on which there were a couple of small codices. John went over and opened one, which, as he turned the pages, seemed to be the prophesy of Malachi, a book he fortunately had read—or more accurately, puzzled over—in the previous year, because he had discovered that Samuel’s father also had that name.

They said nothing as John looked around and out the window onto a kind of courtyard, and then Hannah beckoned, and led him back to Annas.

“Ah, and there you are,” he said as John entered. “Do you feel better?”

“I am quite refreshed, thank you. I hope I have removed the—the traces of my past.”

He laughed. “You smell now of soap, nothing more.”

“I have not had a chance yet to use your oil. I give you many thanks.”

“Yes, well I would not use much of it. And also remember, that if you use it constantly, you will become accustomed to it, and will not smell it, and, as has happened with a few, when you enter a room, you could knock over the people in it with the odor. The fish smell is nothing in comparison to it.”

“It must be powerful indeed, for Hannah already warned me about it.”

“Of course, she would. You would be well advised to listen to her; she is a very wise woman. But let me take you to the students and introduce you. You will be staying but a week, I see from the letter.”

“Yes. My father thought it advisable not to stay longer. I

can discover what the life is like, and you can learn in that time whether I would be suitable for it; but he thought I should return home afterwards and give serious thought to what could be a complete change of life for me.”

“That was prudent indeed; I fully concur. This way. Can you read, by the way? —Oh, of course you can, if you wrote the letter your father dictated.”

“Yes, I can read a little. I had read the prophesy of Malachi, that I saw on the table in my room.”

“Ah, you had a chance to look at it. Very good. One of our classes is studying it at the moment. You might find it enlightening.”

“I am sure I will.”

“It is one thing, you know,” said Annas as they walked down a corridor, “to read what the prophet says, and it is quite another to understand when it was written, and what the circumstances were. He did not paint a very rosy picture of the behavior of those around him.”

“I wondered at that.”

“Well, it was just at the return from the exile into Babylon, and neither the priests nor the people had a very clear idea of what was expected of them—understandably enough, after seventy years—and Malachi, or whoever used that name, (John suddenly realized that it meant “my messenger”) was warning them that the Master was not disposed to overlook their laxness, whether they thought it was laxness or not.”

“Did they reform?”

“Oh, yes, under Ezra and Nehemiah. At least for a while. You know how people are.” John was not quite sure he did. “But there is also the question of what the prophet *meant*, and

how what he said applies to us. That sort of thing, you understand.”

John supposed that “that sort of thing” was what he was going to spend years discovering.

They opened a door into what was evidently a classroom, with several sets of benches, at which were seated students grouped into different ages, some quite young, and others even older than Andrew, poring over scrolls or codices, with instructors walking through the room answering a question a student had as he raised his hand, or prodding another who seemed to be daydreaming, or reprimanding others who were talking about something other than the text before them. There must have been a dozen of them in all. “As you can see,” said Annas, “we are a rather exclusive—not to say ‘elite’—group. If we accept you, you will have to work hard. You in particular will have to work *very* hard to catch up to those your age, who have been studying here, some of them, since they had but seven years. But I do not wish to frighten you unduly; others have done it with success, and your father informs me that he and your tutor think you quite brilliant. They would, of course. We shall see.”

Then he raised his voice and said to everyone in the room, “Men,” (they were all men, or boys) “I wish to introduce you to a potential student, John, son of Zebedee from Galilee, who will be spending a week with us, studying you and what you do, while, of course, we also shall be studying him to see if he is a suitable candidate. He will then leave us for—” he turned and looked a question, which John answered in a whisper—“a month or so, and will make his decision, while we also make ours. Please welcome him. And Daniel,” he said to a boy a little

older-looking than John, “he gives you thanks for the loan of his tunic for a day or so, while his is unavailable.”

There was a murmur, and one of the youngest—he must have been around eight years old—came up to John, and said, “Will you be beginning with us? You look quite old.”

“I know not,” John replied. “I already know how to read and write, so perhaps not.”

“Oh,” said the boy, and returned to his place.

“I think,” said Annas, “that if you simply resume your studies, and let John wander through the room, he will be able to see what you are doing, and perhaps can find a place where he feels comfortable. Then he can join that group, and see what it is like to study here.” And he nodded at everyone, and left.

John, rather at a loss, went to the back of the room, and watched some of the boys, who seemed to be about his own age, as they discussed what was written in the scroll they were all reading. There was only one scroll, of course, for each group of students, because they were so expensive. Some were of papyrus, but some—the important ones, evidently—were of parchment, and the whole room smelt of leather, dried reeds, and ink; the smell was another magic to John.

As he paused by a boy, he recognized the one Annas had pointed out, who stood up and said, “Does my tunic fit you satisfactorily?”

“Oh yes, you are Daniel, is it not?” said John. The boy nodded. He was a bit taller than John, and noticeably thinner, with a very sharp nose. “I give you thanks for lending it to me. I will return it tomorrow, I suspect; my clothes all had to be washed.” He reddened with shame. Well, it would have to

come out sooner or later, he supposed.

“I notice that it is a bit small across the chest,” said Daniel, running his hand—rather caressingly—across John’s breast. “I hope it is not uncomfortable.” He smiled. John was not pleased with the smile.

“It is a bit tight, but it is fine,” he said, not returning the smile, but in what he managed to make a friendly, but not too friendly, tone.

“What were you? A blacksmith? With that chest and those arms.” And he reached over and felt John’s biceps, with another smile.

John took his arm away, and said, “No, I was a fisherman, and I rowed the boat most of the time.”

“Ah, yes, I see,” said Daniel. “It must be hard work.”

“One becomes used to it.”

“I can see that. Though I doubt if I could.” John shared his doubt.

There was a bit of an awkward pause, and Daniel asked, “Can you read?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, good. Then you will not have to start with the little ones. Greek?”

“No, only Hebrew.”

“A pity. Some of the writings, you know, are only in Greek—though a few of those have been translated into Hebrew. But generally, it is the other way round; everything was translated into Greek two or three hundred years ago, in Alexandria—”

“In Egypt, you know.” (John felt like an ignoramus, but Daniel chose to ignore it.) “And so, we have to learn Greek as

well as Hebrew, because we can compare the texts we have with that translation, to see if we can discover what the original writer wrote.”

“But would not the Hebrew be what he wrote?”

“Well, you see, the problem is that there are often many versions of the text—in Greek as well as Hebrew, of course—because of the way they are published.”

“I do not understand.”

“You do not know how books are published, then.”

“I never even thought about it.”

“Well, several scribes gather together in a room, each with a blank scroll, and one person stands at the front and reads—as clearly as he can—the scroll to be copied. The scribes take down what he says, and when they are done, there are twenty copies of the same book.”

“It sounds quite efficient,” said John, interested.

“In theory, it is perfect. But the problem is that not every scribe hears what the reader says accurately, which is one reason why there cannot be too many in one room; as the room becomes large, it becomes harder for all to hear perfectly, and so scribes sometimes write down what they *think* the reader said, rather than what he actually read to them. And of course, when one of the mistaken scrolls is then used as the one which is read from, the mistake becomes multiplied. Attempts are made to correct this, but they are not always successful; and so one must take the different texts and try to puzzle out which one must be what the original author actually wrote—or dictated, of course. And there is also the problem that not even every author could actually write himself, and so he himself would not be in a position to correct his own scribe.”

“It all sounds very complicated,” came a quiet voice. “Enough! Let the poor boy observe us, and go back to your studies.” This from a middle-aged man whose beard had two white streaks on its sides. Daniel smiled again at John, and said, “Later, we can talk,” and sat down, poring over his scroll with a partner, who pointed out to him where they were.

John walked around the room and found the place where Malachi was being discussed. He sat down at the end of the bench and listened as they pulled the text apart and examined every word, giving its history and its many possible meanings, and speculating on which meaning it could have in this context, and how their interpretation of what it meant stacked up against various other texts from other parts of Scripture, and what various commentators (who seemed to be legion) had to say.

As he listened, John wondered how they could put together what Malachi was actually trying to say from such a hodgepodge of words. Each word was labored to bring out what *it* meant; but when John had read the text, he was interested in what the whole thing told him. He supposed that this was because of his ignorance, and somehow or other, what they were doing made the whole message clearer—but certainly, to his untutored ear, it only made everything confusing.

He suddenly felt tremendously depressed. He wondered if he would ever be able to concentrate on such minute details, which, he assumed, must be important, because they were spending time and sometimes heated disputes about them, and, more than this, he wondered if he cared about doing so.

“But,” he thought to himself, “I am totally new to this, and certainly out of my depth. But perhaps I can learn to swim

in this water, and after a while, I will grow used to it, and learn to like and even love it.” He felt inclined to doubt this, however.

Seven

The classes were dismissed shortly after this, and it seemed everyone gathered around John, firing questions at him from all sides. When a few of them heard that he was a fisherman, they subtly showed varying degrees of scorn, but made no open remarks, because they once or twice saw him making a fist, and no one (or two or three, for that matter) looked to be a match for him. John, for his part, was ready to defend his occupation—his “profession,” as he thought it—against all comers, and if they did not like it, they would pay for their attitude with a bloody nose or black eye. But fortunately, Mary’s advice was in the background of his mind, and he stopped himself before doing anything more than showing his displeasure. He was amazed at how easy it was to intimidate them.

There were, however, two or three who, like Daniel, were the very opposite of being intimidated, and who stared at him a bit too greedily for his taste. He began to think that he was perhaps normal after all, because he found their attention so repulsive.

If they had looked like Andrew or Samuel, or if they had

been a bit more subtle at it, it might have been a different story, but they were the kind of people his companions in Galilee laughed at scornfully and ostracized; and John had eagerly joined in, partly, he supposed now, to cover up for how he himself felt. But he now saw that his attitude was genuine enough, and he had to make an effort to be friendly, if distant, with them. It would not do to make enemies on every side, and they perhaps could no more help what they felt than he could help his feelings about Andrew.

As he was talking to them, he thought of Andrew, comparing his reactions. But really, what he felt toward Andrew, it seemed, was mainly admiration. He did not really want to do anything to Andrew—not that he knew what it was he *would* do—or have him do anything to him, except perhaps hug him, so much as he wanted to *be* what he saw Andrew to be. And in fact, he was making advances in that direction, by doing pushups and situps every other morning.

But the whole matter, he realized, was more complex than that. But he had to put any pondering of it out of his mind, because he was becoming distracted from the conversations he was having.

Most of the students, of course, were either friendly in a normal, casual kind of way, or simply greeted him and wished him well and went about their own concerns with each other. They were all, he had to admit, polite, even those who seemed to despise him (they did not dare to be otherwise), and so as he talked, he saw that he might be able to manage with them—at least, he hoped so.

It was well. He was not very good in social situations, to say the least; and fortunately, at the moment at any rate, he did

not have to say much, simply answer questions that they asked, and let them talk. But, knowing his deficiency here, he resolved to study how they behaved, and learn to imitate them.

He began to see, as some of the more popular ones mentioned their own experiences that were somewhat similar to something he alluded to in one of his rather laconic answers, that the trick in conversation seemed to be to chime in with an event in one's own experience that matched to some extent what the other person was saying; it established a solidarity with him, and induced him to go on—except when, as John discovered once or twice in trying this out, one's remark gave the impression of his being superior in some sense to that of the other person; he could see someone flinch occasionally when he said, "Oh, yes, I once did . . ." and sounded as if he were saying, "Yes, I did that also, and it was far more interesting, because . . ."

After a few attempts in this direction, and especially once when he began a lengthy monologue on details of casting the net properly and saw the other person start looking around for an escape—something that he experienced at home when he launched into one of his special interests—he felt that it was far better to let them talk, at least until he learned a bit more about how to walk through this swamp without falling into quicksand. He envied those who seemed to be able to do it by instinct.

But one had, he began to see, to make an assumption first: that others were interested in one, and expected him also to be interested in them. In that way, one's experiences would matter to some extent to them, and be a springboard for them to point out things in their own lives that might be of interest.

The people who found their own lives fascinating but cared nothing for others, he saw, were the ones people shunned. This was a serious matter to John, since, apart from his interest in Andrew and Samuel, which had overtones he wished to avoid, he had not thought much about others.

He began to see that he had to try to cultivate a genuine desire—or at least to appear to have a genuine desire—to find out what mattered to the one he was talking to. Telling of one's own experiences seemed to be, in the skilled hands of the popular conversationalists, a kind of prod to elicit something from the other person.

But since John was so full of what intrigued him, he realized that socializing well was going to be a formidable task. Perhaps he might have to give up the idea of being the bright light of a conversation, and retreat into keeping himself mainly to himself.

He was studying all this while he was talking, or rather listening, to the people, and he found it all bewildering, and even overwhelming. He had many times had the same feeling earlier in his life, when, especially in groups, his head seemed to become full to bursting and made him want to scream. On those occasions, he would usually run off by himself and do some of his exercises—anything to let his mind empty out.

It was not possible for him to do this here, of course, and he began to be afraid he would explode. But mercifully, a bell rang after a short time, and everything quieted down. "We are going to eat now," he was told, and they all silently went first to the large, waist-high water-jars that were standing there, to wash for the evening meal. John, of course, was clean from his bath, but he washed like the rest, and then they went and lay

on dining-couches around a U-shaped low table, with Annas in the middle and the favored few in front and behind him.

There was silence at the beginning of the meal—for which John was grateful—until, as it turned out, the prayer was said. Everyone lay down on the couch on his left side, head supported by the left hand, the elbow of that arm resting on the cushion, and his feet protruding a bit over the outside edge of the couch. In some places (not here) slaves went around the outside and washed the feet of the diners, wiping them with a towel they had around their waist.

The food was served from the center opening of the table. Diners ate by dipping their right hands into the dish, using the thumb and first two fingers, occasionally using a knife to cut meat into bite-size pieces if it was not already prepared that way, and occasionally taking bread or the meat and dipping it into a small dish of sauce before bringing it to the mouth. All this was familiar to John; it was the way people normally ate. One licked the fingers afterwards, and wiped them on a small cloth.

To his surprise, John found that he was not at the foot of the table, as he expected to be (in fact, he had gone there, but Annas himself came and said that he thought he would be more comfortable up higher), but about halfway down one of the legs. Annas then returned to his place at the head of the table, and led the prayer, after which they were allowed to talk—but quietly, only with the person in front of or behind one. Apparently, John discovered as he looked around, the hierarchical order was one of chronological age, not experience in studies—which made sense. It would be silly for a someone with twenty years to have to converse with one half his age.

As it happened, Daniel was lying in front of him, and every now and then during dinner, he leaned back against John's chest to make some remark. John had a bit of difficulty ignoring any overtures that might be a bit more than friendly. It was clear that he would have to do something to keep Daniel at a distance, but he did not want actually to antagonize him. Fortunately, Daniel in general was a likeable sort, and also something of a chatterbox, and so John could get by with a sentence, or even a word or two—and sometimes just a grunt—which Daniel took as sufficient. And what he was saying *was* useful, since he was explaining what all of them did every day, something that John would have to learn somehow.

He began to think that Annas's—or rather Hannah's—selection of Daniel as the one to lend the tunic had more to it than simply his size (he saw that there were others whose tunics would have fit just as well), but that if John wanted to find out how things were in this school, Daniel would probably be the most efficient source; and Hannah, at least, would be shrewd enough to see that doing a favor for a new lad would predispose a person to be friendly and open with him. Whether she also saw what was pellucid to John, that John's appearance would be an added incentive to Daniel's friendliness, was not clear to John.

Well, what would be would be. He felt sure that he could fend off untoward advances, and probably prevent any serious ones from being made; though he *was* a bit curious as to what would actually happen if he let Daniel do what Daniel seemed to want to do. It was interesting that, though he wondered what it would be, more or less in the abstract, he had no desire to find out—at least from Daniel. Life was complicated; but on

the whole, he felt a bit more comfortable with himself than he had previously.

They walked outside after the meal for a while, in groups of two or three; Daniel, of course, seeking out John. "Do not feel that you must be a kind of nursemaid to me," said John; "I can manage by myself."

"Oh, I have no doubt," said Daniel, "but it is perhaps well not to feel completely alone at the beginning, and it is no trouble at all for me." The smile.

"Well, I give you thanks for your concern," said John, not smiling. He looked around. "This courtyard is beautiful, with the palm trees." It had its own magic for John; a kind of restful peace as the twilight began to darken the sky. He felt as if he was in the palace of a king.

"They are temperamental things, the trees," said Daniel. "When there is a drought, they look wretched: gray and ragged. But this Spring has been good to them."

"Do you do this every evening after the meal?" asked John.

"Yes. They say that a calm walk after dinner is good for the constitution. Though I think whatever you have been doing for yours is far better than anything we have devised." The smile.

John quickly fought for something to say to change the topic. "And what do we do next?"

"Well, most of us go to our own rooms, and prepare for the morrow's lessons. I saw that you were interested in what Adam and his two companions were doing."

"Well, I had been reading Malachi—" In truth? A fisherman actually reading Malachi?"

John reddened. "Well, my tutor gave it to me a couple of months ago, and I was making what I could of it."

"I am astounded. You are indeed a remarkable person! Adam!" he called. "Did you know that John here has actually *read* Malachi already?"

One of the older lads, who had quite a good beard, came over; John had sat beside him as they were discussing the text. "In truth? I thought he was simply trying to look intelligent."

"Well," said John, "that is pretty much what I *was* trying to do. I did not want to disturb you, and it took me quite a while to puzzle out where you were. I think I finally discovered it."

"Of course, it is quite a short book."

"I know. That is why my tutor gave it to me. I had just spent a long time with Daniel, and he thought I should have something where I could see that the end was not far away."

Adam laughed, and so did Daniel, who added, "I know nothing whatever about it. It is a couple of years before I undertake it."

"Well, for all its lack of length, it requires considerable study," replied Adam.

"Do not they all?" said Daniel.

"You are about to come to something that really puzzled me as I read it earlier," remarked John. "It will be interesting to see what you have to say about it."

"Well, we will see you tomorrow, then. Feel free to make any remark, and do not think you will sound stupid. We all sound incredibly stupid at times." John was not so sure of this; but of course, there was certainly no reason why he would *not* sound stupid if he said anything. What did he know? He could

barely decipher the words themselves.

He resolved that if something occurred to him, he would—perhaps—bring it up, to see what happened. Probably he would make a fool of himself, but one did not learn unless one started somewhere. On the other hand, it would not do to begin on the wrong foot.

As he entered his room that night (Daniel wishing him fondly that he would sleep well), he found that it was difficult to get to sleep, in spite of the rather long journey he had made earlier that day. All the events of the afternoon crowded in on each other's heels, and he wondered if he would be able to tolerate this existence.

On the whole, he decided that he did *not* find it intriguing, as he had expected. It looked, in fact, quite boring. Whatever he wanted out of Scripture (and he was anything but sure what that was) seemed buried, somehow, in the way it seemed they were treating it. He was not being fair, he knew, and was probably simply projecting his fears onto his recollection of the day; but there was something already nagging at him that this was not the way to become a prophet, and fishing was probably a far better alternative for him in the long run. He, a prophet! He laughed inwardly—but still, who could tell?

And, when one considered it, fishing looked less attractive, especially when one realized that one stank afterward. But of course, he thought to himself, when one was around fishermen all the time, who noticed? And it was a useful occupation. But it was purely physical, and his mind cried out for something more. There was—he knew not—there was something people needed to know, that perhaps he could

proclaim to them. The whole world was waiting for something, for rescue of some sort—and not simply rescue from Rome, rescue from the mess each person made of his own life—

And this reminded him of Samuel and Thomas. Poor Samuel! His life was a shambles that could not be unshambled now; one could apologize for a cruel remark, or even a blow (something John had to do too often), and make up for it to some extent, but when one was dead, it was like trying to unslaughter a sheep.

And Thomas! Was there anything he could do to undo what had been done to him? True, Thomas had done it to himself, but Samuel had told John that he had tried to stop once, and could not—any more than John could rid himself of the feelings he wished he did not have toward Andrew and toward poor Samuel.

Thanks be to God, he had not let them go as far as apparently Thomas had with his drinking! He was certain that there was an abyss waiting to swallow him, one fully as disastrous as the one Thomas found himself in. He would have to be *very* careful, especially here, with others apparently wanting to lead him down into the pit.

Not that he had any desire to follow them—now. But who knew? Daniel was not bad-looking, when it came to that, once one made certain allowances.

But that was absurd! The whole thing was disgusting!

But the problem was that the very disgust had its attractive aspect.

“Please, Master! Help me! Keep me safe!” he said aloud into his pillow as he lay there, tossing and turning. If there was anyone who needed rescue, it was he.

And then he thought of John, bathing people for a change in their way of thinking. Could a bath in the Jordan or anywhere else actually effect this? Remember Naaman the Syrian, bathing in the Jordan when he gave up the idea that other rivers in Syria were just as good. And was the Messiah, the one anointed to be the Prince, the successor of David, actually going to come, or was this a metaphor for some grand spiritual renewal that had nothing to do with an actual person?

It sounded as if John, at least, believed that it was a real person, and that he was already among them, and would soon reveal himself to be the actual Prince. And perhaps the world would take a new direction, and there actually could be rescue from their sins! And perhaps John could be his prophet! There would be two Johns, the bather and himself!

And did *Jesus*, of all people, have anything to do with this? And if so, what? Did he know who it was? Could he bring John to him, and then they would go to Thomas and cure him?

Eight

eventually, John did get to sleep that night. He was young and healthy, and he did not actually spend much time tossing ideas, worries, and experiences around; it only seemed that way. He woke to the sound of the bell, completely at a loss as to where he was for some moments; and then yesterday, with all its concerns, flooded back to him.

He had been told that on rising, all bathed. As he had hung up Daniel's tunic on one of the pegs near the door, he noted that his tunic and mantle were there on two of the other pegs. He would not need the mantle as long as they were inside or in the courtyard, of course, since the weather was quite warm, not to say even hot, but it was ready, just in case, relieved of its fishiness (he sniffed at it just to make sure, but it too smelt of soap).

He emerged, wearing his tunic and carrying Daniel's, certain that he would find him and be able to return it, and sure enough, almost as soon as he stepped out of the door, there he was, with his smile. "You slept well?" asked Daniel.

"Very," he answered. "Here is your tunic. I am grateful

for the loan of it.”

“It was nothing. I was happy to do it.” John suspected he was, once he saw him.

“I was thinking of having it washed before I gave it to you, but I knew not how to go about it.”

“Oh, one leaves ones things for Hannah, but do not bother. You only wore it one afternoon, after all.” He spoke casually enough, but John had a suspicion that he was not averse to wearing something that had been touching John’s skin—and doubtless had a bit of his sweat. John wondered if *that* smelt of fish.

They all went to the room John had bathed in, and stripped and got into the pool, one or two with soap, while most simply, like John this time, used the water. John was accustomed to bathing with a number of people, and thought nothing of it, until he saw a couple of them, including Daniel, watching him as he did so. He moved over to a corner, facing the wall, and made a rather hurried bath. In Galilee, at least, it was an unwritten rule that one did not look at anyone else when bathing or relieving oneself; or if one did, as in talking to someone, it was a casual glance at the face, and one looked away promptly. Most behaved in this way here also; but John did not really look around to see this, because he did not want to be taken for one of the starers—if they *did* stare, and it was not simply his imagination.

But when he emerged and was drying himself off, Daniel, dry but not yet dressed, came up to him and put his arm across John’s shoulder, more or less as Andrew had done, and was about to say something when John said, “Daniel. Enough.” in a not unfriendly, but firm, tone.

“What?” he answered. “I meant nothing.”

“Enough.”

“You are not angry, are you?”

“No. I simply want us to understand each other.”

“Very well. As I said, I meant nothing by it.”

“Fine.”

There was a silence. Then Daniel said, “I was about to say that next we go to the refectory to break our fast. We will keep our former seats; we always sit in the same places.”

“Very good.” Daniel then went to where he had hung his tunics, and put on—the one John had been wearing the previous day. John sighed. He had hoped that he had handled the situation properly, but this made him wonder. He gave no sign that he noticed what Daniel had done, and Daniel had been anything but ostentatious about it; John would not have noticed had he not precisely been looking for it. He supposed, however, that if he had not issued his warning, Daniel would have put it on and smiled over at him; and so if he did not do so, perhaps John had gained his point. Well, let him have this little satisfaction, then, as long as he left John alone in the future.

Breakfast went well; it was in silence, and so Daniel did not really have an opportunity to lean back on John’s chest to make a remark. In any case, he did not, which was a relief to John—and something of a disappointment? He wondered at that feeling.

After a time during which they straightened up their rooms, they went back to the classroom, and John again sat beside Adam, who pushed over the scroll of Malachi, now that he knew John could read it. John, however, thanked him, but

then showed the codex that he had brought from his room, and opened to the page that corresponded to what was on the scroll, and listened to what was going on.

The discussion had passed the place that John had been interested in, so he raised his hand, and asked, "But who is this 'messenger' he spoke of just there? And what 'way' is he preparing, as you say, for the Master himself?"

"Well," said a student on the other side of Adam, "you remember we said that it might have some connection with what Isaiah said about leveling mountains and filling up valleys when the Master comes. But of course, perhaps it has simply a spiritual significance. Can you imagine the Valley of Hinnom being filled up, and a straight road from here, say, to Jericho—or to where Jericho would have been before the valley got filled?"

"Of course," chimed in another, "there is what Ezekiel said about the water from the Temple that flowed down to the east into the Salt Sea [the Dead Sea], and made it fresh. That would require an enormous earthquake, to lower the mountains to our east—or make a cleft in them."

"That was why I said it must be only spiritual," answered the first.

"The reason I asked," said John, "is that shortly after I read that, I heard that there was a man down by the Jordan who was bathing people 'for a change of thinking,' claiming that the Prince who had been prophesied was about to appear; and I wondered if the passage might refer to him, somehow."

All of them laughed. John reddened; the very first thing out of his mouth apparently showed how ignorant he was. Adam said, "There are fanatics such as that who appear almost

every year!" said one. "Every month! Every week!"

Adam went on, "So it is not likely that this one will be the one referred to by Malachi."

John countered, "Well, but the Prince must come at some time; perhaps this is the time."

"Perhaps," said Adam. "But I would not put a wager on it. Actually, it is this notion that the Prince must come at some time that makes these fanatics be listened to. And they are aware of that, never fear. Even when their predictions fail, you find them and their followers twisting what was said so that it fits events that totally contradict it."

"I suppose you are right," said John, and lapsed into silence as the others went on with the discussion they had been having. Somehow, this depressed him even more than he had been depressed the day before; these people were undoubtedly correct, but somehow, John had hopes that now might be the time when salvation was to come. He needed it—though, based on his encounters with Daniel, perhaps less than he had previously thought. On the other hand, based on his disappointment that Daniel had stopped his advances, perhaps he was not so virtuous as he hoped.

As the week wore on—and it must be said that in several respects, it *wore* on for John, he joined other groups, who were working at different levels on other texts; but it was, it seemed to him, the same sort of thing; puppies worrying a sandal they had filched from the closet, sometimes playing at fighting over it, sometimes taking it in their mouths and shaking it to death, and never, it seemed, asking what the author was actually trying to *say*. John kept feeling that he was unjust in this, but he found no real evidence to contradict his impression.

There were also the discussions of the various commands of the Law, in which this or that commentator had spelled out what had to be done to ensure that it would be meticulously obeyed. It was not simply, for instance, that the name of God was not to be used irreverently; it must not be used at all, to avoid even the possibility of a frivolous use. Even in reading Scripture, and even when quoting God when he gave Moses his name, one had to say, “Master” instead of it, leading to silly readings of the Song of Moses, such as, “The Master is a warrior, and Master is his name,” which it clearly wasn’t; it was his title, and he *had* a name, which in this context certainly could be used without being irreverent about it. But John had heard such things already in Synagogue, and had the same reaction there. But one did what the authorities commanded—most of the time.

And one group was discussing the rules for keeping the Sabbath holy; how many steps one could take without “working,” and whether it was “work” to rescue an ox that had fallen into the ditch. There were endless disputes on such matters by the commentators, and in general the consensus seemed to be to err on the safe side.

But to John, the more this was entered into (and of course, he had lived a good deal of it in Galilee), the more difficult it became simply to get from one end of the day to the next, especially on the Sabbath, without violating one regulation or the other. And was the Master really a spider waiting at the edge of a web for one to touch one of the strands so that he could pounce? But then where was the love he was supposed to have?

True, he was definitely annoyed at the people Malachi

excoriated; but they were doing rather flagrant things: building their own houses and paying no attention to the Temple, sacrificing sick animals instead of healthy ones. What kind of a *sacrifice* was it to foist off on the Master what one wanted to get rid of anyway? That sort of thing made sense. But it seemed to John that the people here were carrying things too far. He was all for reverencing the Master, and fearing him, but not being in terror of him to the extent of looking over one's shoulder at every action one did to see if his rod was raised in fury.

“Of course, it is only my first week,” he told himself—
—and then pictured the weeks stretching on and on to eternity.

Interestingly, during this week, Daniel turned out to be quite a friend, once he had got over his flirtation. He was a very intelligent man (he was a year older than John, who considered himself definitely a man at sixteen, though no one else seemed to), and easy to talk to, something John greatly appreciated, with his lack of social skills. In the short time they were together, John grew quite to like him.

And it was interesting also that the other students who seemed to take an inordinate interest in him had also backed off, once they saw how Daniel had changed toward him. He wondered if they formed a kind of group or if each realized for himself that any overture in that direction would only receive a rebuff. Whatever the case, it made life considerably more comfortable for John.

Adam also became something of a friend to John, though he was older; he evidently had seen that John had taken what they had said about the messenger as something of a rebuke,

and he wished to make amends without actually saying so. John was grateful for his effort; but the fact was that John *was* ignorant, and became more and more aware of it as the week progressed; questions kept arising in his mind, and occasionally he asked one, but he became afraid that they were questions whose answers everybody had known for years, and, despite the students' politeness, he did not wish to risk too often what he sometimes saw: the opening of eyes that clearly said, "You mean you did not know *that*?"

He was not really ignorant, he told himself; but after all, what he knew were the intricacies of fishing and manipulating a boat in all weathers, something that not one of them knew the least thing about or cared to know about, and beyond simply deciphering what he had been given to read, he had absolutely nothing to do with scholarly matters—and, he was discovering rapidly, he had about as much interest in them as they had in fishing.

He supposed he could *do* the work they were doing, if he applied himself to it seriously; but to what end? To be able to explain every jot and tittle of some text which as a whole might have some profound import, but which as a puzzle of scattered pieces did not seem to mean anything to John.

When the week was almost over, John and Daniel were in John's room, discussing what he would do next. "I must return home," John said, "for my father does not want me to make such a profound change in my life without giving it considerable thought. He said I should take a month afterwards before I actually came to a decision."

"I gather, however," said Daniel, "—or at least I suspect, that the decision is going to mean that we will not be seeing

you after the month is over.”

“I would not say that,” said John.

“*I would,*” he replied. “The signs are all there. You are like a colt let out to pasture as soon as you leave the house. Your life is leaping and frolicking in the fresh air, not sitting here like us, with the lamp burning, poring over smelly parchment.”

“I like the smell of parchment,” said John.

“That may be, but it is one thing to like the smell of it and another to devote one’s life to it.”

“I must admit there is something in what you say. But I have no idea now what it is I wish to do with my life. I cannot escape the notion that I have more to offer the world than fish every day.”
 “Or a certainty *that* is true!” said Daniel. “There are great depths in that mind of yours.”

John laughed. “I cannot see where you would find them. I feel as if I am swimming in the middle of the ocean, and belong in a tiny pond.”

“Ah, but that is because you are unfamiliar with everything here. But I have heard some of the people discussing questions you have asked—”
 “And from *them* you have inferred that I am profound? They generally produce nothing but laughter.”

“Well, I heard that also, from time to time. But it is the laughter of surprise, because they are confronted with someone to approaches the subject from a completely different point of view.”

“True. A point of view of total ignorance!”

“No, no. There are ideas behind your ‘ignorance.’ And a few of them, like Adam, see this. True, they see all kinds of

difficulties that you do not with what you say; but they also see that there is something behind it that makes sense, and that ought to be considered. They really do.”

“I am amazed!”

John paused. Finally he said, “I know not what to say.”

“All I meant is that you have nothing to be ashamed of in that head of yours. I think you are perfectly right that you are not really cut out to be a fisherman; and there is something intellectual there, if I may so put it. You might have a great contribution to give to the world. But not here, unfortunately.”

“I am—flattered is too weak a word. I am overwhelmed. But it makes life a bit difficult for me.”

“Oh, I suspect the Master knows what he wishes to do with you, and will give you the tools you need for whatever work he assigns.”

“I fondly hope so. But I wish he could make himself a bit more explicit in what he wants. I would, I think, gladly do it if I but knew what it was. But I think you are right in one thing; this life here does not seem to be what I was looking for.”

“I agree. We will miss you, you know. Some of us, at least.”

“And I will miss you also, Daniel. You have been a good friend.”

“Well, I am happy to hear that. I was afraid I might have made you an enemy.”

There was another pause. “Tell me, Daniel—I know not how to say this—” he paused.

“What is it? Be not afraid.”

“Did I—Did I look like—like the kind of person you

thought I might be at first?”

Daniel laughed. John turned red.

“You doubtless wish to know so that you can avoid sending the wrong message to people like me.”

“Well, I—”

“No, John, there was nothing you did. It was what you are. I happen to like muscular men, but most muscular men I have met are brutes, and you seemed quite human, and not really unfriendly, even when I seemed a bit more than friendly, if I may so put it.”

“Well, I was new here, and I did not want to antagonize anyone at the very start.”

“And you handled matters very diplomatically, I must say, for which I am very grateful. Instead of a bloody nose, I gained a friend I feel comfortable with—and, I hope, one who finally feels rather comfortable with me.”

“I do, now that we are simply friends.”

“I have no problem with being simply friends, as you can see. Of course, if you were ever to change your mind—”

I cannot see that ever happening.”

“I am sure you cannot. But *if* it should ever happen, I just wanted to say that I am willing to accommodate you. But to return to what you asked, no, you did not send any signals to me—or to others, whom you may have noticed also. It is just that we—or rather, I should speak only for myself—had hopes rather than evidence. Is that sufficient for your purposes?”

“Quite sufficient.”

“I suspect that you feel as uncomfortable discussing this as I do. Shall we change the subject? Or let us return to the real issue. If you think this is not the life for you, have you any idea

at all what it is that you would really like to do with yourself? Besides fish, I mean.”

“Well—you will laugh at this.”

“Possibly. But who am I? Go ahead, say it.”

“I once thought I would like to be a prophet.”

He did laugh. “I can see why being a mere scholar would be a considerable deflation to *that* ambition! But of course, why not? It never entered my own head, I must say, but if we ever needed prophets, we do now, at a time when there seems to be a dearth of them.”

He pondered for a moment. “But how would one go about making oneself a prophet? It seems one simply gets a call of some sort. It would be futile, I imagine, to prepare by going out and ‘dressing sycamores,’ whatever that means.”

John laughed.

“Who knows?” Daniel went on. “Perhaps the very desire to be a prophet is a kind of call. If so, you will be directed as to what to do. I would not necessarily expect an angel to come down with a burning coal and apply it to your lips, but *something* might happen. Of course, if you are not destined to be a prophet, probably nothing you did would be of any avail.”

“I would not call it exactly a ‘desire,’” said John. “It is simply something that occurred to me.”

“Well, I would not dismiss it. Stranger things have happened, even to those who dress sycamores.”

“Well, in any case, I have not decided anything. Other than that, my future seems a complete blank.”

“I would not concern myself with it. The Master knows what he is doing, and unless I miss my guess, he has some sort of plan for you; and doubtless this stay with us is part of the

preparation he is giving you. He does nothing in vain. I expect some day to be able to say to my friends, 'Oh yes, I once knew the great John, and even gave him a little advice and encouragement!'"

John laughed.

Nine

The week was finally over, and John was rather relieved. He knew he had to say his farewell to Annas, who would give his own opinion of whether he should come back after the month was over; but he had no fear, since he was pretty well convinced that he was seeing the last of the school no matter what.

And, when he was ushered into the room where he had originally greeted Annas, Annas rose and embraced him, as was customary, and said, "So you will be leaving us, at least for a time, then, John."

"Yes, Master," he replied.

"What think you? I know you will be pondering it, but you must have some impression about whether you want to devote your life to what you have seen."

"Of course, Master, I am not sure. It is a wonderful life in many respects, but as Daniel told me, I seem to be more of an outside person than a scholar."

"Daniel is a very intelligent man. I have, of course, had reports about you, which are, I think I can say, mixed. Your colleagues recognize your intelligence; your interventions, with

so little experience to guide you, reveal an acute mind, which, if trained and directed, could perhaps perform adequately the tasks you would be required to do. They have said, however, that you seem not to—shall I say, take kindly—to the approach we have here. Comment?”

“I have great respect for what you are doing; it is clearly very meticulous. I just wonder if it is the kind of thing that really excites me.”

“Well put. Well put. That was what we noticed. Well, I have written our impressions to your father, who doubtless will enter into your reflections in the month to come, and you can ponder them and weigh them against your own impressions of yourself and us; and I am sure that you will come to a conclusion that is suitable. We ourselves have concluded that if you do wish to return, we will accept you on a provisional basis for a year or two; and if at the end of that time, you have progressed sufficiently in our rather stodgy enterprise, we will take you as a permanent student. I have a second letter in which I have included the cost of this week’s stay with us, as well as the tuition per year in the future. That, of course, will also be a consideration for you and your family; though I believe that you will be able to meet the expense.”

John was shocked. It had not occurred to him that it would cost anything to study here. He said, “Thank you, Master,” to prevent there being a stunned silence.

Annas, fortunately, did not give a sign that he noticed anything. “It was a pleasure having you with us—and I think I speak for everyone here, but particularly myself. I consider you a very personable, polite young man; your mother and father should be very proud of you.”

“They are more proud, Master, than I deserve.”

“Well, that shows what good parents they are—not to mention that it is a good example of what I was saying. But you deserve much in your own right. Much. I will be very happy to see you back again should you decide to return, though I am inclined to think it somewhat unlikely. And if you do not return, consider that whenever you are in Jerusalem, my house will always be open to you if you wish to see me.”

“You are very kind. Thank you, Master.” And with another embrace, John was dismissed.

The students knew, of course, that he was leaving, and those who had become his friends also embraced him and wished him well, Adam in particular. Daniel was not in the group.

John looked about for him, puzzled, as the students left, and he suddenly appeared from a room at the side. He had been waiting for John to be alone, it seemed. “So we are seeing the last of you, then,” he said, sadly.

“I am not certain of that; but it seems likely.”

“May I give you a fond—but friendly—embrace?”

“Of course.” And Daniel held him for a bit longer than was necessary. And John, it must be said, appreciated it somewhat more than he wished, but then loosed his own arms, and Daniel dutifully dropped his.

“I give you much thanks, Daniel. You have been a good friend.”

“The thanks go the other way, to my mind. If ever you are in Jerusalem, do come to visit for a few moments; it would do my heart a world of good if you did so.”

“I will remember,” said John, whose own heart would be

gladdened by another sight of Daniel.

“Farewell, then.”

“Peace.”

John left, wondering if he was wrong in fighting against his feelings. Daniel, clearly a good man, gave no sign that he saw anything wrong with what he wanted to do with John, nor evidently did the two or three others who looked rather greedily at him—when he thought of it, it still disgusted him, except now not so much in the case of Daniel.

But there were clear injunctions against it, were there not, in Scripture? He seemed to recall that somewhere in Leviticus it said that a man who lay with a male was to be put to death. He wondered what the analysts made of that; it seemed clear enough to him; and he assumed that that was what Daniel was driving at—though he wondered how in fact it was managed. Certainly, all the men he spoke with except people like Daniel regarded that sort of thing with abhorrence. He concluded that Daniel’s orientation deluded him, somehow; and he saw how easy that would be, based on the fact that he himself had begun to doubt based on his own inclinations.

That perhaps was a very good reason for his not returning. If this had happened in a week, what would years with Daniel bring? Or if someone like Andrew happened to join them? Though in that case, he could imagine Daniel and he competing for his attention. He shook his head in disgust. But again, there was something about the disgust itself which it would be wise not to explore. Inclinations!

“I would I had them not!” he muttered aloud to himself as he walked through Jerusalem to the Temple, causing those passing by to look strangely at him. He realized he had spoken

aloud, and thanked the Master that he had given no verbal hint of what it was he wished he did not have. Well, he certainly had no wish to have them, if the Master condemned what they inclined him toward, and he hoped that the Master would take into account that they were against his will.

At least for the moment.

As he was pondering this, he entered the Temple area and walked, faster and faster, toward the corner where he was to meet Simon and Andrew—and there they were! They did not see him as yet, and he ran, dodging people in the way, toward them, his pack bouncing against his back, calling their names. Andrew looked up, and opened his arms, into which John flew, and they embraced.

This was, of course, more powerful for John than the embrace of Daniel, and he withdrew with some trepidation that Andrew would notice something, and then embraced Simon. “It is a joy to see you, youngster!” exclaimed Andrew and Simon together, and John answered, “You have no idea how happy I am to behold both of you!” and all laughed from sheer joy, Simon holding him at arm’s length, and looking into his face. He was glad that it was not Andrew, and wished it were Andrew.

They still smelled—rather faintly, after all this time—of fish. It occurred to John that he liked the smell of fish, and had been missing it.

“So the scholar has not forgotten his old friends,” said Andrew. “You smell of—what?”

John laughed. “Soap. They had me bathe and wash my clothes as soon as I entered the house. But how could I forget you?” Little did Andrew realize how difficult it would have

been.

“Oh, I suspect it will be quite easy as the years go on. But you will at least be spending a month with us, is it not?”

“Probably a good deal more than that.”

“Oh? You found the life not to your liking? You miss rowing the boat and smelling of fish?”

John became serious. “Make no jokes about it, Andrew. It is a good life, and one which in many respects I love dearly. And when I met you, I realized I actually *like* the smell of fish.”

All laughed. “No, but,” said Simon, “you do not think you were intended to be a rabbi? Or was it—” He realized that it would be indelicate to suggest that the school did not consider him qualified.

John caught what he was driving at, and laughed again. “Oh, they would—probably—accept me if I decided to return. At least, provisionally, for a year or two; but if I *did* decide to return, I think I could make it permanent; it is not all that difficult.”

“But you rather think,” said Andrew, “that you will not do so.”

“At the moment at least,” answered John. “There is much there to like, but there is something—” he did not know how to finish the sentence.

“Something not what you expected,” said Andrew, doing it for him.

“Let us leave it at that. I must think about it. There is also the fact that it will cost my father a good deal of money.”

“Indeed?” said both of them in surprise.

“Oh, yes. When one thinks of it, of course it is expensive to keep and educate a person; it simply did not occur to me,

and I was—I almost knew not what to say—when Annas mentioned it to me as a matter of course. It is *not* inexpensive.”

“Do you think your father can afford it? I realize, he is doing well, but we *are* but fishermen, after all.”

“I looked at the fee, and I *think* he could manage it rather easily. I know not, but I *think* so. Still, it is a consideration. If it is really the life for me, then it is probably worth it, and I can pay him back when I finish; I gather that students of Annas do rather well after they graduate. Some of the ones in their last year have mentioned their prospects, in order to tempt me to stay, I think. But if it is merely something I *can* do, then it seems to me that the remuneration should not be something I should take into account. Why make my father pay for a career that I find not really—not really *mine*, if you know what I am saying.”

“Then you prefer fishing to rabbizing?” asked Andrew.

“I know not. I think that fishing is perhaps not my life either; but the problem is that I know not what is. But if I am going to do something that does not completely suit me, then at the moment at least, my inclination is to go back to fishing rather than to ‘rabbize,’ as you say.”

“Well, we will certainly welcome you, whether or not your whole heart is in it,” said Simon, and Andrew nodded enthusiastic assent, “especially now that we are definitely a team with Zebedee.”

“Oh, then whatever it was you were doing was successful?”

“As far as one can call anything that lawyers do ‘successful,’ said Andrew sardonically. “Thank God for Simon! Many a time I was ready to smash the table with my fist, but he

simply went calmly on, asking them to explain themselves, after which they turned sentences into tighter and tighter knots, more tangled than a net that had caught a shark.” His look made John wonder whether this admission about Simon’s skill was something of an effort.

“They knew—or at least they thought—that they could out-talk us,” said Simon, “and at first made a game of it. But I decided that I was not going to let them make us frantic, and I simply went on and on until they condescended to spell out what they meant in Aramaic that meant something, and I would not let them go until they got it clear. I mean, the whole thing was simple enough, really; but they wanted to make it a maze of whereases and therefore and so on, and I—who was it that the Greeks said gave somebody a thread to carry into a maze so he could get out?”

Neither John nor Andrew had any idea what he was talking about.

“It matters not. I made them spell out in simple terms what they were saying—and it was amusing to see the difficulty they had in doing it—”

“Amusing! It was infuriating!” said Andrew.

“That was because you let them have the upper hand,” remarked Simon. “I knew that we were the ones finally in control. We knew what we wanted, and we knew we could do it without any legal agreement if we chose, and so, in spite of the fact that they kept telling us we could not, when all was said and done, we had them put the whole thing into legal language that we could understand. Zebedee will have no problem.”

“And all was said and done,” said Andrew, “only yesterday! But we are free of them! We have the documents!

Zebedee needs only to make his mark upon them.”

“Well, I am glad that you were successful.” said John.

“But let us pay our respects to the Master,” said Simon, “and then we can return to where we are staying.” They suited the action to the words, after which Simon said, “There is room for you, of course, if you do not mind sleeping on a mat on the floor.”

“Of course not.”

“No doubt it will seem primitive after the luxury you experienced in the High Priest’s palace.” remarked Andrew. “I saw the outside of it three days ago, when I could not tolerate another moment of those discussions.”

“A good deal of the palace is quite luxurious, to be sure,” answered John, “but not my room. By any means. Students are even lower there than servants.” The others raised their eyebrows, and John went on, “Not that we were abused; but our comfort was not uppermost in the minds of the establishment. I have no complaint, really.”

As they were saying this, they were walking through the, to John, rather confining streets of Jerusalem, trying to stay together, but being elbowed out of the way by people going in the opposite direction and those behind them who all seemed in a frantic rush to pass them and get somewhere. John had thought that the frenetic pace of Jerusalem he had experienced in the past was due to the crowds for the Passover, but he now discovered that there were always crowds, and they were always frenetic; it was simply that the city held ten times as many people as the streets were designed to accommodate. And at Passover, when it held thirty or forty times as many, there was not that much difference; too many was too many, and many

too many was barely noticeable from the normal intolerable situation.

They finally arrived at the modest accommodations the two had selected, and John realized how easy it was to become spoiled even in a week. The room was even more barren than his room in the palace, and there were no ornate rooms to go to from there, and certainly no courtyard with well-kept palm trees. It was what he expected, of course; but now he had a point of comparison. He said nothing to the others.

They went out and sat outside a shop that had what Andrew called, “fairly decent food” and ate the evening meal and drank the rather sour wine, which John mixed with a good deal more water than usual to take away the taste. The students ate well, he realized, now that he had returned to ordinary fare.

“We could leave on the morrow,” said Andrew as they were eating, “but I thought I would like to see this John we spoke of, as long as we are down here. Do you remember?”

“Of course I remember! How could I forget a prophet named John?”

“Of a certainty! He would be a rival, I suspect. So we are to have two prophets named John, then.”

This hit close to a nerve, and John reddened, at which Andrew said, “Oho! *Now* we know why you went to that school! But you found they were not a training-ground for prophets!” and he gave John a playful punch in the shoulder.

John was silent. What was there to say? Finally, he said, “But seriously, I would like to hear what he has to say myself.” And he also remembered that Jesus’s mother had said that Jesus might be around there, and that in some way, he might be able to help John with his troubles about Samuel and

especially poor Thomas, whom John had barely thought of for a week. Perhaps Jesus knew this John, and could recommend John to him. He had washed the fishiness from himself, but perhaps John could bathe away the impurities from his soul.

As he lay down on his mat to sleep, the troubles he had put into a box in his mind spilled out; Daniel had driven Andrew from his thoughts, and all the rest had erased Thomas from them. He felt guilty that he had forgotten him; but on the other hand, had Mary not told him not to concern himself, that all would somehow be well?

He wondered if anything would ever be well.

Ten

The next day, they journeyed to the place by the Jordan where it was said that John was bathing the people. And as they neared it, it was hard to miss where it was, because quite a crowd was around him, and his booming voice, aided by the water of the river, carried far.

He was clearly a hermit, dressed in skins, with his hair long, like a Nazirite. He was rather remarkably clean for a hermit, however, presumably because periodically he would go down into the water (he preached on a beach at the shore) with a number of people, each of whom he would immerse in the water, telling them he was washing off their sins and killing their past life; and they would wade back and let the sun dry them off.

He was certainly direct in his speech. "You vipers' spawn!" he shouted, seeing the long fringes of the Pharisees' squarish mantles among the crowds. "Who told you you could escape from the retribution coming upon you? Show results that demonstrate a change of heart, and do not start telling yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father.' I tell you that

God can make these stones bear children to Abraham! No, an axe is now at the roots of the tree, and every tree that does not bear good fruit is going to be chopped down and thrown into the fire to burn!”

“He definitely does not mince words!” whispered Andrew to John. “If even they are being condemned, what chance have the rest of us?” But John was voicing—granted in a overstated way—something that had been rankling in John’s mind for the past week. He could not quite identify it, but it had something to do with being overly careful with observances that one could see, rather than those that could not be seen. Daniel, for instance, was very observant, except for what to John was far more important than making sure one had one’s little leather phylacteries bound around his arm and head when he prayed.

Some people with worried looks came up to John and asked him, “Rabbi, what are we to do?”

“If you have two tunics, give one to someone who has none; if you have extra food, do the same.”

A tax-collector came up to be bathed and said, “And what should I do?” and John answered, “Do not demand more than you were told to collect.” The man looked at him, astonished, and said, “Then I should starve?” and walked away.

There were even some soldiers who had misgivings about their conduct and approached John to be bathed. When they asked him what to do, he said, “Do not bully people or arrest them on false charges—and be satisfied with your salary.” One or two thought this something of a hard saying, but decided to be bathed anyway. When they emerged, they seemed relieved.

John became rather nervous seeing all this. How could he go to be bathed from his sins and admit publicly what he felt

toward Andrew, and what he had done to poor Samuel and Thomas? And in a sense, he had not *done* anything wrong—at least deliberately; but if he confessed it, it would certainly sound much worse than he felt it was—perhaps. He knew not. He did not think he had the courage.

As he was deliberating—and he saw, somewhat to his relief and amusement, that Andrew and Simon were also having qualms about stepping forward to be bathed, a group of the Pharisees came up to John, and instead of approaching him in penitence, asked, “Are you claiming to be the Prince? The Messiah who was prophesied, the descendant of David?”

“I?” said John. “No. But someone is coming after me, who is ahead of me, because he was in existence before me. We have all received something of what in him is complete. We have been blessed with gifts that are his by right. The law may have been given by Moses, but God’s blessings and truth have come into being through him. No one has ever seen God, but the God God fathered, who is in the father’s bosom, has made him known. I? Who am I?”

“Who *are* you? Are you Elijah? You sound as if that is the one you claim to be.”

“I am not.”

“Are you the Prophet who was prophesied?”

“No.”

“Then who are you? We have to give some answer to those who sent us. Just who do you claim to be?”

“I,” said John, looking at them and addressing not only them but all the assembled people, “am a voice crying in the desert, ‘Smooth out the path for the Master,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”

“But then why are you bathing people, if you are not the Prince or Elijah or the prophet?”

“I am bathing you in water,” said John. “But there is someone standing among you—someone you do not recognize; someone whose sandal-straps I am not good enough to untie! He will bathe you in the Holy Spirit—and in fire!”

At this point, the delegation turned away in disgust. And John called after them, “And he has his winnowing-fan in his hand to thresh out the grain off the granary floor, and he will store the wheat in his barn and burn the chaff in fire that will never go out!” But what he said was lost on them; they soon were out of earshot.

Some other people, who had a good deal more courage than John could summon at the moment, then came up to be bathed, and John, to his immense relief, saw that John did not require each of them to broadcast his sins to all and sundry. Apparently, if one had an air of repentance, John accepted that as sufficient.

John almost went forward, but then a lone man came up, with his back to John as he observed, so that he could not see him clearly. For some reason, there suddenly was no one around him. John looked at him, and almost whispered, “I should be being bathed by you, and you are coming to *me*?”

“Allow it for now,” said the man softly—he turned slightly, and it was *Jesus*! “This is what must be done,” he went on, “not to leave out anything proper.” So John, with some reluctance, went into the Jordan with him, put his hand on his head, and immersed him in the water, and drew back.

Suddenly, something happened in the sky above; it was as if it opened up, somehow, as a cloud sometimes breaks up, but

there was no cloud there. It was as if the sky itself was a cloud, and one could see a brightness behind it. A bird—a dove—came out and lighted on Jesus as he emerged from the water, and an enormous thunderclap seemed to say, “This is my beloved Son; I am pleased with him.” John’s hair stood on end; his knees grew weak. He almost tottered.

“Did you hear that?” said Andrew.

“What?” said Simon.

“Those were words, were they not?”

“I heard thunder,” he answered.

“No, they were words. I heard them.”

“I did also,” said John. “Or something like words.”

“What did they say?” asked Simon.

“Something like, “This is my son, the one I love; I am pleased with him.”

“That was what I thought I heard also,” said Andrew.

“Or, if not exactly that, words to that effect.”

“I did notice that the thunder was—meaningful, somehow,” said Simon. “Whatever that means.”

“I think we should leave,” said John. “I must think about this.” It was incredible that it would be Jesus this happened to! How different it made what Mary had told him! He could not grasp it; he was totally confused, and needed to be by himself to think; yet he was incapable of moving.

He was staring at the place where Jesus was drying off, and he saw an extremely handsome man, with fringes to his mantle that made him look like a Pharisee, come up to Jesus and speak briefly. Jesus greeted him and answered whatever question he had, and evidently dismissed him; then the two walked away in different directions.

John now found he could move; the others with John seemed as dazed as he was, and they went home in silence, until Andrew said, "And I thought I recognized him from somewhere."

"Who?" said Simon.

"The one the bird lighted on," he answered. "I could swear I have seen him before."

"It was Jesus of Nazareth, the carpenter," said John.

"You are right!"

"He built my boat, the little one, when I was but a boy. You remember; the one now beside our house."

"Of course!" said Andrew. "How could I have forgotten?"

"But then what does all this mean?" said Simon.

"I know not," answered John. "But it is something vitally important, I am certain. I must think!" He had to be by himself; he simply could not digest it.

Apparently the others felt as he did, and they went to their room in silence. John sat by himself apart on the floor in a corner, his arms around his knees, and for a long time thought nothing, simply feeling a strange mixture of awe and confusion. Jesus! His friend Jesus! "My beloved Son!" And Mary—so convinced that he would be here, as if she had communicated with him somehow! And Mary herself; what did that make her? He knew she was—what? Different, certainly, but as a queen is different from her subjects; but she treated no one, least of all John, as a subject, but as a beloved young friend. Just as Jesus had treated him. "My beloved Son, in whom I am pleased. Listen to him!"

Incredible! But on the other hand, as he thought back, he

now saw that there was something very different about Jesus also. Perhaps Jesus had already called him, without his realizing it! Perhaps his desire—if it *was* a desire—to be a prophet, and then his hearing the thunder call Jesus “My beloved Son,” was the call. Perhaps he *would* be able to make some contribution to changing the world!

But Jesus had not seemed to notice him, especially. It was a kind of ceremony that he felt he had to go through with John “not to leave out anything proper,” whatever that meant. John knew. He had obviously known Jesus from before, and recognized that he was far superior to John: “I should be being bathed by you, and you are coming to *me*?”

But the interesting thing was that when Jesus approached, John did not immediately point him out as “the one who is coming after me” who is “ahead of me because he was in existence before me.” It was as if he was waiting for something to indicate who this person was, whatever suspicions he might have about him.

And did the thunder—or the dove coming out of the “hole” in the sky—supply the signal he was waiting for? John thought back, and it seemed that John was as stunned as everyone else. Afterwards, as John looked on in his confusion at the fact that it was Jesus who was drying off in the sun, it seemed as if John also had to be by himself to digest all this. He had said no more, and after Jesus and the other man left, he made gestures of dismissal, had he not? John did not quite remember, he was so confused.

Of course he would go back on the morrow. He was sure that the others would go also. But then a slave apparently from the lawyers Simon and Andrew had been consulting came up

and said something to Simon. Simon spoke to Andrew, who said, "But surely you will return to the Jordan tomorrow. We must discover what all this means!"

"You go, with John," said Simon. "A complication has arisen—of course, how else could those people behave?—and I must see to it before we return home. I will take care of it—it is nothing serious—and either meet you or be here so that you can tell me what has happened."

Andrew protested, and they discussed the matter for a while, but finally assented. He came over to John, and said, "I assume you plan to go back to the Jordan tomorrow," and when John said, "You could not keep me away!" he went on, "It turns out that Simon will have to see to some legal detail, which we hope will not take long, but he wants us to go as early as possible, and will either join us, or I can come back and fetch him if necessary."

"Lawyers!" said Simon. "They are like colds; they *will* appear at the most inconvenient moments! But fear not; I am certain it can all be resolved easily. It is a nuisance, nothing more, but one at least one of us cannot avoid."

John was secretly rather pleased that he and Andrew would be alone together when they met Jesus—as he was certain they would.

But the next day, they arrived back at the Jordan quite early, and nothing unusual happened until nearly nightfall. John was bathing the people, (both John and Andrew had themselves bathed), and giving his speech about changing one's way of thinking, because the world was going to be a different sort of place soon.

Then, however, as the sun was setting, Jesus appeared

again, and John said, pointing to him, “There is God’s lamb, the one who is ridding the world of its sin! He is the one I was speaking of when I said that there was a man coming after me who was ahead of me because he existed before me. And even I was not sure who he was, though I came to bathe you in water to reveal him to Israel.”

But then John looked around at everyone (Jesus had gone by by this time, and John was about to go after him, when he realized he did not know where he was), and said, “I saw the Spirit coming down out of the sky like a dove and lighting on him. It was not that I recognized him myself; the one who sent me to bathe the people told me that when I saw the Spirit come down and rest on someone, he would be the one who was to bathe people in the Holy Spirit. And I saw this, and now I can swear that he is the Son of God!”

“Rabbi,” said John, going up to him. “do you think that he would like others to follow him?”

“Come back tomorrow, and if you see him, your question can perhaps be answered.”

“Perhaps we should be following you.”

“Me? Why would you follow the bridegroom’s servant when the groom himself is there? No. He will have to grow greater, and I grow less now. You will see. Come back tomorrow.”

So, since Jesus was not there, the two went back to their room, where they met Simon, fuming. “All day they kept me!” he raged. “Over nothing! And it is not finished *yet!* These men can find complications in—in a cup of clear water! I must go back tomorrow! What happened there today?”

The others told him and he exclaimed, “Jesus of

Nazareth! Who would have thought it? I think I even met him myself once! It *was* truly he?”

“Without a doubt,” said John. “I know him well.”

“Amazing! Well, let me know what happens. I should be through by mid-morning.”

That night was haunted with “and now I can swear that he is the Son of God!” The Son of God! What could that mean? And had John not said, “The God God fathered, who is in the Father’s bosom?” What could *that* mean? The *God* God fathered! And even the thunder confirmed it: “My beloved Son.” Incredible! Impossible! And *Jesus*, of all people; Jesus who had been so—normal! Ordinary! And yet not! The God God fathered! In the Father’s bosom!

The beginning of the next day promised to be a repetition of the previous one, except that John as he bathed the people had his eye on Andrew and John, who were close beside him, and was obviously watching out for Jesus. As afternoon drew on, Jesus walked by, as if musing on something, paying no attention to John and the ones around him, and John said to Andrew, “That man is God’s lamb,” clearly indicating that they were to go after him. John thought, “God’s *lamb*?” He remembered this from the day before, “The one who is ridding the world of its sin.” It must refer somehow to the Passover lamb. But what was *that* all about?

Jesus gave no sign that he had noticed them, until they were away from the crowd, and then he turned, smiled in recognition at John, and said, “What is it you are looking for?”

“Rabbi,” said John, turning red, wondering if that was the title he should give, and also realizing that he could not say aloud what he wanted—and then realizing that he knew not

what it was that he *did* want. He was totally confused. “Where—where are you staying?”

Jesus gave a little chuckle, and said, “Come and see.” They followed him to a room not unlike theirs, and he said, with no preamble, “Would you be interested in becoming a part of changing the whole world?”

The two were astounded, and Jesus said, “You saw what happened the day before yesterday, did you not?” They nodded, rather sheepishly. “It is time—or almost time—for me to put away my, shall we say my disguise, and introduce myself to the world—gradually, gradually. If people accept me, the world will be a very, very different place—and certain people”—he gave a look at John and Andrew in turn—“will understand themselves better and will eventually be able to be at peace. That is what you wish, is it not?” The two nodded. “Among other things, I realize,” he added.

He looked at them, as if to ask for comments. John felt he dared not speak to this person, who clearly was at the very least a prophet like Elijah, and whom the thunder had called “his beloved Son.” Jesus laughed at his consternation, and said, “Come now. I am still who I was. What I am now is what I was then; it is just that you know a bit more about me than before. But you were not terrified of me when I put the ‘John board’ in your boat and told you to be sure to step on it. Why should you be terrified now?”

John thought he had very good reason to be terrified now that he realized he had been dealing with some kind of supernatural being. He finally managed to blurt, “You want *us* to join you in changing the world? We are but fishermen!”

“Ah, but you will be doing what no human being can do,

fisherman or king. You will see. What Elijah did was nothing to what you will do as a matter of course. Had you no desire to be a prophet?"

"He does indeed!" exclaimed Andrew. "He all but told us two days ago!"

"I did not!" said John, scarlet with embarrassment.

Andrew said, "He told us that—you know he spent a week with the school at the High Priest's palace, to see if he wanted to be a rabbi, and he came back two days ago, dissatisfied, and when I mentioned John—the one who was bathing the people—as being a prophet in competition with him because of the name, he acted as if I had read his thoughts!" Andrew was babbling, John realized; he was as much overwhelmed by Jesus as John was.

"He actually *told* Daniel of his ambition, you know," said Jesus. John's head snapped around to look in astonishment at Jesus. Andrew, of course, was totally mystified at who this "Daniel" was. "And Daniel said," he went on "The Master knows what he is doing, and unless I miss my guess, he has some sort of plan for you; and doubtless this stay with us is part of the preparation he is giving you. He does nothing in vain. I expect some day to be able to say to my friends, "Oh yes, I once knew the great John, and even gave him a little advice and encouragement!" He does indeed know what he is doing, and Daniel did not miss his guess; he himself was something of a prophet there."

John gaped at him openmouthed. How did he know? Had Daniel told him? But when?

Eleven

ANDREW THEN EXCLAIMED, "I MUST fetch Simon!" and dashed off, leaving John and Jesus alone together. Jesus looked at John, and laughed at the dumbfounded expression, and then said, "Fear not; you will become accustomed to me. I am truly a man like you. I am the Son of Man."

John was silent. But the thunder and John had said that he was the Son of God. "Touch me," said Jesus. "You will see that I am not a vision; I have flesh and bones like anyone else." John reached over and felt Jesus's arm; it was indeed a real arm, well-muscled from his work in the carpentry shop. So a carpenter and a few fishermen were going to change the world.

Jesus, as though reading his thoughts said, "You think it cannot be done—and there is a strong possibility that it cannot be done in the way it should be done. But God, as Daniel said, does nothing in vain."

"When did you talk to Daniel?"

"Let us just say that I know what he said, because *you* know what he said."

"You can read my thoughts?"

“It is of no consequence.” It was certainly of consequence to John. Who *was* this person?

“But—but in that case—” He could not finish the sentence.

“You passed your test well with Daniel. I am pleased.”

“My test?”

“God does nothing in vain.”

“Then my stay with Annas was a test?”

“Do not misunderstand. God was not testing you; you were testing yourself. Put it this way: an opportunity was presented, and you rejected it. Did you not feel relieved afterward?”

John thought a moment. “I did, I remember. I had been worried that I was not—not normal, and it seemed that I was normal after all. But—”

“It would have been more difficult, would it not, if the man who made the advance was like—say, Andrew?”

John considered this. “I know not what I would have done in that case.”

“So you were tested with something not so difficult.”

“Well, but Daniel became my friend, you know.”

“And what is wrong with that? Andrew is your friend.”

“Yes, but Andrew is not—and—well, I—well, I—I then began to wonder whether—”

“And you remembered what Scripture said, did you not? But it does not say that you must hate those who are a temptation to you; only that you must resist the temptation itself. And because Daniel is what he is, that was not so difficult for you. You passed the test. You did very well, in fact; I am proud of you.”

John reddened again, and then said, “But—but I almost did not. Because I wondered how Daniel could—could not have a problem, when I—when I saw one.”

“Ah. That is why you spent no more than a week there. You do *not* plan to return, do you?”

“I suppose not. In fact, I am sure I will not—especially with Daniel there.”

“So you see the danger—or at least part of it. Daniel is a good man, but the kind of study engaged in in that school encourages finding plausible arguments for things that are the direct opposite of the obvious—as well as finding ten thousand complications *in* the obvious, making a command that was supposed to be liberating something burdensome in the extreme. Daniel and some others there have convinced themselves that the command in Leviticus refers to, shall I say only certain types of activity that they are interested in, leaving them, they think, free to engage in other acts that do not fit their strict definition. Do you see what I am saying?”

“You mean that the kind of analysis they do leads to interpreting simple commands as if they were very complex ones, such as how many steps one may take on the Sabbath, and at the same time, these complications allow them to see ways to avoid the obvious command.”

“Exactly. Such as that an oath taken by the altar is not binding, but it is binding if taken by the gift on the altar, or one can break an oath taken by the Temple with impunity, but not one taken by the gold in the Temple.”

“It was just that sort of thing that bothered me.”

“And rightly so. My Father was giving guidelines on how to live peaceably and contentedly; he was not creating a swamp

where one needed a map to avoid stepping into quicksand. I thought you should see this in practice. But too much exposure to it can be fatal.”

He *thought* John should see this. It sounded as if he had arranged everything. John was having severe difficulty embracing the idea of “my Father” and the idea that what had happened to him was thought out beforehand and planned—and somehow planned by the carpenter he was looking at.

“Then is Daniel doomed?” he asked. “You said he was a good man, and he *is* so in many ways.”

“He is in severe danger, but there is hope for him. Especially now that you are his friend. You see, my Father is looking not only to you but to those you have contact with. He looks to everyone, in fact. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without his knowing it and arranging it.”

John had heard something like this before, but it did not have quite the impact of what Jesus was saying. It was overwhelming; John felt as if he were drowning in the idea. “Then I, too, have been ‘arranged,’ as you say.”

“Well, you are not a puppet manipulated by the Father—and certainly not by me. The Father gave you certain traits: the obvious ones that we trace to your blood, such as your curly hair, the shape of your nose, and so on, which give signs as to who your parents are; and there are also spiritual traits you were given: you and James, for instance have spirits of thunder, do you not?”

“We do tend to become angry easily. You have seen that for yourself.”

“I have indeed. Though you are learning to control them; otherwise Daniel would have had a bloody nose, I suspect.”

“He himself was afraid of that,” John laughed.

“And you have a very inquisitive mind; you do not simply accept what is told you and move on. Remember when you were learning the letters, and you wondered why there were many letters that said the same thing.”

“I remember.” But how did *he* know of this?

“But the point is that you are free. What you *do* with the traits given you is your own choice. My Father does not make you chose this or that.”

“He does not?”

“Well, it is more complex than that. But the point I am trying to make is that it is *you* who determine your life by your choices, and these are not forced upon you. Your impulses are given you beforehand, so to speak, such as your tendency to anger; but though these may influence you, your choice is what you make it, and need not follow these influences. Thus it was with Daniel, even when you found him, let us say, not unattractive.”

“But why was I given this particular—what you called ‘influence’? I certainly do not want it, and you seem to agree that what it leads to is sin, do you not?”

“I do.”

“Then why do I have it? And why can I not rid myself of it?”

“Ah, here you have touched on one of the great mysteries of life. You know that some men are born blind, through no fault of their own—or no fault of their parents either—and they must struggle through life without being able to see. Some are born crippled; others become crippled because of some accident that was no fault of anyone’s. So there is nothing to

blame yourself for if you have this tendency. The problem is that with tendencies such as this, it can be fatal to act upon them. For instance, some, like Thomas, have, or acquire, a desire to become drunk, and must struggle to prevent themselves from destroying themselves. Each person has aspects of himself that he perhaps wishes he did not have, but which in the end he simply must accept, and learn to live with. Because if there are to be many human beings, each one must be limited in his humanity in a way different from anyone else. And so some necessarily will be much more limited than most. And some limitations create serious problems if one acts upon them.”

“It does not seem fair.”

“It is *not* fair, if by ‘fair’ one means ‘equal.’ No two human beings are ‘equal’ in that sense, or they would be the same person. Not even Thomas and Samuel were ‘equal,’ though they were the same in many ways.”

“Is there any hope for Thomas? Your mother seemed to think there was.”

“Oh, yes. When we return to Galilee, this will be seen to, I think. But it is very complex, and involves several people and their choices. Thomas is in great danger, but it is possible—and I think likely—that the right people will make the right choice, and that he will be saved. If he is, he will join us—if he chooses to; and I think he will. It does not mean that he will be free of struggle; he will have severe, and I think sometimes overpowering struggles; but all will be well, finally, and he will be a great man because of his struggles. As will you. A *very* great man, or I miss my guess. And I miss very few guesses. Daniel was very perceptive.”

“You speak as if you do not know, and yet you know.”

“That is another of life’s great mysteries. Events depend on men’s free choices; but my Father is very—you might say ‘clever,’ and can arrange things even though people do not make the choices one might expect them to make. He controls the universe, including our lives and everything about our lives; and yet *we* control our lives also, without interference from him—even though under a control he exercises without exercising, so to speak. It is, as I say, a mystery.”

“Every word you utter is a mystery.”

He laughed. “Well, we are speaking of the essential mysteries of human life and freedom. Philosophers have racked their brains over these matters for thousands of years, and will do so for thousands of years to come. Small wonder if what I say now sounds enigmatic. But I say it because you need to hear it, and because, though you cannot understand it—I am aware of that—you can begin to accept it. Trust me.”

“But is there some special reason why I—why—I mean, with Andrew and Daniel, even—”

“Actually, there is. This tendency you have, in your case, is the negative side of a tremendous potential you possess, John; and to develop the positive side, you need it and the struggles against it. Your life will be in many ways quite difficult, but you will see in the end how it is all worth while, and how it all makes sense. You will not regret it.

“Of course, it is always possible for you to throw everything away, and become like what Daniel may become unless he is rescued. And there will be others you will meet, and some—but well, let us leave that. For I—and my mother—will be here, helping you. Fear not. All will be well,

even those things that seem anything but well. You wondered two nights ago whether anything would ever be well again. You will see.”

Again, how did he know?

“Then somehow what I did to Samuel, and—and Thomas?”

“You wish, I know, to be forgiven for what you did to Samuel and Thomas, and you suspect that John’s bath did not accomplish this.”

John nodded, hope rising within him.

“The *sin*, what there was of it, is gone. The *acts* remain, however, and we must, as I said, do something about the consequences of what you and others have done. But all will be well even there. You will not fully see this until the worst day of your whole life.” he looked over the landscape with infinite sorrow, and a certain—what was it? Fear? “But even the tears and agony of that day will be erased, if it happens thus. All will be well, because my Father loves you—all of you, even the worst of you—and he does nothing in vain; and he does not allow your evil to overcome his love.”

John did not know what to say.

Jesus laughed, and then said, “Fear not. The lamb redeems his sheep. You will see. And you *will* be the great John. You and the other John will be two of the greatest in the new Kingdom. Trust me.”

“You realize how hard all this is. I must trust in a carpenter that he is—is divine, somehow,—and yet I know that there is but one God, and He is a spirit, not a man.”

“I know. I am speaking to you now much more frankly than I will speak to anyone else for a very long time, because

you have a mind which can, if not absorb, accept it. I will tell you now what I will tell others only years from now. The Father and I are one and the same thing. One spiritual thing. Yet I—the same I—am truly the Son of Man. Trust me.”

John’s mind was reeling. Finally, he said, “It seems I must. What else can I do?”

“Oh, you could reject me; you could say that what John said is a delusion based on some kind of hold I have on him, and the thunder was either a coincidence or a mass delusion also, based on expectations raised by him. He *is* a forceful speaker, is he not?”

“He is that.”

“He has glimpsed the light. In fact, he saw it before anyone else—except my mother. He has an idea of what the light is that has entered this world in shadow, but he does not fully understand it. And he will not do so, while he is living on this earth. He has a mission: to prepare people for me; and when that mission is accomplished, he will leave. Like Moses, he is leading others into the Promised Land—the land that was promised to Adam, as it happens—but he will not cross over himself.”

John did not understand even this. It sounded as if John was going to be killed fairly soon—or perhaps would sicken and die.

“And your mother? Your mother knows everything about you?”

“Oh, yes. From the beginning. From just before the beginning, in fact. And you are quite right that she is different. She is as different from the rest of you—and even from me, in that sense—as Eve was before and after she ate the fruit. She is

the one human person who is as human beings were originally meant to be. Of course, not even she understands fully; but she accepts perfectly. It will cause her immense pain, and you will be a help to her there, just as she will help you—but all will be well even there.

“But we will have to talk further later. I think I hear Andrew returning.”

“I have enough just in these few moments to occupy myself for months!” exclaimed John.

Jesus laughed again. “If you stay with me, you will have enough to occupy yourself for five lifetimes! But fear not.”

At this point, the two men came in sight, and Jesus looked at Simon, stroked his beard, and said, “You are Simon, son of John. You will be called *Kēpha*.”

All three looked at him, astonished. “You will be called ‘Rock’?” What could that possibly mean?

“I seem to be making everyone speechless today,” said Jesus. “It is that I am so happy to have at last started on the path that is laid out for me, and found those who will wish to travel it in my company. You *do* wish to join me, do you not?”

All said, “Yes, Rabbi,” and Simon added, “Of course!”

“It is well,” said Jesus. “You have concluded your negotiations here?” he asked Simon.

“Yes, finally!” he exclaimed. “That is, unless they find some further complication. How they can make something so simple into a—a twisted net of words!”

Jesus laughed. “Then perhaps it would be a good idea to escape before they can think of something else. The irony is that if you choose to follow me, all of this is, as they would say, moot.”

They looked at each other.

“And I must tell you,” Jesus went on, not expecting a reply, “that I myself have something that I must do for the next forty days, after which I can join you in Galilee. And John, you yourself must take a month to decide what kind of life you wish to live—and the two of you would be wise to do the same. If you follow me, your lives will be very, very different.”

“I am certain, Master, that we will follow you, whatever comes,” said Simon.

“You have no idea what you are saying, Simon. You will follow me, but it will be nothing like what you think.”

“It matters not. I am ready for anything.”

“You will remember what you just said on the day you find that you are ready for nothing. But even that will be well. But all of you need a good night’s sleep in preparation for your journey, and I myself must prepare myself. Peace.”

“Peace,” they answered, and he turned and left.

Twelve

The next day, they set out for Galilee, and when they arrived, John embraced his parents, who were overjoyed to have him back; and then he read the letters he had to Zebedee and gave them to him. Zebedee drew in his breath a bit when he heard the cost of tuition, but John told him, “Fear not. It is very unlikely that I will be going back.”

“Indeed?” Zebedee put his hands on John’s shoulders and looked intently into his eyes. “You found it—less than satisfactory, then? Because Annas said he would be willing to accept you.”

“It is a very nice place, and I think I could succeed there; but it is, I am afraid, not for me.”

“Then we will have you as one of our crew! I was hoping this would happen!”

“Well, as to that, something has come up.” John did not know quite how to continue.

“*Another* complication! What is it this time?”

“What if I were to tell you that I—that Andrew and Simon and I—have discovered the Messiah, the Prince who was

prophesied?”

“If you were to tell me that, I would answer that you are mad.”

“Even if I told you that he can read my thoughts?”

“*Especially* if you told me he could read your thoughts! Mountebanks have existed from the beginning of time, John, and they can be very clever and very convincing. You are young, but—you say that he has befuddled Simon and Andrew also?”

“I would not say ‘befuddled.’”

“Of course you would not.”

“Well, suppose I told you that when John—the one who was bathing the people—bathed him, I actually saw the sky open up, right there by the Jordan, and a thunderclap said, ‘This is my beloved Son; listen to him.’ And Andrew and Simon saw it also and heard the thunder, except that Simon did not hear the words.”

“No doubt. Simon has some sense.”

“But Simon is as convinced as the two of us. The whole thing was uncanny.”

“And just who is this ‘son of thunder?’”

“You will not believe this; it is Jesus of Nazareth.”

“The carpenter? The *carpenter*? The one who built that boat out there?”

“The very same one.”

“John, how *could* you? You *know* him! He seemed to be a very nice man, but—but really, John! The Son of—of a thunderclap! You know that he is the son of Mary and Joseph!”

John was silent.

“How much money did he want?” asked Zebedee.

“Money?”

“I never would have thought it of him, but why else would he try to recruit you for some mad enterprise?”

“He wants no money.”

“Oh, no, of course not! So he has not mentioned it as yet.”

“Father, it is not as you think.”

“No, son, it is not as *you* think. When something like this comes up, there is always money behind it, either now or in the future. You will see. He will have to ‘finance’ this or that; and at first it will be small sums, but it will grow and grow, and you will be stuck in the mud of some scheme which will be the ruin of you. I would think that Andrew and above all Simon would have seen through it from the start!”

John saw that nothing was to be gained by pursuing the subject, and—to be sure, a bit shaken by what he had just been told—he reminded his father that he had agreed that he would spend a month deciding what to do with his life, “and I will give what you say very careful consideration,” he said, “and will discuss it with James, who was not there, as well as with Simon and Andrew.”

“You realize that if you and Simon and Andrew—and possibly James also—go off on this campaign of the mythical Prince, I will not have a crew to man my fishing boats? Except the hired hands, and I suppose Simon’s and Andrew’s hired hands? What did they go to Judea for, if the whole business was to break up before it really started?”

“I am sure that we will have to take all this into account also.”

“You had *better* take it into account, if you want to

eat—and if you do not wish your mother and father to starve also!”

“I—we will find a way, *if* we decide to follow Jesus. You will have to talk to him yourself, of course; you will see that he is not as you think.”

“I must say that I cannot imagine him to be as I think. But the prophesied Prince! *That* is—preposterous!”

John’s face grew red with anger. “Why preposterous? The Prince must come at some time, and *someone* must be the Prince! Why not now, and why not Jesus?”

“He has certainly become persuasive!” John was about to make another hot reply, and remembered what Mary had said. What would it accomplish?

“Father,” he said, trying to contain himself, “we have a whole month. And he himself said that he has something to do for a month or more, before he will come to Galilee. Let us wait.”

“Very well, we will say no more about it for now. John. I have no desire to anger you. You know I love you and wish only the best for you, and the last thing I would wish for you is for you to be deluded into following a—to put it bluntly, a fraud.”

John took a deep breath. “And that would be the last thing I would desire, also. So let us agree on that.”

“Very well.” And Zebedee walked away, shaking his head.

John did not know what to think. His father was a very wise man, and John knew how easy it was to become persuaded by a clever talker. There were those in the school he was in, Daniel not the least of them, and Adam; but this was different, somehow. Jesus, as he remembered his conversation, did no

“persuading.” The thunder spoke, and he mentioned it, and simply asked if they were interested in changing the world. He did not try to make it sound attractive. Indeed, he told John that he would have great struggles his whole life long. But on the other hand, would not that be just the kind of thing to attract an eager youngster who had recently become fed up with plodding analytical studies? The whole thing looked like the sheets of a bed after one had spent the night in a nightmare.

The atmosphere in the house in the days that followed was rather wintry. John’s father was allowing him time to think, but was very clear about the fact that he was *allowing* him this time—when he and James were not fishing, of course—to consider matters very carefully indeed. He was friendly enough, but he breathed an air of insistency.

John waited for quite a while before he brought the matter up with James. His father’s skepticism has warned him not to try to “recruit” James for Jesus, and so he merely made laconic remarks from time to time, trying not to influence him one way or the other. But when the month was all but over he thought he should let James know what had happened, in as detached and factual a way as possible, so that *if* James also wanted to join Jesus, he would have the evidence John had.

They were rowing out to the fishing area, and were far enough away to be in a position to speak to each other without frightening the fish. John, who was rowing, was of course talking toward the stern, and James stood just behind him, before he took up his position in the bow. As John finished his description of what happened, James seemed intrigued, and asked, “You do not think you were deluded, somehow?” and

John answered, "I cannot see how. He did not act as if he wanted anything from us, least of all money, as Father fears, but that he thought it would help us. He *did* give me a good deal of advice about my personal life that I found very useful."

"And what was that?"

"Well . . . I think I would prefer not to speak of it."

"Even to me?"

"If you do not mind. It is something that happened in the school, a situation I was a bit nervous about, but he told me I handled it very well—and the interesting thing is that he seemed to know all about it even before I told him. He even mentioned that it had been arranged, somehow, the whole school business, as a way for me to test myself and my ambitions. And I *did* learn there that that kind of life is not for me, however attractive it may be in many ways."

"And this is the person we knew as merely a carpenter?"

"Well, James, even then, did you think that he was *merely* a carpenter?"

"What do you mean?"

"Do you remember how he handled the wood, and seemed to talk to it?"

"Now that you mention it. It was as if he were friends with it, or something."

"Well, he showed us something more of that side of his life there in Judea. It was—it was almost frightening. It was *very* frightening. Especially after the thunder. You have no idea. I thought I knew him, and I found—it was like looking into what seemed to be a shallow lake and finding that the bottom was nowhere near where you thought it was, because the water was much clearer than you supposed."

“You mean when we went for a swim in that abandoned marble quarry that had filled up with rain water? I remember trying to step the next step down, which seemed just below where I was standing, and was suddenly far over my head.”

“Well, as I listened to him, I was so far over my head that I could not see the bottom at all! And it was *dark* down there, even though the water was clear as—clear as the air. But you got the impression that *he* could see all the way down.”

“He sounds like a fascinating person, to say the least.”

“He said that he is gradually going to take off what he called his ‘disguise,’ and show more and more what he really is; and if he is what John and the thunder called him, it means that he is somehow the Son of God—even though he insists that he is just as truly the son of man—it is a total muddle! And he told me personally that what he was was what he would only very much later reveal himself to be: that spiritually, whatever that meant, he and the Father, by which I assume he meant the one whose name we never say, that he and the Father were one and the same thing. He said I needed to know it early.”

“You realize that it makes no sense, do you not?”

“When the thunder itself as much as says so also?”

“You are sure that it talked?”

“As sure as that a dove came out of what I guess you would call a hole in the sky and lighted on his shoulder. I *could* be mistaken, I suppose, but then Andrew also heard it, and Simon said that the thunder sounded ‘meaningful,’ though he heard no words. And they were not exactly words, I will admit. You would have to have been there. But I heard it, and I knew perfectly what it was saying.”

“It is all very mysterious.”

“And then he knew all about what I had been doing, and even what I had been *thinking*. And he explained how it had all been ‘arranged,’ and when he said it at least, it all made sense. He said he and the Father controlled things without controlling them, or forcing our choices. I confess I was completely lost there.”

“Well, I assume I will speak to him myself when he comes. I will try to keep an open mind. I have serious doubts, I must tell you.”

“As would I have, if someone told me. I understand Father’s position perfectly. But if Jesus is really what he says he is, he knows all about this—*especially* about Father’s opposition, and he has some ‘plan’ that will make him willing to give us and Simon and Andrew up.”

“Now *that* would be a miracle! If he can do that, I will have no problem following him!”

Suddenly, John shipped the oars, and said, “James, I have been thinking. Why do you not let me cast the net once or twice? I have not done so for a long time, and I would like to make a cast or two lest I completely forget it. Who knows? It may be the last time I get to throw out a net.”

James thought about it. “Well, why not? It may be the last time for both of us—though, frankly, I doubt it. I doubt it in either case. But I would not mind rowing, since there is such a short distance to go. Let us switch.” So John climbed upon the seat and then back to where James had been, as he passed him and sat down and adjusted the oars to his satisfaction.

They started off, a bit awkwardly for the first two or three strokes until James found the rhythm, and then as smoothly as ever, and in no time were at the fishing grounds.

John made attempts to cast the net—and realized that it was not like rowing; it took constant practice. The only thing he succeeded in doing, in fact, was making a hopeless tangle of it, and finally, in a fury, he pulled it back into the boat, and said to James, “We must go back! I have made such a mess of the net that it is totally useless! Look at it!” He almost shouted, because there was no problem scaring the fish, because there was nothing to catch them with.

James looked back, and had a hard time keeping from laughing, looking at what John had done and the expression of rage at himself for doing it. “I think you are right,” he managed to say in as matter-of-fact a tone as he could manage. “Perhaps we can get an hour or two in if we can straighten it out.” He turned the boat about and pulled strongly for the shore.

When he got there, he shipped the oars and they beached the boat, and he rubbed his shoulders, saying, “It seems as if I am not as in practice in rowing as I was either,” and let out a little groan, doubtless hoping that that would assuage John’s conscience a bit. “Now, let us see what can be done with that net.”

The two of them sat there in the boat and took the net, trying to straighten it out, John still fuming with anger at his ineptness. After spending a good deal of time in a futile attempt to make something of it, in frustration he took out his knife and cut several of the strands that had become hopelessly, as it seemed to him, entwined.

“John! John!” cried James, seeing that he was making matters worse, and that he was entering one of his tantrums. John had not done this for two or three years now, but James

rushed over behind him and grasped him, pinning his arms.

And there they were, sitting there, amid the tangles of the net, with John on the rowing-bench of the boat, and James behind him holding him, when Jesus walked up. He looked over at them, and laughed. "Come," he said. "Follow me."

They both looked up with chagrin. He said, "We must go to see your father. Andrew told me there has been an accident."

"An accident! Is he hurt?" said the two of them together.

"I am afraid so, rather badly. Very badly, in fact. He slipped on the road, and a fully-loaded cart rolled right over him. Simon says he thinks both legs are broken. He cannot walk, he said."

"Is he home? Did they get him home?"

"So I was told. Let us go to him. Your mother must be worried. Simon said that he looked as if he might die."

"Die!" they cried.

"Fear not. All will be well. But let us go."

They were already going, in fact, all three of them practically running. It was only a few moments before they arrived at the house, and John burst the door open. "Is he all right?"

"Oh, John!" cried his mother. "James! He is—at least he is conscious, but he is in such pain! Come see!"

"Father! Father!" they cried and rushed into the room, Jesus right behind them.

Zebedee let out a groan that ended in a scream, and then gritted his teeth. "It—I think both legs are—and in many places. We have called for the doctor, but—It hurts so! It hurts so! It was a—a cart full of hay! Oh!" and he gritted his teeth

again, and all but screamed once more.

Jesus had gone up to him by this time and touched his legs—and suddenly, there was nothing wrong with them.

“What happened?” he cried. “The pain is gone! It almost feels as if I could walk!”

“Try,” said Jesus. “I will help you up.” He put his hand under his shoulder and lifted him to a sitting position, and Zebedee swung his perfectly healed legs over the edge of the bed, and stood up. “I cannot believe it!”

“I would not tell this to anyone, if you please; it is not yet my time,” said Jesus. “You may say that you had a narrow escape from something that looked at first to be very serious—which is certainly true.”

“You did this!”

“As I say, I would really prefer that this not be known.”

“How did you do it? How *could* you have done it?”

“Well, I am aware that John has told you a bit about me—”
“You mean that what he told me was actually *true*?”

“Come, now, Zebedee; you know your son is not a liar.”

“But—but he was spouting some nonsense about the sky opening up and a voice from heaven, and you being able to read his thoughts, and—and I know not what!”

“As I say, he is not a liar.”

“Those things actually *happened*?”

“John was not the only one who saw them. Andrew and Simon did also—and that was before I had a chance to speak to them and ‘befuddle’ them, as you said. I waited two days, in fact, before I spoke to them.”

“And now you have made my legs whole by simply touching them! It is beyond belief!”

“A great deal that is beyond belief is going to happen in the near future. And not simply by me, but by your two sons and Andrew and Simon, and Philip—you know, the wine-merchant’s son, the one who helped carry you here—and some others you know. I have been sent to restore the world to what it lost when Adam disobeyed. And ordinary people will help me and do things that no one since Elijah has been able to do. You will see.”

“I cannot take this in! It is too much!”

“Your son felt thus—he still does. I realize that it is a bit overwhelming. But what I am telling you is true, and I am afraid it was necessary that something drastic happen in order for you to be persuaded. I am sorry for the pain and inconvenience, but it did not last long, and you will come to see that it was necessary.”

Zebedee stood there gaping at him, unable to say a word.

Thirteen

“I thought I saw your father *walking* down toward the boats,” said Philip, the son of the wine-merchant, coming up to John, who was standing with Jesus outside his front door beside the boat that Jesus built, looking at it.

“You probably did,” said John, matter-of-factly. Jesus smiled.

“But that is not possible!” he exclaimed. “I was one of the ones who carried him in! His legs—one could see the bones sticking out! It was horrible! I came to see if he was still alive!”

John looked over at Jesus, and then back to Philip. “Well, you must have been mistaken. He—”

“Nonsense!” cried Philip. “A noble effort, John,” said Jesus. “But there is no need to hide the truth from Philip, even if it were possible. Yes, Philip, his legs were broken, and yes, Philip, you did see him walking down toward the boats. I wanted you to see both of these things, because I want you to know that I did it, because I have something for you to do.”

“*You* did it? You mean you restored his legs?”

“I did.”

“I do not believe it! How?”

“It matters not how. You saw him walking. His legs are perfectly healed.”

Philip just stared at him, as Zebedee had done.

John spoke up. “I know not whether you knew Jesus before as merely a carpenter. Well, it turns out he is much more than a carpenter. He is the Prince who was prophesied.”

Philip looked over at John, in complete confusion. “The Prince? What prince? What prophesy?”

“You know, the son of David who was supposed to come; the one we have been waiting for all these centuries.”

“You mean to take over the throne of Judea, and drive out the Romans?”

“Well, not exactly that,” said Jesus. “The Prince was not prophesied as a kind of Judas Maccabeus. Remember, ‘It is too little for you to be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Israel. I will make you a light to the nations, so that my rescue will reach to the ends of the earth. They will not be hungry or thirsty, and the scorching wind or the sun will not assault them, because the one who pities them leads them and guides them beside springs of water.’ There is more, of course. The point is that the time has come—or is about to come—and I want you to be part of it.”

“Me? But . . . But how do you know me? I am no one.”

“As I was a carpenter. But you will be great, as will John, and James, and Simon, and Andrew, and—and it is for this I need you—Nathanael and Thomas.” John drew in his breath.

“Thomas!” cried Philip. “He is worse than Zebedee was! I am sick with worry about him! He comes, or used to come, to me sometimes to buy wine, and every time was more and

more—it is—I have not seen him for—I know not if he is still alive! You have no idea!”

“Fear not. All will be well, with your help, if you would. First, you must find Nathanael, and bring him to me. I will be down by the shore, near Simon’s boats.”

“But no one has seen him either, for—for months! He and that slave of his have simply disappeared, ever since the accident with Samuel. I went up to his house once and he told me not to come back until I had good news.”

“You have good news now. Go back. Or better, try the fig tree.”

“He has never been there. Never.”

“Try it. Trust me.”

Philip looked at him. “And you really did restore Zebedee’s legs?”

“With simply a touch,” said John.

“Indeed I did. And John is correct. As I said, I am telling you this because I need you. Nathanael will come if you urge him.”

“And you really are the Prince we have been waiting for all this time?”

“Indeed I am.”

Philip ran off. Jesus looked at John, and said, “He is a trusting soul, is he not? That is why he is in such danger, and why he must keep himself near me. But all will be well.”

“Then even this has been arranged,” said John, overwhelmed.

“Not a sparrow falls to the ground,” he answered. “Let us go down to the shore with the others.”

John did not know what to say. Jesus’s remark about

Philip set him thinking. If Jesus wanted Philip to be in his—what would one call it but his ‘entourage?’—*because*, as a trusting soul—a naive soul—he was in danger elsewhere, then it followed that John was to be with Jesus, not because he had some great talent, but because he was in severe danger if he were anywhere else. It was a humbling, not to say humiliating, thought, but John could see that in his case, it was probably very true. How many Daniels were there out there, and worse, how many Andrews who felt as Daniel did, and how would he be able to keep himself from doing what he was convinced was wrong, if someone Daniel showed up in something like Andrew’s body? The mere thought of it both frightened him while it enticed him. He shuddered.

“Fear not,” said Jesus. “I am here. All will be well. I told you that it will be difficult, but all will be well—if you too become a trusting soul.”

“I hope I can be so,” said John, not realizing he was answering Jesus as if he had spoken the thoughts that Jesus was answering.

“*You* cannot. Have no trust in yourself. Trust me. It will not be hard to do so as time goes on. See what I did to your father. You will see much greater things. Nothing is impossible with God.”

John thought, but did not say, “And, according to you, you are God.”

“Very true,” said Jesus, and John turned scarlet. Jesus laughed. They walked on in silence, and presently came down to the shore, where Andrew (John saw with joy), James, and a few others had gathered.

“As I told you,” said Jesus to them as he came up, “we

had an errand to do with Zebedee, who, I believe you have found out, is not really seriously injured after all.”

“I cannot believe it!” cried Andrew. “We thought we saw him inspecting his boat, and he was!—in fact, Simon went with him to discuss what we would do, because he wanted to suggest that he take Malachi as a partner. Simon and Philip and I had carried him home, you know. He was at death’s door! But there he was, it seemed, but a moment ago, walking about as if nothing had happened, and worried about what he was going to do without us!”

“Yes, well,” said Jesus, “it might not be prudent to advertise the real situation; it is too early, really, but it was necessary if we are to begin properly. Zebedee had reason to be worried. But all will be—if not well, exactly, satisfactory—even there, or I miss my guess.”

The others stared at him. “Then it is true?”

“Put it this way. Zebedee had an accident, but it turned out that any damage was temporary.”

“You will not convince Philip of that,” returned Andrew. “You know how he is—or perhaps you do not know. He saw him, and knows that it is a miracle if he merely did not die.”

“I know. I have talked to Philip, and as it happens, he also has seen Zebedee walking, and, in spite of what you might think, Andrew, he was convinced. Ask John here. Philip, by the way, is on an errand for me at the moment.”

“Amazing!”

“I should warn—or perhaps advise—you to prepare yourselves for amazing things. Soon they will begin happening thick and fast, and you yourselves will be doing many of them.”

No one had any reply to that. “James,” said Jesus, partly to break the embarrassed silence, “Could you introduce John to those here he does not know?”

“Of course, Master,” said James. He brought John to a fiery man with a beard of ebony, and said, “Simon, this is my brother John. John, this is Simon, who used to be one of the revolutionary party they call the Zealots.”

“Indeed?” said John, considerably surprised, shaking hands.

“What is so odd about that?” he answered. “From all I could gather—and from what we just heard—he is the Prince who was prophesied, and we have all been waiting for him so that we can rid ourselves of the cursed Romans!”

“I am not at all sure that the Master has that in mind. He told Philip—”

~~“What else could he have in mind? He is the Prince.”~~
 “Well, he told Philip,” John insisted, “specifically that the Prince was not prophesied as a kind of Judas Maccabeus. And then he quoted some prophesy—I think Isaiah, but I am not sure, to the effect that ‘It is too little for you to be my servant, merely to save the tribes of Israel. I will make you a light to the nations, for my rescue to reach to the ends of the earth. They will not be hungry or thirsty, and the sun will not assault them, because he leads them beside springs of water.’ Something of that sort. You may remember it better than I.”

“So?”

“So I would not be counting on the Master to lead a rebellion.”

“Perhaps not as Judas Maccabeus did. But how can he save us if we are slaves to Rome? You will see. You will see.”

James at this point grasped John by the shoulder and

turned him to another man, who looked exactly like an owl, with his round face and prominent ears, and his nose like a beak. "And here we have my own namesake, James."

"And so you are the younger brother I have (hem) heard about," he said. "It is a (ha) distinct pleasure to meet you."

"The pleasure is mine," said John, not at all sure that he was not lying. This constant clearing of the throat could take some getting used to.

"I am Judas," said another, stepping up, "but people have taken already to calling me Thaddeus, because there is another Judas among us, from Kerioth, and so we call him Judas Iscariot." He rattled this off as if it were a speech that he had been rehearsing and he wanted to get it over with. Apparently, he was very shy, and used this ploy not only to introduce himself but to deflect attention away from himself immediately.

And now John was confronted with the handsomest man he had ever seen. Not as tall or quite as muscular as Andrew, though clearly physically fit and fully as tall as James, with gently wavy hair and beard, and a very winning smile as he held out his soft-looking hand. Had he seen him before? He looked vaguely familiar.

John took the hand, and the grip was firm but without any attempt to show how powerful he was; he returned it in kind. He was floundering about in his mind for words—he felt like gasping at the sheer beauty of the man—when Judas said, "You are the one, are you not, that is studying to be a rabbi?"

"Well, no, not really," John managed to answer. "I went to the school in Annas's house—"

Judas nodded in recognition.

"He is a relative of my mother's, you see," John went on,

trying not to babble, “and my father decided that I should spend a week there to see if that was what I should do with my life, and I, well . . .”

“And you found it was not. I had the same experience, more or less, but only after years of pursuing the studies.”

“Indeed?”

“Judas is a priest,” said James.

“Ah,” said John.

“Of course,” Judas answered, “One is a priest by birth, so there is nothing in that. But one must do *some* studying to discover what one must do, must one not? And I was quite captivated by it at the beginning, I must say.”

“It is a very—one could get very absorbed in it.”

“*If* one is a certain type of person. I imagine it would be a bit confining for one used to the outdoors, such as a fisherman.”

“One of the students there told me he suspected something of the same thing about me. He was right. But what decided me was that we went to the Jordan, to John, you know, and we saw Jesus there.”

“*Did* you! I saw him myself. Did you see him when he was bathed?” Ah, was *he* the one he saw just after Jesus?

“As a matter of fact, we did.”

“As did I. I was a kind of hanger-on of a delegation that went to question him—John, that is—and he did not satisfy them, but there was something about him that made me stay.”

“He certainly was a forceful speaker.”

“And he said things that my companions decidedly did not want to hear; but I thought they had truth in them. At any rate I lingered, to see if he could point me toward this person

he was referring as ‘a voice crying in the wilderness’ to, and so forth, and I happened to be present when Jesus stepped up to be bathed.”

“Then you saw what occurred.”

“I did. Most people said that it thundered from a clear blue sky, but *I* thought the thunder said something. And a bird came from nowhere and lit on Jesus’s shoulder. My hair stood on end.”

“I heard the words—or not words exactly, but—and I saw the dove also.”

“It *was* a dove, now that you mention it. And I know what you mean about the words. I thought I was hallucinating.”

“No, there definitely was something, and the thunder meant something like, ‘This is my son, the one I love; I am pleased with him.’”

Judas became excited, “Exactly! So it *was* real! At any rate, shortly afterward, I introduced myself to Jesus, and he said he would meet me here in Galilee after forty days. I gather he intended to make a forty day fast to prepare himself for his ministry.”

“Oh, is that what it was?”

“Well, it is pure speculation on my part. But if he *is* the Prince, and is about to make himself known as such, it would sound reasonable.”

“I must ask him some time.”

“I do not think I would have the temerity to do so, myself.”

John blushed. “Ah, well, you see, I knew him before, when he was simply—well, not ‘simply’—a carpenter. He built

a little boat for James and me when we were but children.”

“Indeed? What a privilege!”

“Now that I think of it, it was a tremendous privilege! But at the time, it seemed—well, at the time a carpenter was a carpenter. One did not think otherwise. But even then there was something about him.”

John glanced over at Jesus, who was standing a bit apart, looking to see if anyone was coming. John, and also Judas, had been so engrossed in their conversation that they had forgotten that Jesus was among them. He hoped that he had not said anything that Jesus would not approve of, but Jesus was obviously preoccupied.

“Well,” said John, “but I must become accustomed to a completely new Jesus, no matter how much he is like the old one.”

“So must we all,” replied Judas. “Even those of us who knew nothing of him before are discovering new wonders in him every day. This business with your father, for instance. Who could do it except the Prince? And I have no doubt also that he knows—if he wishes—every word we have said.”

“You have had that experience also? I found he not only knows words he could not have heard, but my very thoughts! It is most disconcerting!”

“Actually, I was prepared for it. You see, I did a good deal of studying of Greek philosophy—Plato and Aristotle and especially Plotinus—because when I dipped into it, I found to my astonishment how very close they, especially Plotinus, came to what we Judeans believe in. They proved it scientifically, if you will. And Jesus clearly has what Plotinus called the ‘One’ flowing through his soul. I was not at all surprised that he

knew others' thoughts."

John, who had never heard of these philosophers, said, "It is—it is a frightening experience."

"Indeed it is. Fortunately, this incarnation of God, if you wish to put it so, is one of love and not mere indifference, and so one fears with the fear of awe, not of terror."

"I think one can say that. I *hope* one can say that. No, I *know* one can say that. He may be awesome, but he is a friend."

At this point Jesus pointed off in the distance, where two men were approaching, and said, "Now there is a real Israelite; there is nothing devious about him."

Fourteen

NATHANAEŁ, APPROACHING, STOPPED and gaped at Jesus. “Where do you know me from?” he asked. “Before Philip called you,” replied Jesus, “I saw you—under the fig tree.”

This obviously gave him a fresh shock. John realized that something had happened to him under the tree, something involving being seen. When he found his voice, he exclaimed, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”

Jesus laughed. “You believe just because I told you I saw you under the fig tree? You will see more marvelous things than that.” He looked up to heaven. “Amen amen I tell you, you will see the sky open up and God’s angels going up and coming down upon the Son of Man!” As he said this he raised and lowered his arms over his chest as if he were following them there.

Apparently there was to be no explanation of this little exchange, because Jesus then turned to the astonished group and said, “But if you others would excuse the two of us for some moments, I would speak to Nathanael privately. Then, if he wishes, I will introduce him to you.”

He drew apart, and what was obviously his slave began to follow them. “In a moment, Ezra,” he said. John now noticed Ezra for the first time (even one who has not had much experience with slaves learns the trick of seeing them and then not noticing them—because, of course, one does not speak to a slave except to give him orders—any more than one notices the furniture in a room).

But this one was different. He had heard of black people, but had imagined that they were simply rather darker brown than most (the fierce sun had, of course tanned anyone who spent any time there). But this man was black! Almost the color of ebony, except for the palms of his hands, and, from what John could see, the soles of his feet, which were about the color of a normal person who had been in the sun for a while. His nails were also light, and made little jewels at the ends of his fingers and toes. One could see, however, that his skin was not really black because his hair, which was kinky rather than curly like John’s, was black as ink, and made one realize that his skin was merely very, very dark brown.

John was fascinated. Here was a magic that he had never even imagined. One could not compare him with Judas, because it would be like comparing pears with pomegranates, but he was extremely handsome in his own way, with very defined muscles—he had no fat on his body at all. And he was big, almost as big as Andrew, though without quite so huge a chest and arms, though his were quite muscular—as befitted a slave, thought John. He kept staring at him, not knowing what he was doing, and suddenly Ezra he smiled a smile that lit up the whole landscape with his white teeth, and then his pink tongue came out and wet his lips. John’s heart leaped. It was

like his visit to the drapers as a child, when he was enthralled by the variety of colors.

He could not decide if the smile was meant for him, or for the people in general, or simply because of some thought that had occurred to Ezra, because he made no indication that he had seen John looking at him, and his gaze tranquilly and slowly went around the group, John supposed after the manner of a slave, who needed to see (and remember) everything while giving the impression that he observed nothing, that he was simply there.

It occurred to John for the first time that it must have been infuriating, acting as if one were merely a donkey waiting to have some burden put on one's back. But of course, he was a slave, and perhaps slaves *were* little more than donkeys that could talk—that was what he had been told, but something in him refused to believe this.

Nathanael and Jesus were talking in low tones, but Nathanael suddenly blurted, loud enough to hear, "Master, I am nothing *but* fear! I can do nothing! It was from fear that I did nothing and let Samuel die." He let Samuel die? How? Was he there? Was *he* the man John saw occasionally as he went by where Samuel and Thomas and their father anchored their boat—sitting beneath a *fig* tree, was it not? with a scroll or a codex in his hands. Was Jesus trying to use him to rescue Thomas? Perhaps because he was responsible in some way, as John was?

They had lapsed back into inaudibility until again Nathanael said aloud, "*I?* It is impossible!" But Jesus did not seem to agree, and they resumed their discussion. The next thing that one could hear was Nathanael saying, "Oh, I will

free him now! This instant!” Interestingly, he looked relieved at this, as if *he* were thankful to be free of Ezra, for some reason.

“Ezra!” Jesus called, and beckoned to him. “Thomas has something to say to you.”

“You are a free man from this moment, Ezra,” said Nathanael.

Ezra stared at him in disbelief. “Do you mean what you just said?”

“I mean every syllable.”

“Oh, thank you, Master! And thank *you*!” to Jesus, who simply smiled. “I cannot believe it!”

“Not Master any longer. Simply Nathanael.”

“I cannot believe it! Free!”

“But if you would, Ezra,” said Nathanael, “I would ask the favor of you to accompany me for a while. I am to go to Thomas and ~~try to bring him here.~~”
“Well, not here,” said Jesus. “I must go to the house of Simon Barjona. I will meet you there. I will introduce you to the others now, and they will tell you where to go.”

“Of course, I will join you,” said Ezra. “Free! I cannot believe it! Thank you so much—”he evidently wanted to add “Master” and could not, and then he looked as if he would call him “Nathanael,” but found he could not do that either.

Jesus brought Nathanael, almost reeling with bewilderment, and Ezra, whose face was almost white because he was smiling so broadly that all one could see was his teeth, to the little group that had been around him. Nathanael looked surprised that he had heard of so many of them:

They talked for a considerable while as people just becoming acquainted do, about inconsequential matters,

Nathanael learning who was who, everyone a bit embarrassed at suddenly being thrown together, as well as being part of something far beyond what they could have imagined.

Finally Jesus said, “I think, however, that Nathanael has a task before him that is rather pressing. And I myself have something that needs to be done with Simon Barjona. Fear not, Nathanael, all will be well.” He turned and rather hurriedly went off in the direction of Simon’s house.

Nathanael stood there, nonplused. “Does anyone know where Thomas is? The one who—who had the accident?”

“I know, Mas—” said Ezra, and stopped, embarrassed. Nathanael did not seem surprised that he knew, for some reason.

“Then you can bring me to him.”

“Well, I know more or less where he is. But we will find him.”

“Lead on, then,” and they left the group.

Philip, who had evidently met the others, said, “Did you know what happened to James’s fath—oh, there you are, John. You must have told them.”

“I did. And they saw him for themselves, even Andrew and Simon. Simon is off with Zebedee, in fact, trying to persuade him to give up both of his sons to Jesus. I suspect it will be difficult for Zebedee to refuse, after what has happened. I understand that they are trying to see if Malachi—Thomas’s father, you know—might join Zebedee to fill up some of what is now lacking.”

“So you are going to join us and give up your studies as a rabbi.”

“Well, I—I found I was not suited to it.”

“Not intelligent enough?”

“Really, Philip!” interjected James.

“Well, I know nothing about John, except that he catches fish. How was I to know whether he was smart enough to be a rabbi?”

James simply shook his head.

“Do you think (hem)” said the other James to anyone who wanted to hear, “that Nathanael will be able to (hem, hem) rescue Thomas, as one supposes he has been sent to do?”

“I would think,” answered Andrew, “that if the Master sent him, it is about as certain as that the sun will rise tomorrow.”

“It will require a miracle!” exclaimed Philip. “More than what happened with Zebedee! He was all but a falling-down drunk when last I saw him, and he must have gotten worse since! He was a disgusting sight! All covered with filth! He stank, and not simply of fish any longer!”

“I wonder that you did not refuse him the wine.” said John.

“What could I do? He would only have found someone else. I remonstrated with him, of course, but he ignored me.” The usual excuse, thought John. But then, would he have done anything different if he were the merchant? Wine is a dangerous substance, and if one is going to sell it at all, one cannot be overly solicitous about what one’s customers are going to do with it.

The conversation became general, most wanting to avoid considering a clearly unpleasant topic, but unable to keep it entirely out of discussion, because after all they were waiting for Thomas and Nathanael to appear. John dropped off to the

side by himself, as was his wont—he always felt uncomfortable in a crowd—and wondered if Thomas would have been cleansed when they saw him, and then thought that if Ezra were with Nathanael, he would be charged with the cleansing. But then, Ezra was a free man now, and perhaps he might refuse. John thought, “If I had been a slave and were just freed, I certainly *would* refuse, if only to assert that I was now a free man.” But who knew? Perhaps Ezra had some kind of affection for Thomas, since John thought that he had sometimes seen Thomas there with Nathanael in the afternoon after work, and of course that meant that Ezra was also there, no doubt taking everything in.

It occurred to him to wonder what it would be like seeing and talking to what to all appearances was Samuel, knowing all the while that he was the one who had killed Samuel. He could almost sympathize with Malachi, who doubtless could not stand what he regarded as the murderer of the one he loved, looking exactly like the one he loved. Would *John* be able to do so, even though he was but a friend of Samuel, and was somehow complicit in Samuel’s death? It was as much his fault as Thomas’s, after all; all Thomas did was jump into the lake after Samuel—on *his* advice—had thrown in the wine. But still, he prepared himself for a shock.

Toward evening, finally they saw Nathanael, Ezra, and an emaciated Thomas walking rather slowly toward them. Thomas looked like a Samuel who had not eaten for weeks. He all but tottered—but evidently out of weakness, not as a drunk, John noted with relief.

“As you see,” said Nathanael to them when they drew up, “I have brought Thomas, who wishes—he thinks, just as I

suspect we all do—to become one of us and follow the Master.”

Philip dashed over. “Then you have seen him! Thank God! The last time you came to the shop, I could hardly recognize you, you were so drunk!”

Nathanael recoiled in horror (like everyone else), as Thomas made a fist and looked as if he might hit him in the face. But then Thomas bit his lips and took a deep breath and said, “When they found me, I was even worse, half dead and seeing things that were not there. But I have been saved—I think—I hope. No, I know.” But he added another “I hope” under his breath.

“I never knew it was you, before you came to me yourself, after you k—” at this point, even Philip realized what he was about to say, and caught himself. “After the accident. Before, I thought it was Nathanael.”

Nathanael was obviously considering what reply to make, when Thomas took another deep breath, and answered, “Well, that was part of the deception that I was practicing. I find, though, that I was deceiving myself even more than anyone else. Samuel—and my poor father—knew all about me, though I thought I was being so clever.”

“You had *me* completely fooled,” blurted Philip

John laughed along with a number of others, an embarrassed laugh. “Not completely,” said Thomas, who had evidently decided that the way to deal with Philip was to take him seriously and ignore his *gaucherie*. “I remember once you told me I looked as if I was drunk.”

Philip flinched. “I was merely joking.”

“No doubt I *did* look as if I was drunk, because I was. I

did not realize how drunk I was, and was convinced no one would notice, but you made me drink less, as I remember, for a while. But it caught up with me again. It is insidious.”

Philip looked thoughtful. “How is it that most people can drink and nothing happens, but others become drunks? You would think they would see what was happening and stop before it became too serious.”

“It is not that simple, Philip. I told you it is insidious. At first, I suppose, one *can* stop, but at that point there is no reason to stop. Everyone else drinks wine, and one thinks that one is not drinking any more than anyone else. But one does not notice that one drinks more and more as time goes on, and still believes that perhaps it is a *bit* more than others, but not unusual—and one believes that he can stop any time he chooses. But he finds no occasion to choose, even as life becomes more and more difficult. And then when the crisis comes, he cannot stop, and he even fights when—” he could not go on, and doubled over in sobs.

As everyone looked on in horror and pity, Philip ran up to him and placed his hand on his back, while the others stood round in embarrassment, “I am so sorry, Thomas! I know you could not help it! But the Master has saved you from it, has he not? It is over!”

Thomas gradually recovered control of himself. He straightened up and looked Philip in the eye, and said, “Oh, no, Philip, it is not ‘over.’ I suppose it never will be ‘over.’”

John thought, “And it never will be ‘over’ for me either. Thank God it was Thomas talking with Philip, and not I. He would have a bloody nose—or worse—by this time!” And then he thought of the other problem that probably never would be

'over' for him, "And," he said silently to himself, "my reaction to Judas proved it, did it not?—though he *is* an interesting person in his own right. I must watch myself. I never even noticed why I was acting so friendly."

Thomas was continuing, "But it *is* past, and the Master has made it possible to begin again—he says."

"Fear not, Thomas," said Philip apologetically. "Trust the Master. He can do anything." John said under his breath, "I *do* trust you, Master—I think."

"It does seem so," Thomas answered. "At least I no longer see things that are not there." He looked around. "You all *are* here, are you not?" The others laughed another embarrassed laugh.

"Do not fear that you must not mention what happened," said Nathanael to everyone at large, who began to take this very lesson from what they saw, "Thomas told me that he would like to have you call him 'Didymus,' Greek for 'Twin,' precisely so that the memory of Samuel can be kept alive. And by the way," he added as an afterthought, "you might call me Bartholomew."

Son of Talmi, the rich man up in Cana, thought John. There must have been something between him and his father, he opined, as he saw the nod of comprehension in a few of the group.

Nathanael then went over to Thomas and began to introduce him to those standing about, and saw that Thomas was as surprised as he had been at how many of them he knew of, and perhaps had met at one time or another. Andrew took his hand in a very friendly manner, and said, "I have heard of you and your brother. My own brother Simon is not here at

the moment. He is negotiating with Zebedee to combine our fishing businesses into one—and I think with your father, if I am not mistaken—”

Thomas’s face flamed, and Andrew realized that he also had stepped into quicksand. Malachi had disowned Thomas, after all. He tried to recover himself by saying quickly, “Since not only Simon and I, but both of Zebedee’s sons have decided to follow Jesus. He has but the hired hands at the moment.”

James came up behind Andrew and took his hand, “I am James, Bar-Zebedee. We are here because, though my father rather expected John here,” he nodded at John beside him, “to leave us and do things religious, he is not quite reconciled to the fact that Jesus seems to have stolen both of us from him.” John nodded, and took his hand also.

“What is this ‘following’ that we are supposed to be doing?” asked Thomas.

“Know you not?”

“I know nothing except that I was a drunk and now I seem not to be. Nathanael told me that he could rescue me; beyond that I know nothing of him—except that he told me that he would like me to ‘follow’ him, for some reason. And he seems to know things.”

James laughed. “It is difficult not to do follow him if he calls you, is it not?” and John added, “He is the Prince; I am convinced of it. We are to be his retinue. That is what it is.”

“Now John,” said James. “You do not *know* this.”

“Nonsense! I do not *know* the sun will rise tomorrow—or rather,” he said, looking up at the western sky—“that it will be overcast. But facts are still facts. Of *course* he is the Prince.”

“Prince?” asked Thomas.

“Know you not?” said John. “The one the prophecies have written of. The Son of David, who is to be King.”

Fifteen

Thomas's eyes widened. "Of a truth?"

"We were down in Judea when John started speaking of him," said John. Thomas and Nathanael looked confused, and John, seeing this, said, "John is a person that has been causing a tremendous amount of controversy, bathing people in the Jordan down there, telling them that he is the forerunner of the promised Prince, and that we should prepare ourselves. I happened to be there, though James stayed here to keep the business going—I was to enter into studies at the Temple, and my—at any rate, I was there with Andrew and Simon, who had decided to take a little holiday and see this preacher."

"And we were enthralled," said Andrew. "He had everyone convinced that we were about to enter a new age." And then he actually pointed out who it was that he was referring to," continued John, "one day that Jesus walked by. He said that he had bathed him also (he bathed us too, of course) and saw the Spirit come upon him like a dove, and that was how he knew who he was."

"And of course, as soon as we heard it, we went after Jesus," continued Andrew, "and spent the day with him. John may have been forceful, but *he*—well, of course, you have met

him.”

“We knew we were to be ‘students’ of his, as he called us, as if he were a rabbi,” said John, “but he mentioned that he would not be available for a couple of months, and that we should resume what we had been doing. ‘I will see you again, never fear,’ he said.” (At this point, James took John aside and told him, “Be not quite so enthusiastic about what you are interested in, remember. You tend to make others bored if you are not careful.” They had discussed this often, and John, who was about to break in again, was silent.)

“And sure enough,” Andrew continued, “as we were in the boats not too long ago, mending our nets, he came by and told us to follow him—and we did, as did James and Simon, leaving poor Zebedee befuddled and, truth be told, a bit indignant. That is what Simon is trying to patch up at the moment.”

Nathanael then stepped back in and said, “But let me introduce you to the others.” He brought Thomas to James the Owl, who said, “I am (hem) pleased to make your acquaintance. I had (ha) heard of your plight from Nathanael—or should I now say (hem) Bartholomew?”

“Call me whatever you like,” answered Nathanael, clearly annoyed.

“So like you,” said James. “It gratifies me,” he said to Thomas, “to see that you are (ha) recovered.” Thomas did not seem to be able to deal with the hems and has very well either (did anyone?), and smiled and turned back to Nathanael, who was bringing him to someone else.

“This is Judas,” he said, relieved to have remembered the name just in time, “but he also has another name, Thaddeus,

to distinguish him from the man over there we will meet in a moment, Judas from Kerioth, whom we call 'Iscariot' for that reason. The two greeted one another and made the appropriate noises, and then Nathanael went over and said, "Judas, Thomas is by now quite bewildered at how we all seem to be named in pairs." John was impressed that he himself could keep them all straight. After all, John knew most of them, and Nathanael had just met everyone.

As Judas greeted Thomas cordially enough he said, "We will sort ourselves out in a short time. We are in one sense a rather rag-tag group, but the Master knows what he is doing; you will see."

"But there is another Simon also," said Nathanael, "besides the brother of Andrew," and led him to Simon the Revolutionary. Thomas's eyes widened when Nathanael said, "We call him 'Simon the Revolutionary.'" He looked the part so perfectly.

"In truth?" said Thomas, evidently surprised that a revolutionary would be associated with Jesus.

"Well, I used to belong to the Zealot party that, you know, has been trying to find a way to free us of Rome. And if Jesus is the Prince who had been prophesied, then he will be able to accomplish it—he will be sure to do so—and so I joined him."

"The rest of us," broke in John, who could not contain himself, "are not quite so sure that that is what Jesus has in mind."

"I would not rule it out, youngster," said Simon.

"Oh, please! Do we look like the makings of an army?" Even less so now, he thought, with a reformed—if he *was* re-

formed—drunk among them.

“You never know,” answered Simon. “I imagine those who followed Judas Maccabeus did not look like much at the beginning. We will see, we will see.”

“We will never see *that*, I am certain.”

“Yes, well, many are certain of many things.”

“But I did not have a chance to tell you—Didymus—” said John, eager to end what promised to be an ongoing controversy between them, “how very happy—how *very* happy—I am to see you here.” It was so—glorious—to see Samuel again, and to know that even if it was not Samuel, it was Thomas, and a Thomas who was not also killed by what John had done with Samuel.

“Why thank you—John, is it? The names are running by me so quickly I lose them as soon as I hear them. But I fear I am no great addition to anything.”

“Fear not. You will do great things. We all will do great things; I am convinced of it.”

“By the way,” said Andrew, “did you know that Jesus’ mother has been invited to a wedding in Cana tomorrow? And that it looks as if we will be going also?” Thomas flinched at this, and John thought, “It will be a test for him, of a certainty. How will he avoid accepting a cup of wine? And if he holds it, how can he avoid tasting it? And then doubtless all would be lost!”

“Indeed?” said John. He hoped it was not true, for Thomas’s sake.

“I believe so,” answered Andrew. “That is why Jesus is at Simon’s house now. He is speaking to his wife and her mother about the arrangements; it is her sister who is about to be

married, and he is trying to see if we will be a burden on the couple.”

“I can see why,” said Thomas. “Probably whoever invited her and Jesus had no idea that it would involve eight or ten more people.” He also sounded eager that it might prove impossible.

“Exactly. And I do not think they are especially well off. So perhaps Jesus will go alone; I would suspect that that would be the most sensible thing. But Simon gave me the impression that he (I mean Jesus) would like to bring us along, if it were possible. Perhaps Jesus will subtly supply some financial help, somehow.”

“He wishes to make a sort of public display of us as a group, I suspect,” said Nathanael. “We are presumably the core—or part of it—of whatever it is that he is planning.”

John thought that it was anything but a promising “core” of any significant enterprise. Because it seemed more and more true that Jesus had gathered his followers more because they needed him than that he needed them. He had heard some remarks as they were waiting that Nathanael was nothing but a lazy oaf, and Nathanael himself had blurted that he was “nothing but fear,” which might be the source of his reputation. A coward—if he *was* one—a drunk, two hotheads, one of whom had attractions he wished he did not have, a revolutionary, a—Philip—a man who could not say three words without clearing his throat, a shy little man who disappeared into the crowd at the first opportunity. That left no one but Andrew, Simon, and Judas; and only Judas looked as if he was really fit for world-shaking.

And Ezra. How did he fit in, if at all? John was talking of

inconsequential matters to Andrew, but he had Ezra in the corner of his eye, as he and Thomas were standing apart from the others, engaged in a rather serious conversation. Nobody else had paid any attention to him at all, striking as his appearance was—probably because he had been a slave, and one did not notice slaves, and thus got the impression that they were not worth noticing—even after they had ceased to be slaves.

At one point, Thomas laughed aloud, calling attention to the two of them. “If ever I need lessons in how to be a successful slave, I know who to come to for instruction,” he said. Ezra laughed with him.

John, who had come to a pause in his own conversation, wandered over to them and said, “What was this you found so amusing?”

Ezra gave Thomas a knowing look. What was *that* about? Thomas said to John, “Oh, Ezra was telling me how slaves manage to manipulate their masters, and I said I knew who to go to if I needed lessons in how to be a slave.”

“How does it feel, Ezra,” said John, “to be a free man?”

“At the moment, John,” (as he said the name without any “Master” preceding it, John reacted for an instant, but recovered himself) “it is not so very different. I find it somewhat frightening, however, because my decisions now have consequences. When I merely did what my master ordered, the consequences were his.”

“Yes,” returned John, after a moment’s thought. “I have heard people who leave the army say much the same thing.”

“But I will learn.” He gave John a huge smile, which made John’s heart leap. Another one to be careful of. “We all

have a great deal to learn, I think,” he said.

“True.” How extremely true! He noticed with relief that Jesus was approaching. “And we have found the perfect rabbi and master. And here he comes—with his mother and Simon.”

Jesus and Simon were engaged in earnest conversation when they approached, with his mother contributing a remark here and there.

John ran up as they came near, and told them that they had met Thomas, and Jesus said, “Yes, we are nearly complete now. There is one more, but I think that it will be some time before he joins us.” Another one in serious danger? thought John. If I am right, that is what it is. It will be interesting to see.

“But,” said John aloud, looking over at Thomas, “are we going to the wedding-feast? Or will you go by yourself?”

Jesus’s mother answered, “You were never slow, John, in getting to the point. Give us a moment to breathe. Who is this new member you have?” John took her arm and all but dragged her to meet Thomas, who bowed. Jesus went off to the side, letting his mother be the center of attention. He seemed interested in what his “students” conversation would be, rather than in dominating it.

“I am very happy to make your acquaintance, Thomas,” she said. “My son speaks highly of you?”

“He does?” said Thomas in amazement. “I cannot think on what grounds.” He blushed in embarrassment.

“Oh, he sees what is inside a person,” she answered. “I imagine you were a bit—shall we say taken aback?—by some of the rest of the group. Their outside in some cases is not prepossessing.” That was an understatement, thought John, who

happened to be looking at the owl James. He wondered what the danger was that he was in.

"He told me that I must trust him," he replied. "I personally have no choice, but as Judas, I think it was, said, he seems to know what he is doing."

"Have no fear on that score," she said, "though of course, I *would* say such a thing, being his mother. But precisely because I *am* his mother, I can claim to know him better than anyone else; and I assure you, he is eminently worthy of your trust."

"I hope so, my Lady," So Thomas too had caught her regal air. "I myself am the person I am afraid to trust. I fear I have no capacity to do 'great things,' as people seem to be predicting of me."

She laughed. "Fear not. If he thinks you will do them, then you will do them. You will see. Fear not. Consider what you have done already."

Jesus had spoken of him to her, then, thought John. Or perhaps the two of them knew each others' thoughts. He remembered how Mary had pondered before he went to Jerusalem, as if she were consulting Jesus, wherever he was. "I find it not full of accomplishments, I am afraid," Thomas said, after a pause.

"But you are only looking at it from a certain point of view. He looks from all points of view. You will see. Fear not."

"I will try, my Lady."

"He asks no more." She turned from him to say something to John and then turned back, "Not even success."

That was interesting. Did it mean that John himself might sometimes fail? He felt a burst of both hope and fear. But then

he said to Mary, "But have you met Nathanael?" as Thomas lapsed into a kind of reverie, pondering her remark. She asked Nathanael as she approached him, "Are you the one Philip found under the fig-tree? He told me about it." Nathanael cringed a little; what Philip said could be explosive.

"I am," he said. "I am quite as bewildered as Thomas over what possible role I could have in—whatever it is I am apparently to have a role in. I am completely in the dark."

"Fear not," she said. "It will come out, and you will find that you can do whatever needs to be done—you will perhaps amaze yourself at what you can do."

"I am already amazed, truth be told, my Lady. But it is all his doing. I was just thinking that I fit David's notion of himself as a 'worm, not a man.'"

She laughed. "Ah, but look at what David made of himself, with the Lord's help."

"Oh, but I am no David! Far from it!"

"Trust him. He knows what he is about." John himself was as convinced as everyone else of this. How could he not know, if he could divine others' thoughts so accurately?

"In my case, I have no alternative. To trust in myself is to trust a worm, and that is despair."

She laughed again. "Fear not."

"*He* will have to bring that about, I suspect. But I will try. I am gratified to hear you say that I need but try, not necessarily succeed."

"I meant that. You will see. The success is secondary. He could do it all himself, but he wishes that we join him."

"If I can."

"Of yourself, you cannot. None of us can. But trust him."

And *there* was wisdom, thought John. If I only could keep it in mind!

“Well, as I said, I will try—or at any rate, I will try to try.” She laughed once more.

But John now was growing a bit impatient about the wedding feast, and the stress it would put Thomas to. Was it not too early for a test, even if Jesus was to be nearby? He broke into the conversation with, “But then are we all going to the wedding on the day after tomorrow? If so, we must prepare, you know.” Simon, who had joined them, seemed to think that there would be no difficulty with there being such an increase in the guests, but Mary was not quite so sure. “I will keep my eyes open,” she said. “It would not be just if we turned a happy day into an embarrassment.”

As Simon was speaking, John saw Thomas out of the corner of his eye, and said, “Simon, you have not yet met Thomas, who now calls himself ‘Didymus,’ in honor of his brother, who died, you know, in that tragic accident.”

“I have heard much about you in the past,” said Simon, “though as rivals at the time, we never met. I am happy to see you here.” His emphasis on “happy” probably had something to do with the fact that he had been meeting with, among others, Thomas’s father, who had disowned him.

Thomas answered, “I had also heard of you and Andrew, not to mention John and James. I was astonished at seeing all of you.”

“Almost as astonished, I imagine, as we ourselves are at being here. But he knows what he is doing.”

John said, “Then matters are settled? My father is mollified?”

“Well, at least not discontented. The joining of our hired hands and—and another person—makes the business viable and even perhaps somewhat better than either of ours was by itself. He still grumbles, but I think he sees it and accepts it. Of course, what else can he do?”

Andrew came up, “I am delighted to hear it,” he said. “I was sure that you could work something out.”

Sixteen

“Iwould that you had been there, Andrew,” returned Simon.

“No, it is as well I stayed,” he said. “You have the tongue, and my appearance there would only have emphasized what they were losing.”

John had turned to Ezra and asked in a low voice, “What do you think, Ezra? Will we be able to survive the wedding-feast?” Thomas was right beside him, and, though he was lost in thought, John did not want to mention his name.

“That is the question, is it not, youngster,” he answered, having caught his drift. “Everyone says Jesus knows what he is doing, and all the evidence is that they are correct. In that case, we have nothing to worry about.”

“If I could but make myself believe that.”

“Well, we can also keep our eyes open.”

Thomas turned to John, and asked, “Which of the two is the older, Simon or Andrew?” he asked.

“Simon, of course.”

“Ah, then that explains it.”

“What?”

“Why it was that Simon did the talking. One would have thought, just from looking at them, that Andrew would have done a better job.”

John laughed. “Muscles do not necessarily mean diplomatic skills.”

“No, what I meant was that Andrew seems—how shall I say it?—in control of things.” That was true. John knew that, though Andrew did think of Simon as a better spokesman, he had a certain resentment about the fact that Simon, in his impulsiveness, always took the lead. Andrew, who was slower, but considerably more thoughtful, perhaps felt rebuffed at this.

He said, “Oh, he is. But it is true, Simon has the tongue. Sometimes a bit too much of it. But it seems to have been adequate to the task this time at least.”

Ezra remarked, “It is difficult not to judge on first appearances, but the problem is that is difficult to judge *correctly* on first appearances. Or on appearances at all.” That was true. Certainly, there was more to Ezra than his color and physical condition.

“*That* is true,” said John aloud, “and it means that I will have to get to know you better. There is much beneath *your* appearance.” John then thought, “Well, the fact that he—let us face it, attracts—me is not a reason why I should avoid him.” Or was it?

“There is much beneath it,” answered Ezra, with one of his brilliant smiles, “that I myself know not.” John wondered what he meant by this. It seemed somehow directed at John, but he could not fathom any hidden communication, if there was one.

“I hope that is true of me also,” said Thomas. “All of you

seem to detect something in me that I have never been able to discover.”

“That, if I may say so,” replied Ezra, “is because you have also been a slave right up to this very morning, whether you realized it or not.”

Thomas thought for a moment. “A different kind of slave,” he admitted, “but I see your point. I was a slave, obeying the orders of drink. It is a new way of looking at it.”

“I suspect that most people are slaves to something or other, and only think they are free, when they are actually led on by this or that. I was lucky, in that sense. It was obvious I was a slave; but when one is enslaved by something inside oneself, one probably thinks of oneself as free.” Ah, perhaps that is what it was. Had he detected that John was struggling not to succumb to being a slave to something inside himself—or perhaps suspected that he was indeed a slave, and a slave to what Ezra himself had within him? But that was preposterous. He was letting wishful thinking direct his thoughts.

Or something.

Thomas was saying “—my vice was making me do things, and ruining my life and the lives of those around me. If I could but undo it!”

“And Bartholomew wishes the same thing,” said Ezra.

John nodded, “And so do I, indeed.” If Ezra had been thinking what John had speculated, would he take this as a reply?

Thomas laughed. “Perhaps we have all been chosen because we were all slaves to something, and Jesus wished to set us free.”

“There may be something in that,” said John. Thomas was obviously quite astute. “And as to that, if there ever was a free man, it is the Master—and possibly Judas Iscariot.”

“Think you?”

“Why, do you see something in him?”

“No, not really.”

“I think,” said Ezra, “what Thomas is referring to is what I have noticed from what I have seen of him. Judas is too perfect. He is exceedingly handsome, and brilliant—he is a priest, you know, Thomas.”

“No, indeed?”

“Indeed. So in addition to being intelligent, he is very learned. And he is graceful, and apparently strong, and almost anything else you can name—and humble, in the sense that he makes no boasts of his qualities, though he does not deny them. And yet . . . And yet I feel as you do. With the Master, it is different. He is all that Judas is—of course, less strikingly beautiful as a man—but it sits well on him. He is above us, and he knows it, but—how shall I say it?—it does not please him, particularly; it is but a fact. With Judas, it is a fact, and he is quite happy about it.”

“Come now, Ezra, you are being unjust,” said John.

“Am I? Thomas feels it. Is this not what you feel?” he asked Thomas.

“I have barely seen him, so I could not say. Perhaps we are being unjust, but the vague impression I got was something along the lines you were saying.”

“Perhaps we *are* unjust. But I have had much and much time to study people. I may be mistaken, but I think not.”

“Well, the Master chose him, and as everyone says, he

knows what he is doing.”

“I wonder. Did the Master choose him—as he clearly chose you and Bartholomew—and me—or did he choose the Master?”

“As to that,” said Andrew, who had heard the tail end of the conversation and come over to join them, “I was there when John was bathing everyone, and Judas came up to be bathed, just after Jesus. We all thought that it had thundered, and some heard a voice, and there was the bird that John mentioned afterward, which was the sign he had been told to look for—though I hear that he actually knew Jesus before; he was his cousin, or something—and Judas immediately spotted who it was, and after he dried off, asked if he could become a follower of Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said that if he went to Galilee, by the shore of the Sea of Tiberias, he would find him in a month or two. It was only after that that John pointed Jesus out to John and me, and we followed him ourselves.” So Andrew had actually heard what Jesus, and, yes, it was Judas, had said to each other just after his bath.

“Interesting,” said Ezra. John then realized that Judas had admitted—no, not ‘admitted,’ mentioned—that very thing to him, and in a quite satisfactory way. Why, as a Pharisee who did not see eye to eye with the others, would he *not* do as he did?

“But the Master *does* know what he is doing,” said Andrew, “and he would not permit himself to be ‘chosen’ by anyone if he did not wish him to be among us.” Exactly, thought John.

“I suppose you are right,” said Ezra. You must be right, of course. No one manipulates the Master.”

“Well I think you are all being hard on Judas for no

reason,” said John. “I see nothing wrong with him. I like him.”

Thomas said, “Oh, we see nothing *wrong* with him. Just the opposite. Ezra was saying that his problem was that there was too much right with him.”

“That sounds to me like nothing but simple jealousy.”

“And so it may be, youngster,” said Ezra. “Our problem seems to be that we really have nothing much to talk about at the moment except each other—and that inevitably means finding fault with each other.” He laughed, and the others joined in.

Unless of course, thought John, the Master saw that Judas also was in some kind of severe danger. There might be something about Judas at that, if his theory of how people were chosen was true.

Nonsense!

Jesus suddenly broke in, (to forestall pursuing this further? wondered John) “We are almost, but not quite, ready to start announcing that the reign of God is just about to begin, and to prepare people to change the way they think about things. Another few days, I expect. But I think we had best be thinking now about something more practical: where each of us intends to spend the night—and to see to it that each has a wedding-garment ready on the morrow for the day after.

John looked at Thomas at the same instant Nathanael did, both evidently realizing that Thomas no longer had any decent clothes of his own. John supposed that what he was wearing was something Nathanael loaned to him—certainly neither he nor Samuel had had anything that expensive previously. And anything he himself had would not have been cared for, and

doubtless was fit for nothing but the fire. This was confirmed by the look on Thomas's face. Nathanael came over to him and said, "Fear not, Thomas. What you are wearing at the moment will do very nicely. I dare say even that it will surpass many of the others, who, after all, were fishers like you."

John realized that, unlike perhaps Simon and Andrew, he had some clothes that would be acceptable, as did James. He saw, in fact, Simon and Andrew speaking together about it. James, who was about Simon's size, offered to help, but no one came anywhere near having anything that would fit Andrew. Judas quite generously let three or four of them borrow some of his clothes. Judas was *very* well dressed. Perhaps he too was rich.

Ezra, who was looking on in a detached way, finally stepped over to Andrew and said, "I think I have something that you might be able to use, Andrew, if you do not mind putting on what used to be the livery of a slave. Of course, Bartholomew was always discreet and tasteful, and so it will not look like livery when you are wearing it. It will be a little tight on you, but I think you could get into it."

Andrew looked at him, at first skeptically and then with some confidence at his size. "Why thank you, Ezra, if you think Bartholomew would not mind."

"They are *my* clothes, Andrew. They only *were* his." John thought, it is not easy to forget that Ezra was a slave—or rather, it was easy to forget that he was no longer a slave.

Andrew flushed. "Of course. I was not thinking. Excuse me."

"Apology accepted." Ezra smiled, and so did Nathanael, but Nathanael's smile was a bit rueful. John suspected that

Nathanael too had just now realized that Ezra's clothes belonged to Ezra and no longer to him, and was ashamed not to have thought of this. How could Nathanael have set him free and yet claimed his very clothes? There doubtless would be several more little *contretemps* like this one.

Ezra said, "I will fetch them tonight. I expect that Bartholomew and I will be sleeping in Cana. The wedding itself is in Cana, is it not?" He looked over at Nathanael, who nodded.

"I do not think it worth while to go around to Bethsaida," said Philip. "If one of you can find room for me, I will stay here in Capernaum. In that way, we can be back here early enough tomorrow."

John immediately offered him his house, which had a spare room, and he accepted gladly.

Nathanael looked up at the sky, and said, "But the sun is about to set, and perhaps we had best be started. The hill is a rather long climb, and a bit rough at night. Would you join us, Thomas?"

Thomas noticed that John was coming over as if to invite him also to his own house, but when John heard Nathanael, he turned to make a random remark to Simon, leaving Thomas free, and Thomas said, "Thank you, Nathanael," and went after them as they turned to climb the rather steep ascent. John was a bit disappointed, but after all, Thomas and Nathanael had been friends, and John was only the friend of the appearance of Thomas. But for that very reason, he wished he could get to know him better, and not see him as Samuel-who-was-not-really-Samuel, but as a person in his own right.

The next morning, they breakfasted more or less in

silence; it seemed that Philip was not a “morning” person, and did not become his usual outspoken self until nearly noon—for which John, for one, was grateful. All Philip said was, “I forgot. I should have gone home last night. I must go over to Bethsaida some time today, to fetch my clothes for the morrow.” The others made noises that they had heard him.

After eating, they wandered back to the shore, where the group was gathering. Jesus was there, but as usual not saying much, and rather listening to them than leading the conversation. John found these purely social meetings particularly distressing, since he did not really know how to interact with others, and it made life easier when there was something definite to talk about, and definite people with whom to talk. But he managed by putting on a face of interest, and nodding as if he understood what the others were saying, while he actually retreated into his own private world; and the time passed reasonably well. Philip made excuses and disappeared for a couple of hours, returning with his clothes on his arm.

Eventually Thomas and Nathanael also appeared, with Ezra carrying a load of clothes. He had not completely shed his role as the slave, it appeared—but then John remembered that he was the one who had offered clothes to Andrew, and they were his clothes.

Ezra went up to Andrew and showed him the clothes, and Andrew tried on the cloak, which was the most important of the garments, and, to his joy, it almost fit him. “I had no idea you were that big, Ezra,” he said.

“Actually, we selected this one because it is a little large for me; I used to use it when I had some task that would

require moving around a great deal. But if you do not try fishing in it, it seems as if it will serve very nicely.”

“And you have a tunic also. That is well. My tunic looks rather—forlorn—inside it.”

“I expect you will be able to get into that also, though you might have a bit more trouble moving once you put it on. But it is only for the wedding and the reception, where you have nothing to do, except congratulate the bride and groom and drink wine.”

At this, John saw Andrew cast a glance in Thomas’s direction, which Thomas pretended not to notice.

The conversation up to this point, insofar as it had any definite topic, had centered around asking Jesus when they would begin the announcement of the start of what Jesus called the “reign of God,” and how they would go about it.

Jesus now answered that it would not happen until after they had attended the Passover the next week, and that he had in mind some events that would prepare for it. “I plan to give a speech somewhere around here stating what the new reign of God is going to be like—probably up the mountain over there, where there is that plateau halfway up where people could gather and hear well. But we will see how things develop. I expect it would be unwise to begin in Judea.”

This caused some discussion, since Judea seemed to some the logical place to begin, while others thought that it would be better to have the movement established before confronting the Judeans, who might not like the idea of their authority being, if not trampled on, diminished. Jesus held himself aloof from actually joining in the conversation, but seemed to be listening intently, gauging the readiness of his followers to

accept his lead.

Judas Iscariot figured heavily in this discussion, since, as a priest himself, he had a fairly good finger on the pulse of the establishment in Judea. His opinion seemed to coincide with that of Jesus, since he said that if one were to try to make the Judean priesthood change their way of thinking, one would have to do it gradually and very diplomatically, somehow convincing them that *they* were the authors of the change, rather than that a Galilean upstart was telling them that he was right and they were wrong.

“What is wrong with being a Galilean?” asked John, his face immediately flushed with anger, and some others murmured agreement.

“Nothing at all. You are as good Judeans in the generic sense as the people living in Judea. But you know that *they* do not think so. The idea of a prophet coming from Galilee is laughable to them.”

“Well, they will have to become used to it!”

“Granted. But since they think that they are the only true Judeans, it will take considerable diplomacy to make them give up the idea.”

“Either that,” broke in Simon the Revolutionary, “or a movement so strong that they will have no power against it, especially if here in Galilee we show how we can shake off the Roman chains.”

Several of them opined that that would be a miracle beyond anything they had so far seen, to which Simon responded, “Exactly. But who can say if it will not happen?” Jesus looked a bit bemused. John had by this time cooled back down. Judas had not meant anything except to state what was

obviously a fact. But it was a worrying fact, and the Master would have to see how to handle it—presumably without turning them into an army.

It looked as if it was going to be an exciting future, if not positively a dangerous one.

And so the day passed, without anyone's actually becoming enraged at anyone else, though there were a few instances in which John and—less often—James made a remark or two that could be construed as intemperate. But they had both been learning to quell their hot tempers, and quickly cooled down, especially when others agreed with their main point, and only added caveats and qualifications.

At one point, John became curious about just how much Ezra actually knew about Judas, and went over to him as he was standing by himself—a common occurrence with him—and said, “I was wondering, Ezra. Have you had any extended conversations with Judas?”

“He has not exchanged a word with me.”

“Indeed? You sound as if you think it is deliberate.”

“Well, to test my theory—you remember, I had the idea that he was quite contented with being perfect—I went over and extended my hand, as if to introduce myself. He looked at it, and then for the first time looked up at me, and turned away; it was as if he was afraid that some of the soot would rub off on him. I was half tempted to tell his back that my color was not contagious.”

“Really, Ezra!”

“Ah, John, but you did not see the look on his face! It was not difficult to interpret, believe me.”

“I do not understand. He was all cordiality with me.”

“Well of course. You, though merely a fisherman, which in this group he has at least to tolerate, were thinking of studying to be a rabbi, and you can read, and, if you will permit my saying it, you are quite cute, with all your muscles and your curly hair.” John half expected a smile à la Daniel, but he stated it as a simple fact, and so John let the moment pass, and said, “So you think he deliberately insulted you?”

“No, I would not exactly say that. I think he thought that *I* was insulting *him* by approaching him on my own to speak to him. Slaves do not do such things.”

“But you are not a slave.”

“John, John, to some people, once a slave, always a slave. And I suspect, especially if one is black.”

“Well, I think—at least I *hope*—that you are misinterpreting him. Perhaps he was preoccupied at the moment.”

“Perhaps. But I think I will not make a second attempt. If he wishes to speak to me, he may approach me. I will receive him with the utmost cordiality, you may be sure.” Now came the dazzling smile.

“I would imagine that you received many slights when you were a slave.”

“More than I could count. People would speak of me—with me standing right there beside them—as if I were some kind of inanimate object they were appraising. There were times I almost screamed. And of course, I was not something to be spoken *to*, except to order to do this or that. But one learns after years of putting up with it that it does not matter. One is what one is, and the fact that one is enslaved is not a reflection on one’s person, but on the conditions under

which one happens to be—and what others think reflects on them more than it does on oneself.

“One either learns that or is repeatedly beaten, and dies trying to run away. Because, of course, the arrangement is such that one never can earn enough money to buy one’s freedom. Why would an owner allow such a thing? He would only have to train a new slave. And, of course, one learns to respond politely to the severest insult, as if nothing had happened.”

“I have sometimes wondered how slaves felt; but of course I never really knew anyone who could afford one, so I had no real experience of them.”

“It is *not* an enviable situation. But one learns how to make the best of it.”

“Apparently that was what you were saying to Thomas, when the two of you were laughing yesterday.”

“Something along those lines.”

“But are you going to be one of us? Jesus has not exactly said you are, and has not said you are not.”

“I think he would accept me. But as to myself, I rather think I would prefer to be a kind of observer rather than an active member of whatever he is going to do. I perhaps, because of my color more than anything else, would be too much of a curiosity to do much good. Perhaps I can learn from him and go back to spread his doctrine in Ethiopia. We shall see.”

The trouble, of course, was that no one really knew what Jesus was really up to; they only had, each of them, some experience of his remarkable powers, but what this Reign of God would mean was a complete mystery. Would he try to reinstate the Judges of old, without a king, letting the Master

be king, speaking through prophets, or would Jesus be a kind of spokesman himself for the Master? But then what?

Seventeen

BUT IT AGAIN DREW TOWARD evening, and John invited Thomas and Nathanael and Ezra to stay with Philip at his house there in Capernaum, so that they would not have to face the trek they had made the previous night and morning. There was only one other room for the three of them, John said, but it was large enough so that they could share it without much discomfort. “We can put some straw on the floor to make temporary beds, and it should be comfortable enough.”

The others agreed, and they went off after John and James. It turned out that Simon and Andrew had the house next door (where Jesus and his mother were staying): the one Nathanael took Thomas to, though, John said, walking by Thomas’s side, they had only recently come here, in order to team up with Zebedee and his family; “They are originally from Bethsaida, and it was becoming a nuisance to come here from there or for us to go there from here, so they moved. Jesus himself, you know, is not from here, but from Nazareth, up not far from Cana.”

Thomas nodded. “Tell me, I have been wondering,” he

said. "What was his occupation up to now? Something physical, I expect; he does not look much like my idea of a rabbi."

"Oh, he is not—that is, he *was* not. He was a carpenter until just last year. Had you not heard of him and his father Joseph? I thought everyone knew them."

"Joseph. Oh, yes, I seem to have heard the name. We never had much of any need for a carpenter, and so would not have sought him."

"The whole area will have to find a new one," said John. "The Master has clearly begun a different career, and Joseph, poor man, has some kind of a heart condition that prevents his working any longer."

"That is sad."

"Well, Jesus's mother says that he is not in any pain, but is exhausted most of the time, if he tries to do anything strenuous. And from what I have been able to gather, working with wood is a good deal more strenuous than fishing, unless you are plying the oars."

"I wonder that Jesus cannot do something for him," said Thomas. He was obviously wondering why Jesus had not cured him, given what he had done with John's father.

"I asked his mother that very thing," he answered, "and she said that he had his reasons—of which I have no doubt."

As they reached the house, John pointed out the little boat that Jesus had made, and they spent a short time admiring it. John then introduced the three to his parents, watching their eyes widen as they saw a black man among them, and they had their evening meal (Philip had run ahead at James's request to warn Rachel beforehand that there would be more guests) and settled themselves down to sleep—in conditions rather

better than those John had slept in with Andrew and Simon.

As he lay down, curiosity about what was “rocky” about Simon pestered his thoughts for almost a quarter of an hour, until sleep intervened.

The next day, after a rather festive breakfast, they donned their wedding garments and joined the others at their customary meeting-place. John was rather amused to see Andrew moving a bit stiffly in Ezra’s clothes; the tunic just barely fit him, and he seemed afraid that if he made any sudden move, he would rip it—which was a real possibility. But if he kept himself relatively still, as Ezra predicted, he looked fine—quite elegant, in fact—in it. It was fascinating to think that these were the clothes Ezra wore when he wanted extra freedom.

Thomas took himself apart with Jesus in earnest conversation, doubtless about how he was to behave with respect to the wine. John saw him stroke his side, where he suspected he kept some wine as a kind of insurance, since he always looked guilty when he did this, and so some of the conversation probably had to do with whether he was wise in keeping it and had to get rid of it, or whether it might make the transition to sobriety easier, if he had the idea that if things became unbearable, he had something to rescue himself with—and thus things never would become totally intolerable, and the rescue would never be needed. If this were what was going on, it was a dangerous tactic, but conceivably it might work. John looked on the two of them with pity for Thomas, and sorrow for Samuel, whom he was coming more to resemble, now that he had some food in him.

John heard Jesus say, “And do not be worrying. There is

nothing to worry about as long as you put your trust in me.”

“I will try, Master. Thank you.”

Jesus chuckled, as if he were anticipating something amusing, John wondered what it was. But what he said was good advice. John felt by no means confident that he could escape the dangers he might face. Suppose Ezra meant something when he said that John was “cute, with your muscles and your curly hair”? And suppose he followed up on that? Would John be able to resist? “On my own, no,” he said half aloud. Well, the Master would have to keep watch on him, and doubtless would tell him—*had* told him—“there is nothing to worry about as long as you put your trust in me.”

At any rate, nothing had happened so far. John fought the feeling of disappointment at this.

The moments that seemed hours passed, and eventually so did the hours, and John finally found himself congratulating the bride and groom, whom he thought he had met once, and after enduring desultory conversation as long as he could bear it, he wandered over by himself a bit behind Jesus, who was joined shortly by his mother. Interestingly, Ezra had spotted his mother approaching Jesus and had quietly placed himself next to John, to see what would happen between them.

Mary said to Jesus, “They have no wine.”

He turned to look at her, with some consternation. “What is that to you, Madam, or to me? My moment has not come yet.”

She looked back, saying nothing with her mouth, but everything with her eyes, and apparently received, if not an answer, at least a kind of permission, and then turned to the servers, who happened to be standing by. “Do whatever he tells

you,” she said.

Jesus stroked his beard, and looked around, pondering what he could do, and then spotted six stone water-jars standing by the wall, fully waist high. He turned to the waiters and said, “Fill the jars with water.”

They looked at each other, and then shrugged in a “Well, why not?” kind of way, and three of them fetched pitchers of water—rather large ones—and went out back to the stream, filled them and after a short time, the water-jars were full to the brim.

“Draw it out now,” said Jesus, “and take it to the one in charge.”

Once again they shrugged, and then their eyes widened as they smelled the “water” they were now taking out of the jars. They brought it over, and when the one overseeing the feast tasted the wine, He asked where they had got it, and when they gestured toward the water-jars, he said, “And he kept it *there? This?*” and immediately beckoned to the groom, who had a look of humiliation on his face. When he came over, he whispered, “Everyone serves his good wine first, and then when people have begun to feel the effects, he uses the poorer quality. But you have kept the good wine until now!” The groom was completely bewildered, and the steward said, “Well, taste it,” and gave him a cup of the wine that the servers had brought over. Now it was the groom’s eyes that widened, and when the steward said, “How much of this do you have?” he looked helplessly at the servers, who answered, “Oh, we have enough, never fear!” and added under their breath with glee, “Enough to supply an army!”

“Well, serve it!” said the steward, and they returned to the

water-jars and began filling cups and handing them around. John and Ezra looked at each other.

As the servers began serving the new wine, there arose murmurs of delight among the recipients, who evidently had not yet drunk enough not to be able to tell the difference between what they had been drinking and what they had just been served.

Thomas moved over to Ezra, who had once again drifted into an inconspicuous corner, and said, "What did they say to each other?"

A server came by, and John took a cup. The wine was superb, as he had imagined. He kept himself within earshot.

"So you saw me spying, did you?" said Ezra.

"I could see that you had the same idea I had," answered Thomas.

Ezra explained what he had seen, and then Thomas said, "I heard him tell them to draw it out and take it to Zephaniah."

"—Who was astounded that Saul would have kept the good wine until then," continued Ezra. "He had no idea what he was saying, of course, but when he got the idea that they had plenty of wine, you could see that he did not care, he was so relieved."

"You are sure that it was water?"

"No question about it. I saw where they got it. I doubt if Saul has a wine-creek behind his house."

"And it is wine now, is it?"

"Either that, or Zephaniah cannot tell the difference between wine and water."

At this point, a server passed, and Ezra took a cup from

him, tasting it. "Indeed," he said, and took another taste. "You know," he said, "Bartholomew never drank anything but the finest wines, and therefore neither did I. But we never had anything like this! Incredible!" He looked compassionately at Thomas. "A pity you cannot taste it—but . . ."

"I know."

"I think it would be better for me to withdraw, so that I will no longer tempt you." He went back to John, and said, "Ah, you already have some."

"He outdid himself."

"*That* is certainly true. I hope if he ever plays a joke on me, it will be of this caliber!"

"But behold Thomas," John said. Just then, the groom himself came over with a couple of cups of wine, and said, "But you have nothing to drink. We cannot have that. Take this, and I will fetch another one for my—wife." And he handed it to Thomas, who took it, wondering where Jesus was. Well, he had told him that he could take it if refusing it meant being insulting. But what was he to do with it?

"He looks as if he is going to taste it! Where is Jesus?" And then they spotted him, almost at the same moment Thomas did; and he was looking straight at Thomas.

Thomas held out the cup a bit, and looked a question.

Jesus nodded, and took a sip of his own wine, which certainly seemed to be permission to drink. He looked a question at him again, and Jesus again nodded.

"He is actually telling him to drink it!" exclaimed John.

"Something strange is going on," said Ezra, and began to move in Thomas's direction.

But not before Nathanael had reached him after he had

taken a sip and then looked up with the strangest expression on his face, in which surprise, profound disappointment, and relief were mingled.

Nathanael said, from behind, "Do you think that wise, Thomas, so soon?"

"Taste it." said Thomas, handing him the cup.

"Oh," said Nathanael, who blushed and left. Something strange was indeed happening.

Ezra was right behind Nathanael. He said nothing, of course, but merely made himself visible at the edge of Thomas's sight. Thomas also handed the cup to him, and he too said, "Oh," and, stifling laughter, faded into the place he had chosen next to John.

"What is it?" asked John.

"What we should have expected. *That* cup was nothing but water."

"Indeed? How like him!" So *that* was why he had that amused look on his face earlier; he was anticipating this.

"And *now* what?" said Ezra, as he looked over at Mary approaching Thomas. "I think you must excuse me, John, but it looks as if there is something else that I would not like to miss."

"I rather think they wish to be private, Ezra."

"They will not mind *me*. No one minds that a slave is standing by."

John was anything but certain of this, but what could he do? If he tried to follow them as they went outside, he would only be calling attention to them, which was clearly what Mary did not wish. She doubtless had something important to say to Thomas, and if Jesus thought that it was to be kept from Ezra,

he would see to the matter. Certainly, one of the things Ezra had learned as a slave was to be discreet, so there was no chance that he would divulge anything. And who knew? If Jesus did not intervene, it might be something Ezra also needed to know.

John was by this time beginning to be completely overwhelmed by the crowd, and himself went outside, where he found a bench by himself, and sat and contemplated the sky and the very beautiful garden, with insects buzzing around the flowers. It turned into one of his magic moments, and kept him spellbound for a considerable time, until James found him.

"You are all right?" he said. "I have been looking for you, wondering what happened to you."

"Oh, I am fine—now," said John. "You know how I cannot stand these gatherings. It simply became too much for me, and I found a place where I could be myself."

"I was hoping that was what it was. But you know how you are. Either you go away and deflate, as it were, or you become more and more frantic and are apt to start a fistfight."

"I know. I did not want that to happen. Especially after everything else had worked out so favorably."

"Then all is well? I expect people will be taking their leave soon."

"I will join you shortly. I am almost back to my normal self."

"Very well." And he left.

Shortly afterward, Ezra came by, and said, "Ah, there you are."

"You have completed your spying, then."

"I have," he said a but smugly. "But I am sorry to say that

I cannot tell you the results of it. I do not think they would wish that it be revealed. But I can tell you this: If you have a lofty opinion of who or what Jesus is, it is not lofty enough! Not anywhere nearly enough! It is incredible!” He went away shaking his head.

Well, perhaps he would learn what this was all about some day, John thought. He rose and joined the people taking leave of the bride and groom.

And there was Thomas, looking as if he had had a revelation even more amazing than that of the water into the wine except in his own cup. John and James persuaded him and Nathanael and Ezra to stay with them the next few nights as they prepared to go to Judea for the feast of the Passover, which was quite near.

The next day, they began forming themselves into a semi-nomadic company, with provisions for cooking their own food and tents for shelter outside. It seemed that this was to be their normal condition from now on, rather than imposing constantly on the hospitality of those in Capernaum. They would need all this, of course, on the trip to Jerusalem, which they planned to take along the valley of the Jordan river this time, rather than going directly through Samaria.

Several others had joined them also, including a number of women, who occupied themselves with the material needs of the group. Ezra became a kind of liaison between the men and the women, since he had taken care of the domestic duties with Nathanael when they had lived together in the “cottage” beside his father’s mansion, a cottage which Thomas described to John as twice as large as his father’s house. Thomas had apparently not been brought to see the mansion itself, for some

reason John did not think it was prudent to ask. There definitely was something between Bartholomew and his father, in spite of the fact that he was now increasingly being called by the patronymic rather than Nathanael.

John, who was sensitive to his surroundings, was always depressed once they left the rock-strewn, to be sure, but relatively lush hills of Galilee and sank lower and lower in the trench called the “Arabah,” which had only a little strip of green beside the Jordan, with the hills—low mountains, actually—on either side nothing but gray dirt and rocks, with nothing—nothing—alive on them. Possibly some creatures roamed there, coming down to the river to drink, but one saw nothing at all, like land that had been prepared for planting and abandoned. And, of course, it grew hotter and hotter as they went south toward the Salt Sea, that dreadful place in which there were no fish or life of any kind, where one could not even sink, the water was so thick—and the surrounding land was covered with salt where the sea had been.

John wondered where all the salt had come from, since this was not part of the Great Sea to the west and had no connection with it or any other part of the ocean, but was fed only by the Jordan. Could it be that minute amounts of salt in the silt carried by the river accumulated here, as the water evaporated with the heat? There was no outlet to this “sea,” John knew—the land was the lowest in the country—and the salt on the land around it argued that the whole area had once been covered by water. Perhaps the sea would someday shrink to a pond on which one could even walk. Imagine walking on water!—but no. If Ezekiel’s prophecy was correct, the mountains somewhere to the west toward Jerusalem would

split in two and a new source of water would well up from beneath the Temple, coming down here to make this lake huge and fresh, full of fish, with trees with medicinal leaves all around it.

John suddenly thought that this would probably happen in the time of the Prince, which was *now*! Perhaps cataclysms would accompany Jesus—beneficent cataclysms where the world would be transformed. And then perhaps Isaiah's writings were not simply imaginative poetry, and lions would in fact sleep with lambs beside them, which had no fear, because there would no longer be destruction!

Nonsense!

But then, a man had had his legs restored by a simple touch, and Thomas had been freed from something which had completely overwhelmed him, and ordinary water had at not even a word become superb wine! Who could say? Even these mountains, so gray and forbidding, might turn out to be lush and green! Why not?

And perhaps John himself would not have to fight off the demons inside him. Oh, if that could but come to pass!

Did he have *that* much trust in the Master? But had the thunder itself not called him his Son? And had he himself not told John in confidence that the Father and he were "one and the same thing?" Why not a complete transformation of the world? Perhaps *this* was what he was planning! And John was to be a part of it!

But how could one's mind embrace such thoughts? Or was it the very dreariness of the landscape that encouraged them? Because there *had* to be something better than this.

Eighteen

As they climbed the forlorn hills to the west, and finally reached green life, with the cypresses pointing up toward the One who gave it, and all but begging for him to be praised, John's soul soared with relief—and hope. Well, whatever would happen, he would see it.

At the gate entering Jerusalem, Jesus encountered a number of sick and lame beggars, whom, in lieu of supplying with money, he cured with as little fanfare as he had transformed the wine, simply by touching them. They gasped in astonishment and glee, and ran off—literally, in some cases, especially those who had been crippled—to announce their good fortune to all and sundry.

The reign of God was already starting, it seemed, if John was at all on the right track. It apparently was to begin with the removal of disease and deformation from the people.

The result was predictable: As soon as the people heard of this, Jesus was inundated with the sick, whom he touched and healed. They all shook their heads in wonderment, not only at the cures themselves, but even more at the casual way

in which they were done, as if Jesus regarded this as simply the equivalent of giving alms.

Before long, they went into the immense Temple, with its vast courtyards teeming with people, full of the noise of their conversation and of the bleating of sheep and the lowing of calves to be sold to those who wished to make a sacrifice.

Jesus stopped, all but shaking off those who were pressing around him hoping for a cure—his look made it clear that he wished to be undisturbed, at least for a while. He looked around at the vendors and at the money-changers, stroked his beard as if thinking, and suddenly came to a decision. He undid the cord that bound his waist. “John, lend me your cincture, would you?” he said, with fire in his eyes. The ends of the cords were tied into knots to keep them from fraying, and he doubled the ropes over in his hands into what was a kind of whip with four tails, which he began swinging before him.

“Out! Out!” he shouted, beating the animals on their rumps, making them bellow and run off. “Out!” He came to the money-changers’ tables, where Roman denarii were converted into shekels to pay for the sacrifices, and suddenly kicked them over. “It is written,” he cried, “‘My house will be called a house of prayer,’ and you have made it a den of thieves!” The money-changers screamed at him as they dashed to pick up the coins that were flying and bouncing all over the pavement.

“Take those out of here!” he shouted at the pigeon-vendors, “You are not to make my Father’s house a market!” The vendors fled from their tables, grabbing their cages of pigeons, grateful that they had escaped his wrath without having the birds fly off away from them. The sellers of the

other animals meanwhile were chasing their cattle, trying to round them up and take them out of the Temple as quickly as they could. Confusion was everywhere, animals braying, bleating, and bellowing, people yelling, the sick pleading, pigeons flapping their wings explosively in their cages, hooves clattering on the tiles, coins jingling still on the pavement, and vendors scurrying everywhere.

“My Father’s house,” he had said. John wondered if anyone else had noticed it in all the excitement. He went over to Thomas and shouted in his ear, “Is it not written somewhere, ‘Zeal for your house has eaten me up’?”

“I know not. I may have heard it, but—I know not. But whether it was written or not, it has certainly happened.” John remembered what Judas had said about approaching the Pharisees slowly and diplomatically. Jesus evidently had his own ideas on that score. In fact, he saw Judas put his hand over his eyes and turn and walk away; for him, this was obviously a disaster. John had a suspicion that what Jesus was doing was meant partly for Judas’s sake; he was trying to nip in the bud any idea that Judas might have that he could control things from the background.

Nevertheless, the flagrant abuse that everyone commented on during every Passover was now being rectified; and he wondered whether any of the authorities would have the temerity to denounce what Jesus was doing.

It seems they would—indirectly. Someone came up in front of Jesus—a safe distance in front of him, since he still had his whip and looked as if he might use it again at any moment—and shouted, “Where is your authorization to do something like this?”

Jesus, panting from his exertion, looked round at them with scorn. He switched the whip to his left hand, and then with his right, beat his breast with his fingers, "Destroy this temple," he shouted, and flung out the hand in front of him with three fingers raised. "and in three days I will rebuild it!"

No one said anything for a few moments; his reply was so far from an answer that they were stunned, trying to fathom it. Finally someone laughed mockingly and said, "This temple has take forty-six years to build, and you will build it in three days?"

Jesus gave no further answer, however, and looked around at them, still full of wrath. Finally, he walked across the courtyard, now cleared of animals and money-changers, and went from the Courtyard of the Gentiles into that of the Judeans, the Temple proper. The students followed.

"Who is he? Who does he think he is? Is he pretending to be the Prince?" they heard from every side. Some answered, "Had you not heard? He is the one who was curing all sorts of diseases, merely by touching people." "And so?" was the answer. "And so, perhaps he *is* the Prince. He certainly acts as if he is!"

But Jesus paid no attention to them, and walked on into the Court of the Judeans, where he stood silently for a while to pray.

No one except his students followed him, Judas included, far in the rear. Apparently, though some had scoffed, no one dared to put to the test whether if they destroyed the Temple, he might in fact be able to rebuild it; too many were marveling at the impossible cures he had effected as if they were nothing. If diseases could obey him thus, why not the stones of the

Temple? And John added to himself, if water could turn into wine, the rebuilding of what was torn down would be child's play.

But Jesus gave no indication that he put any trust in the faith of those who were positively disposed; it was too early, and too little had happened, and besides, no one knew what his plans were if he really was the Prince. Everyone was already buzzing about an overthrow of the Romans, which Simon the Revolutionary was busy to suggest. But Jesus himself made no further step.

Jesus had lost no time, John realized, in putting into the people's mind that he was the Son of God, if not "one and the same" as his Father, whatever that meant. People would remember "my Father's house." Certainly the Pharisees would, if they could use it to hold against him later.

John saw Ezra and Thomas in earnest discussion, and wandered over as Ezra was saying "—he must be wondering why attach himself to someone who does not follow his advice and expects *him* to follow wherever he leads?" Ah, evidently referring to Judas, because Ezra went on, "—him, as a rational person, his advice is obviously the most rational course. What he does not realize is what we know: that everything about Jesus is beyond mere reason."

"Are you saying that you think this action of Jesus is irrational?"

"No. Only that the reasons for it are beyond what a 'rational' person would conceive."

At this point, John joined them. "What do you suppose he meant by what he said back there?" he asked.

"I know not," answered Thomas. "It seemed to me to

make no sense. 'I will destroy this Temple and rebuild it in three days.' Meaning he had the power to do so if he chose?"

"No," said John, "he did not say that. He said, 'Destroy this Temple.' Is it not so, Ezra?"

"That indeed is what he said."

"Meaning," said Thomas, "If *you* destroy this Temple, I will rebuild it in three days? That makes even less sense. Why would the Judeans destroy the Temple?"

"By starting a war, making the Romans do so?" speculated John.

"But notice," said Ezra. "He did not wave his hand about as if to indicate the Temple. He was pointing at his own breast."

"Destroy *this* Temple," said John.

"Meaning," went on Thomas, "if you kill me. But then what? I will 'rebuild myself' in three days? It *still* makes no sense."

"But you are right, Ezra, now that you mention it," said John. He did seem to be referring to himself."

"And how would this 'rebuilding himself' be his credentials showing why he could clear out the Temple as he did?" asked Thomas.

"I suspect," said Ezra, "that we are going to hear many things that will seem to make no sense until the Kingdom, whatever it is, is established. I cannot believe he does not have *something* in mind. We must simply remember these things, and later on we will understand them."

"I hope," said John, and the others nodded assent. All three became lost in pondering, John wondering whether Jesus was anticipating that he would be killed somehow and then

“rebuild himself.” It would certainly establish his credentials as “one and the same” as the Father. But then what?

It was toward evening when Jesus emerged from his meditation, and he gathered them and said, “We will spend the nights here in a place I know of across the Valley of the Kidron Brook, on the Mount of Olives.” and they started down the hill toward the east, when a man came up to Jesus and said that Nicodemus, a member of the Sanhedrin, would like to see him that evening.

“Indeed?” said Jesus. “This is not an arrest for my audacity, I trust.” So some member of the Pharisees had indeed caught “my Father’s house.”

The messenger was saying, “—merely would like to see what you have to say.”

“Simon,” Jesus said to Andrew’s brother, “Do you remember the garden where we stayed once when we were in Jerusalem? That is where we will be going. I will come to you later, after I have had a talk with this Nicodemus. —And it might be as well,” he added, “if we kept this destination to ourselves. We might need a place later on to go where no one could find us. Do you understand?”

“I do, Master,” said Simon, who was as much in the dark about what he meant as everyone else.

Jesus then followed the messenger, and Simon led them to the east, up the hill from the Kidron Valley, as the sun began to sink over the Great Sea, finally becoming a huge red half-sun on the horizon, turning the sky orange and green, with a few clouds red and purple around it. John always marveled at the—lurid, almost violent—colors of the sunset, and yet how peaceful everything was at this time; the very birds were quiet.

That was it. It was the silence in which this display of heavenly glory—or agony, if one took a certain point of view and thought of it as day's dying throes—took place. Perhaps death only seemed horrible and tragic; perhaps the sunset was saying that it was actually a beautiful thing, and that it foretold a new and different life after it, as some of the Pharisees believed. John hoped so. He wondered what Jesus would say about life after death. Was there another death afterwards, and a cycle of lives and deaths, as he had heard from some? Or was death an entry into an unending life? Or was it eternal night, and peace in the sense of oblivion? He hoped not.

He followed the others into a garden full of gnarled olive trees and found a fairly comfortable place to lie, bundled in his cloak, because it was rather cold that night.

He looked over at Thomas, lying near Nathanael and Ezra, who, as he settled into sleep, patted his side, taking comfort from the wineskin or whatever he had there. John sighed for him.

The full Passover moon had risen and brightened the little grove when Jesus appeared among them and took his place next to Simon and Andrew. "The seed, it appears," he whispered to Simon, "has been planted. It is not what I would have planned, but it will do; it will do."

After celebrating the Passover the next evening at the house of a friend of Jesus in Jerusalem, they went to the banks of the Jordan, where Jesus instructed them to bathe the people who were coming to him.

"Do you know that John is still bathing people, over at Aenon?" asked Andrew. "Someone I bathed just told me. He said he wanted to come here also."

“It is well,” said Jesus. “We are not rivals.”

But others who came reported that the Pharisees were beginning to notice that Jesus’s followers, who were, of course, more numerous, were bathing more people than John was, and that Jesus was becoming more prominent, because in addition to bathing people, Jesus was curing various diseases among them.

“You are making them nervous,” said Judas Iscariot. “And it might not be wise, think you not, not to make them nervous at this early stage?”

“I agree,” said Jesus. “We should return to Galilee and there begin seriously announcing the advent of the Kingdom.”

So they left, but instead of going along the Jordan, they went straight through Samaria. They had reached Sychar, near Jacob’s well, around noon on the second day, and Jesus said, “You go into the town to buy food. I will rest a bit beside the well here. We might stay here a night or two.”

“Here? In Samaria?”

“Fear not; we will be perfectly safe. Now go.”

When they returned, they found Jesus talking with a woman, who had come to the well to draw water. They were astonished, not only that he was speaking alone with a woman, but with a Samaritan. Ordinarily, the only contact Judeans like them had with Samaritans was strictly business, buying food and so on.

She took one look at them as they came up and ran off, leaving her water-jar.

As they prepared the midday meal, Jesus paced up and down, clearly excited. “Rabbi, eat something,” said James, John’s brother.

“I have food to eat you know nothing of,” answered Jesus, continuing to pace.

“Did she give him something to eat?” they asked each other, and he stopped and looked at them. “My food,” he said, “is to do the will of the one who sent me, and finish the task he has given me.” He looked out at the fields, where the crops were beginning to sprout. “You would say, would you not, that it will be four months before the harvest?”

He waved his hand at the landscape, “But I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields; they are already ripe for the harvest, and already the reaper has begun collecting his pay and is gathering a crop for eternal life, so that the one who planted the crop will be just as happy as the one gathering it in!”

The others looked at him in bewilderment; the fields had barely begun to turn green. “I am sending you,” he said to them, “to reap what you have not worked on; others have done the work, and you will gather the fruits.”

Before they could ask him what he meant, the woman reappeared with a number of the townsfolk, some of whom the students had seen when they bought food. They begged him to stay and tell them more of what he had told the woman; and they stayed in that place two days. It seemed that Jesus had told her that he was the Prince, and also mentioned “everything that I have done,” which was apparently not a catalogue of virtues.

Then they returned to Galilee, where Jesus made for his home town of Nazareth, down the hill from Cana, where he had turned the water into wine. As he entered the region, everyone welcomed him, because they had been at the feast in Jerusalem and had seen his cures and the cleansing of the

Temple. Some were agog at his ability to cure people, and others were overjoyed at how he had tweaked the noses of the Judeans, who did not dare, really, to denounce him, since everyone knew that what he had done is what had been crying out to be done for years.

Shortly after dawn the next day, Jesus entered the synagogue, where the men had gathered to pray. The students stood at the back, John very near a man who looked as if he were trapped and wished to escape—and also looked as if he desperately needed sleep and had been in a fight, rolling on the ground—and Jesus went up to the front, and the rabbi, seeing him, asked him if he would speak. He requested the scroll of Isaiah, which he unrolled until he found the place he wished.

“We have as a guest today,” said the rabbi, “Jesus, someone doubtless all of you know.” Then Jesus began to read: “The Master’s spirit is upon me,” he said, “and this is why he has anointed me to report the good news to the poor. He has given me a proclamation to deliver: one of freedom for prisoners of war, of new sight for the blind; he has told me to set broken people free and announce a year of the Master’s favor.”

Clearly a prophesy referring to him, John thought, if he was indeed the Prince. Perhaps no prisoners of war had yet been freed, but the blind had already been made to see. And there was this: As he said, “set broken people free,” he looked up, John thought at first to himself, but then realized it was to the “broken man” beside him; and the man seemed to take it as directed at himself. He was stunned. Ezra, who was nearby, seemed to notice the look also and quietly edged over behind the man.

Jesus rolled up the scroll and handed it to the attendant, and sat back down. Every eye in the synagogue fastened upon him.

“Today,” Jesus began, “that passage is being fulfilled as you listen to it,” and someone whispered, “What is he trying to say?”

“Evidently,” was the whispered answer, “he thinks that he is the Master’s Anointed.”

“Who, that man? But is he not the Jesus who is Joseph’s son? The carpenter? What is he doing here acting like a rabbi?”

“Acting like a rabbi! He is acting as if he were the Prince who was prophesied to become David’s successor!”

“Does he think we know him not? We know his father and mother and all his relatives! Why, he has lived here his whole life! Does he expect us to believe he suddenly came down from heaven or something?”

But others began recounting what had happened in Jerusalem, and the murmuring grew louder, and Jesus lifted up his hand, and said, mildly, but in a voice that could clearly be heard through the whole synagogue, “I know. You are all quoting me the proverb, ‘Doctor, cure yourself. Do here in your own town what we have heard you do in Capernaum.’”

Here some whispered, “What? Has he done something in Capernaum?”

“They say he has cured many of all kinds of diseases, and how? Has he discovered some new medicine?”

“No, he does it with a mere word, they say.”

“Nonsense!”
“Not accepted in his own land,” Jesus was saying. “There were many, many widows in Israel during Elijah’s time—this is true, what I am saying—when the sky was shut for three years

and six months, and a great famine spread through the whole country. But Elijah was not sent to any one of them; he went to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. And there were many lepers in Israel during the time of the prophet Elisha; but it was Naaman the Syrian, not one of them, who was cured.”

“Do you hear that?”

“He is as much as saying that we are not worthy of his consideration!”

“Who does he think he is?”

“Well I will *show* him who he *really* is!” And the crowd surged forward grasping Jesus, pulling him out of the building, clearly intending to take him to the cliff outside the town to throw him over. Suddenly, everyone began milling about. “Where is he?” everyone was saying. “Who had him?” “He was here but a moment since!” “Who let him go?” They were all furious in their frustration, but it gradually dawned on them that there was nothing to be done. Jesus was simply not there. They began to disperse, shaking their heads.

Nineteen

John caught a glimpse of the “broken man” slipping behind a bush, with Ezra inconspicuously following him. He lost them in the confusion, and decided to go over by Thomas, since Ezra would probably come to him; they were evidently good friends. John did not exactly join Thomas, but stayed a bit out of sight, though near enough to hear, because he wanted to know what was going on first.

After a while Ezra returned, shaking his head. “Who was that man?” asked Thomas, and Ezra answered, “I know not. But something strange is going on. I was about to follow him, and then—rather like the Master—he was nowhere. Has the Master returned?”

“No, he—”
“I expect it would be well to go down to Capernaum for the night,” said Jesus, as if he had been with them and were resuming a conversation. John jumped at his sudden appearance. Where had he come from? “I have an errand to do in that vicinity tomorrow evening, and we can find places there to stay with no trouble. It seems I am not welcome here.”

So it seemed, thought John, that if Jesus did not want to be taken, he would not be taken, since he had the ability, probably as “one and the same” with the Creator of everything, to disappear and appear at will—even if people actually had their hands on him. This was definitely not simply a man who had the powers of an Elijah; this had never happened before.

Jesus, acting as if nothing unusual had happened, gathered his group of followers and led them to the place they had been earlier, by the lake. And interestingly, no one else noticed them at all—any of them. Could he make whole groups disappear? He apparently made the “broken man” disappear with him.

John laughed to himself. He seemed to have the same power Ezra also seemed to have. In spite of his striking appearance, no one seemed to pay any attention to him either. But he was not like the Master, of course; he did not really disappear (John could see him, for instance, when nobody else seemed to), and he had no power to keep anyone else with him from being noticed.

But the point, he supposed, is that one did not actually have to disappear, but simply misdirect people’s attention. In Ezra’s case, it was misdirected because people either thought of him as a slave and therefore part of the landscape, or because they were embarrassed by the thought of talking to a black ex-slave as if he were one of them, and so chose not to see him. What Jesus did might be a version of this, acting on people’s minds, somehow. Who knew? If he was “one and the same” as the Father, a simple manipulation of minds of a group of people was no problem.

The students talked indignantly of the reception he had

received, but it did not seem to bother Jesus; it had apparently confirmed what he had expected. “It goes to show,” remarked Nathanael, “that it is not going to be all that easy to inaugurate the Reign of God in Galilee either. Cures are fine, and perhaps signs of the new state of affairs; but even those impressed by them care about them as cures, not signs.”

To John, that showed how Jesus’s revealing that he was “one and the same as the Father” was going to be a miracle even beyond turning water into wine, and appearing and disappearing, not to mention curing at a touch. How could he convince people that these miracles were “signs” of a completely new universe? And what did it entail? No more disease and suffering? It looked as if that were at least part of it.

That day and the next passed in discussions that went nowhere, and in Jesus’s touching and curing a growing number of people who came to him for relief. Toward evening, Jesus went with his students up to a river ford, at which there was a tax-collector’s booth, where a man—the “broken man!” who looked even more broken than ever, if that were possible—was assessing the tax on the loads the farmers wished to transport, and his assistants were looking on with a mixture of horror and disbelief. He looked as if he was about to give up in complete despair, and went into the booth, taking something in his hand. A knife? To stab himself? It looked like it from the way he held whatever it was.

Jesus walked up and said, “Come. Follow me,” and the man, who was evidently fighting within himself, after a few moments put whatever it was onto a shelf in his booth. He looked back at it, as if wondering whether he was doing the right thing in not using it. But he turned and walked toward

Jesus.

A tax-collector! A “broken” tax-collector—no, a completely shattered tax-collector. And Jesus wanted him to follow him! John’s theory was being confirmed again; Jesus chose people, not because they would be useful to him, but because he was essential to them. Had not Judas said they were a “rag-tag” group? That was why. They were the most needy of the needy, and he would do amazing things with them!

John hoped.

There was a soldier standing by, and he and the two assistants came up to the man, while Jesus said to the soldier, “This man has decided to become a student of mine, and will no longer be working here. You will let him go, and you may tell his—friend—that he will soon be glad to have eyes and ears in the company of Jesus of Nazareth. The name is not unknown in Judea, even now.”

“I will be required to confirm that.” said the soldier.

“I and my followers will not be difficult to find. If you need to locate Levi, you will have no trouble.”

So his name was Levi.

“You are leaving us, Master?” said one of the assistants, and the man, who had almost started to go back to the booth, turned instead to him and said, “No. Yes. . . .Yes. I have decided to follow this man and learn from him.” Then, apparently now that the decision had been made, he continued with less confusion in his voice, “You know how to carry on what we have been doing. Use today’s numbers as a guide to what Rome exacts, and add enough to earn your own keep. You will have no trouble. But be not too exacting.”

Both men reacted with astonishment, apparently at the

last phrase more than anything else. "But you cannot simply leave us!" said the one who had spoken.

He made no reply, and turned to follow after Jesus, who had confidently walked away, as if everything had been settled satisfactorily. The others kept expostulating, but it was as if Levi could not hear. The soldier followed for a step or two, as if he would object, and then shrugged his shoulders, and began speaking to the two assistants.

Philip came up to Thomas, and whispered, "Was he not in the synagogue this morning?" and Thomas, who thought Jesus might not want this advertised, replied, "I know not. The synagogue?" Philip ought to be the last person to have this suspicion confirmed, thought John. Thomas was wise. But of course, Philip would not let go of the idea so easily, even though he left, probably to ask someone else.

Now Ezra approached, "It *was* he, you know," he also whispered, and Thomas nodded, with a significant look at Philip, with which Ezra concurred with a nod.

Jesus was saying, "You must sleep first. And perhaps think a bit on the morrow. We will take you home and then return for you, if you keep to your intention. I should tell you that the soldier will also return. He finds it difficult to believe that you will abandon your life."

"I cannot go back. I cannot."

"But you must assure yourself that this is not simply fatigue speaking. When you are fresh, it is possible you will see things in a different light."

"*You* should know I will not."

"Perhaps. But it is you who should be assured of it above all."

“Whatever you say. I know not even who I am now—or what. I know nothing.”

Did any of us? thought John. But they seemed to be familiar with one another, beyond the short acquaintance John knew of. Interesting.

None of them, of course, made any attempt to speak to the tax-collector, and were murmuring softly among themselves; they were too stunned at this development. Tax-collectors were far worse than Samaritans, and “Samaritan” was often used by the Judeans as a curse, when they needed the worst insult they could make about someone. And now a tax-collector was to be one of them! An agent of Rome!

And who was this “friend” who needed to know about them? Someone in Judea, no less. Pontius Pilate? Was Jesus actually *inviting* a spy into their midst?

Jesus kept him by his side, gently supporting him as he stumbled along the seemingly interminable distance to his house, a sumptuous Roman-style villa (which caused even more remarks) with a fence around it and vicious dogs patrolling inside. No one dared to say anything openly, but it was clear what everyone was thinking. A drunk—at least, a former drunk—was one thing, but a traitor to the Judean people quite another, not to mention someone who bled the last drop from the people for his own gain in addition to Rome’s! John thought, “Well, even if they find out what I am really like, I might not be the one they hold in most contempt now! At least, I *might* not.” He himself was not ready to condemn this Levi, since Jesus evidently knew what was inside a person, as his mother had told John, and was aware that this dross could be transformed into gold—as John’s own dross could be.

He hoped. Oh, how he hoped! And look at Thomas; he had evidently drunk nothing but water since he met Jesus—even the cup at the wedding-feast, John remembered with amusement. He seemed to be constantly teetering on the brink with his stroking of his little wine-skin, but he had not fallen over, just as John had not—yet—fallen. There was hope, if one trusted, apparently. Jesus was showing that he could transform more and more hopeless cases.

The man made some request of Jesus which no one heard; but Jesus stroked his beard and gave what seemed to be an affirmative answer.

After they left him, discussions kept going on in low tones among the students, while Jesus acted—of course—as if nothing unusual had happened. John supposed he was giving them time to become resigned to the new situation—or to leave—because he was obviously in charge, and certainly *acted* as if he knew what he was about. As they began to go to their rest (which increasingly was in the fields or woods; there were more and more of them day by day), he even said, “I believe that we now will have the nucleus I was waiting for. We will see.”

So John was right. This was the one he had been waiting for. And he had apparently waited until the moment of crisis, which had started in the synagogue, or whatever had happened to bring such a man there, and had reached its climax just as Jesus came up—just as John’s despair with the net was the occasion for Jesus to call him.

But of course, his statement raised eyebrows. That a tax-collector, of all people, would not only be one of them, but part of the ‘nucleus,’ whatever it was, was going to take even more getting used to. John was already prepared, because of his

“theory,” but the others were profoundly shocked.

The next day, however, when they went in the morning to see this Levi, his slave came out and told them that he was still asleep, that he had been exhausted from the previous two days when he had had no sleep, and that he did not feel it right to wake him. Jesus seemed to be expecting it, and agreed to return on the morrow.

As they left, they noticed that the soldier also appeared, and, receiving the same message, reported something to the slave. Permission from higher authority? The “friend”?

So there would be a kind of spy among them. Of course, what had Jesus to hide? If he could overcome the difficulty of Roman occupation somehow, then doubtless he could do it in the open. Who knew? Perhaps he could change their way of thinking as well as that of the Judeans. If the whole world were to enter a new phase with lions lying down with lambs, then why not?

Of course, the little matter of the “friend” was not lost on Simon the Revolutionary, who expostulated at considerable length on the topic, certain that he was Pilate himself. He said to John that Jesus was “putting the whole enterprise in danger.”

“If,” answered John, “the ‘whole enterprise’ means rising up militarily against Rome.”

“Well, what else could it be? The ‘reign of God,’ after all.”

“A thousand things. But what would you, Simon? Would you prefer that there be a spy in our midst who (a) is known to be a spy, and (b) looks very much as if he is going to be loyal to us, or would you have one whom no one is aware of?”

“I would prefer to have none at all!”

“Of a certainty. But the question is whether *Pontius Pilate*

would prefer that, as long as you have brought him up.”

“His preferences are not worth a copper to me.”

“Perhaps not, but he has been known to act upon his ‘preferences.’ And the type of spy he would select, if he were selecting one, would in my opinion likely be someone like yourself, who gave every appearance of being against him to disarm us.”

“Are you accusing me of being a spy for Rome?”

John was about to make a hot reply, but at this point, Nathanael broke in, “Not at all, Simon. But John has a point. *If* Rome is interested in finding out what is going on among us (and I suspect they have more than a passing interest with the talk of the Reign of God), then we can live much more comfortably knowing who their liaison is than not.”

The next day they returned, and Levi hobbled out, obviously still the worse for wear, and spoke sharply to the dogs, which only reluctantly gave up their desire to feast on the students, and returned growling to the back of the house while he approached the gate.

“You have returned to life on the third day, I see,” said Jesus. John thought, “The third day?” “And in three days I will rebuild it.” Did Jesus have a liking for three days—alluding perhaps to Jonah, who also “returned to life” on the third day? Was Jesus preparing the students—and the world—to accept something like this in his own case?

“If one can call it ‘life,’” returned Levi. “I am as dead as I am alive.”

“Ah, well, your new life is barely born, and you are still feeling the pains of the birth canal.”

“I am feeling pains, truly,” he returned.

“Do you still wish to follow me and learn from me?”

“I cannot see that I have any alternative. I am totally at a loss. I know not what you are; you are certainly not the one I once thought you to be. But you seemed to be saying that you could put back the pieces of me that have been scattered all over the ground.”

So John was right; he seemed to have known Jesus earlier. Had Jesus done some carpentry work for him? It was possible. Someone had to have built this mansion, and who was there in this area but Jesus and his father to do the woodwork?

“Well, perhaps not put them back,” Jesus was answering. “The self that you were is not something you are proud of and would have restored, is it not?”

“There is wisdom in that.”

“That is why I said a new life has been born, if you would choose to live it. It is your choice, however.”

“As I say, what choice do I have? I cannot go back, and I see no way forward. What would a tax-collector who renounced tax-collecting do? How would I live?”

“Well, you can try what I have to offer, and we will see.”

“What I cannot understand is what possible use *you* could have for me, given what I am, in whatever it is you are doing.”

“Ah, well if it comes to that, there are many things you could be useful for. You can read and write well, in several languages, and we know your skill with money. But that is beside the point, really. The point really is what can be done for a sheep that wandered off as a lamb and has fallen among wolves. The others, here, of course, are not quite convinced as yet that you are not really a wolf. They will learn.”

So he knew other languages—of course he did. John wondered if he could prevail on him to teach him Greek. He

would approach him later, and see if anything could be arranged.

“—find me not a very good companion in any case. I have been alone most of my life, and have forgotten how to act with others. Even my slave and I barely speak. I hope they will be able to make allowances, not only for what I was, but for what I am.”

“It will be good for them, fear not.” And he took him over to the group, which had gathered a little apart, murmuring to each other, and introduced him. He was obviously concentrated in memorizing faces and names. As he met a person with the same name as another, he looked into his face and then glanced over at the other of the same name. Clearly, this was a habit he had learned from his business as a tax-collector.

Twenty

Jesus then said, “let us proceed to the house, and I think it would be useful as we go if I told you a little story. I tell this just to you and not the crowds at the moment.

“Two men once went into the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee and one a tax-collector. The Pharisee stood there and whispered this prayer: ‘My God, I am grateful to you for not being greedy, dishonest, and adulterous like other people—or even like this tax collector.’”

John had been watching Levi during this time, wondering what he thought of Jesus, now (for the first time) telling little stories. He looked up in shock, and John saw that he thought the story was about him. There must have been another person also in the synagogue before the crowd came, standing praying (as many did) in the front.

Jesus was continuing, “—a week, and I pay my tithes on everything I own.’ The tax-collector, however, stood in the back of the Temple and would not even raise his eyes to heaven; he only kept beating his breast and saying, ‘My God, please have mercy on this sinner!’

Levi turned pale, confirming John's suspicion. It must have been a very great sin to bring him into the synagogue after all this time—something much greater than all the sins he had committed in his work as a tax-collector.

“—point is,” Jesus continued following his custom of acting as if nothing was happening, “that he was the one who left the Temple virtuous, not the Pharisee. Everyone who elevates himself will be lowered, and one who lowers himself will be elevated.”

There was a silence. The paleness suddenly left Levi's face, and it flamed crimson. And then he noticed everyone looking at him. The group had not had Jesus tell them a story before, and its obvious application to Levi was evidently supposed to indicate to them what their attitude toward him should be.

James the Owl came up to Levi and asked, “Were you (hem) ever in the Temple, Levi?”

“Call me Matthew, please. That is the name I was born with, and I now no longer have to disguise it. The one I wished to avoid now knows who and where I am. No, I was never in the Temple. It is a story. You must ask him if it applies to me, and how, if at all.”

No one was fooled by this, of course, and everyone took it to signify that Jesus was telling them that he had left the synagogue with his sins, whatever they were, forgiven. But how was it possible?

This was a new development. Jesus did not exactly say that *he* forgave the man's sins, but that the man's attitude induced God—or better “allowed” God, who “did not want the death of the sinner but his repentance”—to forgive him. Still, Jesus was clearly indicating that he knew that Levi was now virtuous;

and if he was “one and the same” as the Father, perhaps he could forgive sins on his own—because he, somehow, was *not* on his own. It was all very confusing.

Clearly this Matthew was struggling with the same concept. Finally, it seemed to occur to him that if it *were* possible, perhaps a new life could begin, after all.

Philip, who could not let go of an idea, came up to him at this point, and said, “Did I not see you in the synagogue in Nazareth, a couple of mornings ago?”

“I have been in that synagogue but once in my life.”

“Oh. I thought I saw you when—but it is of no consequence.”

Levi obviously was quite astute. No doubt he *had* been in that synagogue but once, and that was the time. John saw that Thomas, who looked over at Ezra, had caught it, as had Ezra, who nodded agreement.

Matthew—as his name now would be, it seemed—was walking within earshot of Andrew and Nathanael, who were discussing the story among themselves, without seeming to realize that he could overhear them. “But how can he say that the Pharisee did not leave the Temple virtuous?” said Andrew. “In what had he sinned? He did everything he was required to do. Who pays tithes on *everything*? And what did the tax-collector do except admit that he was a sinner? Does recognizing what you are absolve you from your sins?”

Matthew shrank as if stung, but the two took no notice. As Nathanael paused before replying, John thought, “No, but repentance—the right kind of repentance, perhaps—allowed God to do so.”

Nathanael then answered, “Clearly, there is more to it than that. The tax-collector was beating his breast and begging for

mercy, after all. He was hardly bragging at how clever he was at sinning. He wished forgiveness, and forgiveness was granted him. It is a question of attitude, I suppose. Remember David after Bathsheba, and his psalm. He was forgiven.”

“But he had to pay,” Andrew countered. “His beloved son was killed.” Matthew shrank back in fear. Would he have to pay back all the money he had cheated out of everyone?

“True. But he *was* forgiven, and so was the tax-collector. We know not what he had to pay afterwards.”

“Well I think he should have mentioned it. Why should sinners simply have everything wiped away as if they had done no harm?”

“I *think*, Andrew, that we have entered a new order of things.”

“It seems we have.” answered Andrew. “Especially since the Pharisee’s virtue did him no good. I might grant what you say about the tax-collector, but why should the Pharisee’s virtuous acts count for nothing? Explain me that!”

“You notice how proud he was of everything he did? ‘Not like the rest of men,’ or whatever he said.”

“Did *you* notice, Bartholomew, that he expressed gratitude to God that he was as he was?”

He paused for a moment. “Yes, but he had a list of all his good deeds ready to hand. Why was he praying thus to God, reminding him of all that he had done for him? One does nothing for God! God is infinite; he needs nothing from us.”

“Then why does he require us to do things?”

Another brief pause. “Obviously, for *our* sake. They make us better—
You see?”

“But not if we do them as if we were doing favors for God,

or bargaining with him. No one bargains with the Almighty.”

“But it is not fair! It is not just!”

“You sound like what Ezekiel says the Master said about the Israelites when they complained that he was not fair in punishing a man who had been virtuous his whole life and then committed one sin and in forgiving a notorious sinner who then turned and became virtuous. He said something such as, ‘Am I unfair, Israel, or is it you who are unfair? If I reward the man I reward him for his virtue, not for his previous sins, and if I punish the man, I punish him for his sin, not for the previous virtue.’”

“Yes, I know.” Andrew answered. “I have heard the Scripture, and it has always bothered me.”

“Evidently, you do not see things as God sees them.”

“And you do, I suppose.”

“Put it this way: I am willing to consider that there may be another way of looking at things. And to return to this story, the Master’s point was that those who elevate themselves will be lowered, apparently whatever the reasons they can give for elevating themselves, and those who lower themselves—and I suppose, beg for mercy—will be elevated, whatever they have done. Perhaps that is because of the way things will be when God takes over as King.”

“It seems a rather easy way to escape the consequences of one’s acts.”

“I rather suspect it is anything but easy. It requires a whole new way of thinking—and after all, the Master is constantly saying that we must change our way of thinking, since God is about to begin his rule over us.”

Andrew paused, and then said in a rather disgruntled tone,

“I suppose I have not managed it, then.”

“I doubt if any of us has.”

In the silence that followed, John was pondering that passage from Ezekiel. Why would a man be condemned for one sin when he had led a life of virtue? Did not God reckon the good with the bad?

But then he thought of it the other way, as in Matthew’s case. Why would one act of virtue erase a life of sin in God’s eyes? Obviously, because that act transformed his life—or perhaps better, disposed him to have his life transformed. The *person he was* was defined by this act, and thus his past no longer mattered—except perhaps as a temptation to go back to it. In one sense one is what one is *now*, whenever *now* is; the *now* spreads back over the past and changes the whole life. It is not a question of a series of events adding up on one side and on the other, to be balanced at the end. It is what one *is*, not what one has been; that only influences what one is.

And in that case, the one sin after a life of virtue made the *person* a sinner—unless he repented, of course. His virtuous acts of the past are no longer *his* acts, because he *now* is a sinner, hating God. And how can one who hates God find favor with God? After all, it was a question of one’s relation to God, and that was one’s relation *now*, not what it had been. Ask someone who has just learned to hate you, “Are you my friend?” and he will say, “No,” even though he had been your friend until yesterday.

It had to be something like that. Time, one supposes, means nothing to God.

Which gave John grounds for hope, and simultaneously for fear. What he did to Samuel and Thomas was not *his* act,

because *now* he was not that person. But on the other hand, if he let his inclinations have their way, then he would not be what he now was, and—but that was not even to be thought.

Jesus now seemed to have reached the house he had mentioned, which turned out to be Simon's. He stopped in the doorway, and immediately a rather large crowd began to gather around him.

He began a speech or sermon, which no one was paying particular attention to; they were all still too interested in the fact that Matthew was evidently going to be one of their number, and were anything but happy about it, and some even quite annoyed that all his sins would have been simply forgotten, if the story had any meaning at all. John heard what Jesus was saying, which was something he had heard before, and realized with amusement that Jesus probably had to say the same thing four or five times, because different people became distracted at different times.

He looked at Matthew, who had not heard anything of what Jesus had said before, and realized that he was not hearing what he was saying now. Matthew seemed too concerned with whether his sins had been simply erased, or whether he was expected to pay for them somehow. The pained and worried look on his face, as much as shouted, "Will I have to give up all I own?" a prospect he evidently found anything but pleasant.

But there was a sudden commotion behind Jesus in the house, drawing everyone's attention. Something was going on on the roof, but the students were too close to see what it was.

Suddenly, the ceiling opened, and a stretcher came down through a hole made in the thatch of the roof. Simon looked indignantly up at the vandalism, and was about to mount the

ladder on the side when the stretcher, with a young man lying on it, came to rest just at the feet of Jesus, who was actually standing slightly inside the doorway, talking to the crowd that packed the space in front of the house.

Jesus looked at the youth, and then up through the hole in the roof, and said to the—evidently paralyzed—boy lying there, “Child, your sins are forgiven.” The boy’s face suddenly lit up with relief and joy; it was as if this was what he had hoped for, rather than the obvious, to be free of his paralysis.

And there it was! Jesus was now saying that *he* forgave sins! Well, not in so many words, but what else could it mean? Perhaps the transformation of the young man’s soul? Everything he did had a thousand purposes, one of which in this case clearly was a graphic answer to Matthew’s problem.

The crowd, however, was in no mood to engage in philosophical speculation. “Why does he speak thus? This is blasphemy! Who is able to forgive sins except the one God?” Well, the reign of God was about to start, was it not? It looked more and more as if the reign of Jesus *was* to be the reign of God. Another of his purposes.

Jesus looked over the crowd, at one or two of those who had been complaining. “Why are you having debates about this, and harboring evil thoughts? Which is easier, to tell him his sins are forgiven, or to tell him to stand up and walk?

“But to let you know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins,” and he turned to the paralyzed lad, “I tell you, stand up, take your stretcher, and go home.”

And the boy stood up, and crying, “Hallelujah! Hallelujah!” picked up his stretcher, and went off, leaping and shouting.

Everyone was awestruck. “We have never seen anything like this.” “Praise God!” “How did he do it?” “Strange things are happening today!” “Then his sins must have been forgiven!” “Nonsense!” “What else could it mean? You heard what he said!” “But if only God can forgive sins—” “Yes. What then?”

“I do not understand it.”

John’s quibble was now answered. It was not God who forgave sins—at least God apart from Jesus—and Jesus who was aware of it, it was Jesus, the God-man, who himself had the power. It was another “sign,” and a clearer one, and now one confirmed by the miracle of the physical cure.

As people were milling about, discussing what had happened, Matthew seized the opportunity, approached Jesus, and said something or other to him in a low voice. Jesus also answered in such a way that no one heard, and they began a rather lengthy conversation, in the midst of which Jesus laughed and said, loud enough to be heard, “Your problem, Matthew, is not that you do not believe, but that you do not believe that you believe,” and then lapsed into the undertone again, as Matthew struggled to understand him. They gradually walked off, still talking, not noticed by anyone except John, Thomas and—of course—Ezra, and after a short time were not visible by anyone.

“Misdirected attention” again. Ezra noticed it. Ezra said to Thomas, “Interesting. Did you see? Once again there and then nowhere. The two of them.”

“Indeed?” answered Thomas. “I simply assumed that they had turned a corner or something while I was not looking.”

“They turned *some* kind of corner. I was following them carefully, wondering if just this would happen. It was as it was

with him in Nazareth. No one could say just when it occurred, but afterwards they were not there. One must blink, after all.”

“Well, if they went somewhere private, that is their business, I suppose.”

“Still, it is interesting.”

“What is there that is *not* ‘interesting’ connected with this man?”

“True. By the way, I spoke to Jesus a while back, and told him about my invisible status—”
“Surely, he did not agree.”

So, John thought, Ezra realized that he was “invisible,” except (he thought with some pride) to a select few.

“Well, he did not exactly disagree; he seemed to understand that, because I stand out, people do not find it easy to approach me, at least as one of them.”

“And so?”

“And so I suggested that it might be wise that I simply be an observer here, and not one of whatever ‘nucleus’ he was going to form, for whatever purpose; and then afterwards, I might go to Ethiopia or somewhere else in Africa, where I could transmit what I learned. You remember he made some remark about you and India.”

India? wondered John. Thomas was to go to India?

“I know. It filled me with dread.”

“But if the whole world is to change, then we witnesses of all that goes on from now on will have to disperse far and wide to report the good news about the world’s transformation. Perhaps it will spread gradually, based on what we say.”

“And so what did he say?”

“He told me he thought it would be a good idea. And *I* thought, now that we have spoken of possible spies in our

midst, that an observer who observed without being observed, so to speak, might be a useful article.”

“Of course, I cannot believe that *he* would be ignorant of something of the sort.”

“True, but *we* might be, and he might not be too eager to inform us—who knows? But it will not hurt to keep my eyes open.”

“Well, I wish you—I was going to say ‘success,’ Ezra, but that implies that something akin to a spy comes into our midst, and I fondly hope and pray that *that* never happens.”

“Yes. Well, I have one or two people already who could bear watching.”

“You do? Truly? Who?”

“Come, now; you do not expect me to tell you, do you? You are too transparent. You would begin looking askance at them, probably for no reason but my unfounded suspicions, and—well, you understand, I trust.”

“I understand that if *you* start looking askance at *me*, I will have to be careful where I walk.” Ezra laughed.

So now, thought John, we have two spies among us. One presumably loyal, who is to inform—someone—in Rome, and one who is to spy on the spy or spies—or on secret rebels. The group seemed to begin to resemble Ezekiel’s wheels within wheels, or better, Zechariah’s multiple eyes within some of the creatures of his visions.

Twenty-One

Jesus apparently not only wanted to do something private with Matthew, but wished to leave them alone to digest what had developed. Again, one of his multitude of purposes, one, it seemed for each person that he affected by his actions. It was impossible if he was a man, but what one would expect if he was God.

The implications of all that he had done were stupendous, and, of course, Judas Iscariot was taking careful note of everything; he was mentioning to Simon and Andrew as Thomas joined them that it was obvious that Jesus was filled with the Divine Spirit in a way even beyond what the prophets “including such as Elijah and Elisha were. They had to invoke God, while the Master simply does miraculous things as if by his own power.” John, who really did not enjoy group discussions, held himself a bit aloof from them, but within earshot.

“As if?” said Andrew. “You think it is *not* by his own power?” Did he not say explicitly, thought John, that “the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins”?

“Well, clearly, it is by the power of God. They are perfectly right; only God can forgive sins. But ‘The Son of Man has

power on earth to forgive sins.” So Judas had noticed this. How would he interpret it, then? “Either he is saying that he *is* God, or he is claiming that God has given him this power. But God is a spirit, not someone with flesh and blood. So the only reasonable thing to do is say that he is a man somehow filled with God. Either that, or he is a liar.”

“Or,” said Simon, “he is God.”

“And you can see how absurd that is, I hope.”

Simon, who could and could not, made no reply. Thomas seemed to be a bit nervous, as if he had found out (from Mary, in that discussion at the wedding?) something that made him think it not absurd. And of course John had Jesus’s own words that somehow he was “one and the same” as the Father, and John suspected that this meant much more than that he was “filled” with the “One” or some cosmic force. It was possible, he supposed, but he had severe difficulty in thinking of the Creator, who called himself YHWH—even his mind did not really pronounce the word—was some indifferent “force.” Judas had to be mistaken on that.. Too much of Scripture made no sense, as far as John could see, on that hypothesis. But of course, Judas had gone through the whole course of interpretations that John had shied away from. Who knew what one could make of Scripture if one tortured it as those in Annas’s school were wont to do.

But it had to be said, however, that Scripture gave no hint—far from it—that God could somehow be a man while remaining the infinite, single, only God. Still, Jesus would have to be “one and the same” as God, or he would be claiming that he was God’s “son” in the sense of the pagan heroes, who were children of some god who had relations with a mortal.

That, clearly, was absurd. The other implied that God somehow “limited himself” while in another sense remaining infinitely beyond the limited “version” of himself—or something. But was not this also absurd? John paused and pondered. Could one limit oneself, while not actually being limited? “Could I,” he said to himself, “make myself less in some sense? Well, I could keep my eyes closed and go around as if I were blind. In a sense, I could not see, even though I *could* still see, if I opened my eyes. So it is fantastic, but not *completely* absurd, I suppose. And if it is false, how can a man cure a cripple, claiming to do so as God, and how could God allow such a deception? He would be sanctioning blasphemy. So it must be that the Father—whoever he is—and Jesus are in fact one and the same thing.”

But something in him still recoiled strongly at accepting this. It went against every idea he had formed about God. But had not Jesus insisted that we must change our way of thinking? John’s head began to ache. And how would he—John—ever convince anyone else of this, if he could not even convince himself?

Jesus joined them after a while, looked over at John with a rather amused smile on his face, and then said to everyone that Matthew had an errand to perform, and would rejoin them on the morrow.

The next day, Matthew came up and joined them. He was near John, and John approached him to ask if it would be possible for him to teach him Greek.

“Indeed?” said Matthew. “Can you read? Hebrew, I mean.”

“Yes,” said John.

“Are you a quick learner?”

“They seemed to think I was at the school where I was seeing if I should study to be a rabbi.”

“Indeed!” said Matthew again. “You *were* but a fisherman, I thought someone said.”

“Well, my father had other plans.”

“But nothing came of them.”

“Well, I found that that sort of thing was not really the life I wanted to devote myself to.”

“And then you met Jesus.”

“Well, it is a long story,”

“No doubt. Everything to do with Jesus is a ‘long story.’ But you think you could learn Greek if I taught you.” He thought a bit. “Why not?” he said. “We could meet for a bit in the morning and I could have something for you to study that day, and then the next morning, we could review it. I think we could manage.”

“Thank you, Matthew. I would be very grateful.” And sure enough, they had their little meetings, and John began to learn how to read and write Greek from then on. Matthew seemed pleased with his progress, on the whole.

Matthew then went to Jesus and invited the group to a feast on the evening of the following day, and Jesus accepted. “I will bring but the ten or twelve close to me; otherwise, your servant might be overwhelmed.” Matthew assured him that he could bring however many he wanted, but Jesus said that that was certainly sufficient.

But after this conversation, they wandered over to join Andrew, with Matthew keeping himself in the background as they discussed things.

The group was at that time going around the different towns and villages in Galilee, collecting followers who joined them and left more or less at random, into a synagogue if there was one, where Jesus announced that the reign of God was about to begin, and that the people would have to acquire a new way of thinking.

“Could he mean that what Isaiah prophesied was really going to come to pass?” asked John of Andrew.

“You mean where everything would be at peace with everything else, lions and lambs and so on?”

“Exactly.”

“That *has* to be a metaphor, John. Lions eating hay like oxen? Really, now.”

“Well why not?” replied John, becoming a bit red-faced at being flatly contradicted. “Has he not cured all sorts of diseases with nothing more than a touch, and driven out demons? Why could this not be a sign that the whole world would be transformed?”

“No, no, you understand nothing, both of you,” broke in Simon the Revolutionary, with his usual refrain. “The ‘new way of thinking’ means that we have to get out of our minds that we will be under the Romans forever, and that they cannot be defeated. If we do not get rid of *that* attitude, no new kingdom is possible.”

“You always see everything in terms of a revolution, Simon,” answered John. “But there must be more to it than that—if that is even in it.”

“What do you mean, ‘even in it’?” retorted Simon. “If God is going to become King, then Caesar will have to be dethroned, will he not?”

“Not necessarily. Remember, the first Herod was king some years ago, and we were under Rome then. There is kingship and kingship.”

“There is such a thing as a spiritual kingdom,” put in Andrew, where we *look at* things in a different way, rather than actually having a different government. Especially if God is the one who is King. How else would he govern? Is he going to set up a throne in the clouds or something?”

“Nonsense!” said Simon, and John added, “In that case, the whole thing is a waste of time, it seems to me. If everything is going to be the same, and we are simply going to *pretend* that it is all new and wonderful, what has happened except that we have been deluded?”

“Exactly!” said Simon. “As long as Rome has us under its thumb and is bleeding us to death with its taxes, we will be in misery, and what is the point of denying it?” John saw Matthew shrink back trying to avoid notice. It was as if Simon had cut him across the face with a whip.

“And then what is the point of all the miraculous things Jesus is doing?” added John.

“Need there be a point, except that these people are in distress?” asked Andrew. “Jesus sees them and cares about them, and somehow has the power to cure them, and so he does.”

“You are not paying attention, Andrew.” replied John. “He does not cure everyone; only those who he says ‘believe.’”

“Well, *that* is easily explained by saying that what they believe is that they will be cured. It is quite possible that the power Jesus has will only be effective if someone is convinced that he can do whatever it is.”

“No, no, they are signs. Signs of what it will be like under

the reign of God. He *says* so, in plain language.”

“To me,” answered Andrew, “it is anything but plain. There are all kinds of things that this new Kingdom, if there even is a physical kingdom, could be like.”

“As to that,” said John, “he told me, now that he has acquired the number he was looking for, that he will soon lay out the principles of this new realm of God.” He looked over at Matthew, and so did Andrew, with a not-very-welcoming glance.

“You will see,” said Simon the Revolutionary. “He will begin appointing generals soon.”

“From *us*?” laughed John. “I can see Andrew here, and perhaps yourself, leading an army. But the rest of us? Now *that* would be a miraculous transformation.”

“All I can say is, remember Judas Maccabeus. Who would have thought beforehand that he could do what he did?”

John did not reply. What was the use? The conversation became general, and John began to feel the pressure of being in a group, so he dropped to the side—and noticed Thomas approach Matthew. Interesting. Perhaps Thomas was looking for another who was clearly more despised than he—because he was obviously not sought after by those who knew he was—or had been—a drunk. He edged a bit closer.

“So what do you make of all this, Levi—or rather Matthew, is it not?” he said.

Matthew looked a bit surprised that anyone would condescend to speak to him, but answered as if all were normal, “I know not, frankly, quite what to make of it—Thomas, am I right?”

“Thomas,” he answered. “You are a rapid learner.”

“In my former business, I had to be. But it is far too early for me to be more than simply bewildered by it all.”

Thomas laughed “If you think it bewildering *now*, wait a few months! He loves to speak in riddles, and then is surprised when we do not understand them. I am convinced that he thinks that we are all dolts—and I am half convinced that he is right, except in one or two cases, and I have a suspicion that you are one of the exceptions.”

“Well, I know not how exceptional I am,” said Matthew. “I have overheard a few rather intelligent discussions already.”

“Really? I did not notice that you had been near Judas.”

“You mean the one they call Thaddeus?”

“No, he would qualify as one of the dolts, I think. I myself am on the borderline, if you are curious, but I think I can recognize brains when I encounter them.” Matthew seemed annoyed at Thomas’s habit of nodding his head as if he would hit one with his sharp nose. “No, I meant Judas Iscariot, the Adonis of our little coterie,” and he nodded in Judas’s direction. Matthew, like everyone else who first saw him, was impressed by his striking good looks.

“No, I have not had the pleasure of meeting him.”

“The honor, you mean.” He obviously thought that something of a *faux pas*, and said, “But I am being unkind. Judas is a very fine person; he is a priest, in fact, who heard Jesus speak and was convinced that he had the makings of a great leader. And Judas, who *is* brilliant, and learned to boot, would enjoy, I think, being associated with a great leader. He has no ambition to be a leader himself; he is too much of a theoretician; and besides, it might require disarranging a hair or two from time to time.”

Thomas was too much of a cynic, from John's point of view. People seemed automatically to react unfavorably to Judas. John still liked him, in spite of the fact that he could not accept his "theory" of Jesus, if it could be said to be that developed. Of course, Thomas, who was a friend of Ezra's, might have heard about Ezra's attempt to speak to him. That, if true and not a misinterpretation on Ezra's part because of hypersensitivity, was definitely a mark against him.

"—fancies himself as the one who has the leader's ear and advises him—or in other words, can steer him into doing what Judas wishes."

He hedged: "But you may have gathered that you must take what I say with a good deal of seasoning, because I have a deserved reputation of being a cynic. He is, by the way, our treasurer, unless now that you are here, the office is to devolve upon you." John wondered how much of the cynicism, which he did not notice in Samuel, was due to Thomas's drink.

"Upon me? I fondly hope not!"

"Indeed? You have dealt with money all your life, have you not?"

"For that very reason. I fear I might have become too fond of it. It would be like having a drunk in charge of the wine cellar." That was interesting. Matthew was now clearly afraid of money. Just as John was afraid of certain people, such as Ezra, and Judas—and Andrew, though it seemed that Andrew was safe.

As was Jesus. He was handsome, and would be attractive, if he were not so obviously a superior being. John loved him, but as one loves a father, not a—a potential partner. Or whatever it was that John both sought and avoided in these

people.

Thomas was saying, “—long as you brought up the subject of drunks, and the worst is bound to come out at some time, it might as well be at the outset, and from the supreme authority on the matter. I, you see, am myself a drunk—a drunk who no longer drinks, to be sure, but I am always on the verge, so to speak. If I did not rely on Jesus, I would be in constant terror that I would start again tomorrow, and—in the state I am now in—I realize that the day after tomorrow would be catastrophe. Actually, That was why I dared approach you. You are a tax-collector, and I am a drunk. We are both reprobates, in our own way, and I know not if you sense the opprobrium that all the others are fighting to—”

So John was right. Thomas had approached him precisely because he felt him a fellow outcast. How sad. He was saying “—tell me, of course, that I am seeing things. That is true; I *do* see things—things that are there, that perhaps they themselves do not see. But they try, the poor things, and who can blame them? I am even becoming accustomed to it, as I am sure you will also.” John was wondering if there was some way he could make Thomas feel more comfortable—and possibly Matthew. Certainly, if they knew what was going on in *his* mind, they would realize that he was perhaps even more despicable than they, with the exception of the fact that he had not—as yet—acted on his urges.

“I have a great deal to become accustomed to,” answered Matthew, and repeated pensively, “A great deal.”

Thomas then said, “But let me introduce you to Judas; he really is a fascinating person in many ways. Our pride and joy, in a manner of speaking. Judas!” He turned. “Come over here. I

would like to acquaint you with the man who now calls himself Matthew, now that he has abandoned his treasonous ways”

Judas walked over, and said, “I hope Thomas has not been poisoning your mind about us. We *do* try.”

“He has said as much.”

At this point, John wandered away, and found Andrew. His heart suddenly told him that perhaps Andrew was not as safe as he thought, but he really had no fear of anything untoward happening, and so he said, “And so what think you, Andrew, about our new acquisition?”

“You mean Levi? Or I mean, Matthew? Well, if the Master chose him, I suppose he sees some value in him as a follower, though I doubt he will be one of the inner circle.”

“You do? I got the impression that he was precisely waiting for Matthew—or perhaps was waiting, and then Matthew seemed to be the one he was waiting for.”

“What do you mean?”

“I have noticed that Jesus knows things beforehand only in a sense. Have you seen him stroke his beard?”

“Stroke his beard?”

“At the wedding, when his mother asked him about the lack of wine, he stroked his beard in thought, and then at the Passover, he stroked his beard before he took off his cincture and asked me for mine.”

“He did, now that you mention it.”

“He seemed to recognize in both cases, ‘This is the moment,’ as if he had been anticipating it, but was not certain beforehand what shape it would take. And I *think* I remember when he came back from seeing that Nicodemus or whoever it was, he said to Simon something like, ‘It is not what I would

have planned, but it will do.”

“Interesting. Are you saying that at the Passover, he was expecting that something was going to happen that would give his—what would you call it? Ministry—a start, and the animals there told him, so to speak, ‘this is it’?”

“Something along those lines. At the beginning, for instance, I suspect he knew that something significant would happen when he was bathed by John, and the dove and the thunder were something he recognized as ‘This is what I was anticipating,’ without necessarily having a picture of it beforehand in his mind. And when he saw us, he knew that we were to be two of his followers, though he had not probably thought of us that way when he was doing carpentry work for me years ago.”

“I *think* what you are getting at is that the God-aspect of him, if I can call it that, knows things in a different *way* than the man-aspect, and the man-aspect recognizes it when it happens as the God-aspect anticipates it.”

“It looks as if that is as good a description as any.”

He laughed. “But what monstrous nonsense we are talking!”

“On the other hand, Andrew, how else account for him? I cannot accept Judas’s view that he is full of the force that built the universe, as if that force were a power and not a person.”

“No, I think Judas is mistaken in that.”

“Then if he has the power to forgive sins, and if only God can forgive sins, and if God is ‘my Father,’ what else could it be but that he is God limiting himself somehow.”

“But there is *some* difference between him and the Father. Otherwise why give him another name? And why pray to him,

as he clearly does? All night, sometimes. He does not sleep on those nights he goes off to pray. I followed him once.”

“Still, he told me that ‘the Father and I are one and the same thing.’”

“He did?”

“He did. And he said that he would tell everyone some day, when they were prepared to hear it.”

“Perhaps, then,” said Andrew, after some thought, “the Father is God-*as*-infinite, and Jesus the man is God-*as*-limited, or something. And so the limited side of him prays to the infinite side of him.”

“Or something.” John now laughed in his turn.

“I am happy that no one is listening to us,” said Andrew. We are all but talking rubbish.”

“Still, who are we to think that we can comprehend the Infinite? Is it surprising that what we say sounds paradoxical? Jesus, whatever he is, is a paradox.”

“I know. That is what I find suspicious about Judas. It looks as if he thinks he comprehends. And I think the reality is far, far, beyond what he imagines it to be.”

“I’m inclined to agree. But I suspect that Judas will learn, as the facts become clearer.”

“I wonder.”

“Really, Andrew! You too?”

“I am sorry, John, but there is just something about Judas that does not—” He let the rest of the sentence hang, for lack of a way to finish.

“Well, we shall see. What is *this* now?”

Twenty-Two

They were near the village of Nain at the moment. It seemed that a tiny funeral procession had crossed their path. There were quite a few—almost a hundred—people around Jesus, when he stopped and signaled to the bearers of the stretcher on which the body had been laid, wrapped in a linen cloth, with the napkin tied over the head. The mother was frantically wailing in despair beside it. There did not seem to be a father present.

Jesus went up to her. “Do not cry,” he said.

“Oh, sir!” she wailed. “First my husband, and now him! It is too much! Too much! I cannot bear it! What will I do, alone in the world? How will I live?”

Jesus made no attempt to utter consoling words. He went past the woman to the bier, touched the wrapped body, and said in a matter-of-fact, quiet voice, “Young man, I tell you, sit up.”

And he sat up.

Jesus freed him from the napkin and began loosening the shroud from over his head. Someone cried, “Here! Find him something to wear! He is naked under that shroud!” and one of the men took off his cloak and handed it to Jesus, who put it

over the boy's head as the linen fell off.

Everyone was struck dumb as they saw him blink in the failing sunlight. Then they suddenly began shouting, "A great prophet has risen among us!" "Another Elisha!" "God has smiled on his people!" "Who would have believed it?" "Did you see? Did you see?" "How bewildered he looks!" "He cannot have actually been dead; I have heard of such things in the past." "Then how did he know of it? Everyone else thought him dead!" "Behold the mother!" She screamed and ran up to him, smothering him in her arms and weeping hysterically.

The boy looked a trifle embarrassed at all the attention, and his eyes for a moment looked over her shoulder as if to say, "What is all the fuss?" and then caught sight of Matthew, and his expression changed in an instant to a gaze of horror and disbelief. Matthew himself had turned to see if he had noticed anything behind him, and there might have been six or seven people that he could have seen. Obviously he knew nothing of the boy, who quickly recovered from his astonishment, and was asking his mother and everyone around him where he was, and what he was doing on this stretcher.

But John could tell that it was definitely Matthew that he was looking at, and it seemed that Thomas and Ezra both had that opinion also. That was fascinating. Had Matthew done something to him when he was collecting taxes? It was a possibility.

While he was firing questions at his mother about why he was there, he seemed to remember something, and his face lost whatever color it had recovered (he evidently had been quite tanned before he died; clearly a farm boy), and it looked for a moment that he was going to faint. He whispered something in

his mother's ear, and she nodded tearfully, and then said "But you have come back! You are with me once again! Thank God! Oh, thank God! —And (to Jesus) thank you, Sir, so very, very much!"

"Your faith has brought him back to you."

"You are right! I could not believe I had lost him forever! I knew somehow he would come back to me! And you have done it!"

So he not only could cure the sick, he could raise the dead! And the boy must have remembered something either about what being dead was like or perhaps what had caused the death—and as to that, that red ring around his neck seemed to indicate that he had choked to death. Had he been hanged? Or hanged himself?

The boy whispered something else in her ear, and she said to Jesus, "You are Jesus of Nazareth, the prophet we have heard so much of?"

"I am."

"I was looking for you! I was praying I would meet you! I told myself that if I met you and you saved my son, I would join you. What else have I to live for?"

"Well, if you think you would like to come after me, feel free to join us. And you, child? What is your name, by the way?"

"David, son of Asa. Yes, I would join you also." He said this perhaps a bit reluctantly, but then cast a quick look in Matthew's direction, and seemed to come to a resolution as he turned back to Jesus.

"You may leave, of course, whenever you please; I realize that you are not in a state for making permanent decisions at the moment. —Nor were you, yesterday, is it not?"

The boy blushed. "It would seem not, indeed." Perhaps, thought John, he had hanged himself, and so was one of those Jesus wanted to keep an eye on.

"I trust, then, that there will be no more of that in the future."

"No, Master."

"You need have no fear. Your sins are forgiven."

The boy hung his head. "Thank you, Master."

The boy then said something to his mother and ran off, probably to get cleaned of the spices and dressed. Matthew had moved a bit apart to listen to Jesus speak of the fact that during the coming reign of God, they would have to change their way of thinking; but most of the people were too enthralled by what had happened to listen, and there was hubbub and confusion among them.

Another, clearer "sign," thought John. He had the power to raise the dead back to life by simply touching them. And who could do this but God himself? And what did this mean for "destroy this temple, and in three days I will rebuild it"? Was the final sign to be that he would raise *himself* back to life after being in the grave for three days? God forbid! That would mean that somehow the authorities would hate him enough to kill him, and that he would let them do it! He certainly could prevent it if he wished; when they tried to kill him in Nazareth, he simply was not there. But why would he do such a thing?

But did it also mean—if this was a "sign" of the way the world was to be when God (that is, he) began his actual reign—that in the Kingdom he ruled there would be no death? And presumably, no sickness? We would all live forever? How fantastic! But it looked that way.

He noticed Thomas and Ezra talking, it seemed about this David who had just been cured of death—"consistent with what the Master said to him—and his reaction to it."

"Ezra, you would make an epic poem out of a falling leaf!" laughed Thomas.

"I only hope it is not to be a tragedy. Attend."

The boy had run back, clean and in new clothes, carrying the cloak that had been loaned to him, while Matthew was speaking to Jesus, saying something about the feast he was giving. The boy heard him, and said to Jesus, "A feast? Then surely he will need help, Master! Let me go with him; I can do much, and will do it gladly!" John thought that he sounded far too eager, given the way he had looked at Matthew earlier. Something was wrong here.

Matthew answered that he would not trouble him, and he replied, "There is no trouble; and besides, I would prefer not to have people gawking at me and me and asking me what it felt like to be dead!"

Matthew accepted his offer, and Jesus stroked his beard, looking at the two of them, and nodded permission. Jesus clearly knew what the danger was—if he was God the Son, he had to know everything he needed as man to know—and realized that Matthew was not really going to get his head chopped off in his sleep.

Ezra, who seemed to have the same idea as John, said to Thomas, "Fascinating," as the two walked off together.

Neither Matthew nor the boy appeared the next day, evidently busy with preparations for the feast on the morrow. The boy had apparently decided to sleep at Matthew's house. His mother had fretted a bit, but Jesus assured her that he would be

perfectly safe with Matthew and his slave. Evidently, thought John, Matthew also would be safe.

And sure enough, when they arrived at the—one could only call it mansion—the next day, there was Matthew, with the boy behind him, both dressed in fine linen, Matthew welcoming them in a kind of embarrassed way, as well as a number of what turned out to be tax-collectors, all standing by awkwardly, as if wondering whether the new guests had any idea what they were.

It was a fairly tense dinner, for that reason, among others, particularly at first, but John heard Nathanael, who knew wines, whisper in Thomas's ear (he was drinking water, of course, and looking on nostalgically) that the vintage was almost up to what Jesus had supplied at the wedding, and that Matthew had diluted it very little, probably to loosen tongues. It *was* excellent wine. A little more of this, and John might become a connoisseur. And, he thought, a little more than *that*, and he might turn into another Thomas, and need to drink only water for the rest of his life. He resolved to take warning.

From the influence of the wine, people they began to speak rather more freely after a short time, and the dinner could be said to be a success. Afterwards, people kept their cups and rose from the table, looking over the house and talking.

Suddenly, Jesus let out a piercing whistle and ran out the back, where the dogs (about which the guests had been warned) had been chained. Matthew sprang up and followed.

John, like all the rest, sat frozen for a moment in shock; there was definitely a commotion of some sort back there. Jesus seemed to have shouted something—a command to the dogs?—and of course Ezra tried to go out, but Matthew stood in the doorway, blocking the exit, as he watched openmouthed

what Jesus was doing. (Ezra tried to see over his head, but could not do so without actually leaning against him, and gave up.) Interestingly, Nathanael was blocking the only window that provided a view.

Whatever it was did not take long, and Matthew came back inside, followed by Jesus and one of the tax-collectors, whose eyes looked as if he had narrowly escaped death, though there was not a mark on him or his clothes. When asked what had happened, he simply protested that he was fine, but that he thought that he should be getting home. He thanked Matthew perfunctorily, and went out the front, where a crowd had gathered outside the gate, to find out if it were really true that Jesus was consorting with tax-collectors and sinners.

Thomas went up to Nathanael, who had just spoken to Matthew, and asked, "What went on?"

"Matthew asked me not to speak of it, and so I cannot say, but it is probably what you thought it was."

Ezra, who was, as always, present, said, "So he is Master of vicious dogs also."

"He is Master of everything, it seems. Everything," and he added, "Thank God!"

A few days later, Jesus informed the group that his father had died. He took Simon, James and John, and, interestingly, Matthew, and went to his funeral, leaving Andrew more or less in charge.

John walked beside Matthew as they traveled to Nazareth, and said, "It seems, then, that you knew Jesus from before. Did you know his father also?"

"Yes," he answered. "They did the woodwork on my house, you see."

“Ah,” said John. “They built a small boat for me and James when I was but a little boy. We still have it, but as a kind of trophy in front of our house.”

“They were excellent carpenters. But of course you know that. I asked to see Joseph when I heard that he was ill, and Jesus took me to him. I spent quite a while with him.”

“Ah, yes. So that is where you went to that day. Did you know that you simply disappeared from our view?”

“In truth?”

“In truth. Ezra—the black man, who used to be Bartholomew’s slave (Matthew raised his eyebrows)—“even tried to follow you to see if it would happen, because once in Nazareth—in fact, on the day you were in the synagogue—the townspeople caught hold of him to throw him off the cliff, and he disappeared. Evidently he did not wish to be followed—so I supposed I had better not ask what happened on that visit you had.”

“You are very acute, John. Yes, I was told—many things—that I have no authority to reveal to anyone.”

“I assumed as much. You seem, shall I say, not overly surprised by what you have seen Jesus do.”

“Let us just say that it is consistent with what I heard, and confirms that what I heard was almost certainly factual.”

“But I have been wondering why he did not cure Joseph. It seems it would have been no trouble for him to do so.”

“Oh, as to that, last night I asked him about it, and he said, ‘He knew that after he had spoken with you, Matthew, he had completed all the tasks that were left him on this side of the grave, and he was eager to begin the tasks that faced him on the other. He is (he used the present tense) a worker, and the

enforced idleness of these last few months disturbed him greatly. Last evening, when I left him, he said, "May I go now, please?"

"And so he let him go." The two were silent after this, pondering.

Neither Jesus nor his mother appeared to be in great sorrow, which was certainly consistent with who they were. John himself could not really grieve either. After all, he had almost never seen Joseph since the boat was built, and so there was no real loss on his part—if it had been Mary, it would have been a different story; she was almost as much a mother to him as his own mother. So the ceremonies were gone through, and Joseph began whatever work he now had, which would presumably last until beyond the end of time. John wondered whether in the new Kingdom, if everyone stayed alive, he would come back, and resume a life with a new heart that had no trouble beating. Would he once again engage in carpentry, if it had been what his life was all about?

And what would *John* do, forever and ever? Not fish, he thought; *that* John was dying fast, though it was a nice life; but it was more like the life of John-the-embryo, not the John who now existed. Perhaps he now was the child of John-the-prophet. Well, whatever he was growing into, it was interesting, to say the least.

After Jesus and the others returned, they happened to be in Cana for something-or-other, and a military officer, accompanied, interestingly enough, by the soldier who was with Matthew at the tax-booth, approached Jesus and begged him to go down with him to the city and cure his son, who was very ill and about to die.

"You people!" said Jesus. "Unless you have proof and see

miracles, you do not believe!” Jesus had not been performing cures during this period, perhaps out of respect for the memory of his father, but John thought there was something more going on here. The man was a Gentile, after all, in the first place, and probably had heard a rumor that Jesus could cure people, but was not too sure about it.

But he was obviously desperate. “Master, please!” he said. “Go down before my son dies!”

Jesus looked at him, stroked the beard on his chin, and answered, “You may go. Your son will live.”

The man opened his mouth as if to make a protest; but closed it when he looked into Jesus’ face, thinking better of it, and turned and left.

The soldier gave a glance back at Matthew, as he pivoted to go. John thought that this seemed to confirm that he would not cure anyone, or perform a “sign,” unless the other person gave a sign that he believed it would be done. The officer, John thought, had given that sign when he did not protest. Or had he given up, and dismissed Jesus as a mountebank?

The next day, the soldier returned alone, finding Jesus, to whom he gave a rather substantial gift from the father, remarking that the father had met a slave on the way home, who told him that the fever had left his son, and he wanted to waste no time in thanking him for restoring him to health. He had himself continued to his house to be with his son. Jesus accepted the gift, and handed it over to Judas for the group.

Another step, thought John. Now it was clear he did not even need to touch the person he cured; if he simply declared him cured, it happened, even if he was at a distance and Jesus had never seen him. Who could do this but the one who was

“one and the same” as the Father?

It was a pity, really, that so few were with Jesus all the time. The signs were mounting up rapidly, but very few knew of them.

The soldier, dismissed, then sought out Matthew. They had a rather extended and earnest conversation that Ezra tried to learn about; but he was not “invisible” to the soldier and was warned off. (Matthew had never so much as acknowledged that he existed, for some reason).

“Well, Longinus, I wish you well,” said Matthew finally, loud enough so everyone could hear.

“And I you, Levi-Matthew, in your new life,” replied the soldier.

“If it lasts.”

“Oh, it will. You are hardly a fanatic, but I see the signs.”

“Well, we shall see about that also.” And the soldier left, humming quietly in his cheerful way.

Twenty-Three

That night Jesus excused himself from the group and went up to pray on a mountain overlooking the “Sea” of Galilee from the north. The others, Matthew now among them, stayed back halfway up (because on these occasions Jesus wished for privacy), on a kind of saddle that was still rather high. David, interestingly, slept beside Matthew that night, saying practically nothing, as was his wont. Ezra of course observed this, and later John asked about it.

“There is something there,” he answered. “I would have said originally that it was deep hatred, based on the way he looked at him at first.”

“I saw that look, if you mean when he woke from the dead.”

“That was it. But now he only seems puzzled. Though he appears to be waiting for something. Some false step on Matthew’s part, giving him an excuse for—killing him, perhaps?”

“Killing him?”

“He *looked* murderous. But he now seems to need to be provoked into it. If I were Matthew, I would be *very* careful

what I did in David's presence. I myself am going to cultivate him, to see what I can learn."

"Ezra the spy."

"Let us say, Ezra the observer."

The following morning, shortly after dawn, Jesus came down from the heights, looking refreshed. He called over a small group of twelve, Matthew finding to his surprise that he was one of them (though John could have predicted it), and told them that if they were willing, they were to be his emissaries to the various towns of the area.

"Aha!" thought John. "He is going to multiply himself in us! He sees he does not have much reach by himself, in spite of the fact that people are flocking to him. Look at the crowd!"

"It is time," Jesus in fact was saying, "for the good news about the reign of God to spread more rapidly than I can manage by myself. You will represent me, not only by announcing what you have basically heard me say, but also by confirming by signs similar to mine that the world is indeed about to undergo a change. I will begin to spell out rather more explicitly what the reign of God will be like; you will see. I will give you instructions later on about what you are to do."

A number of people of the area knew where the group was, and as was their custom, they began to gather round on the saddle of the hill, bringing their sick and crippled for him to cure—which he did, spending the morning at it.

Around noon, he went back up the mountain a short way, with by now quite a throng of people on the saddle below him, in a kind of natural amphitheater. He stood up and held up his hands to catch their attention and said,

"You have asked about the reign of God and how you are

to change your way of thinking. Attend, then: It is a blessing for you to be poor, because then you have God for your king;

“To be *poor*?” said those around John. “I am poor, and it is anything but a blessing!” “Silence! We cannot hear!”

“—hungry now, because then you will have your fill. It is a blessing for you to suffer now, because you will find happiness. It is a blessing for you when people hate you and drive you away, and ostracize you; on the day this happens, leap about for joy, because you have a great reward in heaven; your enemies ancestors did the same to the prophets.

“This is insane!” “It is mad!” “He has a devil!” Then how can he cure everyone?” “Be *quiet*!”

“—comfort here now; it is a curse to be full now, because then you will be hungry; it is a curse that you enjoy life now, because then you will suffer; and it is a curse to have everyone speak well of you, because their ancestors praised the false prophets in the same way.” He paused to let what he had said sink in.

What could he possibly mean? thought John, his musings drowning out the grumbling of the crowd, which was now quite loud. How could it be a blessing to suffer what everyone regarded as a curse? Poverty, hunger, suffering, and hatred? And a curse to be rich, full, enjoying life, and being loved?

Now.

Because things would be turned upside down when the Jesus became king? Was he saying that the poor would have everything they lacked, and so would the hungry—would we even need to eat?—and there would be no disease or other suffering? And so the sorrows of this life would be drowned, so to speak, in joy? And those who rejected the kingdom, the

present rich, who enjoyed life just as it was, would find themselves outside, with nothing?

What that meant was, “Accept me as your king, and I promise you heaven on earth. Reject me, and I promise you hell on earth.” A stark choice, to say the least, if that was what he was saying.

The people were gasping with astonishment. What could he mean? How could it be a blessing to suffer and a curse to enjoy life? Someone near John said, “Then we should cause people to be poor and hungry, and do them a favor? It makes no sense!”

Jesus went on, “You heard it said, ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’; but I tell those of you who can hear it, love your enemies and do good to the ones who hate you; pray for those who threaten you. If someone slaps your cheek, turn the other one for him to slap; if he takes your cloak, give him your tunic as well. Give to everyone who asks, and if someone takes what is yours, do not demand it back. In short, do to everyone else what you would have them do to you.”

“This is even worse!” said the man who spoke earlier. John wondered, Did this fit in? Well, if the kingdom that was about to start were a transformation of the world, what did it matter if one for the short time that was left would suffer indignities? Was this what the “change of the way of thinking” was all about?

Others said, “This is not an explanation of the Law; it is something he has made up.” “Who does he think he is? Another Moses?” said another. The listeners began a lively—and loud—discussion among themselves at how Jesus was apparently teaching them on his own authority, and not like the Scripture

scholars. Some scoffed at it, but others said, “But I repeat: If he does not have God behind him, how can he do what he does? You saw that man simply get up and walk when he merely touched him!”

Jesus was pausing for them to get some of their reactions out of their system. He went on, “Do not think that I have come to do away with the Law and the prophets; I have come to fulfill them, not abolish them. I tell you this: as long as heaven and earth last, not the dot on one *i* or the cross on one *t* will be removed from the Law—not until everything is all over. And so if any man sets aside the least command in the Law, he will have the lowest place when God begins his reign, and anyone who keeps the Law and teaches others to do so will rank high God’s kingdom. In fact, unless you show that you are better than the Pharisees and Scripture scholars, you will not even enter God’s kingdom.”

“I am not too certain that I *wish* to be in such a kingdom,” said a man. “We have burdens enough already.” But Jesus kept on, “And do not be evaluating others’ conduct, or your own conduct will be evaluated. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and things will be given to you—good measure, tamped down, and overflowing will be poured into your pocket; because the standard you use for measuring others will be the standard you are measured by.

“*That*, at least makes sense,” said one. “Treat everyone fairly.” “Yes,” said another, “but then why not slap the person who has slapped you? *That* is what is fair to my way of thinking, as well as the other.” “It is not the same thing,” said the first. “I see no difference,” was the answer.

“Can the blind be guides for the blind? Will they not both

fall into the ditch? A student is not above his teacher; at best, when a student finishes, he will be equal to his teacher.”

“I am not certain,” said one, “that I wish to be a student of *this* teacher. ‘Turn your other cheek to be slapped’ indeed! Not *my* cheek. My fist, perhaps!”

“How is it you can see a speck in your brother’s eye and not notice the board in your own? You fraud; take the board out of your own eye before you presume to take the speck from your brother’s.”

“And you do the same,” shouted someone. “Are you perfect? Who do you think you are?”

If they only knew, thought John. They look on him as a magician, and are indignant that he actually has something to say to them. The board in their eye is huge!

Jesus was going on, though the crowd was becoming louder and louder; interestingly, though, his voice rose above it. “—call me ‘Master! Master!’ and not do what I say? I will tell you what a person who comes to me and listens to what I say and puts it into practice is like: he is like a man who was building a house, and dug deep and laid its foundation on bedrock; and when the flood came, the river burst on that house, and it withstood it, because it was built on rock. But the one who hears me and does not act on it is like a man building his house on sand. The river rose, and the house collapsed into a heap of rubble.”

John’s head was reeling after this; there was enough there for years of meditation and study. He hoped his memory was good enough for him to retain most of it—and then he happened to notice Matthew, frantically finishing notes that he was taking on pieces of papyrus. Well, he knew where to go if he

needed a record of what happened.

Bartholomew, who seemed as bemused as John was, came up to him, as if seeking advice. John was flattered that he would consult someone so young when he finished his introduction with “And so what is your opinion of all this?”

“I am anything but certain,” John answered. “I had been assuming that the Reign of God would involve restoring everything to the condition it was in before Adam’s sin, where everything cooperated with everything else and there was no evil.”

“Something along those lines had occurred to me also,” answered Nathanael. “It sounds fantastic, but then, we have seen so many fantastic things—sins forgiven, diseases healed by a touch—by a mere word!—and even the dead raised—that who knows?”

“Exactly. Well, *if* that is what it is all about, then perhaps it *is* a blessing to be poor now, because then you would realize that the Reign of God is your only hope, do you see?”

“Ah. And it would be a curse to be rich, because then you might lose your power over others. That makes sense. And the same would go for suffering or for the other apparent curses,”

“—because they would make you look forward to the Reign of God and not wed you to the life you were living. It would be easy to change your way of thinking.”

“All right. But why let someone slap you a second time? Why give him your tunic if he steals your mantle?”

John thought a bit. “It *could* be the same sort of thing, could it not? I have not thought it through as yet, but could it not be that it would be part of not caring what happened to you now, knowing that in the Reign of God you would not have any

suffering?”

“In other words, nothing makes any difference now, because it will all turn out well soon, so why fret over injustice? It will not count in the long run.”

“I must say I find that hard to swallow, but it sounds as if this is what he was saying.”

“I am inclined to agree. I suppose my thinking has not changed all that much.”

“Nor mine,” said John. If someone slaps me, he would have a bloody nose before I could even think of turning the other cheek!”

“Still, there is a point there, if you think on it dispassionately. If he slaps you, how have you undone the slap by doing damage to *him*? You have just compounded the evil.”

John pondered a bit. “On the other hand, inviting him to slap you again compounds it also.”

“There is something we are missing,” mused Nathanael. “Perhaps it has something to do with not paying attention to yourself.”

“You mean, letting the other person have the satisfaction of pummeling you? I do not see it.”

“Well, he in effect said it.”

“Yes, but how does his continuing in evil benefit him? So if I care for him, why should I let him do a greater evil than he has done? So even if I care not for myself, because in the Reign of God all will be happiness, should I not care that he cease his evil ways? Should I not put a stop to them with my fist?”

Nathanael laughed. “I suppose if you could do it with a heart full of nothing but love for him, hoping that he too would enter the Reign of God with you, where you would embrace

each other, then Jesus would approve. The question is whether anyone could ever manage such a thing.”

“Well, I fondly hope I will never get into a situation where I will have the problem.”

“What *I* hope is that some day we will begin to understand what this is all about.”

“True, we have a long way to go.”

“And if *we* do, imagine what it will be like for all the rest of the people that we will be trying to prepare for the Reign of God!”

“Yes, that will be an adventure! Sent out as heralds to announce something we have only the foggiest idea about.”

“It fills me with terror.”

“And not only you, Bartholomew, believe me.” And with that they parted, each pondering not only what they had been talking about, but what else Jesus had said.

Jesus in the next few days began giving them instructions on how to behave as his “emissaries,” and what to do if people rejected their preaching. John was hardly surprised to find that he was to be paired with James. But it seemed that they also were to have the miraculous powers—at least some of them—that Jesus had, and this was a terrifying prospect. Could John actually confront a man with a demon and drive him out? And if he did come out, would he enter John? Jesus, of course, told them to trust him and have no fear.

Easily said.

Shortly afterwards, they began their mission, haltingly explaining to people that God was about to begin his reign, and that this would involve a new way of thinking, and to show that life would be different, they cured diseases themselves “in the

name of Jesus of Nazareth.”

John once even did confront a madman, and when he ordered the devil to leave him, the man said, “John, is it? We know a few things about *you*, my friend. Shall I tell the people?”

John shook with terror, as James looked curiously at him. Dear God, if James found out! “Silence! In the name of Jesus of Nazareth! Hold your tongue and leave that man!” His voice, fortunately, sounded confident enough, though he thought his heart would burst through his chest. The man screamed and fell on the ground, unconscious. James went over to him, put his hand on him, and he rose, in his right mind, with no recollection of what he had said.

“What was *that* all about?” asked James later, and John answered, “We must be prepared for such things; Satan is the father of lies, after all.” This was insurance, of course, in case someone else should reveal John’s secret.

“True,” said James. “It was very acute of you to think it. I suppose we all have secrets that would sound very bad if they were revealed, however innocent they may be in themselves. But the name of Jesus can silence them, apparently.”

It sounded as if James himself had something he did not want to have made public, which startled John a bit—but then, James thought he knew all about John, and yet gave no hint that he suspected John’s attraction to men, especially since John was in so many respects so very masculine. And if John’s theory about the followers Jesus chose was correct, it meant that James had his own problems which required Jesus’s nearness. He wondered what they were—if there *were* any; it was but a theory after all. But then, it was none of his business; leave him to Jesus.

At evening, they would return to the group, and report what they had done and said, receiving Jesus' commendation, and advice how to deal with this or that difficulty some of them encountered. When James reported about the demon, Jesus said that everything was handled very well—"as I would have expected." John glowed with relief.

Twenty-four

One day, before they set out, the whole group was together, when a young man, dressed in even finer linen than Nathanael was accustomed to wearing (and which he still wore, though now it was not so well kept), understated in only the way that those accustomed to great wealth could do, came up and knelt before Jesus. “Good teacher,” he said, “What should I do to gain eternal life?”

“Why are you calling me ‘good?’” said Jesus. “No one is good except the one God.” This was a little harsh, thought John.

Jesus was continuing, “—keep the commandments: You are not to kill, you are not to commit adultery, you are not to testify falsely, you are not to defraud; honor your father and mother.”

The boy answered, “Teacher, I have done all this from the time I was very young.”

Jesus now looked fondly at him, and said, “Then there is one thing left for you to do. If you want to be perfect, then go, sell what you have and give the money to the poor, and this will

open for you an account in heaven's bank; and then come and follow me."

John, who knew that everything that Jesus did and said had multiple meanings, looked over at Matthew, who had been struggling with this very problem. Matthew had caught the application to him, and it concerned him immensely, based on the look on his face.

The boy's face also fell. He looked down at his clothes, and surveyed the others around Jesus (even Matthew had taken to wearing quite ordinary clothing, not to stand out), and after a long pause, turned and walked off.

Jesus gazed after him, wistfully, and said, "How hard it is for a rich man to put himself under God's rule! It is harder for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to subject himself to God!"

Matthew gasped in shock. Interestingly, Thomas's hand went to the wineskin he had hidden, which everyone knew about. Another application. Could he give it up?

Andrew's brother Simon blurted, "But then who can be saved?"

"With men, it is impossible," answered Jesus. "But everything is possible with God." Thomas looked relieved to some extent, but Matthew was still struggling to come to a decision.

Simon replied, "Yes it is! Look at us! We have left everything and followed you!"

"Amen I tell you," said Jesus, "That those of you who have followed me, when everything is reborn, when the Son of Man assumes the throne of his glory, will yourselves be seated on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel! And everyone

who has left his house or his brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or property for my sake will receive a hundred times as much in this age—along with persecution—and in the next age will enjoy eternal life! And yet” he added, looking around, “many of those who are now in the first place will be last, and many of the last will be first.”

Now it was Thomas who looked worried, and Matthew, who had a look of resignation—fear, but resignation. He went up to Jesus shortly afterward, and after a short conversation, left the group. John suspected that Thomas would hang on to the wineskin for a while; he apparently still needed it just in case things became desperate. Well, Jesus knew of it, he was certain, and had not told Thomas he must get rid of it; it was not really the same as wealth. Doubtless his time would come.

And so would the crisis for John, no doubt. He was “rich” in his secret attractions—which he would gladly be rid of, but could not. But perhaps one day he would even have to give up his friendship with Andrew and Ezra and Judas, to keep himself from desiring them.

Well, Thomas had his wineskin still, and Jesus had not told John to avoid anyone—yet. He would have to wait, and trust. How hard that last word was to live up to!

They headed north, for some reason, toward Philip’s Caesarea (as distinguished from the Caesarea on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, where Herod had his palace, and where Pontius Pilate lived when he was not in Jerusalem in that fortress they called the “Antonia.”). As they walked along, Jesus asked, as if casually, “Tell me; who do people say that I am?”

The Emissaries, of course, had heard much in their missions, and so some answered, “A prophet,” others, “The

prophet foretold by Scripture,” and of course others, “The Prince.”

“And who do *you* say that I am?” asked Jesus, looking at them intently, as if their answer would be crucial. At this Andrew’s brother Simon blurted, “The Prince, the Son of the living God!”

Everyone was taken aback, not least Jesus. It was apparently the answer he was waiting for, but the source seemed to surprise him. He stroked his beard, and said, “Good for you, Simon Bar-Jona! Flesh and blood have not revealed this to you; it was my heavenly Father!”

John wished that he or even Andrew, who had also worked out the implications, would have answered first; but Jesus was apparently to take the one the Father pointed out as the one the Father wanted for some special purpose. Even if, John thought cynically, he did not have a clear idea of what he meant by what he said.

“—are Rock, and on this rock I will build my community! And the gates of the world below will not close down upon it! And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of God, and whatever you lock on earth will be locked in heaven, and whatever you unlock on earth will be unlocked in heaven!”

This was a development indeed. And the fascinating thing was that Jesus originally had seemed as surprised as everyone else! But the die was apparently cast. He then warned everyone not—yet—to reveal that he was the Prince.

James whispered to John, “We need not do so; everyone who has a brain knows already.”

“Yes, but not that he is the Son of the living God—at least not in the sense that he means it.”

“Ah, you think that more preparation is needed to show what that really means.”

“I think a *great deal* more preparation is needed. But what is *this*?”

Jesus was saying “Be aware that the Son of Man must one day go to Jerusalem and suffer a great deal there at the hands of the priests and Scripture scholars, and be put to death, but will come to life on the third day afterwards.”

So he is explicitly saying that he will be killed! And there is the ‘third day’ again! He is going to bring himself back to life as the Great Sign? God forbid! But is it not God who is saying it?

The newly-named “Rock,” feeling his authority, went up to him and said, “God forbid, Master! This will never happen to you!”

Jesus turned to him and said, “Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle in my path! You think as men do, not as God thinks!”

The Rock moved to the back of the group, and if ever a man had his tail between his legs, he had.

Everyone else was struck dumb. No one, including John, could make head or tail of the whole incident. It *could* not mean what it sounded as if it meant.

James was shaking his head. “I understand less and less as the days go on! *This* I cannot even bear to think about! —But going back to what you were saying about preparation to clarify ‘son of the living God,’ I know that you and Andrew have been giving it much thought.”

“You have no idea, I think,” he answered. “But we should leave that to him. He seems to be going about it gradually, and

as events unfold, it will become clearer. It is incredible, if we are right; I still cannot really—I do not wish to say ‘believe’ it, because I believe it and I do not believe it. It seems impossible, and yet who are we to say what the Infinite God cannot do?”

“You mean that you think that he *is* God? The infinite God, who has a name we dare not pronounce?”

“He told me as much in the beginning, James, when he also told me things he could not have known otherwise.”

“I know that he is far greater than any prophet, even Moses. Moses never said anything on his own authority, as he did on the mountain there. ‘You have heard it said,’ as it was in the Law, ‘but I tell you.’ Remember that?”

“Indeed I do. *I* think it is because the whole world is going to be transformed into what Isaiah predicted.”

“And you believe that that was not simply poetry?”

“Put it this way: I would not be surprised if it were not.”

“You are talking about a new creation!”

“Well, what are we witnessing? Look at what *we ourselves* can do!”

“You know, you have been making explicit things that have been in the back of my mind that I have not dared really think upon. There is so *much* I dare not think upon!”

“I imagine all of us will be forced to do so—and soon, if things progress as they have been. But I really wish that it had been Andrew who had said what the Rock said! But, as I know from my own case, and can guess from what I know of others—Thomas, for instance—he does not choose people on the basis of their qualifications, but as we have discussed, on their needs. He can do anything with anybody.”

“I fondly hope so,” said James. “You have no idea how

much I hope so!” John looked at him. Was he referring to Simon only, or was there some reference also to himself?

“If he can bring the dead back to life, then I suppose he can make Simon into a Rock to build his community upon. One would never have been able to imagine it, but presumably he created Simon in the first place.”

“He what?”

“This is one of the implications Andrew and I have been toying with.”

“Good heavens!” He was silent at the implication that Jesus in a sense existed before Simon (who was a year older than he), and actually caused Simon to exist. Finally, he said, “Then it is certainly true that much more preparation is required!”

“Well, we shall see. Perhaps one day he will even explicitly say that he was in existence before he was born. That will establish that Andrew and I were on the right track.”

They went apart after that, pondering all that had happened, John really worried about the implication that Jesus would die—and then come back to life. But still . . .

That evening, Matthew came back. David immediately ran up to him and asked something—and, of course Ezra was nearby, unnoticed by anyone—except John, and apparently Thomas. John tried to imitate him when he wandered over to Thomas afterwards.

“What was that all about?” asked Thomas.

“Interesting,” said Ezra. “David—he and I are beginning to become friends, by the way—asked if he were whether he had been successful in whatever it was he was doing. ‘I know not whether to call it “successful,” David,’ he answered. ‘I am poor now, you see.’

“David, amazed, and, I think, disappointed, said, ‘Poor?’ And he answered, ‘I gave my house to Gideon and gave him his freedom; and the money I had hoarded I asked him to distribute among the farmers and people I had defrauded—because, frankly, I could not bring myself to do it; I could not bear to see myself parting with all that wealth. He is going to keep back enough to live on, but all the rest is going to be given away—except for this, which is for all of us.’ And he showed him a heavy sack he was carrying under his cloak.

“The intriguing thing was that David took this as if it were a blow. He looked at Matthew with a *very* strange expression. Matthew said, ‘Be of good cheer, David, as I am trying to be, and trust in the Master. I *must* do so now, it seems.’

“And David answered, ‘I—know not what to say.’ It looked as if the purpose of his life had been thwarted, somehow. Was he plotting to steal what Matthew had? Fascinating.”

So Matthew had done what John suspected he was going to do. Well, he wished them well—and moved, becoming visible to Thomas and Ezra (Ezra had said something to Thomas about the fact that one was not noticed if he did not move), and after Matthew had given Judas the money, he joined Thomas and John; Ezra faded into the background now.

“Of all people!” said Thomas, nodding to him in welcome. “I would have thought it would be Andrew or Judas, but Simon!”

“I *wondered* what he meant back there with John,” put in John, obviously referring to the John who had been bathing the people—who by this time had been beheaded by Herod.

“What was this?” asked Matthew.

“You know that John bathed the Master also?”

“Actually, I do know that,” said Matthew, and both John and Thomas looked at him. John had not seen him there. But of course, he would not have recognized him in the crowd; he had never met him.

“Well,” John went on, “Andrew and I had followed him after John bathed him, and Andrew went to find Simon, and when the Master saw Simon coming, he said to him, ‘You are Simon, son of John. You will be called Kephas.’ None of us knew what to make of it. Why say that a man was going to be called ‘Rock’? Well, now we know.”

“We do?”

John looked at him, incredulous, and then said, “Oh, of a certainty, you were not with us today. And he explained what went on, with Thomas interjecting a remark here and there.

“But then,” said John, “he said, ‘But who do *you* say that I am,’ and Simon blurted out, as he is wont to do, ‘You are the Prince, the Son of the Living God.’”
 “You see!” said Thomas. “But who would have thought that Simon could do logic?”

“—And the Master looked surprised, and stroked his beard as he does, and said, ‘Good for you, Simon, son of John! Flesh and blood have not revealed this to you; it was my heavenly Father!’ And then he said, ‘And I now say to you that you are Rock, and on this rock I will build my community; and the gates of the land of the dead will not be strong enough to close down over it!’”

“Simon!” said Matthew. “Who would have imagined it?”

“Oh, *Simon* might have done,” returned Thomas. “He is not given to fits of humility—but there I go being unkind again. But you should have seen Andrew’s face! Well, I must not compound the unkindness. But the interesting thing is that the

Master seemed a bit taken aback himself at first.”

“Still,” said John, “there was that prediction that he would be called the ‘Rock.’”

“Well, yes,” answered Thomas. “But you saw him. He was not expecting this from Simon. Perhaps at the beginning, he knew that there was to be *something* ‘rocky’ about him, if I may so speak, but did not know that it meant that he would be the leader of us all.”

“Well, now,” interjected Matthew, “just saying what he said did not necessarily mean that he would be over us, did it?”

“Oh, yes,” said Thomas, “it was quite clear. John did not finish. He went on to say, ‘And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you lock on earth will be locked in heaven’—whatever that meant—and whatever you unlock on earth will be unlocked in heaven.’”

“And he used the singular? He was not referring to all of us?”

“He did,” said John. “None of us can understand what he meant—except that it has something to do with the Reign of God that he is always speaking of. What I found interesting is that he agreed with Simon, because he said that the one who revealed it was *my Father* in heaven.”

“Ah, that is his way of speaking,” said Thomas; “I would not make too much of it.” Either that or the revelation of what it really was was advancing apace. Both Thomas and Matthew, for some reason, seemed to think so.

Thomas said, “It seems as if this Reign of God is to last forever, and somehow the Rock, as I suppose we should begin calling him, is going to have some kind of authority over us—second to the Master, of course. Perhaps when the Master

is away, or something, as Andrew was wont to do—and I think Andrew caught the implication, and was not overfond of it. That was what I was alluding to. I must confess that I myself do not relish the prospect.”

“But what do you think about this locking and unlocking?” asked Matthew.

“I have no idea,” said John, “unless it means that when the Rock (what an odd term) issues a command—”

“God save us!” said Thomas.

“—heaven somehow sanctions it.”

“From the little I know of him, that *is* a rather frightening thing to contemplate,” remarked Matthew.

“True, he is given to impulses,” said Thomas. “And yet, what else could it mean? Unless there is something deeper here, which we have not yet been vouchsafed the key to, if I may continue with the metaphor—if it *is* a metaphor. I understand less and less as the days go on.”

“What does Judas say about it?”

“Oh, he took it all in, and looked wise and pensive,” answered Thomas. “He would do, of course. He cultivates the air that nothing surprises him. But I suspect he is as bewildered as the rest of us.”

It was interesting, John thought, that the subject of his being captured and killed had not even come up. Evidently no one wanted to think about it, much less discuss it.

Including John. Rather than do so, he brought up something he just remembered, which had been put out of his mind by all the events, “Oh, incidentally, we are to go to Judea tomorrow, for the festival.”

“Ah yes,” said Thomas. “All the excitement over this had

driven it out of my head.”

And I *think*, thought John, that I might take a moment or two and call upon Daniel, and perhaps greet Annas, if he is not busy.

They arrived in Jerusalem toward evening, and went again to the garden on the Mount of Olives to sleep, after Jesus had sent word to a friend of his who lived nearby in Bethany, named Lazarus, that he had arrived in the area, and would dine with him and his sister Martha as usual on the morrow.

The next morning, they crossed the Kidron brook and went back into the city, going around the wall for some reason, and entering from the north by the Sheep Gate.

Jesus paused at the Bethesda Pool nearby, walking along the five porches that surrounded it, looking with pity on the blind, sick, lame and paralyzed people lying there, but doing nothing for a while. Tradition had it that at irregular intervals, the water would be disturbed—some said by an angel—and the first person to enter the water when this happened would be cured.

Finally, Jesus saw something that looked like an opportunity from the Father, since he stroked his beard and stopped by a paralyzed man, who had obviously been lying there a long time. Matthew asked someone how long he had been sick, and was told, “Thirty-eight years, if I recall correctly.”

Jesus looked down at him and said, “Would you like to be cured?”

“Master,” said the man, who had no idea who the person speaking to him was, “I do not have anyone to put me in the pool when the water churns up; and while I am going there myself, someone else gets in before me.” He would have had to

drag himself along by his hands; everything below his waist was completely useless.

“Stand up,” said Jesus. “Take your mat, and walk.”

And the man suddenly became well. He leaped up and picked up the mat he was lying on and began walking about, praising God. He was too excited at first even to turn and thank Jesus, who watched him for a while and withdrew.

John saw Ezra say something in Thomas’s ear, and conjectured that it was what he noticed: Jesus had performed this cure on the Sabbath, and in Jerusalem. It was sure to be observed and objected to. Obviously that was the “opportunity.” He was beginning to bring controversy to a head.

“What?” answered Thomas. “He *did* nothing.” John noticed that also. He cured by simply telling the man to walk; but the Pharisees would not see it that way. Yet it would make them look foolish to the people if they brought it up.

And, though Jesus had gone on into the Temple, it was not long before the Pharisees saw the man walking about and said to him, “It is a Sabbath. You are not allowed to be carrying your mat.”

“But the one who cured me,” said the man, “told me to take my mat and walk.”

“Who is this man who told you to carry things and walk with them?”

“I know not. He was there at the pool.”

“Find him. We have several things to say to him.”

The man began looking about, and finally, followed by Thomas and Ezra, went into the Temple, which was not far away. John himself, not to make this a kind of procession,

waited for a little while before he went in. But before he could enter, the man came out and met one of the people he had talked to before, and said, "The man who cured me was in there. I was not looking for him, but he found me. He is Jesus of Nazareth, the one people are calling a prophet."

"Prophet indeed! Prophets keep the Sabbath! Is he still there?"

"As far as I know," said the man.

The Pharisee, in great dudgeon, entered, with John following, and found Jesus, surrounded by a number of people, and snapped, "What is this that we have been hearing and seeing? You perform cures on the Sabbath and tell a man to carry his mat and walk?"

Jesus looked over calmly at him and replied, "My Father has been working right up until now; and now I am working also."

John said to himself, "I thought as much. '*My Father*' has been working. They cannot let this pass."

Nor did the man. "How dare you! You are all but calling yourself God! Beware! People have been stoned to death for less! And if you do such things, you have no right to do them on the Sabbath!"

"Amen amen I tell you," said Jesus, "the Son can do nothing by himself; he only does what he sees the Father doing; what he does, the Son does in the same way. But the fact is that the Father loves the Son, and shows him everything he is doing."

The implication of *this* was not lost on the Pharisee or his companions, who began to gather round him. And he went on still further. "And he will show him even greater things than

this, and you will be amazed. Just as the Father brings the dead back and gives them life, the Son will give life to anyone he pleases.”

Twenty-five

In other words, thought John, the Father and I are one and the same thing. He will have to say this explicitly some day; but it was clearly implied here. Life was beginning to get exciting, if not positively dangerous.

He was continuing, “—time is coming—has already arrived—when corpses will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who listen to it will live again. Just as the Father has eternal life in himself, he has given the Son the possession of eternal life in himself; and he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.”

So he called himself the Son of God, and also the Son of Man; and he has the possession of eternal life in himself. So perhaps he is saying that we also will live forever once the Kingdom is inaugurated. He looked around and saw James, who nodded.

Now the crowd was buzzing. One said, “So this ‘Son of Man’ is now the ‘Son of God,’ is he?” Another chimed in, “And we are supposed to hear his voice from the grave and come out and walk around? Ridiculous!” The first said, “He

certainly has a low opinion of himself, has he not?" A man standing in front of him turned around, and said, "Well, he *did* make a crippled man completely well with just a word. I saw it; he simply said, 'Stand up and walk,' and he did!"

"So?" said the first speaker. "Curing a disease is one thing. But this bringing the dead to life and claiming to be the Son of God is something else!"

"Be quiet! He is still speaking!"

"—were simply acting as a witness for myself, my testimony would be worthless. But there is someone else who has testified about me, and I know how solid his evidence about me is. You yourselves sent people to John, and he gave testimony that was true. I have no need of human testimony; I am saying this for you to be rescued. He was a burning, shining lamp, and you people found pleasure for a while in his light."

"Who is this 'John' he speaks of?" asked one. "You remember," was the answer. He was down at the Jordan, bathing everyone. Some thought he was Elijah come to life again, and announcing that the Prince God anointed had arrived." "Ah, and this one is saying *he* is the Prince!" "Well, he has not exactly *said* so as yet, but one can see where he is headed." "But of course, you see," said the one who had objected at first, "if he is the Prince, he is the son of David. But this one is calling himself the Son of the Master Himself!"

"—Father himself is a witness on my behalf—though you have never heard his voice or seen his form."

"You see?" said the objector, and then shouted at Jesus, "Neither have you, my friend!"

"—what he says has no home in you is clear from the fact that you do not believe in the one he sent. Search the

Scriptures, since you think that there is where you will have eternal life. They are evidence about me. But you refuse to come to me and have life!”

“*I find nothing about Nazareth and Galilee in the Scriptures!*” said someone. “Why should I come to you?”

“I care nothing about what people think of me; but I know you; you do not have the love of God in you. I came in my Father’s name, and you will not accept me. If someone else were to come in his own name, you would accept him. How can you believe me, if you simply take what everyone else thinks about a person and do not try to find out the opinion of the one true God?”

“Well, we certainly are not going to take the opinion of the one who is standing before us!” muttered a man standing next to Matthew and John. “His opinion of himself is a bit too exalted for a lowly Scripture scholar like myself to be able to agree with.” Others were voicing similar sentiments, and they drowned out Jesus for a while.

He was going on, “—Moses, the one you set your hopes on. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, because he wrote about me. But if you will not believe what he wrote, how can you believe what I say?”

That apparently was the end of the controversy. No one came up to arrest Jesus. How could they? On what grounds? For saying something? Still, their hatred was palpable.

At this point, John, who knew that they were going to the home of this Lazarus, that evening, decided it might be opportune to take advantage of the lull to drop in on Annas—and Daniel.

He walked over to the High Priest’s palace, pondering

everything along the way. It seemed his idea of who Jesus was was being confirmed at every moment. His heart beat with excitement—and fear.

Some of the excitement—a mere sliver of it, but it was there—was the prospect of seeing Daniel again. He knocked.

“Yes?” said Hannah. “Oh! It is young John! Peace! How good to see you again!”

“Peace,” answered John, and then said, “Especially since I no longer smell of fish.”

She laughed. “That is right! I remember when you came here—it was all of a year ago, was it not? How time flies!”

“It does indeed.”

“But I am sorry to say that the master is not here at the moment.”

“A pity,” said John. “Could you tell him I called?”

“I most certainly will. He will be delighted to hear it! Will you be staying in Jerusalem long? He should be back the day after tomorrow.”

“I cannot say. As it happens, I have not a great deal of time. But I wonder if Daniel is here—and could spare me a minute or two.”

“Oh, of course! You and he were great friends, I remember. Did you not wear a tunic of his once?”

“Yes, when you were washing the fish out of mine.”

She laughed again. “I remember. It laundered well, thank the Master. But if you have not much time, come in and let me fetch Daniel.”

John waited in one of the parlors, and before long Daniel entered. “John!” he exclaimed, and rushed over and embraced him.

A little longer than necessary.

John pulled himself away—gently. “The same old Daniel,” he remarked, but in a friendly voice. He was not, truth be told, repulsed by the embrace.

And Daniel, as he backed away, said, “And the same old John.”

They looked at each other for a few minutes, both a bit awkward, smiling, Daniel with a bit of The Smile. “But what have you been doing with yourself?” he asked. “Not fishing, evidently.”

“No. It turns out I am a sort of apprentice prophet.”

“Really? How does one become an apprentice prophet?”

“You see, the day I left here, I went down to the Jordan to hear this John who was bathing people.”

“Ah, yes, I have heard of him. He is dead now, I think, murdered, if rumor is correct, by our beloved leader Herod.”

“So I heard myself.”

“If I recall the story, his wife’s daughter danced so seductively to her father and his friends that he promised her whatever she asked, and she asked for John’s head, which he gave to her. Fools, both of them!”

“Was that how it happened? How horrible!”

“That is what they say anyway. So you became his student?”

“Well, no. You see, he was announcing that the Prince was coming, and as it happened, he came while we were there, and he introduced him to us.”

“Indeed!”

“In very truth. It was Jesus of Nazareth. You may have heard of him.”

“Oh? I *have* heard the name. But I must say, I have had—shall I say conflicting—reports about him. Some say he is a miracle-worker, and others that he is a fraud and a blasphemer.”

“So he already has that reputation, has he?”

“Well, you know how people are. You are *his* student.”

“I am, and as to the miracle-worker aspect, he is certainly that. I saw him bring a dead man back to life.”

“No!”

“With my own eyes. And it was no trick. We happened upon a funeral, and he stopped it, and put his hand on the man and told him to sit up, and he did.”

“You will forgive me, I hope, if I seem a bit skeptical.”

“I can see why you might be. But I saw it, and I have no reason to believe that he had ever seen the woman or the man—the boy, really—before. Both of them are among us now.”

“Well, if you say so.”

“And not only that, but now he has sent *us* to go about announcing a change in our way of thinking, because the world is about to be transformed. And I myself have performed cures; I even drove a demon out of a man in his name. I was terrified, but he went out.”

“You realize that all this is a bit much to take in all at once, do you not?”

“I was reminded of you when it happened, in fact, because just before the demon went out, he said, ‘John, is it? We know a few things about *you*, my friend. Shall I tell the people?’ *That* was what terrified me.”

“You mean, what passed between us? But my dear John, you know that nothing whatever happened except that you were

virtuous—according to your lights, at least. You have not been, shall I say, indulging yourself with others, have you? If so, I shall be most indignant!” And most pleased, thought John.

“No. Nothing has happened. But—”

“I understand. But you *would like* something to have happened. Even with me, I gather. Well, that is some comfort.”

“The point is that you know what it would sound like if some devil ‘revealed’ it.”

“Now that you mention it, I can imagine. It would not be a very good advertisement for a student of a holy rabbi. How did you handle it?”

“Oh, I simply told him to be silent in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, and to go out of the man. And he did.”

“In truth? That *is* amazing! Apparently demons are more afraid of the name than you were of the revelation. Astounding, in fact.”

“He is authentic, Daniel.”

“I can certainly understand why you think so. It is just that we heard some stories about a speech or sermon he gave that was full of nonsense, from the reports we got.”

“Yes, well I was there also, and when you analyze it, it turns out that it is anything but nonsense. But discussing it would take hours, and I simply wanted to see you, because I told you I would drop in when and if I came to Jerusalem. This is not really the place or time for me to try to make a convert. But let me just counsel you to keep an open mind.”

“I will certainly do that. But it will be open to *all* sides, you know.”

“I could not ask for more. And I will pray for you, Daniel.”

“And I will pray for you also. Though I have a suspicion that I need the prayers more than you.”

“If you knew! But it was a great pleasure to see you.”

“The pleasure is mine, my *very good* friend. And remember, if you ever change your mind, I am still your *very good* friend.”

“I think—I hope—that will never happen. But peace. I must go.”

“Peace, then.” And John turned and left, pleased and excited to have seen Daniel again, and rather troubled by his pleasure and excitement. He had not thought Daniel was as attractive as he now found him.

Oh, well. Nothing had happened.

“But I left the door open,” he said to himself as he went down the road to Bethany, about an hour’s walk away. He had learned where Lazarus’s house was, and found it with no difficulty. His host greeted him in a friendly, if a bit distant, manner. He was, John knew, a banker, whom Jesus had met through his sister, and he seemed extremely fastidious; his robes were impeccable, and his manners elegant, and John discovered on observation that he seemed to tolerate Jesus as one would a clown, for his entertainment-value. His sister, however, was the picture of sincere cordiality.

Martha and Matthew were engaged in a rather extended conversation. Lazarus, when he heard that Matthew had been a tax-collector, almost lost his demeanor as a host, and proceeded, after barely acknowledging his existence, to keep himself to the other side of the room. John wondered what he would do with Thomas, if he found out he had been a drunk. Or with John himself if some demon revealed what they evidently knew.

“Yes, he is amazing, is he not?” Martha was saying to Matthew. She swelled with pride. “I persuaded Lazarus to invite him to dine whenever he is in Judea, and he comes! And he has told me,” she lowered her voice confidentially, “that he will find my sister for me and bring her back, if she is willing; or if not, will give me news of her!”

“Your sister has been lost?”

“These many years. We lost her, I remember, the day our rabbi’s house burned down and his poor, dear crippled wife died in the fire. He has not been the same since, poor man. Nor have we, because of our sister. We searched and searched, but never found a trace of her. But I cannot believe that she is dead, and the Master has all but confirmed it!”

“I am sorry for the loss.”

“But do not be. The Master will see to it that everything will be explained and turn out well.”

“Well I hope for your sake that it happens.”

“Oh, it will happen. I am sure of it.”

They had a very elaborate dinner, with Lazarus giving all his attention to Jesus, clearly to avoid looking at, and still more conversing with, anyone else. He obviously endured all this for two reasons: because his sister insisted, and because he suspected that Jesus might turn out to be famous, and it might be politic to have him as a friend.

After the dinner, they were seated about, talking, and Jesus said, “This banquet made me think of a story.” (He had lately begun speaking more often analogies and stories.) “There once was a rich man who wore richly dyed clothes of the finest linen, and who dined sumptuously every day. A poor man named Lazarus—” he glanced over at Lazarus, in his richly-dyed linen

robe, “—with a body full of pustules, used to lie by his gate, hoping to feed off what had been left on the rich man’s plates. Even the dogs would come and lick his sores.” Lazarus made a face at the image.

“Finally the poor man died and was carried by angels to the place of honor in Abraham’s banquet,” At this, Lazarus’ began to take notice. “And the rich man died too and was buried.

“He looked up from the land of the dead where he was suffering, and saw Abraham a long way off, and Lazarus next to him at the banquet.

“‘Father Abraham!’ he shouted. ‘Be kind to me! Tell Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and come here to cool my tongue; I am in agony in these flames!’

“‘Son,’ said Abraham, ‘remember: you had your good time while you were alive, and Lazarus had as bad a time. Now he is the one who has comfort, and you who suffer. Besides, there is a huge chasm set between all of you and us, and so not even anyone who wanted to go from here to you could manage it, and no one can pass from there to here.’

“‘Then please, Father,’ he said, ‘send someone to my father’s house—I have five brothers—and warn them not to let themselves come to this place of torture!’

“‘They have Moses and the prophets,’ said Abraham. ‘They must listen to them.’

“‘They will not, father Abraham, but if someone were to come back to them from the grave, they would change heart.’

“He answered, ‘If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not believe it if a dead person comes back to life.’”

This sent a shock through John. If he really was killed and

really planned to bring himself back to life, then would even *that* be of no avail? It certainly sounded like it.

Of course, the whole meaning of the story was completely lost on Lazarus. He was saying to a friend, "You see how he is? He tells these stories that do not have an atom of sense to them, and has everyone enthralled. Fascinating! I was hoping something like this would happen, to show you what he is like!"

"You took no offense that he used your name?" The friend, who obviously had caught the meaning of the story, was struggling to say something polite.

"Offense? I am flattered! I have never heard him use a name in his stories before; and after all, he put me in the place of honor beside Abraham himself!"

"To be sure he did," said the friend. "Yes, I suppose he did. Of ~~course~~ ^{course} now, do not go trying to make *sense* of it! He simply tells these things to amuse himself. And he amuses *me* also, since I see everyone racking their brains trying to plumb the profound meaning behind his stories, and there *is* no meaning; it is all a game of his!"

"If you say so."

"Believe me, it is true. I have known him for quite some time, and he says the most outrageous things to shock people, but he is quite harmless, really. Once one sees this, it is a delight to be with him."

John wondered what kind of a miracle—for it certainly would be a miracle—was going to be needed to shake Lazarus's idiotic complacency and make him recognize the truth. Because he was not one of the ill-disposed; he was simply a fool, and clearly he was Jesus's friend. Jesus no doubt tolerated him for a reason similar to the one for which he tolerated Jesus: others

took him deadly seriously, and either loved him or hated him violently. It was refreshing, no doubt, to find someone who enjoyed him as entertaining.

But what was the meaning of the story and his prediction of being captured and killed? thought John.

There was *some* hope, even in that case, was there not? Presumably those who would listen to Moses and the prophets would believe, and that was most of the well-intentioned. He thought of Daniel with his “open mind.”

But on the other hand, what of the transformation of the world? Perhaps it would mean that the Reign of God would not begin, because he would be rejected as king. What else could it mean, if he was to be captured by the authorities and killed? And so then what?

John could not believe that everything would be a total failure. The well-disposed would be saved—from their sins, perhaps—and rewarded somehow—by eternal life?—and the others would—what? Die in their sins? Not live forever?

Or perhaps—

Jesus was intimating that, because of the perverseness of the people—and John had seen examples of it in the crowds as Jesus spoke—he would fail in his mission of changing the world and restoring the state before Adam’s sin.

But still, God could not fail. Not really. And did not the same Isaiah who prophesied about the lions and lambs prophesy about the Servant who was to suffer and bear our sins?

Perhaps he was telling what *could* happen, and yet was also saying what *would* happen, if he failed. But could God fail?

Could he? But it would not be God but we who failed.

But why would he even try, if he knew it was futile?

No, it must be that there was salvation at least for those willing to listen, and presumably eternal life, at least for them. That was no failure.

Was it?

Was it not?

Twenty-Six

On their way back to Galilee, they passed through Sychar once again, and the people welcomed Jesus, though he did not stay with them.

When they reached Mount Tabor, Jesus told them to wait at the foot, and climbed the mountain himself with the Rock, James, and John.

It was a long climb, the highest mountain in this vicinity; they were all rather winded as they reached the top, and sat down on some rocks there to rest. Jesus went on ahead.

And suddenly, he became light.

He rivaled the sun, and his clothes were gleaming, far outdoing the togas of the Romans, who took immense pains with soap full of lye to whiten them. John remembered they called themselves “candidati,” which meant “gleaming white” in Latin, and thought they had no idea what a “candidatus” really was.

His mind, he realized, was gibbering, he was so stunned by the appearance. Obviously, this overwhelming sight was a visual impression of what “The Father and I are one and the same

thing” meant. Of course, God was really beyond visibility; so bright, if you will, that he could not be seen, just as John had heard that there were sounds so high that humans could not hear them, though animals could. But for some reason, Jesus wished to reinforce the notion that he was far, far more than merely human.

Then two others, also radiant, but not quite so brilliant, joined him in conversation—and in the course of it, John heard the names “Moses” and Elijah!” So Elijah *did* come again! Would he stay and show himself to others, or was this a privilege reserved to just John and James and the Rock?

Then John realized that what they were talking about was what was to happen to him in Jerusalem! They seemed to think that Jesus would not in fact be able to convince people that he was the Son of God, equal to the Father and the same as the Father, even if he finally appeared to everyone as he now appeared. Jesus mentioned that he would have to show his power at the end, but did not wish to do so in such a way that it would take away their freedom; and they discussed how he could do this, and what that meant for his success.

But it was all so overpowering that John could not make head or tail of it. He simply stared in awe, and the words washed over his head like waves, and like waves, made no real impression on him.

Simon suddenly blurted, “Master, it is a good thing we are here! If you wish, I can build three huts here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah!” He too was babbling, barely making any sense at all—and as he spoke a luminous cloud covered them, and they quaked in terror, convinced that because of this profanity they were sure to die.

But the cloud simply spoke: "This is my Son, the one I love, who pleases me greatly. Listen to him."

They all fell on their faces with terror.

Shortly afterward, they felt Jesus touch them and say, "Stand up; fear not," and the Jesus they were familiar with was before them again, and no one else. But of course, they knew that the Jesus they were familiar with was really the resplendent Jesus who had driven them almost senseless with awe; he could never be just Jesus again to them. It was far more of a contrast for John than that of Jesus the carpenter and Jesus the miracle-worker.

They descended the mountain in silence, until Jesus said, "Do not tell anyone of what you saw until the Son of Man comes back from death." What did that mean? What *could* that mean? God grant that it was not what it sounded like!

John, instead of asking Jesus about this—he did not dare—asked instead, "Why do the Scripture scholars say that Elijah must precede you?" thinking that he was going to answer that it had just happened, but he said, "Yes, Elijah is coming, and will restore everything," and then he stroked his beard, and said, "but the fact is that Elijah has already come, and they did what they pleased to him. And the Son of Man will suffer the same sort of thing at their hands."

John and James, as it happened, were walking a little behind Jesus, and James whispered, "Who was he speaking of? John, the one who bathed the people?"

"I would guess that is what it was," answered John, also in a whisper. "Who else could it be?"

"*If* he means what he sounds as if he means."

"*If*," answered John. "I understand nothing whatever!"

And they all lapsed into silence, pondering, or just feeling the effect of the dumbfounding experience they had had. John at one point wondered, “Why we three?” thinking that it was not really that they were special friends of Jesus, but people that needed special attention. Were they each to undergo some horrible test that required this reassurance to make it possible for them to endure it? He quaked in dread.

When they reached the others at the bottom, there was suddenly a great silence as Jesus came up. “What is it you are busying yourselves with?” he asked.

A man answered, “Rabbi, I brought you my son, who has a demon that will not let him speak; and when it gets inside him, it tears him apart, and he foams at the mouth and grinds his teeth, and goes rigid. I asked your students if they would drive it out, and they were not strong enough!” He gave a look at Nathanael, who obviously was the one “not strong enough,” and looked as if he wanted to melt into the ground.

“This faithless race!” exclaimed Jesus. Nathanael cowered. “How long will I be among you? How long will I put up with you? Bring him to me!” Had Nathanael encountered an insolent spirit, and doubted?

The father pulled the boy over, and he fell into convulsions, writhing on the ground. Jesus looked at him. “How long has he been this way?” he asked the father.

“From the time he was little!” he said. “And it often throws him into the fire, and into water to kill him! But if it is possible, please help us! Have pity on us!”

“If it is possible!” exclaimed Jesus. “Everything is possible to a believer.”

“Master I believe!” cried the man. “Please help my

unbelief!”

Jesus, noticing that the crowd was gathering round them, said in a calm voice, “Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you to go out of him.” And the boy suddenly gave out a roar, and fell over as if dead. Jesus then took his hand, and he stood up, and he gave him to his father.

John felt how apt the father’s plea was. He himself believed and, in spite of what he had just seen, did not believe. It was too fantastic, too impossible to be true. But how could one see what he had seen and *not* believe? He was astounded to find how easy it was.

Finally, Simon the Revolutionary asked, “Why could we not drive it out?”

“Because you did not believe strongly enough,” answered Jesus. “Besides, that kind can only go out through fasting and prayer.”

John had not been fasting enough, certainly. He had not been fasting at all. The Master had once said, “Can the friends of the groom fast while the bridegroom is with them?” and then, John remembered, he said, “The time will come when he will be taken away” *Taken away!* “And then they will fast.” He had not noticed that until now!

He looked over at poor Nathanael, who also had problems in that direction—as, he imagined, did everyone else. How could what had happened have been real?

Of course, as soon as things calmed down a bit, the others wanted to know what had gone on on the mountain, since from the demeanor of the three who were up there, they were still in shock.

“We are not to speak of it,” said the Rock. “At least, not

until . . . something happens which I do not understand.” He looked over at Jesus with awe and a kind of terror in his eyes. They all looked at Jesus with new eyes, convinced that he had revealed his true self, and all but killed the three with the revelation.

They walked along, by themselves for a change, since the crowds realized they had gone to Judea and were not expecting them back as yet. On the way, they paused, and Jesus, who was acting as if nothing had happened on the mountain, told them, “Attend carefully to this: The Son of Man is going to be surrendered into human hands, and they will kill him; and on the third day after that, he will return to life.”

A second time. And on the mountain, he had spoken of coming back from death. He was going to be killed, and he had all but told John and the other two that he was going to let it happen!

But he would return to life. He *would*! he *had* to!

John heard Ezra say to Thomas, “Does it not remind you of something?”

“Not offhand. What?” Thomas, like the rest of them, was too upset to remember much of anything.

“Destroy this temple and in three days I will rebuild it.”

A light dawned. “Of a certainty! So you think he *is* referring to actually being killed and returning to life ‘on the third day,’ as he says here.”

“It sounds very much like it.”

“Ezra, what will I do? What will we all do?”

“Trust, I suppose.” He shook his head and went away. As did Thomas. But how *hard* it was, thought John! And could one imagine what the interval between the death and the third

day would be like? Would *John* be able to survive it?

John noticed that Matthew was searching for someone to ask what the meaning of all this was. He apparently picked Thomas, and they had an extended conversation, in which John heard the name Judas, and finally Matthew blurted, "A delusion! If there ever was anyone who did not suffer from delusions, it is the Master!"

"You must question Judas about it. He has a whole theory worked out—which I confess I do not subscribe to." John was glad. He was certain that Matthew was right in what he said. No, Jesus meant it seriously, and what happened on the mountain, if it were a delusion, it was a delusion on their part, not his. And he had predicted his death—and return to life! And return to life!—twice and almost three times. He was preparing them. He would fail in establishing the Kingdom Isaiah spoke of—or *we* would fail, which would amount to the same thing.

But how *could* he fail, if he was what John had seen on the mountain? But even there, he and the ones he was talking to seemed to think that in Jerusalem, he would "depart."

A frantic Nathanael suddenly came up, obviously looking for someone to talk to. "Do you have any idea about what this means? About being killed, I mean."

John answered, "I understand nothing of it! I hope and hope that it is some kind of figure of speech, but if it is, I cannot imagine what it means. I know not, Nathanael."

"And—I know that you cannot speak of what happened on the mountain, but did that help in this?"

"Not at all. If anything, it made it very unlikely. But I cannot say that it made it impossible! I know nothing! Nothing!"

The next day, they crossed the “sea” for some reason, this time all of them in Simon Rock’s boat, which his father lent him for the day; it was large enough so that all twelve of them fit comfortably on benches on the sides (the center was for practical purposes empty for the casks that held the fish they had caught in water until they reached the shore). Jesus sat on the bench in the stern, which had a cushion on it, making it a kind of couch, and then, saying he would take a bit of a rest, lay down and fell asleep, his head near Nathanael, who was on the side toward the stern. John and James were at the oars, and John was on the side looking at Nathanael, and was rather amused to see him gripping the gunwale with white knuckles. Obviously, Nathanael was not a paragon of fearlessness.

They looked up at the sky, which suddenly began to darken, as was apt to happen in that time of year; and then the rain came and the lightning, and the wind blew a ferocious gale, and the boat rocked fiercely. It did not bother John, who had often been in a boat in worse weather, but it terrified Nathanael, who now held on to the gunwale at the side and the stern, praying that Jesus would waken and steady the boat somehow. But he slept on.

Finally, water began slopping over the sides, and two of the men who were not rowing began bailing. It seemed to be getting worse and worse, and Jesus slept on.

Nathanael could bear it no longer, and in panic, he cried out to Jesus, “Master, does it not bother you that we are going to drown?”

Jesus woke, looked out at the storm, and said, “Be quiet! Calm yourself!”

And suddenly, the wind dropped and all was still.

He looked at Nathanael, and with a mock-stern voice, but a smile on his face, said, “Why did you doubt, you people who have so little faith?”

“What sort of a man is this?” said James to John, who was beside him at the oars, as they looked up at the blue sky. “Even the wind and the sea obey him!”

Confirmation of what they had seen on the mountain. —And then, for further confirmation, on the shore they were confronted with another madman, this one naked, full of cuts and scrapes, with fetters and chains that he had broken. He ran up screaming in that demonic voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torture me!”

“What is your name?” said Jesus.

“Legion. There are many of us. Please, please do not send us away into the abyss!”

John saw Nathanael cower to the back of the group, and secretly despised him. Jesus just stood there calmly as the demons pleaded and begged for mercy. He was looking around.

His eyes lighted on a herd of hogs grazing next to a nearby cliff overlooking the lake. The man saw where he was looking, and the demon inside him pleaded, “Please! Send us into the pigs! Let us enter them!”

“You may go,” said Jesus and with a roar, they left and the hogs suddenly went wild. The whole herd rushed around for a moment, and then threw itself over the cliff into the water and drowned.

Everyone looked on in shock, not least the man out of whom they had gone. Multiple demons could be in a person! The swineherds, who of course were Gentiles, looked over the

cliff at the destruction, and ran off. Jesus, meanwhile, asked if someone had an extra cloak and tunic, and covered the naked man, with whom he began a one-sided conversation. It was clear that the man, though no longer insane, was so terrified at what had happened that he could not speak more than a word or two. Jesus was trying to reassure him. Then, when the townsfolk came up, they cried, "Leave us! Leave us! Have mercy!" looking on the madman with fear.

"Master, will you leave?" he said. "May I go with you?"

"No, my friend. Go back to your home, and explain to everyone what God has done for you." And Jesus and his companions got back into the boat, crossing over to Capernaum. Jesus looked at Nathanael smiled an amused smile.

John, it must be confessed, was shaken at this last encounter. They were obviously not playing games with these demons; even though Jesus was in complete control, they were an immense destructive force. John hoped fervently that they could not enter anyone unless the person allowed it somehow, and he hoped in that case that he would never give permission. Perhaps Nathanael was right to be timid before them. Still, it was not the most manly of all attitudes.

Yet who was *John* to brag of being manly?

Twenty-Seven

That evening, as the group was on the road near Magdala by the “Sea” of Galilee, Jesus suddenly shouted “Stop!” at a woman who had just emerged from the shadows, and looked as if she might fall off the cliff.

There was a brief pause, where everything was frozen, and then the woman said, in a rasping man’s voice, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? She is ours!” Another one! This time a woman!

Then the woman slowly approached Jesus, as if she were being dragged toward him. She was exceedingly beautiful, and, incredibly, the very picture of innocence. But the voice! Everyone moved aside in fear. This gave promise, if possible, to be even worse than Legion!

“Ἐλεῖσον ἐμὲ ὦ υἱὲ τοῦ ὑψίστου θεοῦ!” she said in that same male voice, and Jesus snapped, “Be silent! You will answer only when spoken to, no more; you will speak the truth for once, and only in Aramaic.” John, who had been studying Greek with Matthew, realized that what the demon said—for it was clearly the demon who spoke, and not the woman, though

it spoke through her mouth—was Greek, and could catch a few words “Have mercy,” and “Son of the—something—God.”

“Yes, Master. Good master,” answered the voice. The woman began groveling in the dust like a dog awaiting punishment.

“Refrain from calling me good.” barked Jesus. “What do you know of good? How many are you?”

“We are seven, Master, only seven.”

“Does she know you?”

“Oh, yes, merciful Master. She invited me.”

She cringed and groveled again in the dirt of the roadway, “It was not truly a lie, merciful Master. She did not refuse us—”
~~“I will engage in no disputations with you. Is she listening now? Can she hear us?”~~

“Yes, Master.”

“She is to know how you entered her. Explain it.”

“As I said, Master, she did not refuse us. It was our right, and we were not forbidden, as happens so often with us. She—”
~~“Stop. In your description of how you entered her, you are to speak in such a way that she alone will understand what you did to her. These others need not know—and are not to know—what she did.”~~

“But it was her cursing God that opened the door. We could not have entered without it, Master. You know that.”

“Let that suffice. What she had done and what had happened to induce her to curse God is not to be mentioned. Continue.”

So John was right; they had to have permission somehow to enter a person. But it seemed that it was rather easy to obtain, which made him quake. He lost some of what was being said with his speculation of what he would do if it began to happen

to him. "Suppose," he said to himself, "a demon took the form of, say, an Ezra or an Andrew. Would I then be able to resist it?"

"—you tell her?" Jesus was saying.

"Only that she was evil, something that she knew very well, most merciful Master, and whether she wanted to learn what evil really was, so that she could understand what had happened to her."

John then wondered whether a demon could convince him that he could make sense out of John's desires, or could explain that Daniel was correct after all, and there was nothing against following what his nature drove him towards. How could it be against his nature to do what his nature prompted? And yet, there were men born blind and crippled. Natures were not always what they should be. But it was so *easy* to believe that there was nothing wrong with it! What harm could it do?

"No!" John said aloud. Was a demon about to enter *him*?

At that moment, the demon in the woman said, "I cannot lie, Master. I admit that."

"You cannot lie!" scoffed Jesus. "You! You cannot lie to me, certainly, because I know the truth beforehand. I say this, however, so that she will understand that you have been lying to her from the beginning, and so that she will no longer trust anything she thought she knew up to now."

The demon—or whatever was tempting John—had been lying to John also, and making out a plausible case—something terrifyingly easy to do. And here was this woman, who had been seduced by plausible-sounding words, and she had seven devils within her, now speaking openly in their own voice, and revealing what they really were. Up to now, she had probably

thought that she was even virtuous when she did whatever it was that—this was Magdala, was it not? This must be Mary of Magdala, the famous prostitute who had corrupted half of the leaders of the people!

Finally, Jesus broke in on the protestations of the devil-spokesman, “Be silent. I would speak to her now. Allow her to speak.”

The woman looked up from the dust of the roadway, with her hand clutching convulsively at a root that grew across a rut. She saw Jesus’s face and shrieked in terror. She looked as if she had just peered into the pit of hell.

He reached down and touched her back, and she seemed to change. Her eyes went down to the ground before her face once again; and she fought to keep her gaze fixed there, but in spite of herself, she found herself being raised to her feet by his hand, and standing up. Then she looked at herself, seeming to realize how she must appear, with her eyes modestly cast down in front of everyone like a repentant sinner, and suddenly tilted her head back and stared defiantly straight into the eyes of Jesus. Thomas marveled at her temerity. Clearly, the devils themselves could not do it.

“Do you understand your situation?” he asked calmly, and she reacted at first as though he had stung her; but then immediately regained her insolent expression. She was still strikingly beautiful, in spite of the dust and the state of her clothes.

Jesus looked at her, not paying attention to her obvious attitude, but simply waiting for an answer, which took a long time before she nodded.

“Do you wish to be freed from them?” came the question.

Again she paused, and a shudder ran through her body. She looked as if in spite she was going to give a flippant answer; but she was looking into his face, and evidently realized that this would not be acceptable.

"I wish to die," she answered, and added in a voice of scorn, "Master." As he opened his mouth to speak, she drew in her breath in terror.

But he merely said, "That is not for me to grant you now. Do you wish to be free of the demons within you?"

Again a very long pause, and then her face changed from considering the question, and she glanced at Jesus with fear and scorn.

"They are lying to you once again," he said. "If I free you, I will send you from me; and you may stay away if you wish. In fact, I will not permit you to return before sunset tomorrow, so that you will have time to consider your life and what you truly want for yourself."

"You will not be doing me a favor."

"Possibly not."

"Then why do you torment me? You have the power. Why do you not simply do it?"

"Because it is your life, not mine."

"And therefore, I must decide! Then accept my hate and do it! I care nothing for what may happen! Do it!"

"You have heard?" said Jesus, but not to the people around him, but to those inside her. "You are to leave her and remain apart from her until tomorrow after sunset, and then you may return only if she permits you. Go!"

She emitted a gurgling sound, akin to what is called the "death rattle," after which she took in a gasping breath and

screamed so that the hills rang, as she fell once more to the ground and writhed and writhed like a snake whose head had been cut off, shrieking and wailing with different voices, all in the ultimate throes of agony. John quaked in panic. He felt like running, but was rooted to the spot, as were the others.

After an eternity of this, everything stopped. She lay exhausted on the road.

Evidently, the thought came to her that everyone was looking at her humiliation, because she glanced round and suddenly sprang to her feet, staring defiantly once again at Jesus. She tossed her head, and said, "You think you have done a good deed! You think you have saved me! You have destroyed me!"

"Perhaps so," he answered. "That will depend on you. You have a night and a day of peace to consider it."

"Consider what? Who am I? What have you left of me?"

"Whatever there was of you that they left behind. You will find that there is much. You will recognize yourself."

"I doubt it."

"If you refuse to do so, that is your choice, of course."

"So I am to consider my evil ways, and then return and beg your forgiveness, (she spat out the word) now that you have left me this torn piece of rag that I must now call myself."

"Understand this: If you wish to be forgiven, you will receive forgiveness—Do not speak; I am aware that you do not believe it possible. If you wish tomorrow evening to be forgiven, return to me."

"And then I am to learn the conditions you impose."

"The only condition is that you wish it. You must know one more thing. It will not be possible for you to kill yourself

before tomorrow night.”

“So you would remove from me the one blessing in this curse you have cursed me with!”

“For a time, yes. You are rash, Mary. If I did not, you would kill yourself without taking thought. And you will find that it is not now necessary.”

Mary. So she *was* the notorious Mary of Magdala!

Then you are master, and I am slave.”

“Yes.”

“Suppose I refuse to take thought. Suppose I simply wait until tomorrow night.”

“I will not force you to do otherwise.”

“Do you actually believe that you can control my thoughts? Not even they could!”

“It is of no consequence.”

“No consequence! That you think you can control thoughts! That you can forgive sins! You claim that I was deceived by spirits within me, and you practiced magic on me to drive them out! My deception is nothing in comparison!”

Drive her away, Master!” shouted Simon the Revolutionary. “She herself is ten times the demons you cast out of her!”

“I need no driving, kind sir,” she said in a voice of withering scorn. “If the Master will dismiss me, I will leave of my own accord. May I depart, Master?”

“You may go.”

“Thank you, gracious Master. Gracious, kind, generous Master! I leave you in the pleasant company of the rest of your slaves!”

John was completely shaken. Obviously, the influence of the demons had not left the woman, even if they themselves had

left; there was a residue which she would have to shed if she were to come back and beg forgiveness.

And whatever was within John, if it was not indeed a demon, was closely allied to the demons. He had never feared more for himself than when watching this encounter. They could clothe themselves as angels of light, and insinuate themselves into one. True, one would have to give them permission, but did they even need to enter a person? It seemed that they were all around one, even in the actions of people of good faith, such as Daniel, ready to persuade John that all was well, if he would only give what they suggested a try.

And was it all so horrible, what he was tempted to do? True, Leviticus condemned it, as Jesus had confirmed. But why? He had no real answer. A man could talk to his dog, even though the dog could not understand him. Why could not a man have relations with a man, even though the man could not conceive by it? A man could walk on his hands, even though hands had a different function than feet.

But Leviticus had condemned it, and so there must be a reason. There was a fallacy in the analogy that he did not see; there must be. He would have to discuss this with Jesus.

But the thought of confessing his desires to Jesus, and as it were defending them, so that Jesus could explain just where the fallacy lay, filled him with horror, especially now that he knew what Jesus really was: that he and the Father were indeed one and the same thing, somehow—and *that* thing was beyond terror. John was so concerned with all this that he barely noticed what was going on around him.

In any case, he had no real opportunity to see him by himself, and the night and the day passed without incident,

John barely noticing what was going on. There was something about Jesus's dining in someone's house that evening, and they gathered outside the door, while the Rock went in with Jesus.

John was among the usual small motley crowd of the interested and merely curious near the door, everyone nervously waiting to see if the woman would come back, and what she would do. "But how will she know where he is?" said James son of Alpheus.

Suddenly, someone saw her running breathless down the hill. "See there! She comes!" he cried.

She scrambled, gasping for breath, up to the first man she saw, not one of the Twelve, and clutched at his robe; he shrank away in disgust as he turned and saw her, but she cared nothing. "This prophet—" she panted, "what is his name? Has he arrived yet?"

The man flung her hand from off his garment and turned away, but someone else answered, "He is inside at supper." "Is she not?" said another. And another, "She is! That is the one who—" "Let me by!" she cried. "I must see him!" She struggled against a man who was trying to hold her back. His grip was strong, but her fear and her need were superhuman. She broke free.

"She has a demon still!" he exclaimed, holding his hand. There was shouting and a general running to and fro, some trying to get at her to stop her, others to distance themselves as far as possible. Andrew raised his voice above the tumult, "Let her by! If the Master wishes to see her, you will not be able to stop her! Let her by!"

There were protests, and a few still reached out at her, but, clutching a jar which looked like some kind of perfume or ointment, she pushed them aside as a boat pushes flotsam from

its way in the water. She pounded on the door with the jar, and then stopped, evidently afraid she would break it and spill the perfume.

The door suddenly opened, and she disappeared inside.

There was a dead silence for a short time, and then murmurs arose, louder and louder. "What has the Prophet to do with such creatures?" "Do you not remember?" "Remember what?" "Yesterday, he said that if she came to him today, he would forgive her sins." "When? Why?" "He drove seven devils out of her yesterday; they said they were seven. It was horrible!"

John heard Thomas say to Matthew, "—It will be interesting if she also chooses to join us; it was one thing to accept you, Matthew, and me, but this will strain our tolerance to the limit!"

Simon the Revolutionary heard him, and said, "Join us? *That* one? Can you imagine the reputation we will have: 'Not only does he consort with tax-collectors and sinners, he has a prostitute in his midst! And not only a prostitute, but Mary of Magdala!'"

Thomas turned round to face him and said, "Well, you had best prepare yourself. All the signs indicate that that is exactly what is going to happen."

"Nonsense!"

John thought, Another in desperate need of Jesus. Yes, she will be among us, since she doubtless will require his continued presence.

The door remained closed for an inordinate length of time, and gradually the conversation died down to an occasional remark now and then, none of it favorable either to Mary or to Jesus, for admitting her. The consensus seemed to be that

driving out devils was all well and good, and perhaps even forgiving sins (though there was less agreement on how just this was), but it was generally agreed that there were proprieties, after all, and a person *was* known by the company he kept.

Eventually, the door slowly opened, and Mary emerged, looking bewildered and lost. Matthew, John noticed with amusement, looked at her with pity. She certainly *was* seductive, perhaps especially now, since she presumably had repented of her evil ways. Now she not only looked innocent, but she was doubtless free—whatever that meant, though Matthew would know—of all the evil she had committed.

As the door closed behind her someone said, “Behold! She has been driven from his sight! As I told you!” Another chimed in, “I knew that we should not have let her by!”

There was an ominous movement of the small group toward her, with cries to the effect, “Let us show her what one does to those who defile the Master’s presence!” when the door opened again, and a slave put out his head saying, “The Master wishes this woman to have a safe escort to wherever she chooses to go.” He looked at her in disgust for an instant, and disappeared inside.

“Safe escort!” “As if she were a princess!” “It cannot be!” “Look at her! We know who she is!” “She is the worst of her lot!” They came no closer, but neither did anyone step forward to help her through them. and they formed a wall in front of her. She glanced off to her right, thinking to get round them, and saw a small group of women, with faces, if anything, ten times more menacing.

She bridled at the taunts, which kept coming from all sides, and was about make an insolent reply, but thought better of it.

She bit her tongue and then after a long pause said, "You are right. I am a disgrace to womanhood. No one knows how much of one, except one man. And he forgave me. So please, let me pass; I must—" And she stopped, at a loss as to what she was to do. She stood there, closed her eyes, and teetered slightly.

A man came up to her and clapped a hand on her shoulder. "You see, *madame*, it is not quite so simple." She opened her eyes and looked into his huge brown face sneering not a palm-breadth in front of her. The hand transferred itself to her chin and forced her to look at him, and she recoiled at the stench of his breath. "You think you can go to him as to a magician and be forgiven for what you have done, and all is erased. You can now go back to leading ~~men into~~—"
 "Leave her alone!" cried John, coming up behind him and with surprising strength spinning him round. "The Master said 'Safe escort,' and safe escort she shall have! If he forgave her, who are you to persecute her?"

"Who am I?" he spat out. "I am one who knows right from wrong!"

"You call ~~yourself his student~~—"
 "I call myself the student of no man who allows whores to go unpunished!" He swung his free hand and landed a resounding slap on John's cheek. The crowd erupted in noises on both sides, while John fell back a step in surprise and pain, holding his face, while the man said, "You call *yourself* his student, now, do you not? Very well, then turn me the other cheek!"

"I turn you my fist, you lobster! You pig's dropping!—" And suddenly, he checked himself, his face flaming, and stood up to the brownbeard, presenting his cheek. He said in a quiet voice, but full of suppressed passion, "Very well. But if you touch her, it will be a different story."

"It will, will it?" said the man, slapping him once again, now with the back of his hand. "You thought I would not do it, did you not? Now we will see what—"
 "That will be enough!" said Andrew, in almost a conversational tone, one which took for granted that it would be obeyed. He towered over the man. "You, sir, whoever you are, if you do not choose to follow a man who would forgive whores, then I suggest you leave this group; our Master would not be to your liking. John, you are too hot-headed."

"What was I to do? Stand there? No one else made a move!"

"We were here," said Andrew calmly, as her attacker backed away as inconspicuously as he could. "Some of us do not move as quickly as you, but we would have managed to see that no harm was done, without the necessity of making a fuss."

"And who put you over us, if I may ask?" said John, his face still red, both from the slaps and anger now at Andrew. He stood there with his head tilted back, talking as if to his chest, he was so close. "I did not hear the Master call you Andrew Rock."

At this Andrew's face turned scarlet with chagrin, and John realized that he had crossed a line that probably could not be recrossed. He braced himself for another blow, from Andrew this time; but Andrew quickly controlled himself and spoke with measured cadences. "If you wish the opinion of Simon Rock, you have only to go in and ask him," he said. "Now let us all stop being silly. We give a fine example of what his students are if we continue thus."

Mary was standing there, evidently pondering what had happened, and Andrew said, "I think that there will be no more trouble; I am sure that no one will bother you now, madame."

His tone was almost, but not quite, respectful. "You may go."

John was completely shocked at what he had done, and was frantically trying to think of a way to undo the damage. He slunk off into the shadows in the direction of the encampment.

Twenty-Eight

That night he lay in his place, tossing and turning. He slept, more or less, but by fits and starts, waking constantly with his remark to Andrew ringing in his ears, and saying to himself, “I must do something! I must say something to him! But what? What can I say that will not make it worse?”

Finally, the next morning, without any plan, he went, whispering to himself, “Master, help me!” to see Andrew, who looked at him with puzzlement not unmixed with scorn, and said, “Andrew, I wanted to tell you how—how well you handled the situation last night. I admire your self-command, the more especially since I completely lost mine.”

Andrew looked down at him, somewhat more fondly. “Well, of course, I had not just been slapped on both cheeks by that—what did you call him?—‘pig’s droppings.’” He actually laughed, and John also laughed in embarrassment.

“But what I said to you was inexcusable, and I want to tell you that it was the very opposite of what I think—and many others also. I have heard several of the group say that they wish

you had given the answer Simon did.”

Andrew now put his huge arm on John’s shoulder as before. John warmed at the touch. “Well, when we are in such a situation, and cannot fight back—and I must say *you* showed restraint in not retaliating. I know not if I would have had what you called the ‘self command’ you showed in that. Small wonder that you lashed out at someone else.”

“I really hope you understand, or at least forgive me.”

“Think nothing of it, youngster. We all make mistakes.” And he pulled John toward him in a kind of sideways hug. He had no idea how glorious it made John feel.

“Thank you.”

“Forget it. We are the partners we always were.”

“You are a great man, Andrew.”

“Nonsense! If you knew!”

John had a suspicion he did know at least something, which was confirmed by Andrew’s scarlet face at his remark the preceding night—which did not mean that he was not a great man; just the opposite. And of course, there was a good deal about himself that he hoped Andrew would never find out. They parted amicably, John breathing a sigh of relief when he was by himself. He hoped Andrew meant what he had said.

At this point, Jesus, followed by Mary Magdalene, came to the group. He motioned to her, and she went toward them, somewhat irresolute; Matthew, interestingly, beckoned to her, and shyly and gratefully, she took a seat beside him. There was something going on there.

“I told you that there was something I wished to say,” he began. “There was a man who had two sons—” and he launched into a long story that had something to do with one

of the sons going away and spending all his money and then repenting and coming back, and the father welcoming him, and the other son being angry at it, or some such thing. John was too caught up in his own concerns to pay any attention, though it *did* seem that the point was that they were to welcome Mary—something that a good many in the group were extremely reluctant to do.

Jesus then beckoned Mary to him once again, and said, “We will be leaving here soon; it would be good if you would wash quickly. But remember, I would speak privately with you for a few moments afterwards, if you could arrange it.”

As they headed down the road which would pass Magdala, continuing by the huge lake to Capernaum on the northeast shore, Jesus told them to walk on ahead, and he would come up with them later.

John’s brother James took the opportunity of the group’s being alone for a while, and said, “Aside from what just happened, however it turns out, things are becoming serious, He is coming closer and closer to a showdown with the Pharisees, and that is bound to mean that the Reign of God has all but started. Agreed?”

“Well, either it starts soon, or he and we are all destroyed,” answered Thomas. “I have seen the looks on their faces.”

“I agree,” chimed in the other James. “It seems (hem) clear that they cannot allow him to continue much longer or (ha) the whole world will go after him and they will be left with (hem) nothing.”

“And so?” said John. This was taking a turn that he did not think he approved of.

“Well,” answered his brother, “the Master seems too

other-worldly to recognize that a Kingdom will have to have some kind of organization and structure. Someone will have to be in charge of its finances—and we have Judas for that—but someone will have to take care of order and seeing to it that the Master's decrees are enforced, and of protecting the Kingdom from outside threats, such as Rome, for instance. And someone will have to take care of diplomatic relations with other nations, and so on."

"And so?" said John, skeptically. He was convinced that Jesus was not too other-worldly for anything, and that *if* there were to be a kingdom with various offices, he himself would appoint them, or the Father would, as he appointed Simon Rock. (Secretly, he hoped that he would be one of the main ones.) But John's opinion was that he would govern, if any governing was needed, by himself. After all, if he was God, then managing a kingdom and everyone in it was child's play.

"—no disparagement of him, far from it—" James was saying, "then should not we, as more down-to-earth, undertake to decide who should be in charge of what in this new Kingdom?"

John was about to reply, when the other James said, "I know not whether we should. Do you not think the Master might (hem) resent or take unkindly to our (ha) usurpation, as it were, of his prerogative?"

"Better that he should reprimand us," broke in Simon the Revolutionary, "than that we suddenly find ourselves confronted with a Kingdom with no practical means of governance."

"I am not so (hem) certain of that," replied James.

Thomas said, "And he has already begun the process

himself. Clearly the Rock is intended to be a kind of Prime Minister, if he has the ‘keys of the Kingdom,’ whatever that means. But lesser offices have never been mentioned.”

“The problem is how we decide on who is to receive the offices,” said John’s brother. John thought that this was by no means the only problem. “All of this will be subject to the Master’s approval, of course. I have some ideas of my own, but you may not all agree.”

“We probably *will* not,” said Thomas. “Certainly not all of us.”

“Exactly.”

“No one has mentioned Andrew as yet, for instance—”
 No one has actually mentioned anyone, if it comes to that,” said James.

“True,” continued Thomas, “and I doubt if anyone will have the temerity to put himself forward—though I suspect that each of us has his own ideas on that score.”

“So what do we do? Do we draw lots?”

“Why not leave it up to the Master?” said Andrew.

“I would think that *you* of all people would be able to answer that question,” said Thomas. “He picked your brother Simon as second-in-command, did he not?”

Andrew reddened. “And what if he did?”

“Come, come, Andrew, be honest. Even your brother would have to admit how much better you would be at being leader of us all.”

“Actually, I agree,” said the Rock. The others looked over at him in embarrassment, not realizing that he was there. “*I* have no idea why he picked me. I thought at first it was one of his jokes, but he seems to be serious.”

“It does seem to me,” said James, “that it argues to

whether he is so spiritual that mundane practical considerations are best left to someone else. He might even admit this if one asked him.”

“Oh yes?” said Thomas. “I can see someone going up to him and saying, ‘Master, I admire your holiness and spirituality, but do you not think that someone else would be better suited to choosing who is actually to govern this Kingdom of yours—or of God’s, I mean.’ I dare anyone to try!”

“What is it you were discussing as you walked along?” came Jesus’ voice. He had come up behind them.

There was a dead silence.

There was a little boy on the edge of the crowd. Jesus beckoned him over, sat on a rock beside the road, stood him beside him, and put his arm around him. He looked at them. “Amen I tell you,” he said, “if you do not turn back and become like children, you will not *enter* the Kingdom of God. Whoever lowers himself and becomes like this child is the one who has a higher position in the Kingdom of God, and” he looked at the little boy, “whoever accepts one child like this in my name accepts me. One who accepts you is accepting me, and one who accepts me is accepting the One who sent me. Now let us have no more of this. Thank you, my son,” and he sent him back to his mother.

At this point, Jairus, the head of the local synagogue, came up to Jesus and said something to him. The people of Magdala had come out with Jairus, and the crowd around Jesus was now oppressive in its mass.

Jesus listened and then started out, with Jairus leading the way, when he suddenly stopped and looked around. Mary, who had come up close behind him, shrank back, expecting a rebuke

at her presumption.

“Who touched me?” he asked.

The look on his face did not encourage anyone to volunteer, and those next to him hastily denied it. Simon Rock blurted, “Master, with a crowd around like this, you get bumped into. What do you mean, who touched me?”

“No, no, someone *touched* me,” said Jesus. “I felt power go out of me.” And he kept looking around at the people, and finally an old woman came cringing forward and said, “It was I, good Master, I think.”

Jesus looked at her. “Forgive me, my good Master,” she went on. “I meant no harm; it is just that I had had this trouble for such a long time, and my daughter Judith told me—you see, the doctors had eaten up my whole savings and almost everything my daughter could earn—I have not been able to work for years and years, though I once was known as a seamstress inferior to none—”

Mary, now that she knew that Jesus was not rebuking her, looked over at the woman, and suddenly seemed to recognize her. That was interesting. Where could she have met such a person?

“—harm could it do, she told me,” the woman was continuing, “and she said I should go and ask you, and I said that we had no money to pay you, and so I felt I had no right to bother you; but it occurred to me that if I merely touched the tassel of your robe, that would be enough, and—you see, it is not that we would not pay you, it is just that we *have* no money, and I had no idea that it would cause you any distress, and . . .” She trailed off under Jesus’s gaze.

“Just what is this trouble you have had?” he asked.

“Bleeding, Master. Twelve years I have been bleeding, every day, not as wom—but always, you understand. Sometimes enough to fill a drinking-cup. You may ask my Judith; she has taken care of me these many years, she is such a wonderful daughter, and has worked also to keep us both alive.” There was a young girl, about David’s age, hovering at the back of the group, presumably Judith.

“And you spent all your money on doctors.”

“Whenever we could scrape any together, Master. Every mite went to them; everything we have left from food and the barest necessities. But nothing helped. Nothing. I was at my wits’ end, especially since my daughter had lost her work, and—” Her voice trailed off once again.

“And so you believed that merely by touching my robe, you could be cured,” Jesus was saying. The woman started once again to protest that she would pay when she could, and Jesus held up a hand. “You were correct. It was your belief that cured you; you may go in peace.”

As the woman held her hand up over her heart in incredulous relief and joy, Jairus, who had been growing more and more impatient at the interruption of his quest by this insignificant woman, but who did not dare remonstrate, managed to put himself in Jesus’s line of sight once again, and Jesus turned anew to follow him, when someone came up to Jairus and whispered in his ear. His face fell, and he looked over at Judith’s mother with fury.

His head then dropped in despair. He stood there for a moment, unable to move, and finally began to turn away, when Jesus laid a hand on his shoulder and said, “Do not be afraid. You believe also, and all will be well with her. Rock, I wish only

you and John and James to come with me; have the others remain here. There must not be a mob around the house; the girl is very sick.”

The four of them left with Jairus and his servant, and when they arrived at the house, there was wailing and gnashing of teeth, the neighbors mourning the loss of the little girl.

“Go away!” said Jesus, quietly but menacingly. “The girl is asleep, not dead, and should not be disturbed.” They laughed at him.

On the other hand, his tone and his actions commanded obedience, and so only the Rock, James, and John entered the house with the frantic parents. There was the girl, obviously a corpse, stretched out already for burial. John thought of David being carried out to the grave, and could have predicted what was going to happen.

Jesus went up to her, took her hand and said, “*Talitha, kum*,” “Stand up, my child,” and she stood up in perfect health, looking about in astonishment at the condition she found herself in. “Give her something to eat” said Jesus; “she is hungry,” and as the parents bustled about getting the shroud off the girl and fetching some bread, fish, and water, Jesus turned to the three and said, “Let us go,” and then turned back to the parents and told them, “Do not advertise this; it is too early. Say that she was very ill—as indeed she was—but now is well.”

“Thank you, Master! How can we thank you enough?”

“You can do so,” he answered, “by keeping quiet about what actually happened until—well, you will know when to reveal it. The authorities are not well-disposed toward me, and I have too much to do before I put myself into serious danger.”

The parents could not make head of tail of this, and the girl did not even try. When she found out that she had indeed been dead, she all but leaped around for joy.

They escaped and went back to the encampment. John vowed he would keep silence, but James and Simon evidently thought the prohibition did not apply to them, and freely told the whole incident to those in the group who would listen. Everyone who heard it was agog.

John was sure that the parents would not be able to keep the news to themselves, especially under the cross-examination of those who had witnessed the girl dead—and indeed, in short order the whole story became a matter of common knowledge.

John speculated again about why he, James, and the Rock were the ones to be witness to this, as they had been to what happened on Tabor. He surmised that something momentous was to happen to them, and they would need a spate of reminders of Jesus's divinity to see them through whatever ordeal Jesus saw coming toward them. John prayed, "Do not lead us into trouble, Master, and keep us from harm!" Ever since Jesus had taught them that prayer, John had said it three or four times a day. It soothed him.

Shortly thereafter, John happened to be walking at the back of the group, with Ezra. Thomas was ahead of him with Judas, interestingly enough. Suddenly, Thomas, who had just taken a deep draught from—evidently Judas's canteen, paused with an "Oh-my-God-what-am-I-to-do-now" look on his face, and finally, with a great effort of will spat out—a red liquid—onto the ground. He turned to Judas in fury.

"What are you trying to do?" he shrieked. "Kill me?"

"What?" said Judas. "Oh, Thomas, I am sorry! I thought

it was the canteen of water! Here! Drink this!” and he handed him the other one. Thomas took a mouthful—of water, this time—and tried to rinse away the taste. He spat it out and then took a long, long drink.

Ezra looked at John, “That was deliberate,”

“No!” said John.

“But yes,” he answered. “David and I have been watching him. He does not make mistakes thus; I am certain of it.”

“But why would he do such a thing?”

“—am dreadfully sorry, Thomas,” Judas was saying. “I cannot think! I was sure that one was the water!”

“You see?” said John.

“We are not done yet,” said Ezra.

“It is of no consequence,” said Thomas to Judas.

“I am happy to think that you suffered no ill effects,” he said. “Very happy.” He smiled a rather rueful smile, and they walked on together in silence.

“There you have it,” said Ezra. That was no accident. He wanted to test Thomas—and if he passed the test, perhaps plant in him the idea that all was well, and he could drink like a normal person again.”

“But he cannot!” said John. “Samuel told me—” He let it hang in the air.

“I know it also from Bartholomew’s mother. Many and many a time, she has given up drinking ‘for good,’ and then just had ‘one little drink,’ and found herself almost as far gone as Thomas. It cannot be done. Fortunately, from Thomas’s own experience, he knows this. He also has tried and failed in the past. No, the whole thing was deliberate.”

“But *why* would he do it?”

“Perhaps Judas does not know. But again, perhaps he does.”

“Ezra, do you realize that you are making him out to be—to be the devil himself?”

“I know not about that. I suspect the devil is cleverer than what we just saw. But I know what I have seen. Were you aware that he has a mansion in Jerusalem? One that makes Matthew’s house look like a barn, not to mention Bartholomew’s.”

“Well, what of that? He must have been rich before he joined us.”

“Then where is the ‘sell what you have and give to the poor?’ And besides, I have looked into it. He was not rich before he met Jesus—he was not poor either, by any means, but—no, the house and what is in it was furnished by contributions to Jesus for all of us.”

A shock went through John. “Can you prove this?”

“Not yet, but David and I are on the way.”

“I would have to see clear evidence if I were to believe it.”

“I know. That is why I have said nothing as yet. But the reason I tell you is that he seems to be attacking the weaknesses of those he sees. I would hate to have you fall into his grasp. I go for the moment to Thomas, to give him a bit of a warning also.”

He and Thomas spoke for a while in undertones, and finally Thomas said, “Fear not, Ezra, I will try no experiments,” and shortly afterward, Thomas went to Jesus and had a long talk with him. John was glad, especially when he heard Jesus say, “You did well, Thomas.”

“But I am afraid that it might lead me to—” He let the rest hang there, a plea.

“Do not rely on yourself. Trust in me, and do not worry.”

“I will try, Master.”

“Fear not, Thomas.” John thought that he overheard because he was meant to overhear. In any case, he resolved to take the lesson and try to trust harder in Jesus. “What do I have to fear? What can any mere human do to me,” he recalled from the psalm.

The next day, as they were near Capernaum, John happened to be at the edge of a clearing, with Mary on the opposite side, the sun glinting off her shining black hair. She did not seem to see him, and so he studied her. Clearly she was beautiful, with a beauty that somehow radiated innocence, almost, John thought, like Jesus’s mother, “Who is also Mary. Interesting.” But in the mother’s case—how *hard* it was to think of her as a mother; she was like a little girl in so many ways, except wisdom—it was innocence not in not knowing what sin is, but in never, it seemed, committing it. With Mary Magdalene, it was an art acquired by long practice, and now second nature to her. Only a very close look revealed the difference, and John was trying to see if he could discover it.

And also to learn why her appearance did not drive him crazy. Obviously, Matthew was already smitten. He could certainly appreciate her beauty, as one appreciates a beautiful sculpture, or a perfect landscape; but she did not arouse him. This worried him a great deal.

She saw him looking at her, and for just an instant, gave a pleading look—a kind of “Only you can save me” look, which John saw through instantly—as did she. She immediately turned red, and bowed her head to the ground in shame.

And then Judas walked though the clearing between them,

and John's heart leaped.

A few moments later, Ezra walked by and said to the air in front of him, "As I told you. Beware!" He gave no hint that he was aware that John was beside him and could hear, and walked on.

John, shaking his head, walked back to the encampment.

The next morning, he and James went home briefly, and greeted his mother and father. His mother said to James, "I have been thinking. I am going to see Jesus and ask that you and John have second and third place in the Kingdom that Jesus is going to—"
"Oh, please, Mother! No!" cried James, his face scarlet with embarrassment.

"Nonsense!" she countered. "You know as well as I that the Kingdom is almost upon us. And you know as well as I that he has known you for years, and appreciates your virtues—both of you. What harm could there be in putting in a word?"

"A great deal, Mother. Jesus does not operate in that way. He—"
"Not in that way? He is human, is he not?"

James was as certain as John that he was not *merely* human. And they had just had a rebuke on this subject. "Really, Mother, please! I wish you would not!"

"He is just down the road a bit. I see no harm in it. Come!"

What could they do? With scarlet faces, they followed her. She came up to Jesus, knelt before him and said, "I would ask a favor of you, Master."

He looked at her, and then with an amused smile at James and John, who immediately began studying the rocks in the path. "What would you like?" he asked, as much to them as to her. They were, of course, silent.

“Tell me that these two sons of mine will have second and third place when you become King,” she said.

He waited, and James and John had to look up at him from their contemplation of the ground. “You people,” he said, “do not know what you are asking. Can you drink out of the cup I am to drink from?”

There was another pause. John thought of what Jesus had predicted of himself. But when it came to that, he was ready to endure it, if necessary. He and James said at the same time, “We can.”

Jesus looked at both of them fondly. “Yes, you will drink from my cup,” he said with infinite sorrow and pity. “But second and third place in my Kingdom is not for me to give; it is for those my Father has prepared it for.” He patted both of them on the shoulder with an “I understand” gesture, and bowed to the mother, who turned and, in some pique, went back to their house. The two managed to slink off.

Someone had overheard this, however, and there was angry discussion about it. Jesus once again intervened, and said, “You have heard that Gentile authorities act like masters of slaves, and the nobles let the ordinary people feel their power. That is not how it is to be with you. If anyone wants to be of the upper class, he is to become your servant, and the one who wants the top rank is to be your slave. In the same way, the Son of Man did not come to be waited on; he came to serve—” and he paused and looked out at the horizon—“and to give up his life as a ransom for many, many others.”

John went to bed that night with the realization that he himself would probably be giving up his life as a ransom for many also. Could he drink the cup? In truth?

Twenty-Nine

The next night, John was in another clearing, where there was a brilliant star in the moonless sky, surrounded by the “ordinary” stars of what the Romans called “Orion” and “the bull.” Though those stars were bright, this one completely outshone them as if it wanted to be the only real star in the sky. It turned into another of John’s magic moments, and he stood there, fascinated, staring up at it in wonder.

Suddenly, someone brushed—caressingly, but very lightly—against his back. He spun around, making a fist, and it was Judas! His heart leaped again, and for a moment, he froze. It was a narrow path that John was on, and Judas, as he went by, looked as if he was totally unaware, not only of touching John, but that John was even there; he seemed deeply concentrated on something-or-other.

After looking at his back for a few moments, John decided that it would be silly to confront him, as if he had made an advance to John; he would simply deny it, with a bewildered expression. And why would he be trying to seduce John in any

case? Ezra's warning came to his mind, that Judas had begun attacking the weaknesses of Jesus's companions, "but," John thought to himself, "how could he know I had any attraction to him, and what would he have expected to get out of this if I had?" It made no sense, and after some reflection, John dismissed it from his mind, wondering if perhaps it was Ezra who had poisoned his thoughts.

But that—and practically everything else—was driven completely from his consciousness shortly afterward, when Jesus and the other eleven emissaries had gone into a lonely spot, after crossing the "sea" of Galilee in a boat, because Jesus had been so—one might say "pestered"—by the crowds that he decided that they should have a little time by themselves; they would return on the morrow. But it turned out that a positively enormous throng of people had divined where they were going, and had walked around the lake from Capernaum and all the surrounding area and caught sight of them; and Jesus, unwilling to simply send them away, had gone up a hill (it was not very far from the mountain where he had delivered his initial sermon), and he spoke to them at great length, sitting there, with the people ranged below him down toward the lake.

Finally, he said to the Twelve, who were gathered round him, "It is late, and the place is deserted." He turned to Philip, who happened to be beside him. "Where will we buy enough bread to feed all these people?" He had a twinkle in his eye as he said this.

"Half a year's salary," Philip answered, "would not buy enough bread so that everyone could have even a little!" He gazed out at the crowd in dismay. Jesus wore a little smile. He looked around as if for suggestions.

Andrew said, “There is a boy here with five barley loaves and a couple of fish. But” he added as he cast a glance out at the crowd, “what good would that do with all of them?” He waved his arm indicating the multitude.

“Have the people lie down to eat,” said Jesus. The place was quite grassy, and so they milled about and reclined on it, spreading themselves on the field halfway down the hill.

Jesus then took the loaves of bread from the boy, raised his eyes to the sky and thanked his Father for supplying them with food. And then he tore the loaves apart and handed the pieces to the Emissaries to distribute; and did the same with the two cooked fishes. And each of the Emissaries managed to get a piece either of bread or fish or both. John had some of each, a bit surprised at how large his pieces were, given the rather small size of the original batch.

But then as he broke off a piece of bread and gave it to a man lying there, he noticed how large a piece the man had, and looked back at his own, thinking that he had practically given all he had—and it was the same size as it had been! He handed him fully half of the fish he had also, and the same thing happened.

It was amazing! Astounding! He tried to look both at what he was giving and what he had left, and found that, at the slightest diversion of his glance from one to the other, the fragments in his hand had been restored, and the piece given to the other person was almost as big as his original piece. He simply could not discover when the substitution—for substitution it had to be—actually took place.

Mary, who had been wandering by herself, emerged from the path into the field, in front of Simon the Revolutionary, who came up and said, “Have you received any as yet?” and

when she answered No, he took a piece of barley bread he had, broke some off, and handed it to her.

“Is that enough?” he asked. “Take another.” And he tore off another rather larger chunk of bread from the piece he had and gave it to her. “Have some fish also,” he said, and took a piece of cooked fish he was carrying with the bread, broke it in two, and gave her half. “Is it not amazing?” he said, half to her and half to some people seated nearby.

“Is what amazing?” asked Mary.

“Look!” he said. “I gave you two large pieces of bread, and half of my fish, and see what I have left! What I started with! I have been trying to see when it grew back, and I cannot! It is just there when I want more! Is it not astonishing?”

Mary was about to make some remark, but Simon passed along to the group, asking everyone he met whether they wanted more, and saying, “You see? Your King is feeding you! With five loaves of bread and two little fish! And there are thousands of you! I have been counting. You must be five thousand men or more, not even counting the women and children! And all of you are being fed on these five loaves by your King! Or is Caesar your King? Or who is?”

And as he passed from group to group in the throng, the word “King” began to swell from the crowd like a chorus, and when finally the students came around with baskets to collect the leftovers and eventually filled twelve with what people no longer wanted, the cry of “King!” became a roar, as the people stood up, evidently to go up to Jesus and lift him on their shoulders and take him—to Jerusalem, to anywhere, they knew not; they were simply inflamed with enthusiasm.

But quickly the swell of hosannas turned into a confused,

“Where is he?” and Simon began running among them, from one student to the next, asking who had seen Jesus last. The most that could be gleaned was that he had been there, but had slipped away while everyone was distracted with collecting the marvelous harvest from the five loaves. “But he cannot have gone!” screamed Simon in anguish. “It is the perfect moment! Where is he?”

Nathanael put a long hand on his shoulder and turned him around. “Obviously,” he said, “he does not want to be King.”

“What do you mean, ‘does not want to be’? He *is* our King.”

“Then where is he?”

“That is what I want to know!” he shouted, and broke free. He ran off into the woods at the top of the hill, where Jesus must have gone; and after a short while came back, protesting and sputtering for people to help him look for the Master. But the others said that the Master knew what he was doing, and that if he wanted to be made King, he would appear and allow himself to be proclaimed King; but if he did not, everyone here could search the whole hill, and he would be nowhere to be found.

Simon would not calm down for a considerable time, well after the crowd had thinned out a great deal, and night had begun to fall; and even then, all he did was hang sulking about the periphery of the little band of students.

They, on the other hand, were ebullient. “Did you see Philip’s face,” laughed John’s brother James, “when the Master asked him how we were to buy bread to feed all these people?”

“Well how was I to know what he planned to do?” said Philip, evoking a roar of laughter in everyone, who continued

teasing him unmercifully in their joy, while some related anecdotes about the people in the crowd, how everyone tried to find out how the bread multiplied itself—and no one, not even the students, could fathom it; there simply always was more. Like everything Jesus did, it was perfectly simple, and perfectly impossible to understand.

John thought that perhaps he did not want to be king—now, but what he had done indicated that he wanted *the people* to think of him as their King. The Reign of God in the person of Jesus was coming fast. And just as John suspected, there were probably not going to be prime ministers and ministers of defense and state and so on in *this* Kingdom; not if the debacle with his mother meant anything.

But night was falling apace, and Jesus was still somewhere on the hill—or nowhere, or perhaps already in Capernaum. “What shall we do?” they asked each other. “He told us we were to be in Capernaum tomorrow. Shall we wait, or get into the boat now?”

“There is only the one boat,” said Simon Rock, “and”—looking at Mary—“there are more of us now than when we came over. Will we all fit in?”

“Do not concern yourself,” said Thomas. “It is a fine night, though it looks as if there might be a wind later. You go ahead in the boat if you think you want to risk it, in case he has somehow gone ahead of us. I will walk, and see you there probably around noon.” He asked if anyone wanted to accompany him, and Simon the Revolutionary, who was not very interested in chitchat, volunteered, as did Mary and a few others, including women who were driving donkeys with bundles of the group’s nomadic provisions.

John and James took two of the oars, with the Rock and Andrew behind them (that is, toward the bow). John was happy thinking of Andrew at his back. At first, they flew over the water (ordinarily, only two manned the oars), toward the middle of the “sea,” which was the direct route to where they were going.

After a while, the conversation among those riding died down, as people looked up at the sky and saw the stars disappear. John glanced at Nathanael, who was sweating and trying not to panic. Then one of those sudden squalls all the fishermen feared began to blow up. The four oarsmen dug in with all their might as the waves rose, and everyone silently pulled with them mentally, as they struggled harder and harder. In a short while, Philip took over John’s oar, and “little James” the one of “big James,” while Judas, who was strong, spelled Andrew, and Thaddeus, of all people, took over from the Rock, who came to the stern beside Matthew, where Thaddeus had been sitting, and looked out, panting.

Suddenly, he straightened. “Behold!”

“What is it?” came from several voices. The oarsmen were too busy trying to hold the boat on course.

“It looks like the Master!” John looked out. There was a man walking toward them. *Walking!*

“The Master? What boat could he be in? Ours was the only one.”

“He is not in a boat! He is walking over the water!”

“What?” “Where?” “You are out of your mind!”

“Look there astern! See for yourselves!”

“It *is* the Master!” “It is a ghost! They have killed him!” “Who is out of his mind now?” “How can anyone walk on top of the water? You are all seeing things!”

“No, it is truly the Master!” shouted the Rock over the roar of the storm. “Master, if it is you, tell me to come to you over the water!” Typical, thought John. Let him try!

“Come!” came the voice—clearly, Jesus’s voice.

The Rock stepped out of the boat and took a few steps toward Jesus—and then made the mistake of looking down. Immediately, he sank. “Master! Help!” Typical, thought John again. And he is our leader!

Jesus was suddenly up to him, reached out his hand, and lifted him up. “You skeptic!” he said, in an amused, not unkindly tone. “Why did you doubt?” He brought the Rock up to the boat, and both climbed in.

—And suddenly, the wind and rain stopped, and they found that they were on the shore they had been trying to reach. No one said a word, all cowed by what they had witnessed. Not only food, but even the winds and the sea were his slaves, and did his bidding at not even a word, but a mere nod of his head. More confirmation. Always more confirmation! Then why was *John* doubting? He resolved to put such things out of his head.

—Which, of course, was easily said.

He saw Matthew glance over at Judas, as overwhelmed as all the rest. He seemed, nevertheless, to be trying to see if this fit in with his view of what Jesus was, and making adjustments to his theory. Well, good luck to him, thought John. He hoped it would destroy his theory and bring him back to his senses. What he thought Jesus *should* be doing was close to a direct contradiction of what Jesus was in fact doing. But John was too aware of how theoreticians could squeeze facts to fit their preconceived notions.

They found a sheltered, dry spot and caught a blessed couple of hours of sleep, and then proceeded to the synagogue in Capernaum in silence, everyone too tired to talk—and, it must be said, too overwhelmed with the miraculous bread and the command Jesus had over the elements to think of anything to say.

Outside the synagogue, Jesus again found himself surrounded by a crowd, many of whom had come round already by land, or perhaps in other boats that went by, from where they had been staying. They had informed the rest of the miraculous multiplication of the loaves and fishes, and the whole crowd was abuzz. Jesus, however, did not speak with anyone until they were in the synagogue, and everyone had settled down a bit because they were in a holy place.

Finally, he sat down and looked at them. “Rabbi, when did you get here?” someone asked before he could begin speaking. They had seen the students go alone into the boat, and there were no other boats there.

“Amen amen I tell you,” said Jesus solemnly, “you are not looking for me because you saw evidence; you are here because you had a meal and filled yourselves with the bread. Do not be bothering about food that spoils; pay attention to food that stays fresh for eternal life: food that the Son of Man will give you, because this is the task the Father has assigned to him.”

So the miraculous bread was a sign—but of what? Jesus seemed to be saying that it was a sign of some kind of food. Was this to be the food that would end all hunger? Was this how the Kingdom was to begin?

But they ignored it. They were more interested, obviously, in how they could have Jesus repeat what he had done for

them. “But what are we supposed to do,” they asked “if we are to concern ourselves with what God wants of us?”

“God’s task for you,” answered Jesus, “is for you to believe in the one he sent.”

Well, if Jesus was going to give them “true food,” then they would have to believe that he could do it; the bread and the fish were just an indication: a sign.

“Very well,” they answered, “but how do you go about proving that *you* are the one we are to believe in? What *is* this task God has given you? Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, after all, as it says in Scripture, ‘He gave them bread *from heaven* to eat.’” The unspoken implication seemed to be, “but all you have done is multiplied ordinary bread.” They seemed, thought John, to be at least in the right path, though they were still thinking in material terms.

“Amen amen I tell you,” Jesus answered, “Moses did not give you bread *from heaven*.” He emphasized the word as his questioner had done, “but my Father will give you bread that really does come from heaven. God’s bread is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” There it was. He was the bread, somehow.

“Ah! Then give us this bread, Master, all the time!”

“*I* am the bread that comes down from heaven.” said Jesus. “A person who comes to me will never be hungry, and one who believes in me will never feel thirst.” So he *was* the bread. But what did it mean? Simply believing in him, perhaps as divine? No, there had to be more here.

And he heard the people say to each other, “You see? It was nothing but ‘listen to me’ all over again. Bread from heaven indeed! One could *eat* the manna!”

“I told you, you saw the evidence just now, and yet you still do not believe me. But everyone my Father gave me comes to me, and I will not turn my back on anyone who comes to me, because I came down from heaven to do the will of the one who sent me, not what I please.”

And now he made the bald claim that he came down from heaven, and was evidently sent by God, whose will he was fulfilling. John became more and more excited.

At this point, he saw Mary come into the synagogue, and—of course—Matthew went over to her immediately. John, looking on with amusement, missed some of what Jesus was saying.

Whatever it was, it did not sit well with the congregation. They were grumbling to themselves more and more loudly, saying things like, “Is this not the Jesus that is Joseph’s son?” Another answered, “It is. We know his father and mother. How can he claim that he ‘came down from heaven?’”

“What are you complaining about?” said Jesus. “No one can come to me unless he is drawn by the Father who sent me—and then I will bring him to life on the last day. There is a prophesy, ‘They will all be instructed by God.’ Everyone who has listened to the Father and learned from him comes to me; no one has seen the Father except the one who is at God’s side. He has seen the Father.”

So now he was saying not only that he had come from the Father, but that he “is” at God’s side, and “has seen” the Father. The Pharisees doubtless would make much of this. But the people had begun to listen.

“—has eternal life.” he was saying. “I am bread for life. Your ancestors ate manna in the desert and died; but this is

bread that comes down from heaven for people to eat and not die. I am living bread that comes down from heaven, and if anyone eats this bread, he will live forever.” He paused, seemed to be inspired by an idea, stroking his beard in his characteristic way, and then continued, “And the bread I am to give you is the meat of my body, for the life of the world.”

A shock went through John—as it went through the whole congregation. The meat of his body? What could he possibly mean?

“How can this man give us the meat of his body to eat?” said the people to each other. John saw Mary cover her eyes with her hands. Had she been talking to Judas? John had heard that Judas was claiming that the power that went through Jesus was driving him mad. And what he just said *sounded* mad.

Except that he *was* God. After all John had seen, how could he doubt it? So for him, the question was how Jesus could do it. He clearly was not going to break off a finger and give it out as he had the loaf or the fish; his stroking of his beard seemed to indicate that a way that was not so literal—or materially literal—had occurred to him, but what could it possibly be?

Jesus evidently heard the congregation, but instead of explaining himself, he went on, “Amen amen I tell you that if you do *not* eat the meat which is the Son of Man’s body—and drink his blood!—” The congregation gasped once again, “—you will not have life in you!” Jesus seemed more intense now than he had ever been. This was the acid test. He would either find believers, or he had sealed his doom, and he obviously knew it, because he was looking more around at the Twelve than at everyone else. Matthew stared at him open-

mouthed, and Mary was about to weep. Judas was looking at the floor, shaking his head.

“—meat which is my body is real food, and my blood is real drink. Anyone who eats the meat of my body and drinks my blood lives in me and I in him. Just as my living Father sent me and I live through the Father, anyone who eats me will live through me. *This* is the bread that comes down from heaven. Not what your ancestors ate. They died. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever!”

People were now saying, “That is disgusting! How can anyone listen to it?”

Jesus looked around at all of them, as they murmured to one another in their outrage. But still he did not explain himself. “You find that difficult to accept, do you not? What if you were to see the Son of Man rise up to where he was before? Spirit is what gives life; matter is of no use at all; and what I have told you is spirit and life, and there are some of you who do not believe it!”

Ah! John was right. There was a *spiritual* sense to this. We *would* eat his flesh somehow, but not in the obvious, cannibalistic way.

—John hoped.

But it seemed that there was not one of them who believed this, except perhaps John, and even he wondered. But his faith had been bolstered by what he saw on the mountain, and by all the other incidents, not least those of the preceding day. *Walking on top of a heaving sea!* It was no surprise that most people simply dismissed what he was saying as crazy, and not too surprising that those of the Twelve who had not been on the mountain had serious difficulties.

“—why I said that no one can come to me unless he is given the power to do it by my Father.”

But Jesus was now talking to the backs of the congregation, who were streaming out the doors saying that he might be able to cure the sick, but he was mad, and anyone who listened to him was as mad as he.

Finally, there were left merely the Twelve and one or two others. Jesus looked at them, as they gazed expectantly at him, all of them hoping—praying—for an explanation, such as those he would give them privately about his stories. But Jesus said, with infinite sorrow, “Do you wish to go away too?”

There was a dead silence, and a few shuffled their feet. One or two—not of the Twelve—did leave, shaking their heads in disillusionment. Judas was among those who stayed; but he had his eyes fixed on the mosaic on the floor beneath him, almost in embarrassment.

Finally, after what seemed an eternity, Simon Rock spoke up, with tears in his voice. “Master, to whom would we go? We know that what you say is eternal life, and—and we have believed that you are the Holy One of God. We—we know this.”

Jesus smiled poignantly at the masterful effort. “Did I not choose you twelve?” he said. Then his eyes lifted themselves to the mountains on the other side of the lake and beyond them to the infinity he had just said he had come from, and added, “And one of you is a devil!”

Thirty

As John tried to sleep that night, he finally resolved that he would have to trust Jesus and wait for him to clarify what he meant. He was clearly testing their faith in him; he wanted them to realize that he was not mad, and to trust that what he said would make sense, but at the proper time.

Well, what else could he do?

The next day, he was looking around for someone to talk to, but everyone seemed (understandably) preoccupied, trying hard, like him, to believe, because “to whom else shall we go?” The Rock had made the perfect response, John had to admit.

Ezra, whom he had not seen for a while, happened to be nearby, and John, who had not seen him in the synagogue, asked if he were there.

“I was indeed,” answered Ezra. “There is something very mysterious underneath all this.”

“So you do not think he is mad.”

“Mad? If he is mad, who is sane? No, he means *something* that makes sense—somehow. But he wants us to wait and see.”

“That was what I thought.”

“By the way,” said Ezra, “I happened to notice you that night a while ago when Judas brushed against you. I expected a fight, but you showed remarkable restraint.”

“Well, I suppose he did not even realize he had done it.”

“Ah. Still, you did not respond as you did to that clod who confronted Mary Magdalene.”

“Oh, that. I am not proud of myself there, mainly for what I said to Andrew.”

“True. Poor Andrew! It hit a little too close to home.”

“But Andrew is a great man. We had a little talk, and he even said he admired *my* self-control.”

“Well, I am glad it ended not badly. I was a bit worried.”

“Thank God! I was frantic that night! I would that James had come and grabbed me as he used, before I could have done any damage!”

“Grab you?”

“Well, I was much worse when I was younger, you see. I would become frustrated with a toy or something and simply lose control and smash things. James could see it coming, and he would get behind me and put his arms about me, keeping me from moving until I calmed down. Jesus, in fact, found us thus when he called us. I was about to cut up the nets that had become tangled.”

Ezra looked at him quizzically, and said, “You mean, thus?” and went behind John, putting his arms rather tightly around him.

A shock went through John, seeing those huge, muscular black arms crossed in front of his chest, and feeling the heat of Ezra’s body against his back. “Yes,” he said huskily, and cleared

his throat.

Ezra let him go, but as he did so, one of his hands brushed against John's stiffening member. He went in front of him again, facing him, with one of his brilliant smiles; and then his pink tongue came out of his mouth and moistened his lips. They gleamed like polished brown leather. John did not know what to do. "Master, help me! Help me!" he breathed—or rather, panted, to himself.

Ezra smiled again. "That is not how I would have done it," he said. "I would have done this," and he came up to John and hugged him from the front—and then brought his face to John and kissed him with those *soft* brown lips—and then John, whose mouth had dropped open in surprise, felt Ezra's tongue pressing against his, and playing with it.

He thought he was going to faint.

He then felt Ezra's hand cover his now completely stiff member, and then Ezra took John's hand and put it over his own absolutely colossal maleness. The heat of it under his tunic startled him. "Please help me, Master!" he thought, desperate.

By what seemed a superhuman effort of will, he pulled his hand away and put it against Ezra's chest, pressing—feebly, it must be said, secretly hoping Ezra would resist and show him more of this subject about which he seemed to know all there was to know.

But Ezra began to back off. When his mouth was freed, John whispered—because he could not talk—"Please, Ezra, no!"

And to his great disappointment, Ezra took a full step back, and held up his hands, his tan palms facing John in a gesture of surrender. "What?" he said.

“I am sorry, Ezra—I—I cannot.”

Ezra looked at him, puzzled. “Why?”

It occurred to John, not for the first time, that he did not really know why. “I know not,” he said, “but it—but it is wrong.”

Ezra dropped his hands, and said, “*I see nothing wrong with it. You like it, and you can see that I like it. What is the problem?*”

John could not think of a reply, and just stood there, panting. He could not take his eyes off the enormous bulge in Ezra’s tunic.

“In fact,” Ezra said, “my first owner—the slave trader, you know—used to train us in how to give all the different kinds of pleasure, particularly to men, because many men bought us just for that purpose, and we had to know what to do so that we did not get hurt.”

John, shocked, said, “You mean, Talmai—?”

Ezra laughed. “Good heavens, no! I made a few overtures to him, and it was perfectly clear that he not only had no idea what I was doing, but would have been horrified if he did. And in case you are wondering, Bartholomew had no interest in it either. But I did find out later that some of the slaves of the neighborhood needed to learn what I knew, and so—but that is a different story.”

He put one hand over his maleness, John thought at first to cover it, but it was to caress it. John stared, fascinated. “But what I meant to say was that my first master was a devout Judean also, and he had no problem with it either. I was even a favorite of his; he once told me that he could not wait until I grew up and could do to him what he was doing to me.” He

smiled again, one of his dazzling smiles.

John did not know whether he was more excited or horrified by what Ezra said, and by his attitude, and what he was doing. Finally, he was able to answer, "But I cannot believe it is not wrong. I am sorry, Ezra, but—" he could think of no way to finish the sentence.

"You are not angry with me?" he asked.

"Angry! Oh, Ezra!"

"We can still be friends, I hope."

"Of *course* we can! You know I would dearly love to—but I simply cannot."

"I cannot say that I understand, but I respect you. I would hate to have lost a friend because I misinterpreted—you see, my master told us how to read subtle signals people gave, and you—but I see it was not—but no damage has been done, thank God!"

"No damage at all, my good friend."

"I am so happy to hear that!" and he added, as a kind of afterthought, "I have so few friends."

John went over to him and gave him a very brief hug, but without a kiss. It was hard—very hard—to withdraw. It would be so wonderful to—but that was not to be thought of. "But I think I need to be by myself for a while. You understand?"

"I understand. Peace, my *very good* friend." Was that not what Daniel said?

"Peace," said John, thinking, "They say, 'Peace, peace,' but there is no peace."

Certainly, there was none for him, for quite a while. His whole being was cursing him for not exploring the whole thing further, and his mind was thanking God that he did not. He was

sure that if he found out anything more, he would be trapped. Even now, his mouth and tongue tingled for a full hour afterwards.

He presumed that he had won a victory, but everything in him told him it was a defeat. Why had he not gone forward? Why? What harm would it have done?

"It would have trapped me," he repeated to himself, not believing it, even while he knew that it was true.

Fortunately, he soon had a distraction. Jesus and the students were, as usual, in a synagogue, and John was surprised to find that the incomprehensibility of what he had said did not seem to diminish his popularity among the people, because he continued to perform cures that were increasingly amazing, and so the synagogue was as packed as before. After a short while, there was a stirring from outside, and eventually word came through to the front that Jesus's mother and relatives were at the door, wanting to see him.

"Who is my mother?" said Jesus when he heard this, "and who are my relatives?" He raised his hand and waved it over the congregation. "Here are my mother and relatives. Anyone who listens to what God says and acts on it is my mother and my sister and my brother." So now his relatives were "spiritual" relatives. There was more spiritual significance to everything as the hours went on. John only hoped that what had passed between him and Ezra could be spiritualized somehow. He almost laughed at the thought.

But he would have to see Jesus to find out what was wrong with what Ezra wanted, because the more he let himself think about it, the less he could find against it. And if there really *was* nothing wrong with it, he knew now where to find a

teacher—and such a teacher! “Stop that!” he said aloud to himself, and then looked around to see if anyone heard.

Jesus, having heard the news about his relatives, curtailed his discourse and went outside, where he found his mother and a number of people John had only seen in passing: Jesus’s cousins.

“I would not disturb you,” she said in calm voice, “but they insisted that they wished to speak with you as soon as possible—and finally, I told them I would see what I could do.”

“They understood well the best approach,” said Jesus. Then he turned to a group of two or three others who were with her. “But you knew that there was no necessity for this. I am still what I was; I have not changed from the time we played at castles and soldiers in these very streets. I am not some Caesar, who grants audiences.”

“True,” said a thin, pale man, half a head taller than Jesus. He was a little younger, it seemed, perhaps in his late twenties. He fingered his robe nervously, and temporized, “It was the crowd. We tried to get by them to see you, and could not force our way in—and we thought that if you knew we were outside, you would come out to meet us.”

It was obvious that this was a half-truth, perhaps even a little less. At least in this man’s case, the fact that his playmate had become a miracle-worker and a preacher of such intense power had intimidated him.

“Actually,” said a very brown man whose beard was beginning to be grizzled, though his hair was still black. He had enormous eyebrows and a nose rather more sharp than most, “I was the one who wanted to see you before I left to go back to Alexandria. We are both too busy, are we not?”

"I do seem to be rather occupied at present, James," replied Jesus. "I am sorry I did not make more leisure to have a long chat. You leave soon?"

So *this* James did not live in Nazareth. What did he say? Alexandria? Was that not in Egypt? The world seemed to be full of Jameses.

"—morrow, I fear. Business. But I have heard much about you—in fact, there are a few stirrings as far away as Egypt, would you believe, and not simply among the relatives you have there, either. Not much, you understand, but your name begins to be mentioned now and again. And that was my real motive for speaking to you. You must leave this place for Judea so that you will have an audience for what you do. People do not do great deeds in secret, they want to be noticed. If you *are* a magician, you must go show yourself to the world."

A "magician!" Obviously, this James did not really know what was going on. He seemed to be a merchant of some sort, perhaps just passing through.

The others nodded, and the first one said, "The Festival of the Booths is near. You could come down with us. We would be delighted to have you."

Jesus smiled at them, and said, "Thank you for your concern, James—to all of you," with a special nod at James, "but the right time has not come for me yet. For you, any time would be a good time, because the world does not hate you. But the fact is that it hates me, because what I do proves to it that its deeds are evil."

James tried to make a demurrer, and Jesus answered his thought, "No, I am deadly serious. You go down to the festival; I cannot accompany you, I am afraid. It might be dangerous."

They made polite noises of insistence, but they were short-lived. The rumors of Jesus's wild statements had doubtless reached them, and these last remarks of his tended more than anything to confirm suspicions that he might indeed be mad.

"Well," said James, "I thought it a good idea to propose it; but I can see that it has already occurred to you, and doubtless you have good and sufficient reason for what you are doing. As to me, of course, I must go and make myself ready for the journey. Some one of these days, we must get together and talk. And if you ever do come down to Alexandria, my house, as always, is open; and you can be sure that I will put in a word in certain circles and see to it that you are well received. From what I have been hearing, if you continue as you have been doing, there will not be a sick person left in Galilee or any of the surrounding countryside."

The others murmured assent, and each found an excuse to leave. They clearly did not know what to make of this new person, for all of his protestations that he had not changed.

Finally, only Jesus' mother remained, greeting all the students. John was especially happy—and relieved—to see her. She walked back with them to the place where they were staying, which was not an encampment this time, but various houses in and around Capernaum. She was staying there also, not in Nazareth.

She remained with them the night and the Rock and John prevailed upon her to stay for most of the next day also. It passed with little fanfare, like a day in the middle of Spring, which one does not notice while it is passing, because it is a kind of paradigm of what a day should be, and only afterwards reflects on its peace and contentment, wishing it could have

continued forever.

Everyone had already been gone for two days to the celebration in Jerusalem before Jesus said that he had decided to go after all, and the group left, going along the Jordan once again.

On the trip, John found the opportunity to take Jesus aside—he suspected that Jesus had made the opportunity. He said, “I had a—a talk—with Ezra a couple of days ago.”

“And you did well again, John. I am proud of you.” Of *course* he knew all about it. Well, that saved descriptions.

“Then you know that he asked me why I thought it was wrong, and I had no answer for him.”

“And you want one. Not just what Leviticus said, but why it was said.”

“You see, it occurred to me that if we can talk to animals, who cannot understand us—”

“Why can we not have relations with men, who cannot conceive.”

“That was what occurred to me.”

“It is a subtle thing, but essentially, it is a lie, John.”

“But how?”

“Well, first of all, as to the analogy you gave, you must realize that we have no organ of speech as such; we simply have an organ that makes noises, and we use that to communicate. But we also communicate with our hands, as when we write or make signs. The point is that there is no organ dedicated to communication.”

“And so?”

“So if we make sounds that to us mean something and to an animal mean nothing, then we are being perfectly consistent

with our ability to make sounds. Lies in communication occur only when one tries actually to communicate as a fact something that one knows is not a fact. Then the very act of factual communication contradicts itself, and so is wrong.”

“But this is not the same with the organ we are talking about.”

“No. You see, *that* organ, is, among other things, dedicated to a human being’s most noble physical act: that of cooperating with the Father in producing a being with a spiritual soul, one who is free and eternal, who can decide for himself what it is to be himself. And so, this act that this organ induces us to perform is far, far beyond the capacity of the unaided human being; it enlists God’s help.”

“I never thought of it in that way.”

“I say this because with this act, we are not playing games. It is by its nature a sacred act. True, it gives pleasure, and intense pleasure, as you and everyone else know, because the responsibility of seeing to the rearing of a child is enormous and a severe trouble, and the incentive to have one must be great, or the human race would quickly die out.”

“—I guess I can see that.”

“And also, that organ normally is such that one is attracted to those with whom one can perform the act of producing a child. And it tends to attach oneself to that other person, so that the child can be properly reared. The Father has not been remiss in designing the organ and its act.

“But human beings are, of course, not perfect. Some, as you are aware, have a defective attraction, just as some people are crippled, either from birth or because of some accident.”

“Very good. I see that also. How well I see that!”

“But the point is that it is wrong to try to *exercise* that act *as if* it had only the function of pleasure or of expressing one’s love for another. Because it is *also* the act of possibly producing a child. And, of course, if a man uses his organ with another man, his exercise of it has nothing to do with there being a child—he uses it as if it were a different kind of act altogether, or as if the whole were only part of what it is. But it still really *is* the act that is intended to result in a child, as can be seen from the act when it reaches its completion. You understand?”

“You men when—when it is—what happens at the end? I see.”

“And so, to exercise it under these circumstances is always in fact a lie, however natural it might feel, because it is *not* merely something that gives pleasure or even expresses love. It is more than that; but it cannot be more than that between two men. Or women, of course. So it is dishonest when exercised in this way.”

“Also,—and I realize this does not apply to you, but it may occur to you—if a man exercises the act with a woman and tries to block its action so that no child will result, then this too is pretending that the organ and the act are only part of what they really are. Once again, they are really more than that, as the completion of the act even there shows. Here, it is even clearer, because when the blocking of the act fails, the act succeeds—because that is what it is. But of course, the person wants the act, but not its success; he wants a failed act. Hence, he does not want the act to do what it does. Thus, to use the organ in this way is also a lie. I mention this because there are multiple ways to be dishonest with this most noble physical act we can perform; and some involve a man and a woman.”

“But then why can old people use their organs? *They* cannot succeed in having children.”

“Ah, well, with old people, or in general infertile people, the *act* they perform is the same act as the act that produces a child; it is just that either the man or the woman is not fertile. What they are doing is not a lie. After all, not every act, in fact only a minority of acts among healthy men and women do not result in a child, because the faculty is not constructed so that it produces a child every time it is exercised. Thus, what an old couple is doing is consistent with what the act is in itself.

“It is only when the act is such that either it can have nothing to do with a child—as with you and Ezra—or when one tries actively to prevent it from doing what it does, that the act is a lie. In the one case, one exercises a child-producing act in such a way that it cannot even be thought of as such; in the other case, one exercises the act but tries to make it not what it is. Do you see?”

John paused. “I will have to think about it, but what you say makes sense. But I have no idea how I could convince Ezra, or Daniel, of this.”

“Ah, well, It is not your task, John, to get into philosophical discussions with others, or even try to persuade them—except by being what you are. Secretly, because facts tend to make themselves known, they have a suspicion that they are doing wrong—that they are not really being honest—but they do not let themselves think of it, because the attraction, as you are painfully aware, is so strong—and you were very wise not to experience it yourself for that very reason—but when they see you, who clearly would like to join them, but will not let yourself, that is your way of preaching to them, if you will; you

need do nothing further. Your being and your actions tell them what they are already secretly aware of. Of course, if they ask you, you can tell them what you know.”

“I am relieved to hear that. And you think I need not stop being friends with them.”

“Unless the temptation becomes too strong. One must be prudent. I would not try to be alone with them for any length of time, for instance. But if you can remain just friends, you can, as I said, do them good simply by being their friends.”

“Well, thank you, Master. You have given me much to think upon. Much.”

“Never hesitate to come to me, for any reason. Remember, you are the student I particularly love, because you are the student who needs me most.”

“Thank you. I am so deeply grateful.”

“And do not be afraid, because of all this, to love me. Do not be afraid to love anyone, in fact. Or to express it by a hug, for instance, but not as Daniel would wish you to.”

John did not know what to reply. He never thought of the Master as anything but the Master. He was in awe of him, and *did* love him, very deeply, as one loves a kind and understanding father.

Thirty-One

They ARRIVED in JERUSALEM AT evening, and went to the Gethsemani garden again, and as they traveled severally through the night by different routes (since Jesus did not want in known where the whole group was going), John was startled when a voice came out of the shadows, “Is Judas here?” It was Ezra, all but invisible.

“I think I saw him earlier. Perhaps he has arrived at the garden already.”

“If so, he will not be alone, and we must wait.”

“For what?”

“Bartholomew and I have resolved—but perhaps it is better that you not know. It is just that I am so enraged!”

“Enraged? At Judas? About what?”

“I should not—I cannot keep it in! That fiend! That devil! put a *tarantula* in Bartholomew’s pouch during the night! I saw him do something to the pouch, but did not realize what it was. And then early this morning, for the first time, he condescended to notice my existence—we were traveling together—and asked me to go to Jacob’s well for water. Bartholomew had not waked yet. When I came back, Judas was gone, and Bartholomew was in a panic. He had put his hand into his pouch, and felt the

spider—he has a deadly fear of spiders—and almost could not speak! He must pay for this!

“And dearly!”

“Did it bite him?”

“No, but it frightened him half to death!” He disappeared again, looking for Judas.

John, who knew that Nathanael was a timid soul, could imagine how he must have felt. He said nothing as Ezra left, and his rage at Judas grew. He *was* the devil Jesus had said. And yet Jesus was doing nothing, for some reason!

And suddenly there was Judas, walking pensively along, not ten cubits away. John dashed over and said, “Judas, did you put a tarantula in Nathanael’s pouch?”

“What?” said Judas. “You have been listening to that lying slave of his?”

“He is not a liar!”

“Oh, please! One need only look at him—of course, only in the daytime. He is as black as the night.”

“And what of that ‘mistake’ with your wine canteen with Thomas?”

“What of it? It was a mistake.”

“You could have killed him!”

“Come now. Is he any the worse for it? What are you trying to accuse me of?”

“That is what I wish to find out! And brushing up against me!”

“When did I ever ‘brush against’ you?”

“You know you did! That night not long ago!”

“You are out of your mind.”

“Now you are calling *me* a liar.”

“Well, when you say things that are not, what am I to call you?”

“I know what I call *you*, what the Master himself called you—a devil!”

“What is this, little boy? You wish to pick a fight with me? Indeed? You think you are Ezra, or can fight his battles? I can handle Ezra, and I can certainly handle you!”

“If you wish a fight, I am more than willing!” He made a fist.

“Very well, strip, and let me teach you a lesson or two.” Judas, with an anticipatory grin on his face, threw off his mantle and tunic, as did John, and they faced each other. John threw a punch, which Judas skillfully dodged, and then—

John suddenly found himself flat on his back on the ground. Judas threw himself on top of him, and expertly pinned him down.

“You thought it would be easy, did you not?” he panted, still grinning. John struggled to get free, but Judas held him fast, and was moving his naked body back and forth on top of him. That beautiful body! In spite of himself, he found himself becoming aroused.

“Admit it, you enjoy it!” Judas panted, as he kept moving. John struggled harder, as Judas was obviously arousing himself also upon John’s body; John could feel it.

He stopped struggling for a moment, but it did not help; he was still rapidly becoming aroused, and the thought occurred to him that Judas might interpret this as acquiescence in what was going on. And so he struggled once again, harder, giving Judas more trouble in keeping him down while he worked on him. He was no longer wasting his breath making comments.

This went on, it seemed forever, with both men reaching a higher and higher pitch of excitement, until finally, to John's humiliation, shame, and rage, he reached climax—and then Judas did also. He kept holding him down as the reaction began, still moving on the slippery mess on John's abdomen. John was disgusted and sick with shame, as well as weak from the reaction to all of this.

And then Judas stood up, breathing hard, and said, "Well! You seemed to have had quite a good time! I suspected as much. But I hope you have learned your lesson about challenging your elders and betters. There is a stream over there where you can wash—but I think I myself will wear my victory for a while." And he picked up his tunic and put it on over his reeking body, and donned his mantle and walked away.

John lay there for a considerable time, unable to move from the reaction, but even more from despair at the fact that he *did* receive pleasure from what Judas had done to him; intense pleasure.

In fury at both Judas and himself, he turned on his stomach and pounded the ground with his fist in impotent rage. "How *could* I have let him *do* that!" he whispered, and then began to sob with guilt and murderous anger.

The tears now silently streaming down his face, he sprang up, grabbed his tunic and mantle and rushed over to the stream where he washed himself off over and over again. "How *could* I? How *could* I? How *could* I? How *could* I?" He was furious with himself for allowing Judas to trip him onto his back, as well as for the *pleasure* he felt in what Judas was doing! How *could* he?"

He crept off to the garden and lay down by himself, but

could find no sleep. He kept reproaching himself and cursing Judas. “I hope Ezra kills him! *Someone* should do it. *I myself* will kill him if I see him again!” And as the night wore on and on, the recriminations became more and more confused and nebulous, a sort of separate person of guilt that was shouting incoherent things in his ear.

When he woke, it must have been around noon—for he did sleep finally, near dawn—everyone had left. He rose, with a raging headache, and staggered across the Kidron Brook into Jerusalem, where he supposed he would see Jesus in the Temple.

And sure enough, there he was. He went beside Andrew in the crowd around Jesus. Andrew put his arm over his shoulder and drew him to himself, as they heard Jesus say,

“—give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s,” at which everyone laughed and commented, “Excellent!” “Look at their faces! They are enraged!” He looked at Andrew, who said, “They asked him if one should pay taxes to Caesar or not, and he asked for a denarius and asked whose image was on it, you see.”

But while Andrew was saying this, some others dragged a woman forward, her hair askew and robes rumpled, struggling to free herself from their grasp. They stood her in front of Jesus.

“Rabbi, this woman has been arrested in the very act of adultery; and Moses in the Law has commanded us to stone her sort. What do you have to say about it?”

The crowd fell silent once again; this trap was not one he could extricate himself from by clever wordplay. If he dismissed her, he was violating the Law; but how could a man who claimed to be able to forgive sins stone a sinner? John noticed Mary Magdalene over on the other side of the crowd, with a

horrified look on her face. It was as if she thought it could have been she who had been captured. But had Mary not left them a while ago? Had she gone to live somewhere in Jerusalem?

“Is that not Mary Magdalene?” he asked Andrew.

“Knew you not?” She is actually the sister of Martha and Lazarus!”

John drew in his breath. “Do they know?”

“Not yet, it seems. To them, she is just the long-lost sister returned because of Jesus.”

“Dear God! What will happen when they find out?”

“That is what everyone is wondering.”

Jesus, who seemed a bit nonplused by the difficulty the woman presented, kept a calm face. He sat there on the step, tracing his finger in the dust beside him, then erasing the patterns he made. “Should she be stoned or not, according to your view of God’s Law?” said the accuser. Then he added with a sneer, “Do you find the answer there in the dust?”

At this, Jesus straightened up and looked him directly in the eyes. “Have some sinless one among you,” he said, “be the first to throw a stone.” And again he bent over and resumed writing in the dust.

But now he seemed to be writing something legible, and as he glanced up, ostensibly to see if anyone had picked up a stone, he looked at his questioner and gave the slightest nod toward what he had written—at which the man’s face flamed, and he turned away. Jesus erased what was there, wrote something else, and looked up again. By this time, several people had already left, and the one whose eyes he now met did not bother to glance down at the writing, but quietly pretended that he had not even seen Jesus, and moved away also.

It did not require many glances up from what he had been doing for the crowd to become remarkably sparse; and then Jesus wrote in the ground and looked straight at John and Andrew.

“What does it say?” said Andrew to John. He could not read.

“It says, ‘Rape. See me.’ What could it mean?” Puzzled, they stood there as everyone else dispersed. Jesus looked at the woman, and said, “Where are they, Madame? Has no one condemned you?”

“No one, Sir,” she said.

“Nor do I condemn you. Go in peace.” She hurried off.

Jesus beckoned John and Andrew, who were the only ones left. “I wanted to tell you why I did not stone the woman. I could not. You see, I knew what the situation really was.”

The two stood silent. “She loved a man very much, but he was married. He met her, and told her he wanted to go away with her. She wished very much to do so, but told him that she could not, for he was married, and she could not go with a married man. At this, he seized her, threw her on a couch, and raped her. In spite of herself, she experienced great pleasure in what he was doing, though she kept struggling to free herself. And it was at this point that the others came upon them and brought her to me.

“She herself felt guilty because she had experienced pleasure from the act; but all the time, she was trying to avoid and escape it. She was guilty of nothing in fact, because pleasure and pain are automatic and beyond our control. It was what she wanted and tried to do that was her true self, not what she felt. She had no need to feel guilt at all.”

He looked intently at Andrew, who at first seemed to resist, and then nodded; and then he looked at John. It was as much to say, "You have no guilt whatever in what Judas did to you, no matter how you felt about it."

"Thank you, Master," said John, softly, and Andrew said, "Yes. I understand. Thank you."

"Go in peace now, and stop worrying so much." He smiled a loving smile upon them both.

Each was aware that what he had said had a special meaning for the other person, and each knew that that meaning was to remain private to the person. They looked at each other silently, and went their separate ways.

John wandered through the immense courtyard aimlessly, pondering, almost delirious with relief. At least he had not sinned! Thank God! Though it still *felt* like a sin, even now. But Jesus had told him not to worry about it. Thank God!

He thought he heard Jesus's voice, and wandered in that direction. Was he not saying, "You will die in your sins"? It sounded like it.

He came up within earshot, and heard Jesus say, "If you do not believe that I AM, you will die in your sins!" A shock ran through John. Not, "if you do not believe *what* I am, but if you do not believe *that* I am. He was using God's name to refer to himself, and saying that we must believe in who he is: one and the same as the Father. And the night of the storm, when he walked to them on the water, did he not say, "I AM, be not afraid"

But did the people understand what he was now saying? It seemed not. It was too close to an expression that could make sense to them.

But he then said, “When you lift up the Son of Man”—and he held his arms out in the form of a cross. *The form of a cross!*—“you will recognize what I AM, and that I do nothing by myself and only say what the Father has taught me.”

At this, some of the people turned away in disgust. “He never comes out and says he is the Prince, and keeps telling us conundrums! He is a waste of time!”

But Jesus was talking to those who remained. “—real students of mine,” he was saying. “You will recognize what the truth is, and the truth will set you free.” John hoped that he recognized the truth.

“We are children of Abraham,” said someone in the crowd. “We have never been slaves. How can you tell us we will be set free?”

“Amen amen I tell you,” said Jesus, “anyone who commits a sin is a slave; and a slave does not stay in the family forever. The Son stays in it forever. And if the Son frees you, you really will be free.”

John realized that Jesus had freed him from his guilt at what happened with Judas. He did not *feel* free, but feelings did not count. How hard it was to believe this!

“—telling you what I saw with the Father, and you are doing what you heard from your father!”

“Our father is Abraham!” they shouted.

“If you are Abraham’s children, then act like Abraham!” Jesus countered. “But no! You are trying to kill me, a person who has spoken to you of the facts he heard from God. Abraham did not do that sort of thing. No, you are doing what your real father does.”

“We are not bastards!” shouted the crowd. “We have the

one God for our father!”

“If God were your father, you would love me,” said Jesus, “because I came from God. And I did not come of myself; he sent me. Then why can you not understand what I say? Because you cannot hear my words! You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and could not bear the truth, because the truth was not in him. And when he tells lies, he does what is natural to himself, because he is a liar, and the father of liars. And when I tell you what the truth is, you do not believe me!”

The people were making outraged cries that he was the one who had a devil. Jesus looked out over them with anger and said, “Can any one of you name one sin that I have committed? Then if I tell you what the truth is, why do you not believe it? Anyone who belongs to God can hear what God says; and so you cannot hear, because you do not belong to God!”

John was stunned by this exchange. He was certainly not going to persuade anyone by what he was saying; he was throwing out a challenge to them: believe me, or condemn yourselves to perdition! He seemed to realize that it was hopeless, but he had to make the truth clear to them.

“—men I tell you,” said Jesus, “Anyone who keeps what I say will never see death!” What was that? He was promising that if they followed him, they would never die!

“Now we *know* you are out of your mind!” shouted someone in the crowd. “Abraham died, and so did the prophets! And you say”—he repeated Jesus’s words with bitter sarcasm—“that if anyone ‘keeps what you say’ he will not taste death forever! Are you greater than our ancestor Abraham? Who

died! Or the prophets? Who died! Just who are you making yourself out to be?" The crowd roared assent.

Jesus looked out at them and let them calm down somewhat. Then he raised his hand for silence, and said calmly, "If I were to tell you how great I am, my greatness would be nothing. But there is my Father," he pointed to the sanctuary of the Temple, "who is *showing* how great I am. He is the one you call your God—but you do not recognize him. But I know him. If I said I did not know him, I would be a liar like you. I do know him, because I came from him, and he sent me!"

Now he was saying that he came from God, and God sent him. But he had called himself "I AM" just a short while ago.

Then Jesus looked over them once again, and said, "And your ancestor Abraham was glad to see that my day was coming; and when he saw it come, it filled him with joy!"

"You are not even fifty years old," shouted the man who had spoken earlier, and you have 'seen Abraham!'" Everyone laughed, and Jesus, stung, broke into their cacophony with the angry retort, "Amen amen I tell you, before Abraham came into existence, I AM!"

One could hear the intake of breath as the whole crowd reacted in stunned horror. Jesus stood there in front of them for a silent moment, and then cries of "Blasphemy!" "He has blasphemed on the very steps of the Temple!" as people scurried about to find stones to throw at him.

—To throw at no one. He was not there.

THIRTY-TWO

They dispersed, thinking to go to the Mount of Olives, but as soon as they left the Temple precincts, there was Jesus, walking among them. John was nervous that he was going to be seen and captured, but of course Jesus had a way of not being noticed when he did not want to be noticed. Evidently, he had something more to do that day—and John wondered if he would be able to endure it. His head was spinning from everything that had occurred already.

They happened to pass a blind beggar, and Jesus stopped. Andrew asked how long he had been blind, and was told, “from birth.” “Rabbi,” he said, “if he was born blind, was he the one who sinned, or was it his parents?”

Jesus looked at him and answered, “It was no sin of his or his parents either.” He stroked his beard. “It was to use him as a proof that God is really the one who is acting here. We have to do the deeds of the one who sent me while it is still day. The night is coming when no one can act. While I am in the world, I am the world’s light.”

John shook with fear when he heard this. “The night is

coming! The night is coming when no one can act!” Dear God, it is going to happen, and apparently soon!

As he was thinking this, he saw Jesus spit on the ground and make mud with the saliva. He put this rather unwholesome mixture on the man’s eyes, and said, “Now, go wash them off in the Siloam pool.”

And the man left, and after a short time, came back shouting “Hallelujah! I can see!” He did not, of course, recognize Jesus, since he had never seen him before. He had never seen anything before, and was marveling at whatever his eyes looked upon. People began saying, “Is this not the one who used to sit here and beg?”

“No, it is only someone who looks like him.”

“No, I am the one,” he shouted.

“But how did you come to be able to see,” said one in the crowd, looking at Jesus, who was right beside him.

“The man called Jesus made mud and rubbed it on my eyes,” he answered. Jesus wore an amused smile. “And I washed it off, and I can see.”

“Where is he?” they asked, looking at Jesus.

“I know not,” he answered, looking around. Everyone laughed.

But a group of Pharisees caught him by the arm and took him rather roughly inside. After a while, someone emerged and asked where his parents were, and brought them in. They were there a considerable time, and finally, the man was shoved out the door with “So you will teach us our lessons, will you? You were born full of sin!”

Jesus stepped over to him, and asked, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

The man, who recognized Jesus's voice, answered in embarrassment at having seen him without knowing him, "Who is he, Master, and I will believe in him!"

"You have already seen him. He is the one speaking to you."

"Master, I believe!" he said, and fell to his knees.

Jesus put his hand on his back, and said, looking off into the distance, "I have come into the world to separate people. To give sight to the blind, and to blind those who can see."

One or two of the Pharisees who had come out to see what happened to the man said, "You mean, we are blind."

Jesus looked at them. "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of any sin. But when you say you can see, your sins stay fixed within you."

John was furious with them. How could they not see that only God could cure a man blind from birth? It was hopeless! They would kill him, as he predicted; they were too interested in their own self-preservation to even consider what the truth might be!

Jesus was talking about sheep and shepherds, but John was too filled with indignation to be able to follow him; he knew that whatever he said would make no impression on them at all. But Jesus was gathering another audience.

John suddenly heard, "—I am ready to give up my life, and then take it back again. No one is going to take it from me; I am giving it up of my own free will. I have the right to give it up, and I have the power to take it back. This is the command I have from my Father."

Then he *would* come back on the third day! He *would*! He and the Father were the same, and so he could do it! And he

could preserve John also! And he would! Or he would rescue him if he fell!

Because John was deathly afraid that Ezra might approach him again, and he simply was not strong enough to reject him a second time.

“How is it,” he said to himself, “that everything within me says that my success with Ezra is a failure—and my defeat by Judas seems so much like a victory! And my guilt is triumph, even when it is not really guilt! But could I not have stopped what happened? Or should I have challenged him in the first place, when the Master was—but I am forgiven! But why do I feel as if I do not *deserve* to be forgiven! Why do I want *not* to be forgiven, and to throw everything away, and beg Ezra to teach me all he knows! We could go away together! He would gladly do so, I am sure! Everything is upside down and inside out! I do not deserve to live!

“You are trusting in the wrong person,” Jesus said. He was right beside him, and was speaking as if they had been conversing together all this while.

“Master!” said John, his face scarlet.

Jesus laughed. “John, John, I never said it would be easy. But I told you to trust in me. You have been relying on yourself just now, and you see what a frail reed you are to lean upon. Lean upon this oak tree.”

“I try, Master. But sometimes I forget.”

“I know. Let it not worry you. There is much to worry about, but there is no cause actually to worry. Even when I am asleep, as you discovered, I am here.”

“But—but you will not be here always.”

“Ah, is *that* what is the problem? Granted, you will pass

through some difficult hours.” and he looked away as if to say, “And so will I.” He continued, “But know this: even when I am not with you, I will be with you.”

“I do not understand.”

“You will, when the time comes. Fear not.”

“I will try, Master.”

“We are going back to Galilee in a short time. If you see any of the others, tell them to make ready. I want the effect of the blind man to sink in before I return here.”

John happened to notice Matthew, who had returned from somewhere, looking as if his soul had been shattered. He was about to go to him to tell him about the trip to Galilee, but Matthew was approached by Thomas, who had an expression on his face that mirrored his, and they talked for a while, before they parted, each shaking his head. “Dear God!” thought John. “Is everyone in as bad a state as I am?”

It was perhaps likely, he reflected. Jesus wanted his followers to rely on nothing but himself; and to do so, he kicked from under them every prop they had except himself. “—All the while telling us that *he* would be gone, leaving us with nothing! Nothing!” he said aloud. Except, as he said, that he would be there even when he was no longer there—whatever that might mean. “I do not understand it!” John shouted under his breath, half afraid that Jesus would appear and say, “I heard that!”

Like Matthew and Thomas, and how many others, John went to the garden to sleep. Or to pretend to sleep.

The next day, they traveled the hour-long walk over to Bethany, where Martha was busy preparing the meal, and Lazarus was not present, having told Martha to inform Jesus

that pressing business had kept him in Jerusalem that night. John was skeptical. Clearly, it was not that he had discovered that his sister was the notorious Mary of Magdala, or there would have been a scene that would make the actors in the amphitheater at Caesarea proud. Most probably, he had begun to suspect that Jesus was becoming too controversial to be an asset, and wished to distance himself from him.

But the interesting thing was that Mary was not about either. She would hardly be expected to be bustling about as Martha was, but she must be in the house somewhere. Was Mary another one who had all her props knocked from under her? It looked as if every one of the students had begun to realize what “take up your own cross” really meant.

Jesus sat outside the house to wait for the dinner, and Mary’s former slave Judith came out to speak to him briefly, and then said, “I will try,” and ran inside.

Shortly afterward, Mary emerged, blinded by the sun, obviously staggering under her cross, even before her relatives had found out who she really was. Something else had happened in Bethany.

Finally, she noticed Jesus and sat down on the bench beside him, looking at the ground. Jesus began speaking to her, and at first she said not a word, and then made a few laconic replies, in a tone of complete and utter despair.

Suddenly, Martha came out and said, in a voice clearly meant to be overheard by everyone, “Master, does it not concern you that my sister has left me alone to take care of waiting upon you?”

“Martha, Martha,” said Jesus. “So much is important to you, and you have so much on your mind. But there is only one

thing that matters. Mary has chosen the better part, and it will not be taken away from her.” —Yet, from her demeanor, it certainly appeared as if Mary had chosen the worst of all possible parts.

Martha looked indignantly at the two of them, and marched back into the house, muttering (also for all to hear) that unless someone took the worse part, those who chose the better part would do so on empty stomachs. Jesus laughed, and resumed his conversation.

Mary then began to be more and more earnest, and finally she cried, “Stop! Stop!” and covered her ears.

“Mary, Mary,” said Jesus audibly, “you worry too much.”

“Master,” she pleaded, “listen to me! I am no one, I am dirt, but listen to me! If you say such things in public, they will kill you!”

“I know. It does not matter.”

“It matters to *me*!” she almost shouted.

Jesus’s voice dropped, and no one could make out what he said. It mattered to everyone, not least John.

Mary said again in a loud voice, “I do not *want* to be chosen!”

How much John himself longed not to be chosen—and to be free to go with Ezra, and—and what? Do something like what he had done with Judas, and feel the same loathing and disgust afterwards? No! To feel ten times the loathing, because this time it would be deliberate!

“How can I so desire my own degradation?” he asked himself. “Why do I want it so desperately that I would throw everything away for it? For even one moment of it?”

“Jesus, help me!” But Jesus was over there on the bench,

helping Mary, who seemed anything but overjoyed or calmed by what he had been saying.

“It does not matter,” he had said. It did not matter that they would *kill* him! Why was he going to allow this to happen? Why? And if *that* did not matter, what *did* matter? Nothing! John felt he was to be staring at nothing for the rest of his life—which might be short, he realized, because Jesus might not be crucified alone. “Dear God! I cannot bear it!”

But because one continues to breathe, one bears what one cannot bear. They returned to Galilee after that. Jesus had apparently accomplished whatever it was he wanted in Judea, including saving Mary from suicide, or whatever she was contemplating. It seemed that everyone was on the brink of suicide, especially poor Thomas. John heard from his father that Thomas’s father had to be fired from the fishing business because *he*, of all people, was too drunk to be anything but a severe hindrance to it. “I hated to do it, John,” he said, “but I hoped that it might wake him up. As it turned out, it did not. Poor Malachi! But what can one do?”

It seemed that Thomas and Ezra had also made an attempt to help Malachi, but it quite clearly had not worked. “And even that was partly my fault!” thought John. “If I had not given Samuel that *stupid, stupid!* advice, then he would still be alive, and this would never have happened in the first place! And now what can *anyone* do? Must Samuel appear to him also? It is too much! Everything is falling apart!”

Shortly after that, Ezra came to him, and gave him an embarrassed bow. John went over and hugged him—briefly—to show that he was his fond friend, even if it was to be merely a friend. “I understand you have been with Thomas,” he said.

Ezra sighed. “Yes. Poor Thomas. His father—” he did not know how to finish the sentence.

“My father told me. How terribly, terribly sad.”

“Well, it is not quite thus. You see, Thomas went and removed the curse from ~~him~~ ^{himself}. He did! So he is cured?”

“Well, it was not quite so simple. You see, when he awoke, sober, and saw Thomas, he drove him away and essentially cursed him.”

“How horrible!”

“And there was every probability that he would go right back to drinking himself into insensibility—he was almost at the state Thomas was—when I—you see, he knew me and was a friend of mine, and—and, well, I asked him if he intended to continue imitating Thomas.”

“No!”

“It was the only thing that had a chance of working. I had to do it! And it *did* work! He swore that from that moment, the would drink nothing but water!”

“How—how dreadful! That he would do this out of hatred for his son!”

“Thomas is devastated. But he *says*, at least, that he is grateful that his father is sober. And also I saw Zebedee, and he is willing to take him back.”

“Well, at least there is *some* good that came of it. And perhaps Thomas will some day be reconciled to his father.”

“Jesus told him to pay attention to what happens to Lazarus, whatever that means.”

“What does *Lazarus* have to do with it?”

“I have no idea. Except, of course, that he does not yet know that Mary Magdalene is his sister. It must be something

connected with what happens when he finds out.”

“I see. To keep the sky from falling then will be the miracle of miracles. If *that* can be reconciled, then anything can happen!”

“—By the way, there is one thing I have been wanting to tell you, but I have been too busy with Thomas.”

“What is that?”

“You see, I happened to see from a distance the fight you had with Judas.”

John closed his eyes in pain.

“You need not feel ashamed. It was obvious that Judas had studied fighting, and you simply fought when you were younger. My first owner not only trained us in giving pleasure, but he knew that we would be attacked, and so he trained us to fight also. I know what Judas did, you see.”

“Well, at least that part of it was not something I am to blame for, then, I suppose.”

“Not at all. Not any of it. But it was another thing that Judas did that infuriated me. And also, just before we came here to Galilee, he met Thomas, and slashed that wineskin he kept under his tunic, and ruined it, spilling everything on the ground.”

“My God! He did not!”

“He did indeed. But—you remember that episode of the woman caught in adultery?”

“How well I remember it!”

“Well, Bartholomew and I had resolved to kill Judas, and Jesus wrote, ‘Thou shalt not kill’ and looked straight at us.”

“He knew. He would.”

“How could we have thought he would not?”

“So for some incredible reason, he does not want him killed.”

“I know. I cannot understand it. But what could I do? But this was all too much! And shortly after the incident of the wineskin, I met Judas alone, and grabbed the front of his tunic, resolved that he would pay! And he said, ‘What? First the little boy and now the man of coal? You wish to fight? Very well, strip, and I will teach you a lesson also!’

“We threw off our mantles and tunics, and squared off at each other. He tried the same maneuver he had with you, and I was ready for it—but I had had rather more experience than he, and it was not long before I was standing behind him, holding his arm in such a way that if I moved it up a bit, it would break.

“He knew enough to realize this, and so there we were: he in front of me, and I behind him. And then—well, let me say that I introduced myself where I was not welcome. Do you follow me?”

John, who understood too well, looked at him with horror.

“Now what I did *can* be a very enjoyable experience, if one knows how to receive someone thus, if I may so put it; but he apparently had no education in this sort of thing, and in that case, it is apt to be rather painful—very painful, if his—guest—is as large as I am.

“He screamed, and so I moved myself about to see if I could find a position he found more comfortable. But everything I did only seemed to make matters worse. Well, this went on for a considerable time—I have a good deal of self-restraint, and, in spite of the fact that *I* was enjoying myself a great deal,

I wished to prolong the experience as much as possible.”

John had his hand over his mouth in shock. Ezra gave him an amused look, and continued, “After a short time, I let his arm go, because he was beginning to collapse before me, begging me to stop—it was music to my ears—and I had to hold up his hips so that we could stay together. But eventually I grew rather tired; it is hard work, when all is said and done, and so finally, to let him know that I no longer had what you might call any hard feelings toward him, I left a little present inside him—actually, a rather large present—and let him fall groaning to the ground.

“You may have noticed that you did not see Judas for some days. He must have been unable to sit at all for at least a week, and probably could not walk for three or four days also.”

He looked at John with one of his brilliant smiles, while John continued to stare at him with alarm. Suddenly, he let out a huge “Haw, haw!” and rushed over and embraced John, giving him an enormous smack of a kiss on his lips. He jumped back immediately and said, “I am sorry, I could not resist! If you could have seen that look of shocked innocence you have!”

John looked up at him with a scarlet face. “Fear not,” said Ezra. “I will try nothing else. But it was just too much for me!” He continued to laugh.

“I know not what to say!” said John.

“You need not say anything. You see, I know that I purr like a little kitty-cat all the time, because that is what I was trained to do. But I am really still a panther from the wilds of Africa underneath it all. And when someone pulls my tail, he finds that I have claws and teeth!”

“But he will kill you!”

“*If* he can. But I know swordplay and fighting with a dagger also. Not to mention that either David or I have an eye upon him at every moment. We are hoping to make a case so that Jesus will do something before it is too late.”

“Well, I wish you luck on that. But I am convinced that Jesus knows what has been happening, and for some reason does not want him killed—or even out of the way.”

“I know. I cannot understand it. But I will say this. I am sure that after that little encounter, he was afraid he was going to die. He will not. But if both David and I work on him again, he will *wish* he were killed!”

“Really, Ezra!”

“Fear not. I would never be a panther with you.”

John almost—but not quite—felt a twinge of pity for Judas.

THIRTY-THREE

SHORTLY AFTERWARD, DURING THE winter, as the Feast of Dedication approached, Jesus said that it was time to return to Jerusalem. John reluctantly accompanied the group. Things were approaching a crisis, and he was not sure that he could endure it.

And as soon as Jesus set foot on Solomon's Porch, the Judeans crowded round, and said, "How long are you going to leave us in suspense? If you *are* the Prince, come out and say it!"

"I *have* told you," said Jesus, "but you do not believe me. And the deeds my Father has sent me to perform give proof of it; but you will not believe them either—because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep recognize my voice, and I know who they are. And they follow me, and I will give them eternal life, and they will never be lost and no one will take them out of my hands." Somehow this was all connected with bestowing eternal life on everyone who believed. But how hard it was to believe! Accept him and you will never die! It was impossible—unless he really *was* one and the same as the Father, and could re-create what he created.

But the problem was it depended on us, apparently. He would not do it unless he were accepted as King. And he would not be accepted as King if people did not believe that by accepting him they would never die or be sick, and lions would lie down with lambs and all the rest of it. Who could believe it?

Did he glance at Judas? “My Father, who gave them to me is greater than anyone, and no one can take anything from his hands—and the Father and I are one and the same thing!”

There! He had finally said it! There was no way to misinterpret it now! So he called himself the “Son of Man” because he *was* God emptying himself somehow into human skin. “Blasphemy!” came the shouts. They picked up stones once again.

But this time, instead of vanishing, Jesus held up his hand and said, “I showed you many good deeds from my Father. For which of them are you going to stone me?”

“We are stoning you for blasphemy, not any good deeds!” was the answer. “You are a man, and you are claiming to be God!” They have it backwards, thought John. He is God, who has emptied himself into humanity, somehow.

Jesus looked at them, made his left hand into the shape of an open book, and pointed at it. “Is it not written in your Law, ‘I said you are gods?’ Now if Scripture calls ‘gods’ those through whom the words of God were uttered, and if you cannot deny that Scripture says this, why do you say that I am blaspheming when I say I am the Son of God, if I am the one the Father consecrated and sent into the world? Do not believe me if I do not do deeds that can only be done by my Father; but if I do do them, then if you do not believe me, believe the deeds, so that you will recognize and know that I am in the

Father and the Father is in me!”

They screamed and rushed upon him to seize him—and grasped nothing but air. “How does he *do* that?” one said. “Perhaps he is what he says he is,” answered another, awestruck. “Nonsense!” was the angry reply. “He is a madman, who knows a few tricks!”

What he said was in part a sophistry, John realized. The psalm said, “I said, ‘you are gods,’ children of the supreme being, but you will die like men.” He was speaking of the powerful people that abused the authority given them by God, not of people he said were one and the same as himself. But of course, that was not the point. We were to believe him because he was doing things that only God could do, and how could God ratify a lie and a blasphemy? He could never allow Jesus to do this *as a proof* that he was what he claimed to be if that claim were false. However fantastic it was, it had to be true!

Think of it. I am in the Father, and the Father is in me. The part contains the whole within itself. What could that mean but “one and the same thing”?

It turned out that Jesus, who once again appeared among the students as if nothing had happened, now decided to go across the Jordan into Peraea, outside of Judea, where John had once bathed the people. Jesus evidently realized the danger from the Judeans, and was going outside their territory. The people there had heard of him, and were willing to accept him.

The students did not know what Jesus intended. Perhaps he was content to work among these foreigners up until the Passover, where he would create the final confrontation with the Judean authorities.

“I think that is what it will be,” said Andrew. “The city will

be full of Galileans, and the Judeans from this territory, who are well-disposed toward him.”

“And then what?” asked Nathanael.

“Well, what *I* think is that he is counting on having this large crowd to overcome the resistance of the Judean authorities to making him King.”

“I am inclined to believe that you are right,” said Nathanael. “I cannot see how he can come any closer to the crisis without actually being in the middle of it. Probably the Passover will decide things one way or another.”

“God grant it is the right way!” said Matthew.

“God grant. But he himself does not seem sanguine about it.”

“But he told me once that it *could* happen. Unfortunately, he added that it would not.”

“Well, if it could, it can,” said Andrew. “We must not lose hope.”

“None of us has,” said Nathanael. John had not said anything, because John was convinced that he was actually going to be killed. If it was possible that he would not be, that was by this time a theoretical possibility, not something that might really happen. John—and all the rest of them—would simply have to endure it, and perhaps be killed with him, and then come back with him on the third day. Because that *would* happen.

Jesus startled them all shortly afterward, by saying, “We must return to Judea. Make ready.”

“Rabbi,” said the Rock, “The Judeans are trying to stone you now. Are you going back *there*?”

“Are there not twelve hours in a day?” answered Jesus. “If

a man travels during the day, he does not stumble, because he can see this world's light. If he travels at night, he might fall, because then there is no light in him." He looked out across the Jordan to the gray, barren hills beyond which lay Bethany and Jerusalem. "Our friend Lazarus is resting," he said. "We must go and awaken him."

Lazarus? Was this . . . ?

"Master, if he is resting, he will get better," said Andrew. Word had reached the group a few days previously that Lazarus was ill.

"Lazarus," said Jesus, looking solemnly around at them, "is dead." There was a shocked intake of breath. "I am glad of it for your sake, so that you will believe in me, because I was not there. Now. Let us go to him." What? Was he going to bring Lazarus back to life after three days—it would take them almost that long to get there—as a kind of rehearsal, so to speak, of his own return to life? To prepare us not to be overwhelmed when he died?

There was a silence. Everyone knew the implications. Perhaps this was to be the crisis, not the Passover.

Finally Thomas said, "We might as well go—and die with him." Well, if they had to, they had to. What did they have to live for now, in any case?

As they were on the way, word came that Lazarus was indeed dead, and that by the time they reached Bethany, he would be in the tomb four days.

Jesus stopped just outside the town in a secluded place and sent word by David that he had arrived. Ezra came up and stood between Thomas and John. He put a hand on each of their shoulders.

Shortly afterward Martha came out. “Master,” she said, “If you had been here, my brother would not have died! —And yet,” she went on, “even now I know that God will give you anything you ask him.” It was not an act of faith so much as it was a plea, and she dared not even voice what she was hoping. It was too fantastic. Four days! This was no David, being led out on the stretcher to be buried.

“Your brother will return to life,” said Jesus.

Martha hedged. “Well, I know that he will return to life at the resurrection on the last day, when everyone returns to life. But—” Her voice trailed into silence. Everyone knew what she meant.

“*I* am resurrection,” said Jesus, “and I am life. Anyone who believes in me will be alive even if he is dead. And anyone who is alive and believes in me will not die ever.” He looked fixedly at her. “Do you believe this?”

Again, Martha hedged. “Yes, Master,” she said, “I have always believed that you are the Prince, the Son of God who has come into the world.” She did not say that she believed that she would never die, however, or that Lazarus was alive, though dead, whatever that might mean.

Jesus inquired about Mary, and Martha rushed away to fetch her. Where *was* Mary? Had Lazarus died somehow because he found out about who she was? Good Lord, had he killed himself?

They waited for a while in silence, each evidently thinking about what all of this might signify, and finally Mary came up, followed by a small group of Judeans, who had come to the house to console the sisters.

She rushed up to Jesus and fell at his feet, wailing, “Master,

if you had been here, my brother would not have died!” It was almost a reproach. Jesus waited, clearly wanting to see if, as in Martha’s case, there followed any hint of a glimmer of hope in him. But nothing was heard but her weeping.

Jesus finally gave up. He heaved a great sigh of resignation, and said, “All right, where did you bury him?”

“Come and see, Master.” they said, and as they were going over to the tomb, he looked at Mary, who was a bit in front of him, shook his head, and wept.

“See how he loved him,” said some. But that was not it. He wept for how little trust Mary and everyone else had in him. Did *John* really believe that he would come back to life after four days?

He almost believed it.

They came up to the tomb, which was a cave with a large stone over the entrance. Jesus heaved another sigh, as he looked in John’s direction, and said, “Take away the stone.”

At this, Martha came up beside him and whispered, “Master, he is already decaying. He has been there four days!” Martha did not believe.

Jesus whirled around to face her and snapped, “Did I not tell you that *if* you believed, you would see how great God is?” John all but said, “Master, I do believe! Help my unbelief!” Perhaps his own mustard-seed of faith would be enough.

Martha, stung by the rebuke, fell back—and then looked over at a couple of the men, and nodded. They went up to the stone, and with great effort, rolled it away.

Jesus then looked up to heaven and said, “Father, thank you for listening to me. I know, you always listen to me. I am saying this because of the people here, so that they will believe

that you sent me.” And then he looked into the tomb, held his hand out in front of him, and shouted in a voice which made the hills echo, and which was loud enough to reach deep into the pit of the abyss, “Lazarus! Come out to me!”

And the dead man, bound hand and foot in linen, and with his face covered with a cloth, hobbled out. Of course he did. John knew he would.

Did he not?

“Untie him,” said Jesus matter-of-factly, ‘and let him go.’”

And then he looked at Thomas, and Thomas’s eyes widened. Was this what he meant when he told Thomas to pay attention to Lazarus? But what had it to do with Thomas’s problem? Was he saying by this that he could do anything, and that somehow Thomas would be reconciled with his father?

For a few moments, everyone stood paralyzed; it seemed as if it was the corpse of Lazarus walking, and no one dared go near and touch him. Then, from under the face cloth came a muffled cry of “Help me!” and two or three of the men rushed over and with trembling hands undid the straps that held it round his neck.

The shroud, upon which he had been laid and which was doubled over to cover the front of his body, was still covering his face; and the men pulled it aside so that he could see. He was at first blinded by the brilliant sunlight, but as his eyes accustomed themselves while the men were unwrapping his body, he kept blinking and opening and closing his mouth like a fish, saying, “What? . . . What? . . . What? . . .”

Martha, laughing and crying at once, ran up to him and embraced him, saying, “Oh, Lazarus! You are back! I knew it! Thank God! Thank God!”

“Back? . . . Back?” he said.

“Stop that!” cried Judith to the men who were unwinding him, upon whom Martha had almost trampled. “Do you want to undress him here in public? Find a robe for him first!”

“Here, take my cloak,” said one of the men. “We must get you back home and wash those spices off.”

“Spices?—Thank you, Ebenezer,” said Lazarus, bewildered. “But what are you doing here? And where am I? This looks like my father’s grave. And what is it doing open thus?” —And then he looked down at the wrappings, and the expression on his face was so dumbfounded that everyone burst out in laughter.

He flushed and looked angrily around. “Is this a joke? I know not what you have done to me, but I do not find it at all amusing!”

Everyone immediately lapsed into an embarrassed silence. Martha said, “Do not be angry Lazarus. Everyone is merely so happy to see you alive!”

“Alive? Why should I not be alive?”

Ebenezer looked at him as he put the cloak on and let the shroud fall to his feet. “Do you remember nothing of the past few days?”

Lazarus, startled, turned to look him full in the face. Then he stared off into the distance, as if making an effort to recall—and then looked over at Martha, and then Mary, and afterwards Judith, with an expression of intense pain. He closed his eyes in anguish, and then reopened them and once again looked at the landscape. “I remember that I was in Zebediah’s house,” he said musingly, “and I believe I did not feel well. I fell asleep, and it seems as if I dreamed a fantastic dream—but

I cannot recall now what it was. It was something about . . . no, it is gone. And then I thought I heard the Master call me, and I was lying down in the dark, tied up. I struggled to my feet and tried to walk—and . . . then you were here, and—I do not understand it.”

Everyone was silent. Finally, Ebenezer said quietly, “I think we had best get you home.”

During this time, Jesus, who was standing beside Mary, with Matthew on his other side, whispered in her ear, “I think I will return now; it is dangerous for me to be here—even more dangerous because of this. I do not wish anyone to notice me.”

She looked at him, tears filling her eyes, and reached out to touch him. “Thank you, Master! Oh, thank you so very much!” she whispered.

In a mock-serious tone, he replied, “You two have given me more trouble than any dozen others! But know this: I will not have conditions put upon faith in me. Now see to your brother.” And he nodded to the other students and they began to return to where they had been.

It certainly showed the Judeans who were with Martha and Mary that he really had to be what he claimed to be. How could God not be confirming his claim, if he had brought a decaying corpse back to life? After four days in the grave, when “he was already decaying.”

This would be reported. There was no doubt it would be. The Judeans would now have to confront a man who claimed to be God, and who called upon his Father, who “always listened” to him, and brought back to life a man who was “already decaying.”

—Or, John thought, a man who had staged an elaborate

hoax. After all, Lazarus was his friend. Even John could not be *certain* that Jesus had not arranged a charade with Martha and Mary and Lazarus to pretend that he had died, so that Jesus could “bring him back to life.” Certainly, the Pharisees would interpret the report in that way. John did not believe it for a moment, but he knew all the people involved.

And if that act was convincing, it was convincing to people like John, who were in Jesus’s entourage and knew him, but not to those inclined to be skeptical. John wondered if Judas even believed that it was not staged.

This time, Jesus did not go back across the Jordan, but instead decided that they would go north of Jerusalem into the deserted country around Ephraim. The Passover was only a month or so away, and it was likely that Jesus wished to be more available to enter Jerusalem during the feast. Apparently, he also had the idea that the Judeans—and everyone else—had all the evidence needed. The claim was clear: he was “I AM,” one and the same as the Father, but somehow his Son, as well as being the Son of Man. If they wished to accept him as King, and in so doing never die and presumably never suffer, then they now knew what the terms were. They could not accept *him* as King without simultaneously accepting *God* as King. Would they be up to such a leap of faith?

John doubted it—he was all but certain they were not, not only from using common sense, but from what Jesus himself had predicted. He had certainly done everything that could be done, it seemed, to convince the people, but it was so very easy to misinterpret it, and say that he was a madman who knew some magic tricks. No, people could only be convinced, it seems, if he himself died in a spectacular way, by crucifixion, and

then returned to life.

But would he then ask them to make him King? What would happen then? He hoped we would somehow be saved, but would the world be transformed? It seemed likely that if Jesus was rejected, the world would have lost its chance to undo what Adam did, and, like Adam, the world would fall again. A second Original Sin.

And then what? That was the great question.

THIRTY-FOUR

DURING THAT INTERVAL, when nothing was happening, John decided to go to Jerusalem and see Daniel—and possibly even Annas—to find out what he could of what the people in authority thought of Jesus. It was just possible that at least some of them were favorably disposed, as presumably Nicodemus still was, and there might be enough to tip the scales in Jesus's favor. It could not hurt to find out. Besides, he might be able, when the crisis came, to gain entry and follow the trial, if there was one. There would have to be at least a show trial, or the mob would stone the Pharisees.

Hannah greeted him, and said, "The Master is in today. I can see if he can spare a few moments for you." John thanked her and waited in the sumptuous parlor. She returned and said, "He has an appointment shortly, but he told me, 'I could not forego the opportunity to see John again. Send him in, if only for a moment!'"

So John was ushered into the room. He knelt on one knee, and was made to rise by Annas, who said, "Well! I understand you came back once before, and I missed you! It is fortunate that I was here this time—though I am sorry to say, our meeting must be very brief. Caiaphas—the new high priest, you

know—has summoned us to decide on what we are to do with Jesus of Nazareth.”

“Indeed?” said John. “I was curious myself about what you were thinking of doing.”

“Oh yes?” He looked intently at John. “You would not be one of his followers, would you?”

“I am even an emissary of his.”

“Oh, dear! Well, one hopes that you will not—that is, it is Jesus himself that we have a problem with, you understand.”

“I am sorry to hear there is a problem. I am convinced that he is everything he claims to be.”

“Of course, you would be. But you perhaps have not heard what *we* have heard about his claims. But let us not discuss such things, and let me merely say that I am delighted to see *you*, and it is still true that you are welcome any time you choose to come.” There was a knock on the door. “But you see, I must go. It was a pleasure to see you, dear boy!” And he embraced John, saying, “Remember, welcome any time,” and left him with Hannah.

“Would you like to see Daniel before you go?”

“That would be very nice, if it is possible.”

“I am sure it will be. Daniel would be very angry if he knew you were here and he did not see you. One moment.” And she took him back to the parlor, and very shortly afterward, Daniel entered.

“John!” he said, and came over and embraced him, as usual a little too long. It gave John a joy he would rather not have had, but which he wished he had more of. He waited, and Daniel finally let him go, rather pleased with himself at the length of the greeting.

“Are you still a follower of Jesus of Nazareth?” he asked.

“I was telling the Master that I am even one of what he calls his ‘emissaries.’”

“Oh, my! That might cause—difficulties.”

“Actually, that was what I came to find out, if I could.”

“Well, let me put it thus: you would be prudent if you put distance between yourself and him.”

“I thought as much. But I cannot, you know. I have been with him too long, and the more I see, the more convinced I am that he is exactly what he says he is, however fantastic it might seem.”

“It seems more than fantastic, at least from what I have heard. It seems blasphemous—or next to it.”

“I know. The only trouble is that he can prove it by what he does.”

“Or what he appears to do. We heard that he—allegedly, you understand—brought a man to life who had been in the grave two weeks.”

“Four days. I saw it.”

“Indeed? You were there?”

“I was. It was a friend of his. We were in Peraea, and heard that he had died, and by the time we got there, he had been in the tomb four days. And he called him out. And he came, all wrapped up.”

“A friend of his? I see.”

“No, it is not what you suspect. He really had died.”

“At least, as far as you knew.”

“Well, I do not want to enter into disputations with you. I know how it must sound. All I can say is, it is consistent with what I know of him, and I have every reason to believe that it

really happened.”

“Which is just what I would expect of you, loyal as you are.”

“Daniel, I am loyal, as I always have been, to the facts first and foremost.”

“I know. That is one of the things that endears you to me. One of them. I notice also you still keep all your muscles, though you are not rowing a boat any more.”

“That is another one of the things, I imagine. As it happens, I still do pushups and situps every other day.”

“Ah. Well, whatever you do, keep it up. The results are—enviable.”

“I think this has gone far enough, do not you?”

“Not unless you think so. But evidently you do.” he sighed.

“But to get back to Jesus, you think things are reaching a crisis?”

“They already have done. The question—they are meeting on it at the moment, all the important people with Caiaphas, no less, are trying to decide what to do to get rid of Jesus without having a riot on our hands, or without having the Roman army crush us. It is a very delicate issue.”

“When you say, ‘get rid of Jesus,’ you mean ‘kill him.’”

“I am afraid so. He has gone too far. It is either kill him or allow the people to name him King. And the result of *that* is horrible to contemplate!”

“But why? Herod is King up north, and Rome has no problem.”

“But Herod is a King that essentially Rome installed. Rome has no control over this man. And Rome will not have a King

that it does not control.”

“Well, I suspected that this was what was going on. And my opinion is that he is going to allow himself to be captured and killed. If he did not, you would be able to do nothing to him. When people try to seize him, even if he is in their grasp, he is suddenly not there. I have seen it countless times.”

“They tell stories to that effect, but I have always believed that they are stories.”

“They are not. I have seen it with my own eyes. And sometimes, he is suddenly beside one, conversing as if he had been doing so for quite a while. But he was not there a moment since. It is uncanny.”

“It must be, if what you say is true.”

“You know that he says that if he is taken and killed—and he says he will be—then he will come back to life on the third day afterwards.”

“We have even heard that. Would you believe that we have planned to set a guard around his tomb, so that *you people* will be unable to steal his body and say that he has risen from the grave?”

“I believe that you will probably do that, but it will be totally useless.”

“We are not unintelligent—at least *they* are, when their interest is concerned, and here it is a question of survival—and so I am inclined to doubt that he will be able to carry anything off.”

“Unless he actually does come back to life.”

“Yes, well.”

“Come now, Daniel. That will be the acid test, will it not? You will have assured yourself that he is dead, and you will have

sealed up the tomb, and put a secure guard on it. And if the tomb is empty, what will you do?"

"It will not be empty."

"As I say, it is the acid test. If it *is*, then what?"

"Then I might—I *might*—begin to believe in him."

"I can ask for no more. And, of course, if the tomb is *not* empty after three days, then *my* whole world will fall apart, and I know not what I will do. But it will be empty."

"Well, we must wait and see."

"Exactly."

"And if it *is* not empty, will you come to see me again?"

"I hope to see you again in any case."

"I mean—well, you know what I mean."

"If the tomb is not empty—I know not what I will do. I cannot say."

"Think on it. I would be *very* happy to see you."

"Well, but I had better go."

"Peace, my *very good* friend."

"Peace, Daniel." They embraced again, rather longer than before.

Again, John thought, "They say, 'peace, peace,' but there is no peace" as he left.

He had barely returned to the group, when Judith came running up, panting, "Master! Master!" Jesus came over, and she gasped, "Martha told me to tell you to co—come at once! She said that raising Lazarus was noth—nothing in comparison with this!"

What was this? Something *more* with Lazarus? Perhaps this was what Jesus had been referring to with Thomas.

Jesus put his hands on her shoulders as she tried

desperately to breathe, and said in a calm voice, "I understand what is the matter. Be not distressed. You may tell them that my time has arrived, and that I will come to dinner there in two days, and that you should invite some friends of Lazarus, as you had planned. And you must assure them that there is no cause for concern."

"I do not understand. Invite? Planned?"

"They will know."

Judas, who had been listening as soon as he caught sight of Judith, said, "Are we all to accompany you, Master?" He seemed a bit nervous.

"The Twelve, I should think," said Jesus. They could not suffer an invasion of all of us." He looked over at Chusa's Joanna as he said this, and she reddened and fled when he caught her eye. So it had to have been she who had told Lazarus about Mary, and which doubtless had led somehow to his death. Evidently, his return to life was not something he rejoiced over—typical of Lazarus, John thought. He was probably more mortified over how he looked to the important people of Judea than he was happy about being alive again. He probably thought it a fate worse than death. So Jesus must have a new miracle in mind, one that could somehow convert Lazarus into a man of at least some sense.

Jesus said to Judith, "Tell them to be ready in two days. It is little enough time for them to prepare, but if I know Martha, it will suffice; and I think it not prudent to delay longer. Now go when you have caught your breath; they will be wanting news as soon as possible."

Judith did not wait, but ran off before she had fully recovered. David looked after her with a mixture of desire and

contempt, and then looked, his eyes narrowed, over at Judas.

Ezra and Thomas met, and had a long, but obviously private, conversation. It had something to do with Judas, it seemed, since they looked surreptitiously at him, and Thomas reacted with extreme shock at one point. Something drastic had gone on.

And *what* would all this have to do with Thomas's father?

At any rate, shortly afterward, Jesus and the Twelve set off for Bethany, and for some reason did not collect a crowd as they traveled. Perhaps the people were busying themselves with preparing for the Passover, which was to take place in six days. Or perhaps when Jesus did not want to be accompanied, no one somehow noticed him and his followers.

As they arrived, a number of people from Jerusalem were already there, friends of Lazarus, talking with him and pointedly avoiding mention of the event that had happened, but simply making small talk, which Lazarus took almost no part in, merely giving one-word answers when he had to speak. He was obviously in the depths of despair—a fact which was as manifest and as ignored by everyone as his death and return to life—and was finding it a supreme effort behave with even minimal politeness. Fortunately, the people surrounding him were of the upper class in Jerusalem, and, given Lazarus' personality, he could not insult them by ignoring them or appearing too morose.

Martha, who was in the room, was looking with concern and pride at his effort. Mary, as usual, was not visible.

As soon as everyone saw the Twelve and Jesus, the atmosphere, if possible, grew even more tense. Though Martha and Zebediah (the name of the older man that had been at the

tomb with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus) had made careful selection among the guests from Jerusalem to be certain that there was no one who would immediately rush out and denounce Jesus on sight, it was still common knowledge that his whereabouts was to be reported to the authorities as soon as he set foot in Judean territory, and there was always a danger that someone might do something untoward. But no one made a move. Martha had been most judicious.

Lazarus greeted Jesus politely—what else could he do?—but since Jesus was not high society, he looked at him with a loathing that made his position on resurrection perfectly clear, and nodded perfunctorily to the twelve Emissaries (to whom he had always paid scant attention in any case), and then turned back to one of his banking companions from the city, evidently resolved to act as if Jesus were not there, and letting Martha, who was responsible for this debacle, make the best of it she could. Martha's attitude indicated that what she wanted was for the Emissaries to be present for some reason, and she evidently had those from Jerusalem in order to prevent Lazarus from rushing away as he might well have done in other circumstances.

Fortunately, neither Jesus nor—what was more perilous—any of his Emissaries started any controversial conversation; and the others put a face on things whenever it was necessary for any in the two groups to mingle, which they did as little and as briefly as possible. There was a certain bemusement on both sides that the two groups would have been invited together; both thought it was a social blunder on Mary's part, who presumably had wanted to unite those who had come to the tomb with Lazarus' savior, not realizing that what had

happened at the tomb was as forbidden as mentioning the name of the One who had effected the deed.

Mary had come in, rather shyly, around this time, and helped Martha to place the guests on the dining-couches, with those from Jerusalem lying at all the high places around the outside of the U of the table (the serving was done from inside)—to the left and right of Lazarus, who would, of course, as the master of the house, be at the center of the curve. Jesus and the Twelve were seated in the lowest places at the table, but given what Jesus had taught about such things, they were not in much of a position to complain.

At least Jesus was lying at the arm of the table in front of Lazarus (though it meant that he had to tip his head to look at him); it would have been a distinct insult if Lazarus had not been facing in his direction. John, fortunately, was in a position to have a good view of the head of the table.

Martha and Judith with the servants served the dinner; and again Mary absented herself. Matthew had tried to catch her eye earlier, but she had been very preoccupied with something-or-other, and left as soon as she decently could.

Martha had just taken in some dish to serve, when Mary, with a look of anguish and sorrow, rushed into the room, looked about as if distraught, and said, "Master! Forgive me!" and rushed to his feet, which, like everyone's, were hanging over the outside edge of the dining-couch on which he was lying. She broke the neck of a bottle of nard and poured it over them, kneeling and wiping them with her hair. At first, she made weeping noises, and then the tears became all too real. Everyone, Matthew especially, was paralyzed with shock. This was a reenactment, for some reason, of what they all knew had

happened at the house of Simon the Pharisee in Magdala.

The scent of the perfume filled the whole room, as it must have done in Magdala, and there was total, stunned silence, except for her weeping, as he had been told there had been then. John could not make head or tail of it, especially the last part. Mary seemed genuinely remorseful about something-or-other.

“Why this waste?” came a scornful voice, shattering the stillness. It was Judas.

Mary froze and now there was not a sound at all. “Why was this perfume not sold?” he went on. “It would have brought three hundred denarii, and we could have given the money to the poor.”

Jesus looked over at him, with a momentary flash of disdain, swiftly overcome. Then he said, in a gentle voice, “Let her alone. Why are you pestering her? She has done a me a great kindness.” He looked down at her. “She is preparing me for my burial. You always have the poor with you; you will not always have me.” Then he looked around the room. “Amen I tell you, whenever the good news about me is reported in the whole world, what she has done this day will be told in memory of her.”

As he was speaking, there was a sudden stirring. Mary looked up, and everyone’s eyes focused on Lazarus, his face ashen, rising from the table and rushing out of the room. Mary leaped up and ran after him. In the room, people began getting up and there was general consternation.

There was a movement to try to follow him, and then people began to think better of it, and a few blocked the door. And then, from the other room, suddenly there were women’s

screams and sounds of fighting, which went on for a considerable time. It sounded as if Judith had attacked Mary, of all things, and then Martha had joined in.

After what seemed an hour, but was probably only a few minutes, Lazarus' voice rose above the tumult. "Judith! Judith! Judith! Stop! Stop!"

Immediately, everything ceased. There was a dead silence both in the room where the fighting had been going on and in the dining room.

Lazarus' voice came again, too soft for words to be audible, and then there was the sound of Judith sobbing and muffled words, as if she were speaking into cloth.

After another, rather briefer silence, Lazarus spoke again and she answered, more distinctly now but still too faint to for anyone to understand what was being said. Lazarus spoke again, rather more at length, and then she replied, with something that sounded like, "Dear *dear* Lazarus, I did not dare!"

Judith? "Dear Lazarus?" Good heavens! Judith was in *love* with Lazarus! Of all people! But—miracle of miracles!—Lazarus seemed to reciprocate it, from the little they could hear. It certainly sounded like it. Incredible! It had taken this to bring Lazarus to his senses, and Jesus had done it! He had done it! He could indeed do anything!

—Well, at least somewhat *more* to his senses than he had been. To make Lazarus a rational individual would be to create a completely different person. And, to be sure, the Lazarus who emerged after a short interval *was* in some sense an entirely different person either from the one who had entered that room of mayhem or the one they had seen earlier in the day. But he was still recognizably Lazarus. He was secretly elated about

something—obviously about loving Judith, and being loved by her! Incredible!—and announced to all that he was sorry to have disturbed the party, but that there had been a slight accident that he had been able to take care of (“Oh yes?” thought John), and now everything would be all right; that no one was really hurt, but that it was better, all things considered, for the women to remain in seclusion for the rest of the day—and, in short, he begged their pardon for suggesting that it might be well to put an end to the festivities.

They all pronounced that they understood perfectly, though but a few of them had anything like a suspicion of the truth—if it *was* the truth. What bewildered most of them was the contrast to what he had been just moments before. All, including Jesus and his Emissaries, left with a minimum of fuss, a few of the banking friends asking Lazarus when they would see him in Jerusalem, to which he replied, “Soon. Soon. Very soon, in fact.” They seemed gratified with his response.

They went back to the camp at Ephraim, where Ezra came over, all eagerness to find out what happened. When Thomas told him, he laughed his great laugh, and said, “He certainly has a wonderful sense of humor, has he not, in addition to all his other qualities! Thomas, there is hope for you yet! There is hope for both of us!” John, who overheard, concurred.

THIRTY-FIVE

JESUS INFORMED THE EMISSARIES, AFTER a day in their camp near Ephraim, that on the morrow they would be entering Jerusalem, in preparation for the Passover.

Everyone realized that the confrontation was now about to occur, and hoped that there were enough Galileans and supporters of Jesus to tip the scales in his favor. But Jesus was sure to reiterate the claim that he was God when they tried to make him King by acclamation, and say that the Reign of God would come in his person; and it was anyone's guess what would happen then. The slightest thing could turn everyone against him, and with a crowd such as was bound to be there, when that happened, stoning would be the most benign of all outcomes.

All began well—too well, in fact, to last. When they reached the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent a couple of people ahead, telling them to untie a young donkey with its dam, and bring them to him. They returned saying that the owners were Josiah and Amos, who recognized them, and were glad to lend

them.

Jesus then mounted the donkey colt, and rode on it toward Jerusalem. When the people saw him, a huge crowd formed. Someone cut down a branch from a palm tree and waved it, shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" and soon almost everyone joined in, crying that Jesus was the King of Israel, and "Blessed is the one coming in the Master's name!" and strewing either palm branches or their own cloaks on the road in front of Jesus. The roar became deafening.

"Rabbi," shouted a Pharisee who came up, "curb your followers!" and Jesus answered, "Amen I tell you, if they were to be silent, the very stones would shout!" All this was at the top of their lungs, to be heard over the crowd.

When they arrived at the Temple, things calmed down somewhat. The Pharisees and Sadducees were there, with difficulties that they hoped would discredit Jesus; but he calmly answered them all, in such a way that they were the ones who looked foolish, not he.

The Passover, of course, and its preparation were always confusing, with the narrow streets of Jerusalem crammed with people, donkeys, oxen, some horses, the soldiers trying to keep order, vendors of lambs shouting their wares, since every family had to have one for the feast on, as it appeared, the day before the Sabbath. There seemed to be a difference of opinion as to when the moon would actually be full, which was the beginning of the festivities.

But all this was compounded by the disputes that Jesus was having with his interrogators, and the shouting-matches that went on in the audience between those who held that Jesus had been totally vanquished by his accusers and those who were

convinced that Jesus had demolished them. It was impossible actually to listen to anything.

The tumult went on for several days, with Jesus leaving at sundown for the Mount of Olives and the Gethsemani Garden, which, surprisingly enough, the authorities had not found out about. True, the group was quite circumspect in going there. Jesus had seen to it that they did not go in a body, but severally, by separate routes; and since Jesus himself never seemed to be in any one of the smaller groups, the people did not know whom to follow. John did not find this surprising.

John wondered what had come of the deliberations the Pharisees had about how to get rid of Jesus. He suspected that nothing would happen when there was a crowd around, and so probably they would wait until everyone was eating the Passover meal, and if they could find Jesus, seize him then and hold him until afterward, when they would display him beaten and disgraced somehow, and thus turn the crowd against him. Nothing made Judeans hate someone as much as his being disgraced.

Everything was timing. So far, Jesus's timing had been perfect. God grant that it would last three or four more days!

Then one day, some people who spoke Greek approached Philip (who, it turned out, by this time also spoke Greek fairly well) and asked if they could see Jesus. Philip, who did not feel up to doing anything on his own, sought out Andrew, and they went to Jesus and told him who wished to speak to him.

Instead of answering, Jesus drew in his breath. "The time has come for the Son of Man to show what he really is!" he said, looking at the people who had come behind them, and beyond them to the blue sky. Then he looked round at those of the

Twelve who were near him, and said, “Amen amen I tell you, if a grain of wheat does not fall to the ground and die, it remains alone; but if it dies, it multiplies itself many times over.” He was on a step, and looked down at his students, loving them. “Anyone who cares about his life,” he said, “will lose it, and anyone who hates his life in this world will save it for eternal life! And if anyone wants to be my slave, he is to follow me, so that my slave will be where I am; and then my Father will show respect for anyone who follows me.”

John cringed. How could he bear it? How could he walk up to Skull Hill with a crossbeam on his own back, following Jesus? He had seen crucifixions—they were common—but he had always turned his eyes away immediately, in horror. Would he actually be *in* one?

Jesus closed his own eyes, as if in pain, and shook his head back and forth. “But now my soul is in turmoil. And what should I say? ‘Father, rescue me from this moment’? —But I came just for this moment! Father, show how great your name is!”

And then John heard the thunder speak, as it did before, when John bathed Jesus: “I have shown it, and I will show it again!”

“Did you hear that?” said some. “The thunder?” said others. “No, it was words!” “An angel was speaking to him!”

“That voice,” said Jesus, “did not speak for my sake; it spoke for yours. The present moment is the crisis of the world! Now is the time when the ruler of this world will be driven into exile! And if I am lifted up off the ground”—and he held out his arms. The cross again!—“I will draw everyone to myself!” The cross. The cross. Dear God, the cross! He knew, somehow,

from the Greeks that he would fail!

“Wait! Wait! Wait!” shouted the people. There were confused cries of, “We heard that the Prince will stay with us forever!” “How is it that you say this Son of Man is to be lifted up somewhere?” “Just who *is* this ‘Son of Man’?”

“The light is with you for only a little while,” said Jesus when he could be heard over the tumult. “Do your traveling while you have light, and do not let the darkness overtake you; people who travel in darkness do not know where they are going! And while you have the light, believe in the light, so that you will be children of light!”

Immediately the crowd broke into another uproar. Some were defending Jesus, and others kept saying, “Whenever we ask something sensible, he gives us poetry!”

Jesus slipped away in the confusion, and went back to Gethsemani. His disappearance was a signal for the students also to leave and meet him there.

John was numb. He walked—or rather, staggered after one of the groups who were crossing the Kidron brook.

On this afternoon, the day before what most were saying was the Eve of the Passover, some of the students asked Jesus where he wanted them to go to make the Passover dinner ready. Judas was among them. But Jesus singled out two others, and said to them, “Go into the city and you will meet a man there whom you will recognize. Tell him that I ask him if he knows a place where I can eat the Passover dinner with my students. He will show you a room, and you can make it ready. Today.” The two students were a bit nonplused at this, but assumed that it was because of the danger they were all in.

Another brilliant move. The authorities were probably, as

John had thought, waiting until Jesus was going to the Passover dinner, or just before sundown, so that they would not “defile themselves” with the “work” of murdering their God. But Jesus was going to eat the Passover on the day earlier, which some held was the correct date. He would be gone by the time they came to capture him. And he sent the students in such a way that Judas could not know where he was going to eat it.

Why was he doing this if he knew it was futile? John supposed he was doing everything in his power, short of destroying their freedom, to succeed, but he knew that leaving them free was the insuperable obstacle. Insuperable because he had created them free, and he would not contradict his creation.

In any case, that evening, Jesus led them to the house in Jerusalem, telling them at the last minute that they would be eating the Passover dinner that night, instead of on the beginning of the Sabbath (which of course began at sundown the following day).

Ezra came over and said something to Thomas, presumably about Judas, who presumably was going to betray Jesus. Otherwise, how would the authorities know where to look? If John had seen Judas at that moment, he would have choked him to death. “David and I will be waiting in the garden,” he said audibly. Only the Twelve were to eat the dinner this night. John hoped that if Ezra and David saw Judas, they would carry out Ezra’s threat that he would wish he were dead.

Matthew entered the room last, with the rest of the students already lying on the dining-couches (Judas had got in somehow without John’s noticing), and as Matthew took his place, Jesus nodded to see that the number was complete, and rose, took off his robe, and picked up a towel and a basin and

went to the students to wash their feet.

“Master, are you going to wash my feet?” asked the Rock.

“You do not understand what I am doing at the moment,” said Jesus. “Afterwards, you will see what it was.”

“You will not wash my feet!” exclaimed the Rock. Only slaves did such things. “Ever!”

Jesus looked over at him, with an enigmatic smile. “If I do not wash you, you will have no share in the inheritance I am to receive.”

“Oh, well, then, Master, not just my feet! Wash my hands and face also!”

Jesus laughed and said, “One who has bathed needs only his feet washed; the rest of him is clean. And you people are clean.” He looked around at them. “Though not all of you,” he added, seriously. So he knew. Of course he knew.

But Judas did not. Or if he did, he was a master of composure, even looking thoughtful. It was almost as if he were waiting to see if he would carry through what he had planned or not. He even did not flinch when Jesus came to him and washed his feet.

After he had finished and put his robe back on and lain down again, he said to all of them “Now. Do you know what I have done to you? You call me ‘Teacher,’ and ‘Master,’—your owner—and you are right. That is what I am. Now if your Master and Teacher washes your feet, you ought to wash each other’s feet. I have given you an example to follow.”

Everyone looked around, wondering if he meant this literally, or if it was another metaphor. “I am not speaking to all of you,” said Jesus. “I know the ones I chose. I am saying it to fulfill what was written, ‘One who is eating bread with me has

raised his heel to stomp on me.’ And I am telling you before it happens, so that when it does happen, you will believe me.”

He went on talking, but everyone had caught what he was driving at and began talking at once to each other. Jesus then shuddered and sobbed out, “Amen amen I tell you, one of you will betray me!”

So Judas *was* considering it; he must have made the agreement, but Jesus had surprised him by eating the Passover a day early. Jesus had to be giving him a chance to change his mind.

Everyone else was concerned that it might be himself, and began asking Jesus. John, who was in the seat of honor in front of Jesus, leaned back and whispered, “Master, who is it?” as if he did not know, and Jesus whispered back, “It is the one I give a piece of bread to after I have dipped it in the sauce.”

Shortly afterward, far enough away from their whispered conference to make it not seem connected, dipped a piece of bread in the sauce and handed it to Judas: a gesture of particular friendship.

John, who was watching closely, saw that Judas—who had to have been on pins and needles—connected the gesture to what John and Jesus had said to each other. Of *course* he would. He would be suspicious of anything unusual, and here were two unusual things: a whispered exchange in the context of “Who is it?” and a gesture of special friendship. His mind, which had twisted everything to fit his theory, would have twisted this as a signal to John and an insult to him, and by accident he had interpreted it almost correctly. There was no insult. Jesus was telling him he was still his friend, even if he knew what he had had in mind.

But Judas's mind had been poisoned. He could no more believe this than he could believe that Jesus and the Father were one and the same thing. Jesus saw this, and said, in a voice of resignation, "Do, then, what you were to do; but be quick about it." And Judas left.

It was night.

John tried to rise to follow him and kill him or stop him somehow, but Jesus, who was lying behind him, put his arm across his chest and held him down. John took in his breath to shout, "You fools! Stop that traitor!" but before he could actually pronounce the words, Jesus said in his ear, "No!"

"But why?" he whispered.

"I will explain afterward. If we do not let him go, it would be a calamity for all of us."

After Judas had gone, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has shown what he really is. And what God is has been shown in him. And if what God is—" John lost the train of thought, he was so full of rage at Judas. He heard Jesus say, "Children, I am with you only a few moments, and I now tell you what I told the Judeans: you cannot come where I am going."

Then perhaps we will not be with him when he is crucified! thought John. Dear God, let it be that, and not that we would never see him again! He *had* to come back! He *had* to!

"I now give you a new commandment: You are to love each other. You are to have the same love for each other that I have for you. This is how everyone will recognize you for my students: by the love you have for each other."

And John hated Judas! How could he not hate Judas, who was about to have the God of the Universe killed! It was beyond outrageous! But Jesus, he was sure, loved him. He was still

leaving him the chance to repent. But suppose he repents *after* he has done the damage and shown the authorities where we would be? How could anyone love him then? “Oh, my, I am guilty of murder—of deicide!—and I am sorry. Pity me!” But Jesus would pity him and forgive him and give him eternal life, John was sure. That was the love Jesus had for Judas; it was why he let him go.

And we were to love “each other,” presumably—no, obviously—including Judas “with the same love I have for you.” It was not possible.

No, that was wrong. It was not *humanly* possible. “But with God, everything is possible.” John wanted to cry out (but Jesus was talking to all of them still) “Master, if you want me to do such a thing, do it in me. I cannot!”

And he knew what Jesus would say: “Try to try. I do not ask for success, but that you try.” John could not bring himself actually to try, but he tried to do so—and failed spectacularly every time he thought of what Judas was doing—and what he *had* been doing to destroy each of them! How *could* he?

Simon Rock suddenly broke in with, “Master, where are you going?” and Jesus answered, “You cannot follow me now where I am going. You will come after me later.”

“Master,” the Rock answered. “Why can I not follow you now? I will give up my life for you!” The fool! He had no idea what that meant!

Jesus answered, in an ironically amused way, “You will give up your life for me? Amen I tell you, a rooster will not crow before you have repudiated me three times! But do not be worried. Trust in God, and trust in me.”

There it was again. Trust. This was going to make sense

somehow, even if the horrible prediction came true. John could not fathom how, but it *had* to.

Jesus's words came again. "I am leaving to make a place ready for you. And if I do go and have a place made ready for you, I will come back and take you with me, so that you will be with me where I am. And at least you know the way there."

Thomas could not stand it. "Master," he said, "we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way there?"

"*I* am the way," answered Jesus, looking at him with indulgent kindness. "And I am truth, and life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you know the Father also. And you do know him; you have seen him."

And then Philip blurted in his naive eagerness. "Show us the Father, Master, and that will be all we need!"

Jesus snapped, "I have been with you—*all—this—time*, Philip, and you *still* do not know who I am? Anyone who looks at *me* is *seeing* the Father! How can you tell me to show you the Father? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? It is not from *me* the words I say come from; the father, who lives in me, is using them to do what he wants done! Believe me that I am *in* the Father, and the Father is in me! Or at least believe it because of what I have done!"

He closed his eyes and shook his head in exasperation. Then, more calmly, he sighed and said, "Amen amen I tell you, anyone who believes in me will do the things I have done; he will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask the Father in my name."

THIRTY-SIX

Somehow, thought John, all would be well. Somehow. We could not go where he was going now, but he would come back and take us to where he really was—with the Father, one supposes—and then every tear would somehow be wiped away. John could not believe it, but it had to be true. It *had* to be true. The tomb would be empty—and *then* what would Daniel say?

He would find some sophism to explain it. He would think they had stolen Jesus's body.

But perhaps he would have a doubt, which would nag him because of John, and John would have been the instrument of his salvation. And perhaps he and Daniel would meet—with Ezra, and perhaps even a transformed Judas, however loathsome that seemed at the moment—and they would all rejoice together forever, having all that they desired from their illicit attraction, but purified of all evil.

It was too good to be true!

But look what the price was! "Master, we are not worth it!" John cried in his thoughts, while Jesus kept talking.

John's mind was in turmoil. If Jesus wanted them to remember what he was saying, he would have to repeat it after he came back to life; no one, John was sure, could follow him.

But toward the end of the dinner, he held up one of the pieces of unleavened bread, and said, "Take this and eat it. This is my body, which will be given up for you." He handed pieces to each of them. So *that* was what it was. This was, "Unless you eat the meat of my body, you will not have life in you"! He must have transformed himself into this piece of bread, just as in his infinity, he had transformed himself into a man. John thought, He told Philip, "anyone who is looking at me is seeing the Father," and now as I look at this piece of bread, I am seeing Jesus in his bodily reality. How can anyone believe it?

But it was not a question of whether anyone *can* believe it, it was whether one *chose* to believe it. If God can look like a man, then a man can look like—and taste like—a piece of bread. Either that, or nothing whatever makes sense.

As he was puzzling over this, the dinner came to an end, whereupon Jesus took a cup of wine, thanked the Father, held it up and said, "Take this—all of you (he looked over at Thomas, who seemed frightened)—and drink from it. This is the cup of my blood, the blood ratifying the new Treaty, which will be shed for you and for many, many others for the forgiveness of sins."

So his death *was* to forgive the sins of mankind. John looked at Thomas as the cup came in his direction. His hand trembled as he received it, and he looked over at Jesus, who nodded. Would it be—or taste like—water again? He took a mouthful, and, John knew, for he had already drunk from it, it tasted exactly like wine. As he handed the cup on, he looked

again at Jesus as if to ask if he should swallow it. Jesus nodded again. It would do no damage, John thought, as he saw Thomas struggle with the sensation—and then quickly modified this into thinking, “no *permanent* damage.” Much that was horrible was going to come, and who knew? But all would be well.

He hoped.

“Come now; let us go out.”

As they walked through the darkness, Jesus was saying, “What I really am is a vine, and my Father is the farmer. He cuts off every branch in me that does not bear fruit—” Was he referring to Judas?

“—back every one that does bear fruit, so that it will bear more. And you have already been pruned by what I said to you. Stay in me, and let me stay in you. You cannot bear fruit unless you stay in me, any more than a branch can bear fruit if it does not stay on the vine.”

Was Judas still on the vine, in spite of his betrayal, or not? Something in John hoped not, but he knew Jesus wished him to be on the vine, if he repented. Would he repent, or even think better of it beforehand? No, in that case, Jesus would not be speaking of leaving them.

“You did not choose me,” Jesus was saying. “I chose you, and I have put you here for you to go on and bear fruit, and for your fruit to last! But I *command* you to love each other.” Even Judas!

And then Jesus prayed for them, that they too would be one and the same thing as he was, just as he was one and the same thing as the Father. John realized that because of what he had eaten and drunk that night, he actually lived with the life of Jesus! Which was the life of God Almighty, the one whose name

no one dared to pronounce! It was incredible!

But then, everything was incredible! Small wonder that Judas, who had built his life on reason, could not believe it! And Judas, he noted, had not eaten the “bread” that gave life. Jesus had waited until he was gone.

They arrived at the garden. As they went through the gate, Jesus told them to wait and try to sleep while he went over farther with John, big James and the Rock, where he prostrated himself on a large stone, and prayed, obviously in agony himself.

And John saw Jesus pleading with the Father, and begging the Father to take his cup from his lips. “But have your will be done, not mine!” He was *not* the Father, somehow, even if he was one and the same as the Father. John was completely confused.

And in his confusion, fell asleep. Jesus, in despair, came to them for comfort, and had to wake them up! John was devastated with shame.

And he went back praying again, and his face became bloody, somehow, as if his sweat were blood! He was writhing on the ground in agony—but there was some being there who was comforting him, a being John could somehow sense without seeing.

And he fell asleep again, and was wakened again. “The spirit is willing,” said Jesus, “but matter is weak.” John could have choked himself. *This* time he would stay awake! It was the *least* he could do.

And he fell asleep.

Once again Jesus came back, but now he said in a voice of trembling with agony and total exhaustion, “Sleep, now, and try to rest.” and then lifted his head as he heard a noise. “Rise, let

us go forward. The traitor is here.”

And through the gate came Judas with a contingent from the High Priest and some Roman soldiers, armed with torches, lanterns, clubs, and other weapons. Was that Hannah among them? He moved back into the shadows.

Judas then came up and kissed Jesus. Kissed him! *Kissed* him! Jesus made a reply in a low voice, and then stepped forward and said, “Who is it you are looking for?”

“Jesus of Nazareth,” answered the soldier in charge.

“That is the one I AM,” said Jesus, and the words “I AM” rang through the garden like the tolling of a huge bell, almost deafening everyone. The soldiers, along with Judas, stepped back, and fell prostrate in terror.

After a short while of dead silence, Jesus said again, “Who is it you are looking for?”

The attackers got to their feet, and the commander answered in a small, shaking voice, “Jesus of, ah, Nazareth.”

“I told you that was the one I was,” said Jesus. “And if I am the one you are looking for, then let these people go.”

Then the Rock, who had for some unaccountable reason a sword, drew it and slashed at the head of one of the High Priest’s slaves; but the slave dodged, and all he accomplished was to cut off his ear.

“Put your sword back in its sheath!” snapped Jesus, and the Rock, trembling, complied. “Am I not to drink the cup the Father has given me?”

“Allow me to do this much,” he told the commander, and picked up the man’s ear and reattached it. Everyone was dumbfounded, and simply stood there, while Jesus said, “If I am the one you want, then let these people go,” and waved for

his students to escape, and they all ran off, John among them. They had to go through the gate, which meant going through the contingent of soldiers and guards, but no one offered to stop them. John thought, "Then we are not to be crucified with him!" He did not know whether he was faint with joy at this, or faint with consternation that he could not follow his Master. But Jesus had to know it was beyond them, even with his help. He had said, "This is your hour, and the power of darkness" to the captors.

But John had not gone far before he stopped. "No!" he said to himself. "Let me follow them!" he now whispered, as he contingent went back across the Kidron brook. John kept in the shadows, and suddenly knew that they were going to the High Priest's palace. Of course they were; they would have to have a trial of sorts there before they could take Jesus to the Antonia fortress to see Pontius Pilate, who was the only one who could authorize a crucifixion. He took a short cut, and saw them enter while he was still a block away.

"Now what do we do?" said the Rock, who had appeared beside him. "I suspected they would take him here, but we cannot get in."

"I can," said John. "Perhaps you can also, if I say you are with me." He went up to the front door and knocked. Hannah opened it a crack. "Yes?"

"It is John, Hannah. Could I enter, please?"

"I know not, John. You see, ~~there is~~ ^{I know}. I think perhaps Annas will not object to my being here if he knows that I will not create a fuss—I will do nothing. I merely want to observe."

"I know not—I—well, I will ask him."

"And my friend also would like to enter, simply to observe."

We will do nothing.”

“That is more difficult still. Wait here, please, outside.”

They waited for what seemed a considerable time, and finally she opened the door again. “The Master says that you may enter. But he wishes to see you in his room. Your friend may stay in the courtyard, but is to do nothing but observe. He wants you in his room to assure yourself that we are doing everything to be fair.”

“I am very grateful.” And he went in, with the Rock behind him. He pointed to the entrance to the courtyard, and followed Hannah into Annas’s chambers (Caiaphas was now the actual high priest).

As he entered, Annas said, “I wondered if I would see you, dear boy, on this unfortunate night. You are not planning a rescue mission, are you?”

“No, Master. Our master has made it clear that he is willing to be captured. If you talk to the guard—or even to Hannah, who was there, I believe—it will be clear that if he was not willing, he would not be here.”

“Well, that is another matter that we need not discuss. The fact is, he is here, and I asked to have him brought to me first, and I am happy that you are here to see that we are simply going to examine him, and if we find nothing against him, we will gladly let him go. We intend—at least I certainly intend, and I *think* I can speak for the present High Priest also—to be scrupulously fair.”

“I am happy to hear that,” said John, but added to himself, “at least to all appearances. He will not leave here a free man.”

“But here he is,” said Annas, as there was a knock on his door, which opened and Jesus entered, bound and with a guard

of one of those John had seen in the past. The guard looked at John rather suspiciously, but said nothing. John moved to a corner of the room. Jesus also looked in his direction, but gave no sign that he recognized him.

“You are Jesus of Nazareth?” said Annas.

“I am.”

“We have been hearing much about you that is disturbing, and we wished to find out if it is well-founded. Who or what, exactly, do you claim that you are, and what exactly is your teaching?”

“What I have said,” answered Jesus, “has been public and to the world. I always taught in the synagogue and the Temple with Judeans all around me, and never said anything secret. Why question me? Find out what I said from the ones who heard what I told them. They know what it ~~was~~ ^{is}.” “that the way you answer the High Priest?” said the guard with a slap on Jesus’s face.

Jesus’s bound hands went up to his cheek, as he turned to the guard, and said calmly, “If I said anything illegal, then bring a charge against me for it. But if what I said was legal, why did you slap me?”

“Take him to Caiaphas,” said Annas. “It is obvious he has nothing to say to me.” And the guard led him off.

Annas then turned to John. “I am sorry, dear boy. Of course, he regards us as the enemy, and realizes, I suppose, that the less he says, the better off he is. Clearly, he knows the position he is in; but what it means is that he will have to stand trial. I had a hope—a rather forlorn hope, I must admit—that perhaps we could settle matters ourselves, and I could let him go, if he agreed to leave Jerusalem for the next few days.”

"I am sure, Master, that he would not agree to that."

"Yes, well, it seems clear that you are right. I would I could let you into the courtroom, but that is out of my hands. Only the Sanhedrin will be there."

"I understand."

"But you can wait in the courtyard, if you choose."

"I think I will do that, if you please. I will not trouble you further."

"I hope that perhaps I will see you again, on somewhat more auspicious terms. Peace."

"Peace," said John, and left, making his way down into the courtyard, which had a fire in the middle, since it was cold that night, though clear and lit brightly by the full moon, which was now directly overhead. There was a commotion as John came up. The Rock was saying, "I told you I have no idea of whom you are speaking. I swear I do not know that man, whoever he is!" just as a rooster began to crow loudly. He looked up in horror at what he had just said, and suddenly burst into tears, and rushed toward the door. Hannah, shocked, opened it, and he dashed out, crying.

John came up to her, and she said, "Did you know that he was a follower of this Jesus of Nazareth?"

"I did," said John. "I am one myself—fear not. The Master knows."

"And he does not—" she let the sentence hang.

"No. He said he wished me to observe his examination of Jesus, to show that he was being fair."

"And was he?"

"I could find no real fault with it, I suppose. But of course I cannot enter the courtroom for the actual trial, which is why

I am out here.”

“Then I suppose if he knows, we can allow you to stay.”

“Thank you. He said I could also.”

“Then that settles it. But *that* one. I asked him if he was a follower, and he looked frightened, and denied it. But it seemed to me that I had seen him there, as did one or two others, and so we asked him again. And he denied it once more; but then, somebody told me that he was the one who cut the ear off Shealtiel, and—did you?—Were you there?

“I was, and I saw it.”

“I thought I would faint. And then again when he put it back on! It almost would make someone believe in him. Especially after that “I AM” that he said. It was incredible!”

“Well, multiply that by a thousand, and you will understand why I am his follower. I hope they do nothing to him; he is a danger to no one.”

“Oh, John, that is not what *they* think! Not at all! I fear it looks very bad for him.”

“I am convinced of it myself. As is he. But you saw that if he did not want to be captured, you would not have been able to take him. He told you to let us all go, and we all went right by all the soldiers and everyone, and no one made a move to stop us. If he had not wished to be captured, he would simply not have been there, all on a sudden. I have seen it happen many, many times.”

“Indeed? They told me about something of that sort, but I did not believe it.”

“They doubtless told you many things that were true, but were incredible, and so not believed. But you saw one or two with your own eyes.”

"I know not what to say, John. I am so sorry."

"Do not be concerned. It is certainly not your fault."

"But I hate to think—well, I am but a servant. What could I do?"

"I wonder if Daniel is here."

"I could see if he is awake. I suppose he is." And she left. John stood just inside the door, wondering what had happened to the Rock. Doubtless he would be wandering about outside, staying near, as probably all the other emissaries were. John wished that he could get into the courtroom, but he knew it was hopeless; but then he thought that Nicodemus would be there, and he could tell them afterwards what went on. He could not believe that Nicodemus would have gone over to their side.

Hannah appeared with Daniel behind her. "John!" he exclaimed. "I never expected to find you here!" They embraced. "Thank you, Hannah," they said together.

"Here. Let us go in here," said Daniel, and led him into a room apart. "It cannot but be devastating to you," he said. "But he has reportedly said many things that certainly can be interpreted as blasphemous, and you know how they are."

"I know. And I know they *would* be blasphemous if they were not true. The problem is that they are true."

"Yes, well. But you know *they* will never believe that."

"Still, if they need two or three witnesses to agree on exactly what he said, they are going to have trouble. Everything he has ever said is open to several interpretations, and you know how witnesses are."

"Oh, I know. Finding exact agreement is next to impossible. Still, I would not hold out too much hope. There

are ways of arranging such things.”

“Oh, I know. I *have* no hope. Somehow all this will result in our salvation, though I suspect the world will not be transformed as Isaiah predicted.”

“Good heavens! You mean with children playing with adders and lions eating hay?”

“Well, that is poetry. But I think suffering will not be taken away from the world, as it would have been if he were named King.”

“And this is the man who is wedded to the facts! He must be *very* convincing.”

“Well, Isaiah also predicted the suffering servant.”

“He did indeed. And it looks very much as if *that* will come to pass, I fear.”

“Well, what will be will be. But remember the empty tomb.”

“I have not forgotten. But do not *you* forget that I said I *might* believe.”

“Well, I wanted to see you, perhaps for the last time, depending on what happens. It was good of you to come.”

“John, I would come to see you any time. You know that. But seriously, John—” He paused, as if thinking how to say what he wanted to say.

“What?”

He put his hands on his shoulders and looked straight into his eyes. “John, if you—but—John, never start! Never start!”

They embraced. Daniel made as if to kiss him, but John, remembering Ezra’s kiss, backed away. “I will pray for you, Daniel. I have seen miracles. Literally!”

Tears filled Daniel’s eyes, as he said, “I am not certain that

I wish you to do so, my *very good* friend. Peace.”

“Peace, my very good friend.”

Interesting, John thought as he walked to the courtyard, he tells me never to start, and yet he would have kissed me if I had let him—no doubt as Ezra kissed me—and God knows what it would have led to. He was an object lesson in why he was right; once one starts, one keeps going, barring a miracle.

Master, please have mercy on him; he is a good man, really.

THIRTY-SEVEN

hE ARRIVED AT THE COURTYARD and waited, and the night wore on. Toward the third watch, the members of the Sanhedrin came out of the courtroom, talking to each other. John waited by the door, to see if he could meet Nicodemus, and finally he emerged. "Can you tell me what happened?" he asked.

"Who are—ah, yes, you were with him, were you not?" he whispered. "Come apart here." and he went over to a secluded corner, in shadow.

"He has been condemned, I suppose."

He sighed. "He has. I thought he might just escape, since he said nothing at all, and of course, we could not get any two witnesses to agree. Some said the most absurd things! You cannot imagine!"

"I would prefer not to try."

"Wise lad. But the High Priest became desperate; it looked as if we could find no excuse to condemn him—though everyone believed him guilty, I must admit. So finally, the High

Priest said, 'I command you, in the name of the Living God, to tell us if you are the Prince, the Son of God.' Well, he had the authority to command Jesus, and so he answered, 'You are correct. And I tell you that after this time, you will see the Son of Man enthroned beside the Power, and coming upon the clouds of heaven.' Well, there was no way to save him then. The High Priest tore at his robe, and said, 'He has blasphemed! What need have we of more witnesses? You yourselves have heard the blasphemy!'"

"It was not blasphemy, you know. It is hard to believe, but if you had seen all I have seen. . ."

"I have seen enough, youngster. I have seen enough. But there is no convincing them. Especially since they are terrified that his claim to be King will bring the Romans down upon us!"

"I am certain that that would not happen, if we accepted him."

"I suppose not. But they could not be made to believe it. No, they will find a way to degrade him in the eyes of the people out there, and then it will be all over."

"I know. That is what he himself thinks. He seems to think that if he is rejected, then it is only by making himself the Suffering Servant that he can save the rest of us from our sins."

"Well, that was the prophesy, was it not?"

"It seems to have been one of them. The other was what would happen if he were accepted."

"Ah, then you think—that had not occurred to me. What a tragedy! What a catastrophe!"

"The Master does nothing in vain. And he wished to give us a chance to undo what Adam did. But we will fail again."

"I suppose it was inevitable."

“Given the *miserable, wretched fools!* that we are! I cannot *stand* it!”

“But I must go. There will be more meetings, and I must be there. Peace.” He laughed, sardonically. “There will never be peace again!”

“Peace, Nicodemus. If after all this, you wish to join us, we will be in the house—” and he whispered the address of the place they had met for the Last Supper.

“I know it. May God have mercy on all of us!”

“Amen,” said John, as Nicodemus left.

And he waited an eternity, watching people come and go. They had taken Jesus somewhere, and there were noises coming from the place. John could not bear to hear them.

And he waited.

Then, around dawn, a group of guards, one of whom seemed to be the centurion Matthew knew, took a battered, broken Jesus out of the palace toward the Antonia, where the Governor, Pontius Pilate, had his headquarters. John followed.

And he waited, outside on what they called the “Pavement,” looking up at a balcony where the Governor sometimes appeared. The members of the Sanhedrin did not enter, because that night was the Passover, and they would defile themselves if they went into a Gentile’s establishment. A crowd gathered.

And they waited.

The governor emerged, and asked, “What is the charge you are bringing against this man?” referring to Jesus, who had gone in with him.

“If he were not a criminal, we would not have brought him before you,” was the shouted answer from one of the Judeans.

“Very well, then you take him and try him by your own laws.”

“We are not allowed to put anyone to death!” they shouted. Pilate shrugged, and smiled his customary meaningless smile, and went back inside to speak once again to Jesus.

And they waited.

After a while, a rather nervous Pilate emerged, still with his false smile, and said, “I do not see that you have a case against him. And you have a custom that I let a prisoner go for you at the Passover. Do you wish me to release this ‘King of Judea’?”

“Not him!” shouted the Pharisees. “Barabbas!” Pilate was not happy about this, but he went back inside, apparently to prepare Jesus for execution.

And they waited. For a long time.

Finally, a definitely nervous Pilate came out again and said, “I am now going to bring him out, to show you that *I* find nothing wrong with what he did.” And Jesus emerged, full of blood and spittle, wearing a red soldier’s cloak as if it were royal robes, and a crown on his head that seemed to be made of thorns. He swayed and almost fell, and one of the guards held him up. “There is your man,” said Pilate; “look at him.”

The people were too shocked to say anything for a moment, and then one of the Pharisees shouted, “Crucify him!” and the cry became a chorus. “Crucify him!”

He had been disgraced and degraded, as John feared, and the crowd instantly turned against him.

“You take him yourselves and crucify him,” shouted Pilate over the din. “I have no crime to charge him with.”

“We have a law,” they screamed, “and that law says he has to die, because he made himself the Son of God!”

Pilate looked at Jesus with alarm and consternation. He went back inside with him. What was this? Had Jesus convinced him that he was more than human?

And they waited.

The Judeans were conferring as to what to do if he said he would let him go. They seemed to come to a consensus on the best answer.

Pilate came out, and in a shaken voice said, "I am going to release him. I —" If you let him go, you are no ally of Caesar!" they shouted. Everyone who claims to be King is committing treason against Caesar!"

Pilate, trembling with fear that a riot would start, had his judgment-seat brought out and called for Jesus to be brought also. He stood him beside himself and said, "Look at him! That is your King!" It sounded as if he meant it.

But they had won, and they knew it. "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!"

"You want *me* to crucify your *King*?" said Pilate.

"We have no King but Caesar!" they shouted.

Pilate's face gradually relaxed into the self-satisfied smile he usually wore, and he sentenced Jesus to be crucified, first washing his hands in front of the people and claiming that he himself was innocent of his blood. No one paid attention. There was screaming and shouting everywhere, but there was no one who was a partisan of Jesus; they were all against him, now that they had seen him beaten and degraded. They only wanted the degradation to be complete by seeing him hanging naked on a cross, fouling himself with his own excrement.

And then Jesus and two other prisoners emerged, heavily guarded, with the cross-beams of their crosses on their backs.

Jesus almost collapsed under his cross right at the beginning, because he had spent the night after that dreadful agony in the garden being beaten and mocked by the High Priest's guards, and then apparently whipped within an inch of his life by Pilate's soldiers, who afterward crowned him with the thorns and beat him over the head as they spat on him.

And after several steps, he did fall, and looked as if he was not going to get up. The soldiers lifted him to his feet again, and began looking around. Their eyes fastened on a man almost as big as Andrew, and they told him to carry Jesus's cross behind him. They did not want him dying before he experienced the crucifixion itself.

On the way, Jesus saw his mother, who looked as if she were about to faint. They nodded to each other, silently. Jesus had to save his breath, and Mary had no words. John went up beside her and held her hand.

There were a number of women there also, who were not of those who were cursing and mocking him, and he did stop and say something to them as they wept. But the noise of the crowd was so great that John, who was only several cubits behind him, could not hear. He was trying to shield Mary from being pummeled and shoved by the crowds who were jostling for a better view.

Jesus fell again, now without the burden of the cross. And John fell mentally with him, as Mary all but collapsed at his side. She said not a word, nor did she weep openly, but she could barely walk. He put his arm about her to support her, hoping that he himself would not collapse. His sleepless night and the tension and the agony were beginning to overcome him.

And Jesus slipped on the stones of the narrow street and

fell once again, now about ten or a dozen cubits ahead of them, with the Skull Place in sight. It looked as if he could not get up this time, but the—the centurion *was* the one Matthew knew!—lifted him rather gently, with a look of extreme anguish on his face. Did he know who?—was he not the one whose commander's son was saved from death by a mere word from Jesus? He was! Then he must know who it was he was about to execute!

After an eternity, they arrived, and the prisoners were stripped and laid on top of the crossbeams. The centurion himself drove the nails into the heels of Jesus's hands. Jesus said something, and the centurion paused with eyes closed in pain and the mallet raised, and almost dropped it, but then steeled himself and drove the nail in, after which Jesus and the crossbeam were lifted onto the upright, and his feet nailed, one beside the other, onto the upright. The others were crucified in the same way, one on each side of Jesus. The screams were blood-curdling, though Jesus himself merely kept grunting in agony, trying to find a position which was not absolutely intolerable, and not finding one. He arched his back, but that drove the thorns into the back of his head, and apparently that pain was the worst of all.

John stood there with Mary and her relative, Clopas's Mary; and then Mary Magdalene came up with them. And they watched and waited.

And waited.

And the soldiers finally began dividing the clothes they had taken off the prisoners; but when they saw that Jesus's tunic had no seams, one of them said, "We should not tear it; it will be worth more intact. Let us play dice for it." And John

remembered the psalm—the first lines of which Jesus had shouted just moments ago on the cross! “My God, my God! Why have you abandoned me?” and in the middle, it said, “They have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones. They have divided my clothes among them and played at dice for what I was wearing”! David had foretold this!

He looked at Mary and said, “This was prophesied!”

She answered. “I know.”

“But what can it mean?”

“Ours,” she answered, “is not to understand it; merely to endure it.”

And they looked on at the increasing horror, as it grew dark in the middle of the day, without a cloud in the sky.

Someone screamed, “It is an eclipse of the sun!” and someone else answered, “No. Eclipses only happen on the new moon. The moon passes in front of the sun. The moon is now full. The sun is losing its light!”

“God have mercy on us!” Everyone began beating his breast.

Jesus looked over at his mother and John, and said, “Madam, thatis—that isyour—son.” and then he said to John, “That isyour—mother.” John, his eyes overflowing, took her hand again.

The centurion found Matthew in the crowd, and went over to him, speaking to him with a look of terror on his face.

And then Jesus said, “I am thirsty.” and the centurion, in panic at the darkness, since it was almost as if it were night, called for a sponge, and dipped it in the bucket of wine the soldier had, putting it on his spear and holding it to Jesus’s lips.

When he had moistened them, he said, “It is over!” and

screamed and let his head drop.

And the scream prolonged itself into a huge roar, and the ground shook, and the rock on which they were standing split under them. Everyone fell to the ground.

—And then the sun shone again, the ground stabilized itself, and Jesus was dead.

The centurion looked at him with dread and said, “He really *was* the Son of God!”

Some of the others, now insolent because the world had not come to an end, approached him and pointed to the sign above his head. “It should not say, ‘The King of Judea,’ it should say, ‘He *claimed to be* the King of Judea.’ The centurion said, “You will have to take that up with Pontius Pilate himself. I have simply obeyed his orders.” They left.

And they waited.

John finally said, “It cannot be long now. They will not leave him or the others hanging after sundown, because it is the Passover.” And Joseph of Arimathea came, with an order from the governor, and the soldiers broke the legs of those beside Jesus, who screamed in their last agony and died; and then the centurion, since he saw that Jesus was already dead, took his lance and drove it into Jesus’s side, whereupon what looked like two liquids, red and clear, flowed out.

“You see, he is dead,” he remarked to one of the other soldiers. “The blood does that after death.”

Then Joseph, Nicodemus, Andrew, John, and several others managed to take the body of Jesus down from the cross as the sun began to set.

They hurriedly rubbed the myrrh and aloes over the body, racing to beat the sun, and Joseph said, “My own tomb is just

over the way. It would be an honor if he were buried in it.”

The others agreed, because it was nearby, and the sun was already on the horizon. So they wrapped Jesus quickly with the spices in linen, and carried his body to the tomb, rolling a stone over it just as the Sabbath was about to begin.

John then took Mary, his new mother, under the arm and escorted her to the place where Jesus had given them the meat of his body to eat. They said nothing, and entered, finding one or two already there, also completely silent. They sat against a wall, Mary in the corner, wrapped in her own misery, and existed.

Thirty-Eight

They slept, because no one had energy to do anything else, and then woke and existed once again—forever and ever. No one moved. Eating was unthinkable. They existed, and wished they did not.

There was a discussion, with Nicodemus, on whether they could go back to the tomb on the day after this Sabbath and anoint and bury him properly. Nicodemus began citing various authorities about the rules for burial, when Chusa's Joanna, of all people, broke in with, "Unless there is some explicit provision in the Torah against it, then it most certainly *will* be done!" When Nicodemus demurred and said, "Madame, it is not so simple," she cut him off with, "Give me none of your 'interpretations!' If you cannot find it in the very words of Moses, then I will hear none of it! Has not the Master himself said that these 'interpretations' have made the Law a prison instead of the joy it was supposed to be? Tell me not what your 'interpreters' think!" She actually silenced them! Joanna!

After an eternity, someone asked "Does anyone know what happened? Why he was condemned?" Nicodemus was about to

speak, when John said, “I was there at the very beginning, when he was taken to the former High Priest Annas,” and he told what he had seen, up to the trial.

Nicodemus then described the trial, and how they could not find any consistent evidence against him, until Caiaphas issued his command and Jesus told them he would be coming in the clouds of heaven, “Which was a quotation from Ezekiel indicating that he was divine, and he had referred to himself as ‘I AM’ just before it, so they found him guilty.”

Philip broke in, “Why did they not stone him then and there?”

Thomas said, “I can answer that. Because there would have been a riot. They had to have him executed by Rome for several reasons: first, not to make it appear that they were the ones who did it, or we brave, dauntless, intrepid followers of his would—”

“You ran off as fast as anyone else!” cried Philip.

“I am all too painfully aware of that,” he replied. “They had nothing whatever to fear from us, as was so blatantly demonstrated; but they did not know that. Second, they had to discredit him; and stoning would make him look like one of the other prophets, and would certainly not endear *them* to the people who had heard him denounce them as the descendants of those who had stoned his predecessors. But crucifixion—well, you saw it, and you heard what people were saying. How could anyone respect a person who had been through that? How could anything he said carry any authority after everyone saw him hanging there, stark *naked!* *Pleading* for a drop of *water!* I cannot *bear* it!” He was merely echoing what everyone was thinking.

He paused and took a breath. “You see? It was brilliantly done. The whole council would be in favor of it, because he had

showed to their faces that he was a blasphemer.” He was *not* a blasphemer! It was *true*! He *is* the Son of God! Still!” cried Philip.

“You believe that, and, in spite of what you think, so do I—I think—I know not. I know nothing now. *Pleading* for a drink! . . . But you see my point. If even we doubt it because we saw him there, how would anyone else ever be convinced?”

“He will come back! He said he would! How can you doubt?”

“Philip, Philip, do not—it is time to grow up, Philip. You will finish by giving these poor women hysterical illusions. His spirit will return, and when we recover from this ghastly time—if it is ever possible—we, at least, will be able to live by his precepts, and that will return him to life in us. That was what he meant. Did he not pray that we were to be one thing in him, just as he was one thing in the Father? And that he would be in us just as the Father was in him? That is the return to life that he promised. We need conjure up no mad visions of him walking about to compound the horror of what we have been through.”

“It is *not* a mad vision! He *will* return. *You* are the ones who are mad! How can you *say* such things?”

“Philip, he himself said that he was leaving to send us his Spirit from the Father.”

“And he said he would come *back*! He *said* it!”

“—I cannot bear more of this. I am leaving. —Fear not, Nicodemus, I will not go father than a Sabbath’s walk. But I *will* go mad if I stay here another instant!”

Philip looked at him with a mixture of anger and disdain, but said nothing further. He left.

“I know where he is going,” said Nathanael, shaking his head sadly. “I am tempted to go myself.”

Ezra came and sat by him, a darker shadow in the dim room. Neither had anything to say.

And nothing happened.

John woke to stirrings in the room. The women, who had, he vaguely remembered, prepared the burial spices and water and cloths, were about to leave to bury Jesus. It was the first light of dawn.

To bury Jesus.

He noticed that Mary of Magdala went out after the others. To watch? What did she know of womanly chores? What difference did it make?

The Rock nodded to John, and they also left. John was definitely in no hurry, but the Rock was walking fast, and so he had to keep up. He did not want to see the tomb again—he was afraid that it would be as he left it, and it was now the third day, and he did not want to know.

Suddenly Mary Magdalene came running back, and when she saw them, she panted, “They have taken the Master out of the tomb! And we know not where they have put him!” She made as if to run on to the others in the upper room, but then realized that she had given her report to the two important ones, and stood there, irresolute.

The Rock and John ran off to the tomb. John was younger and in better condition than the Rock, and arrived there first. The stone was indeed rolled away. Where were the women? Where were the guards? What had happened?

He went up to the tomb, and looked inside. It was empty, as Mary had said. The shroud he had been wrapped in was there, lying on the floor—and there, off in a corner, was the cloth that had bound his head. Why did they take his body after

unwrapping it? Was someone *else* planning to give him a proper burial? But who? And when had he come?

By this time, the Rock, panting heavily, had come up to the tomb's entrance with John. John pointed inside, and the Rock went in, blocking out the light briefly. John then went in himself and picked up the shroud—which, when he held it in the ray of sunlight that came in the entrance, seemed to have a faint image of Jesus upon it! A strange one, but it was almost recognizable, if backwards, somehow.

He showed it to the Rock, who said, "What could this possibly mean?"

And then it began to dawn on the two of them that he had not been taken out; he had *walked* out, somehow *through* his shroud, leaving his mark upon it as a sign that he had done so!

He must have been the one who rolled the stone back and doubtless frightened the guards, who had left their post! Because there *was* a guard there! They had taken care to see that there was one! What would they say to their commander?

John and the Rock simply looked at each other, for a long time. John picked up the shroud—which would be a precious relic, evidence of Jesus's death and probably of his resurrection—and walked in a daze back to the upper room.

When they got there, they found that the women had been there before them, and the room was abuzz with their story that there was an earthquake that moved the stone away and stunned the guards.

"And then we saw this huge ~~man~~—"
 "It was an angel! He was all in white, and he glowed brighter than the sun that was rising behind him!" said another.

The first went on, "And he said, 'Fear not. I know you are

looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has come back to life, as he predicted. Come up and see the place where he had been laid, and then tell his students that he has returned to life and will go ahead of you into Galilee!”

“And we hurried back, and there he was, on the way! And we fell down before him, and he told us to tell his brothers—”
That was what he called you!“

The speaker frowned at the interruption, and went on “That he had come back to life! And there was something about Galilee!”

“I think he said he was going there, or that we would meet him there, or some such thing. I was too excited to think! Imagine! We actually *saw* him!”

At this point Mary Magdalene came in. “I was not with the others,” she said. “I saw—oh, there you are!—and walked back to the tomb after you ran there, and you were gone when I left. I sat there, looking in, wondering what they had done with him, and then there were two men in white inside the tomb that I had not noticed, and one said to me, ‘Why are you crying, Madame?’

“I said, ‘Because they have taken my Master away, and I know not where they have put him.’ And then there was a man behind me, and he asked me also why I was crying. I thought he was the gardener, and, without looking at him, I said, ‘Oh sir, if you are the one who took him from here, tell me where you put him and let me have him!’

“And he laughed! at me! And then said, ‘Mary!’ and I realized it was the Master, and I embraced his legs. And he said, ‘Now do not be hanging on! I have not risen to my Father just yet! Besides, I want you to go to my—brothers—and tell them

that I am going to go up to my Father and your Father and my God and your God!’ And he vanished. But he had the marks of the nails in his hands and feet! So I came as quickly as it could.”

John went over to Jesus’s mother, who also had seen him, judging by her expression, though no one observed the encounter, which had to have taken place in the room, since she had never left it. But she was radiant with joy, and when he looked quizzically at her, she said, “Yes, it is true.”

Still there was no sign of Jesus—certainly not of a physical Jesus—in the room where they all were, that whole day, and as it wore on, the men especially, began to think that the women were just being hysterical. Mary Magdalene was not given to hysterics, but these were strange times. But if they were not, where was Jesus?

“Peace to you,” came his voice, and he was suddenly among them. The door was locked.

They stared, dumbfounded. He showed them his hands, with the—healed—holes going through them, and his feet, and then bared his side to show the gash in it. Somehow, the wounds looked beautiful. It was the magic moment of all magic moments. He was—different, somehow, though it was clearly Jesus. In a way, he was unrecognizable, though it was clearly he; he was as different from the way he had been three days ago, before this whole horror, as a child is different from the adult. But just as the child shines through the adult, and the adult appears as the fulfillment of the child, however different he may be from what he was, Jesus was now his true self, what his earlier self gave promise of.

Everyone was still incredulous. Finally, Jesus said, “Touch me. Ghosts do not have flesh and blood, as you see I have.

Here; do you have something to eat?" No one dared to touch him, but one of the students diffidently handed him a cooked fish, which he ate in front of them.

And then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Sacred Breath, the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are gone from him; if you hold him to them, they are still with him." And he vanished.

So now *we* have the power from then on to forgive sins! thought John. And we also—those of us at the last meal—have the power to bring Jesus to everyone as food, and have them also live the life of Jesus! Because he said he was going to his Father. He will not be with us always; this is part of our punishment for rejecting him.

But he said he would meet us in Galilee. So he will be with us for a while, at least. He has to teach us what we need to know in the future. We will remain as his Emissaries, and—who knows—ordain successors to ourselves, for the rest of the time the world exists.

Ezra was conferring with Nathanael, evidently about Thomas, who was not there. Ezra finally said audibly, "You *must* go! You *must*! Or he will kill himself! And now he *need* not! You *must*!"

"Ezra, I—I cannot! I could not bear to face him that way again!"

"What? Will you be the death of *both* of them?"

Nathanael shrank as if stabbed, and then turned and left the room.

What was this? Was *Nathanael* also in some way responsible for Samuel's death?

Ezra looked rather wistfully over at John, but John was too

taken by this new mystery to pay much attention. He decided he would go out by himself in the night and walk off the excitement of the day.

It was too much for the human constitution, he mused as he went out under the almost-full moon that blotted out all but the brightest of the stars. First that unbearable horror of the crucifixion, and trying to comfort the Mother—who did more to comfort me than I her—and then his willing her to be my Mother also. How incredibly thoughtful of him, in his agony!

He pondered that without thought for a long time. Then there was the fear as he went to the tomb, and the mystery at finding the shroud—with his picture on it! How like him!—he wondered if all corpses left an image of themselves on the shroud they were buried in. He doubted it. This was a gift for when he had gone away permanently.

And then his appearance among them, as if nothing had happened. And how different he was! But how the same! It was all too much to take in.

“John.”

“Who?” The voice was familiar. “Samuel! You also!”

“I have been sent to you and to Thomas, and to our father, and to Nathanael. You are the last, before I return. I was allowed to tell you that I could not be happier about what happened to me.”

“Happier?”

“You see, I was frantic about Thomas. He was destroying himself, and he was obviously cut out for greater things than being a mere fisherman. But I knew not how I could save him. You remember I told you I would give my life for him?”

“I remember all too well!”

“Well, it turned out that only by my death and his disgrace would he have a life that he deserved. I lost nothing; I had a bump on my head, and then every wish I had was fulfilled, including the one of filling you with some share in my happiness. My life is absolutely complete; I would change nothing about it. Nothing! Your mistaken advice to me turned out to be exactly what saved Thomas!”

“I cannot believe it!”

“It is true. I can see what would have happened had I not died. It would have been a miserable existence, not only for Thomas, but for me—and for you, who would have had to put up with my misery, though you loved me. Then share my joy!”

“Then Thomas will come back.”

“Nathanael will manage to bring him. He now thinks that he is having another drunken hallucination—and for the moment, he believes that Nathanael and you are also deluded—but he will be back within the week.”

“What does *Nathanael* have to do with all this?”

“Oh, Nathanael saw the fight we had, and was afraid to jump in to save me when I fell under the boat. Thank God he was! If he had saved me, I would have lost the use of my right side because I would have been nearly dead—and—it would have been horrible! Worse than if I had not followed your advice! No, everything happened for the best.”

“I cannot believe it!”

“Nonsense! Of course you can! The Father loves us and wants only what is best for us, unless we ourselves are determined to have what is bad for us.”

Immediately, Judas came to mind. “You mean, like Judas?”

“I had no direct contact with Judas, and so I know not his

fate. I know him only through what I know of Thomas and you, and so I know in general what happened, but that is something that will not be disclosed until the Last Day, I think. You might ask Jesus, but I believe he would give the same answer.”

“It is wonderful to see you, Samuel. I cannot say you are just as I remember you, because you are so—much more you, somehow!”

“You have no idea, John! But one day, you will! And that day will last forever! And I will be with you, forever! You will see. Peace.”

“Peace, Samuel.” And he vanished.

John, elated walked around for a while, and then went back to the room, where Ezra met him. “Bartholomew is out finding Thomas,” he said.

“I assumed that from what I heard of your conversation. Believe it or not, Samuel met me and told me that all would be well.”

“I am so glad! I knew he would be able to do it.”

“It may take him a while, from what I gathered from Samuel. But he will persuade him to return. Samuel told me that he thinks we are all seeing things, as he did when he was drunk.”

“He would, of course.”

“But he also saw Samuel—the real Samuel—again, as I did, and as I gather Nathanael did—and so did his father, and I think that will persuade him.”

“His father saw him also?”

“That was what Samuel said.”

“Did you know that his father said that until Samuel came out of the grave and told him that what Thomas did was the

best that could have happened to him, he never wanted to see Thomas again?”

“Indeed? Well, that was exactly what Samuel said!”

“Hallelujah! Things *can* make sense, after all!”

“Not, perhaps, the sense they would have made if Jesus had not been condemned, but the Father knows how to work things out, apparently.”

Ezra looked at him. “John,” he said.

“Yes?”

“You would not—you do not think you would change your mind?”

John looked lovingly at him. “Ezra, I am afraid—you know I would dearly love to do so, but the Master explained to me why it was wrong, and—and it *is* wrong, Ezra. I cannot.”

He sighed. “I knew you would say that. It would not be you if you said anything else. I only asked because if you *had* said anything else, I would have changed my mind about going back to Africa. I can tell about the Master there. And do not be concerned about me. There are others—many others, you understand—but you are special.”

“Ezra, I am so sorry!”

“Some day, I may—perhaps when I am too old to—but fear not. The Master loves me, and will find a way, somehow.”

“I am sure he will.”

“Well, I am sure that you will be great, my *very good* friend. And you will certainly be a prophet some day. I can see it in you.”

John laughed. “I had almost forgotten. But who knows? You know I have a new mother?”

“Indeed?”

“Indeed. Jesus willed to me his mother. How blessed I am!”

“Then you certainly *will* be everything you want to be. I almost envy you.”

“You will be what you wish to be also, Ezra. Ultimately. We all will be.”

“All? Even Judas? I saw him die. He hanged himself.”

John closed his eyes. “Jesus loved him, I know that. And died for him. He will be what he chose to be. I hope at the last minute he made the right choice.”

“I am afraid I cannot agree with you there. I know he repented of what he did to Jesus, but—”

“He did? How do you know?”

“Oh, the fool threw the money they gave him into the Temple treasury. I was following him. I was going to—well, you know what I was planning to do with David, but before we got to him, he had brought out the rope, and we watched him choke himself to death. I suppose he had time then to repent of *that* but he was rather busy most of the time trying to breathe. It lasted quite a while. David was absolutely horrified, because he had also hanged himself.”

“He had? That was how he died?”

“So he knew about it first-hand, so to speak, as well as had a glimpse of what came afterward. Frankly, anything that came afterward was too good for him, as far as I am concerned.”

“There is a part of me that wants to agree with you. But to have it prolonged to eternity!”

“Well, that may be another thing that some day I will be able to agree with. But just let me say that it has been not only a pleasure but an education to know you. I will remember you

fondly in Africa; you will brighten my days there.

“And you brighten my life here and wherever the Master takes me, Ezra.”

“Peace.”

“Peace.” They embraced.

Epilogue

For the Curious

Now: What is this novel's historical basis, and what is the result of my imagination? As I mentioned at the beginning, there is no evidence that John had homosexual tendencies, or that he had the characteristics of Asperger's Syndrome, such as difficulty in social situations, physical awkwardness, and so on. I suppose I will have to apologize to him when I meet him in a few years (or sooner), but it made the novel—to me—more interesting, and it stressed one point I was trying to make in all of the series: that saints are just people who try hard, and that the Master does not demand success, but that we try.

The childhood of John is, of course, nothing but fiction, except that he had a brother James and was a fisherman. The fiction includes the boat the Jesus and Joseph built for the brothers. That John learned to read and was to study to be a rabbi is also fiction, though it is likely from his writings that he knew how to read, and also knew Greek at least passably (it is only likely, because many people “wrote” by dictating to a scribe; but he probably had to have written *Revelation* himself). The fact in Chapter Two that the family knew Annas is based on John 18 (i.e. John's Gospel), which says that he was known to “the high priest,” and I took this to be Annas. John's becoming acquainted with Samuel and Samuel's death is also fictional (as is Samuel himself, except that we know from a few references to Thomas in John that he was called “didymus,” the twin, but we

know nothing of the twin.

Also, John's knowing Jesus's mother Mary is fictional, but there is an inference from some of the incidents of his Gospel. Andrew's size, by the way, is fictional, as is any hint that John was attracted to him.

Chapters 5 through 8, about the stay in the school for rabbis is fictional, as is Daniel. In Chapter 9, the reason why Simon and Andrew were in Jerusalem is fictional. In Chapter 10, the episode with John as he bathed people is in all the Synoptics (Mark, Luke, and Matthew) as well as John, and I borrowed pieces from all; the thunder's speaking is in all three Synoptics. The fact that Judas was there is fictional. I mainly followed John's report of what happened.

In Chapter 11, the conversation with Jesus is fictional, but Simon's being summoned by Andrew and being called Kepha is out of John's Gospel (Chapter 1).

In Chapter 12, everything is fictional until John and James are trying to untangle the net (of course, how it got that way and what John did with the knife are fictional) and Jesus comes and tells them to follow him. Zebedee's accident is fictional, because I had to make up a situation which would dispose him to let his two sons and the two brothers in the other boat leave and follow Jesus.

In Chapter 13, Philip's acquaintance with Zebedee and his sons is fictional, as is the "fact" that he is the son of a wine merchant. Judas's being a priest, as well as a strikingly handsome man, are fictional, as well as his knowledge of philosophy. I made Judas the quintessential rational man, and gave him the problems that such a man would have with Jesus. He exemplifies pride, by the way, something not uncommon with such men.

In Chapter 14, Philip's bringing Nathanael is from John Chapter 1, but why he is astounded at Jesus's saying he saw him under the fig tree is made up. Ezra is completely fictional. There were Judeans (Jews) in Ethiopia, and I assumed some intermarried with black people and had black children. Ezra and Nathanael's going to Thomas and rescuing him from *delerium tremens* is fictional, as is Thomas's alcoholism. The addition of Thomas's father to Zebedee's crew is fictional; we know nothing whatever of Thomas's father.

In Chapter 16, that Judas was present when John bathed Jesus is fictional. The students' concern about wedding garments is an inference from Matthew's parable about the wedding and the meeting of a person without one. Philip's living in Bethsaida is from John, Chapter 1.. The prejudice of the Judeans against Galileans is in John's Gospel (e.g. "Do some studying and you will see that no prophet comes from Galilee") and explains John's pejorative references in his Gospel to "the Jews" (the "Judeans" in the original Greek).

In Chapter 17, I have Andrew and Simon living in Capernaum, having moved there from Bethsaida (where John 1 says they came from), because it made the novel easier. As far as I know, there is no indication where John is from. Joseph's sickness and his later death is an inference from the omission of references to him in the Gospels, though his mother appears many times. The episode of the changing of the water into wine is in Chapter 2 of John's Gospel, though of course, Thomas's cup's being water is fictional.

In Chapter 18, the trip to Jerusalem for the feast is in John's Gospel, where he tells of the driving of the sellers out of the Temple. I used mainly John's report of it, with an addition

or two from the Synoptics (who all put it at the end of his career, since they first report what went on in Galilee and leave Judea to the end). The Gospels are not chronological reports, but arrangements of the events to make the case for Jesus's divinity more clear, as a lawyer arranges his arguments in court. The introduction of the Garden of Gethsemani at this point is fictional, though it could well have happened. When it is first mentioned in the Gospels, it is done so as someplace where Jesus was accustomed to go. Jesus's seeing Nicodemus is from John's Gospel, as is the bathing of people by the students and the return to Galilee through Samaria and the episode with the Samaritan woman. Jesus's return to Nazareth is mainly from Luke, though of course, the "fact" that Matthew was in the synagogue is fictional.

In Chapter 19, Matthew's being the occasion for the parable Luke relates about the Pharisee and the tax-collector is fictional, though Jesus's disappearance when the crowd tried to throw him off the cliff is not; it is from Luke. The call of Matthew is in the Synoptics (though all but Matthew himself call him "Levi"; I made up a reason for it), but the circumstances are fictional, as is the "fact" that the soldier who was his guard was Longinus, who by tradition (and my novel) is the one who crucified Jesus. We know nothing about this soldier except that there *was* one.

In Chapter 20, the incident of the paralytic let down through the roof is in all three Synoptics. Jesus's disappearance with Matthew is fictional. In Chapter 21, Judas is doing what the rational man would do in interpreting Jesus. John's studying Greek from Matthew is, of course, fictional. Jesus's habit of stroking his beard is also something I made up.

In Chapter 22, the resurrection of the son of the widow of Nain is in Luke, but everything surrounding it is my imagination, much of it from my Matthew novel. Matthew's feast is in all the Synoptics, though of course there is no mention either of David's part in it nor of the episode of the dogs; that was a miracle that happened only in my brain. The death of Joseph is an inference from his not being mentioned in the Gospels, though there is a strong indication that Matthew got his information on the birth of Jesus either directly or indirectly from him. The military officer's son is from John, but the fact that Longinus was his assistant is fiction.

In Chapter 23, the Sermon on the Mount is from both Matthew and Luke (I gave Luke's version). The selection of the Emissaries (implied here) is in the Synoptics, as is their mission. Of course, John's experience in driving out a devil is fiction.

In Chapter 24 the episode of the rich young man is in all three Synoptics, as is the declaration of the Rock and Jesus's response—including the prediction of the Passion. Matthew's getting rid of—almost—all of his wealth is fictional, though I suppose it really happened. Everything about David except the fact that he was brought back to life is fictional, by the way. The conversation with Matthew is how I connected what is in the early chapters of John and the naming of Simon as "Rock" here; and, by the way, the use (in the Greek text) of the singular in "I will give you the keys" is one way I explode that interpretation some give of Jesus's saying "*you* are rock (pointing to Simon) and on *this* rock (pointing to himself) I will build. . . ." That latter interpretation is based on the different genders of Simon as rock and the normal gender of the word. But you can't call a man a female rock; and the Aramaic doesn't

support it. End of sermon. The episode of the paralytic at Bethesda is from John, as is what follows, continuing into chapter 25.

In John's visit to Daniel, the death of the Bather is from the Synoptics. The visit to Martha and Lazarus is not mentioned but implied in the Gospels, and the fact that Mary was not there is not anywhere implied, but is purely my imagination. The story of the rich man and Lazarus is from Luke, but not that it was told in the presence of Lazarus, whose reaction to it, of course, is fiction.

In Chapter 26, the transfiguration is in all three Synoptics, as is the cure of the possessed boy whom the students could not cure (that Nathanael was the one who failed is made up). The stilling of the storm on the lake is also in all the Synoptics, as well as the cure of Legion.

In Chapter 27, the episode with the possessed woman is in Luke (I made her, following some traditions, also Mary of Magdala, the prostitute, and Mary of Bethany. See the Mary novel).

In Chapter 28, the story of the prodigal son is in Luke, though its application to Mary is my imagination. The discussion of who was to take posts of power is in all three Synoptics, though I gave it a nuance that is only slightly implied in the Gospels. The Jairus episode is also in all three Synoptics, as is the woman with a hemorrhage. The episode of Judas's "mistakenly" offering wine to Thomas is fiction. The implication that Judas is embezzling money from the group is stated by John in recounting the anointing of Jesus by Mary. The mother of John's request that James and John hold high positions is in Mark and Matthew.

In Chapter 29, the incident with Judas is fiction. But the episode of the feeding of five thousand is in all four Gospels, though the walking on water is only in Mark, Matthew, and John. John's Gospel is the only one to report the Bread of Life speech (and interestingly, the only one to omit the institution of the Eucharist later—something even mentioned by Paul). The statement “and one of you is a devil” is from John's Gospel, who remarks that it was meant about Judas.

In Chapter 30, of course the encounter between John and Ezra is completely fictional. The relatives of Jesus waiting outside is in the three Synoptics, but I added to it from John's Gospel the advice to show himself in Judea. I put it in his cousin James's mouth, because (a) the evidence is that this James was neither of the two Emissaries, and (b) that his letter seems to indicate strong influence from Alexandria. The text says “brother(s), but this clearly meant any close relative—either that, or Mary's mother had two daughters called “Mary”: Jesus's mother and Clopas's Mary, whom John calls her “sister.”

What Jesus tells John about homosexual sex is what I have concluded from my philosophical research. John gives the best argument in its favor, and Jesus shows where the fallacy is; it also refutes the fallacy that if the attraction is innate, it is legitimate (“natural”) to follow it. Jesus's advice to “preach” by one's life is also, I think, the best way to do it.

In Chapter 31, I am not sure, but I suspect that when people wrestled, they did so naked. The ancients were considerably less prudish than we are, even in our “enlightened” age. Of course, the fight is fictional. John returns to the group when Jesus solves the dilemma about taxes to Caesar, which is in all the Synoptics, and the woman caught in adultery, which is in

John's Gospel. Note that Jesus, as the "one without sin" should have thrown the first stone. I made up a reason why he did not. John also hears Jesus refer to himself as "I AM," which is in John's Gospel, as is his claim to be in existence before Abraham.

In Chapter 32, the man born blind is from John's Gospel, as are Jesus's remarks that follow the episode. Jesus's talking with Mary, as well as Martha's reaction, are from Luke. What happened with Thomas and his father is fiction, as is what happened between Ezra and Judas, of course.

In Chapter 33, the incident at the Feast of Dedication is out of John's Gospel, as is the withdrawal to Peraea and also the raising of Lazarus.

In Chapter 34, John's visit to Annas is an inference from his being able to enter his palace after Jesus's capture. The invitation to dinner at Lazarus's house and what Mary did in the dining room, as well as Judas's reaction are from John's Gospel, and it is there we learn that Judas was an embezzler. Of course, the aftermath with Lazarus and the women is fiction.

In Chapter 35, the triumphal entry into Jerusalem is recounted in all four Gospels; I followed mainly John's and Luke's. Philip's approaching Jesus and Jesus's reaction are from John's Gospel, as is what followed. The Last Supper's occurrence on the day *before* the Passover comes from the Synoptics' clear indication that it was the Passover dinner, plus John's Gospel's insistence that on the next day, the Judeans would not enter Pilate's praetorium in order "to be able to eat the Passover meal" that night. I reconciled this by assuming that there was a confusion in when the moon was full. This is not necessarily far-fetched, by the way. The moon becomes full *at an instant*, just as the Vernal Equinox occurs at an instant (the

instant the sun crosses the equator); and if that instant happened to occur at the time one day passed into the next (i.e. at sundown, in this case), some might take it as the day before and some the day after, especially among the careful Pharisees.

The washing of the feet and the offer of the food to Judas is from John's Gospel, as well as Jesus's discourse afterwards.

In Chapter 36, John does not relate the "this is my body" and so on, though he had implied it in the Bread of Life speech earlier; it is recounted in all the Synoptics and Paul. The agony in the garden is in the Synoptics (and not John's Gospel; John portrays him as always in complete control). Jesus's stunning the soldiers with "I AM" is in John's Gospel; I have mingled this with much from the Synoptics; basically, what happened with Jesus himself is from the Gospels, and is not fiction; what is fiction is the reactions of others. The interview with Annas is from John's Gospel. The Rock's denial is in all four.

In Chapter 37, I assumed that the knowledge of what went on in Jesus's trial was from Nicodemus, who would have been in attendance. There are slight differences in detail in the Gospel accounts as to what happened, but no substantive disagreements. (E.g. Luke has Herod's men put the mock royal robes on Jesus; the others say it was Pilate's.) The trial before Pilate is mainly from John's Gospel. The dimming out of the sun is from the Synoptics; the removal and hurried burial of Jesus's body is also from the Gospels.

In Chapter 38, what went on among the students is fictional, except that they gathered in the upper room. I invented a reason why Thomas was not present when Jesus first appeared to the others. The apparition of Samuel is based on Matthew's statement that at that time, many dead people

appeared. John's acquiring Mary as his mother is from his Gospel. Judas's throwing his blood money into the Temple and hanging himself is from Matthew.