I was seven years old. What do you know when you’re seven years old? All my life, or so I thought, we’d been in the city of Alexandria, in the Street of the Carpenters, with the other Galileans, and sooner or later we were going home.

Late afternoon. We were playing, my gang against his, and when he ran at me again, bully that he was, bigger than me, and catching me off balance, I felt the power go out of me as I shouted: “You’ll never get where you’re going.”

He fell down white in the sandy earth, and they all crowded around him. The sun was hot and my chest was heaving as I looked at him. He was so limp.

In the snap of two fingers everyone drew back. It seemed the whole street went quiet except for the carpenters’ hammers. I’d never heard such a quiet.

“He’s dead!” Little Joses said. And then they all took it up. “He’s dead, he’s dead, he’s dead.”

I knew it was true. He was a bundle of arms and legs in the beaten dust.

And I was empty. The power had taken everything with it, all gone.

His mother came out of the house, and her scream
went up the walls into a howl. From everywhere the women came running.

My mother lifted me off my feet. She carried me down the street and through the courtyard and into the dark of our house. All my cousins crowded in with us, and James, my big brother, pulled the curtain shut. He turned his back on the light. He said:

"Jesus did it. He killed him." He was afraid.

"Don't you say such a thing!" said my mother. She clutched me so close to her, I could scarcely breathe.

Big Joseph woke up.

Now Big Joseph was my father, because he was married to my mother, but I'd never called him Father. I'd been taught to call him Joseph. I didn't know why.

He'd been asleep on the mat. We'd worked all day on a job in Philo's house, and he and the rest of the men had lain down in the heat of the afternoon to sleep. He climbed to his feet.

"What's that shouting outside?" he asked. "What's happened?"

He looked to James. James was his eldest son. James was the son of a wife who had died before Joseph married my mother.

James said it again.

"Jesus killed Eleazer. Jesus cursed him and he fell down dead."

Joseph stared at me, his face still blank from sleep. There was more and more shouting in the street. He rose to his feet, and ran his hands back through his thick curly hair.

My little cousins were slipping through the door one by one and crowding around us.
My mother was trembling. “He couldn’t have done it,” she said. “He wouldn’t do such a thing.”

“I saw it,” said James. “I saw it when he made the sparrows out of clay on the Sabbath. The teacher told him he shouldn’t do such things on the Sabbath. Jesus looked at the birds and they turned into real birds. They flew away. You saw it too. He killed Eleazer, Mother, I saw it.”

My cousins made a ring of white faces in the shadows: Little Joses, Judas, and Little Symeon and Salome, watching anxiously, afraid of being sent out. Salome was my age, and my dearest and closest. Salome was like my sister.

Then in came my mother’s brother Cleopas, always the talker, who was the father of these cousins, except for Big Silas who came in now, a boy older than James. He went into the corner, and then came his brother, Levi, and both wanted to see what was going on.

“Joseph, they’re all out there,” said Cleopas, “Jonathan bar Zakkai, and his brothers, they’re saying Jesus killed their boy. They’re envious that we got that job at Philo’s house, they’re envious that we got the other job before that, they’re envious that we’re getting more and more jobs, they’re so sure they do things better than we do—.”

“Is the boy dead?” Joseph said. “Or is the boy alive?”

Salome shot forward and whispered in my ear. “Just make him come alive, Jesus, the way you made the birds come alive!”

Little Symeon was giggling. He was too little to know what was going on. Little Judas knew, but he was quiet.

“Stop,” said James, the little boss of the children. “Salome, be quiet.”
I could hear them shouting in the street. I heard other noises. Stones were hitting the walls of the house. My mother started to cry.

“You dare do that!” shouted my uncle Cleopas and he rushed back out through the door. Joseph went after him.

I wriggled out of my mother’s grasp and darted out before she could catch me, and past my uncle and Joseph and right into the crowd as they were all waving and hollering and shaking their fists. I went so fast, they didn’t even see me. I was like a fish in the river. I moved in and out through people who were shouting over my head until I got to Eleazer’s house.

The women all had their backs to the door, and they didn’t see me as I went around the edge of the room.

I went right into the dark room, where they’d laid him on the mat. His mother was there leaning on her sister and sobbing.

There was only one lamp, very weak.

Eleazer was pale with his arms at his sides, same soiled tunic, and the soles of his feet very black. He was dead. His mouth was open and his white teeth showed over his lip.

The Greek physician came in—he was really a Jew—and he knelt down, and he looked at Eleazer and he shook his head.

Then he saw me and said:

“Out.”

His mother turned and she saw it was me and she screamed.

I bent over him:

“Wake up, Eleazer,” I said. “Wake up now.”

I reached out and laid my hand on his forehead.
The power went out. My eyes closed. I was dizzy. But I heard him draw in his breath.

His mother screamed over and over and it hurt my ears. Her sister screamed. All the women were screaming.

I fell back on the floor. I was weak. The Greek physician was staring down at me. I was sick. The room was dim. Other people had rushed in.

Eleazer came up, and he was up all knees and fists before anyone could get to him, and he set on me and punched me and hit me, and knocked my head back against the ground, and kicked me again and again:

“Son of David, Son of David!” he shouted, mocking me, “Son of David, Son of David!” kicking me in the face, and in the ribs, until his father grabbed him around the waist and picked him up in the air.

I ached all over, couldn’t breathe.

“Son of David!” Eleazer kept shouting.

Someone lifted me and carried me out of the house and into the crowd in the street. I was still gasping. I hurt all over. It seemed the whole street was screaming, worse than before, and someone said the Teacher was coming, and my uncle Cleopas was yelling in Greek at Jonathan, Eleazer’s father, and Jonathan was yelling back, and Eleazer was shouting, “Son of David, Son of David!”

I was in Joseph’s arms. He was trying to move, but the crowd wouldn’t let him. Cleopas was pushing at Eleazer’s father. Eleazer’s father was trying to get at Cleopas, but other men took hold of his arms. I heard Eleazer shouting far away.

There was the Teacher declaring: “That child’s not dead, you hush up, Eleazer, who said he was dead? Elea-
zer, stop shouting! Whoever could think this child is dead?"

"Brought him back to life, that's what he did," said one of theirs.

We were in our courtyard, the entire crowd had pushed in with us, my uncle and Eleazer’s people still screaming at each other, and the Teacher demanding order.

Now my uncles, Alphaeus and Simon, had come. These were Joseph’s brothers. And they’d just woken up. They put up their hands against the crowd. Their mouths were hard and their eyes were big.

My aunts, Salome and Esther and Mary, were there, with all the cousins running and jumping as if this were a festival, except for Silas and Levi and James who stood with the men.

Then I couldn’t see anymore.

I was in my mother’s arms, and she had taken me into the front room. It was dark. Aunt Esther and Aunt Salome came in with her. I could hear stones hitting the house again. The Teacher raised his voice in Greek.

"There’s blood on your face!" my mother whispered. "Your eye, there’s blood. Your face is cut!" She was crying. "Oh, look what’s happened to you," she said. She spoke in Aramaic, our tongue which we didn’t speak very much.

"I’m not hurt," I said. I meant to say it didn’t matter. Again my cousins pressed close, Salome smiling as if to say she knew I could bring him back to life, and I took her hand and squeezed it.

But there was James with his hard look.

The Teacher came into the room backwards with his hands up. Someone ripped the curtain away and the
light was very bright. Joseph and his brothers came in. And so did Cleopas. All of us had to move to make room.

“You’re talking about Joseph and Cleopas and Alphaeus, what do you mean drive them out!” said the Teacher to the whole crowd. “They’ve been with us for seven years!”

The angry family of Eleazer came almost into the room. The father himself did come into the room.

“Yes, seven years and why don’t they go back to Galilee, all of them!” Eleazer’s father shouted. “Seven years is too long! That boy is possessed of a demon and I tell you my son was dead!”

“Are you complaining that he’s alive now! What’s the matter with you!” demanded my uncle Cleopas.

“You sound like a madman!” added my uncle Alphaeus.

And thus and so it went, with them shouting back and forth, and making fists at each other, and the women nodding and throwing glances to one another, and far off others joining in.

“Oh, that you say such things!” said the Teacher, saying every word as if we were in the House of Study. “Jesus and James are my finest pupils. And these men are your neighbors, what’s happened to make you turn against them like this! Listen to your own words!”

“Oh, your pupils, your pupils!” cried Eleazer’s father. “But we have to live and work, and there’s more to life than being a pupil!” More of them came into the room.

My mother backed up against the wall, holding me close. I wanted to get away, but I couldn’t. She was too afraid.

“Yes, work, that’s it,” my uncle Cleopas said, “and
who's to say we can't live here, what do you mean drive us out, just because more of the work goes to us, because we're better and better at giving people what they want—.”

Suddenly Joseph put up his hands and he roared out the word: “Quiet!”

And they all went quiet.
The whole mob of them fell quiet.
Never had Joseph raised his voice before.
“The Lord made shame for an argument such as this!” Joseph said. “You break the walls of my house.”

No one said anything. Everyone looked at him. Even Eleazer was there and he looked up at him.

Not even the Teacher spoke.

“Now Eleazer is alive,” Joseph said. “And as it happens, we are going home to Galilee.”

Again no one spoke.

“We will leave for the Holy Land as soon as our few jobs are finished here. We’ll bid you farewell, and those jobs that come to us as we prepare to go we’ll send to you by your leave.”

Eleazer’s father stretched his neck, then nodded and opened his hands. He shrugged. He bowed his head, and then he turned. His men turned. Eleazer stared at me, and then all of them went out of the room.

The crowd left the courtyard, and my aunt Mary, the Egyptian, who was Cleopas’ wife, came in and closed the curtain partway.

What was left now was all our people, and the Teacher. The Teacher was not happy. He looked at Joseph. He frowned.

My mother wiped her eyes, and looked to my face,
but then the Teacher began to talk. She held me close, her hands shaking violently.

“Leaving to go home?” said the Teacher. “And taking my fine students with you? Taking my fine Jesus? And what will you go home to, may I ask? To the land of milk and honey?”

“You mock our forefathers?” asked my uncle Cleopas.

“Or you mock the Lord Himself?” asked my uncle Alphaeus, whose Greek was as good as the Teacher’s Greek.

“I don’t mock anyone,” said the Teacher, looking at me as he spoke, “but I marvel you can leave Egypt behind so easily over a little hubbub in the street.”

“That has nothing to do with it,” said Joseph.

“Then why go? Jesus is coming along wonderfully here. Why, Philo is so impressed with his learning and James here is a marvel, and . . .”

“Yes, and this isn’t Israel, is it?” asked Cleopas. “And it isn’t our home.”

“No, and it’s Greek that you’re teaching them, Scripture in Greek!” said Alphaeus. “And we teach them here at home in Hebrew because you don’t even know Hebrew and you are the Teacher, and this is what the House of Study is here, Greek, and you call it the Torah, and Philo, yes, the great Philo, he gives us work to do, and so do his friends, and all this is very fine, and we’ve done well, and we’re grateful, yes, but he too speaks Greek and reads the Scriptures in Greek, and marvels at what these boys know in Greek—.”

“All the world speaks Greek now,” said the Teacher. “The Jews in every city of the Empire speak Greek and read the Scripture in Greek—.”

“Jerusalem does not speak Greek!” said Alphaeus.

“In Galilee we read the Scripture in Hebrew,” said
Cleopas. "Do you even understand Hebrew, and you call yourself a Teacher!"

"Oh, I'm weary of your attacks, why do I put up with you, where are you taking yourselves and these boys, back to some dirt village! You leave Alexandria for that."

"Yes," said Uncle Cleopas, "and it's no dirt village, it's my father's house. Do you know one word of Hebrew?" He then sang out in Hebrew the psalm that he loved and had long taught to us. "The Lord shall preserve my going out and my coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore." Following it with "Now do you know what that means?"

"Do you yourself know what that means!" shot back the Teacher. "I'd like to hear you explain it. You know what the scribe in your synagogue taught you what it means, that's all you know and if you learned enough Greek here to shout in my face, you're the better for it. What do any of you know, you hardheaded Galilean Jews? Coming to Egypt for refuge, and leaving as hard-headed as you came."

My mother was anxious.
The Teacher looked at me.

"And to take this child, this brilliant child—."

"And what would you have us do?" asked Alphaeus.

"Oh, no, don't ask such a thing!" my mother whispered. It was so unusual for her to speak up.

Joseph glanced at her, and then looked at the Teacher. The Teacher went on.

"It's always the same," said the Teacher with a great drawn-out sigh. "In times of trouble, you come down to Egypt, yes, always to Egypt, she receives the dregs of Palestine. . . ."
"The dregs!" Cleopas said. "You call our forefathers the dregs?"

"They didn't speak Greek either," said Alphæus.

Cleopas laughed. "And the Lord on Sinai didn't speak Greek," he said.

Uncle Simon said quietly, "And the High Priest now in Jerusalem, when he lays his hands on the goat, he probably forgets to tell all our sins in Greek."

They were all laughing. The older boys laughed. Aunt Mary laughed. But my mother was still crying. I had to stay by her side.

Even Joseph smiled.

The Teacher was angry. He went on:

"... if there's a famine, come down to Egypt, if there's no work, come down to Egypt, if there's a murderous rampage on the part of Herod, come down to Egypt, as if King Herod took the slightest care as to the fate of a handful of Galilean Jews such as you! A murderous rampage! As if—."

"Stop," Joseph said.

The Teacher stopped.

All the men stared at the Teacher. No one said a word.

No one moved.

What had happened? What had the Teacher said? Murderous rampage. What were these words?

Even James had the same look on his face as the men. "Oh, you think people don't talk about these things?" asked the Teacher. "As if I believe travelers' tales."

They said nothing.

Then in a soft voice Joseph spoke.

"The Lord made patience for this!" he said. "But I don't have it. We go home because it is our home," he
went on, staring at the Teacher, "and it is the Lord's land. And because Herod is dead."

The Teacher was taken aback. Everyone else was surprised. Even my mother was surprised, and I could see the women looking at each other.

Now, we little ones all knew Herod was the King of the Holy Land, and we knew he was a bad man. Only lately had he done a terrible thing, a desecrating of the Temple, or so we'd heard as all the men talked about it but we didn't know much more than that.

The Teacher was frowning at Joseph.

"Joseph, it's not wise to say such a thing," the Teacher said. "You can't speak of the King in this way."

"He is dead," said Joseph. "The news will come by the Roman post in two days."

The Teacher was cold. All the others were quiet, eyes on Joseph.

"How do you know?" asked the Teacher.

No answer.

"It will take a little while to prepare for our journey," Joseph said. "Our boys will have to work with us until then. No more school for them now, I fear."

"And what will Philo think?" asked the Teacher, "when he hears that you're taking Jesus?"

"What has Philo to do with my son," said my mother. Her voice shocked everyone.

Another silence followed.

I knew this was not an easy moment.

A while back, the Teacher had taken me to Philo, a rich man and a scholar, to show me to him as a fine pupil, and Philo had taken a great liking to me, and even taken me to the Great Synagogue which was as large and beautiful as the pagan temples of the city, where the
rich Jews gathered on the Sabbath, a place to which my family never went. We went to the little House of Prayer in our own street.

It was after those visits that Philo had given work to us from his house, to make wooden doors and benches and book stands for his new library, and soon his friends had given our family similar jobs which meant good wages as well.

Philo had treated me as a guest when I was brought to him.

And even today when we had put in the doors on their pivots, and picked up the painted benches from the men who did the painting and taken them to Philo, I had seen him and he had taken time with us to tell Joseph kind things about me.

But to talk of this now, that Philo had taken a liking to me? It was not right, and I felt the men were uneasy as they looked at the Teacher. They had worked hard for Philo and for Philo’s friends.

The Teacher did not answer my mother.

Finally Joseph said: “Philo should be surprised that my son goes home with me to Nazareth?”

“Nazareth?” said the Teacher coldly. “What is Nazareth? I’ve never heard of such a place. You came here from Bethlehem. Your terrible stories, why you—. Philo thinks Jesus is the most promising scholar he’s ever seen. Philo would educate your son if you would allow. That’s what Philo has to do with your son, that’s what Philo’s said. Philo would see to it—.”

“Philo has nothing to do with our son,” said my mother, again shocking all that she spoke up, her hands clasping my shoulders tightly.

No more the rich house with its marble floors. No
more the library of parchment scrolls. Smell of ink. Greek is the language of the Empire. See this? This is a map of the Empire. Hold the edge for me there. Look. All this Rome rules. There is Rome, here is Alexandria, here is Jerusalem. See, there Antioch, Damascus, Corinth, Ephesus, all great cities, and in all these cities the Jews live and speak Greek and have Torah in Greek. But there is no city outside of Rome as great as Alexandria where we are now.

I shook off the memory. James was staring at me. The Teacher was talking to me.

"... but you liked Philo, didn’t you? You liked answering his questions. You liked his library."

“He stays with us,” said Joseph calmly. “He will not go to Philo.”

The Teacher continued to stare at me. This was not right.

“Jesus, speak up!” he said. “You want to be educated by Philo, don’t you?”

“My lord, I do as my father and mother want,” I said. I shrugged. What was I to do?

The Teacher turned and threw up his hands.

“When will you go?” he asked.

“As soon as we can,” said Joseph. “We have work to finish.”

“I want to send word to Philo that Jesus is leaving,” said the Teacher, and with that he turned to go. But Joseph stopped him.

“We’ve done well in Egypt,” he said. He took money out of his purse. He pressed it into the hand of the Teacher. “I thank you for teaching our children.”

“Yes, yes, and you take them back to—where was it?
Joseph, there are more Jews living in Alexandria than there are in Jerusalem.”

“There may be, Teacher,” said Cleopas, “but the Lord dwells in the Temple in Jerusalem, and his land is the Holy Land.”

All the men laughed to approve and the women too and so did I and Little Salome and Judas, Joses and Symeon.

The Teacher couldn’t say anything to this, but only nodded.

“And if we finish our work quickly,” Joseph said with a sigh, “we can reach Jerusalem in time for Passover.”

We all gave cries of delight when we heard it. Jerusalem. Passover. We were all excited. Salome clapped her hands. Even Uncle Cleopas was smiling.

The Teacher bowed his head. He put two fingers to his lips. Then he gave us a blessing:

“May the Lord go with you on your journey. May you reach your home in peace.”

The Teacher left.

At once all the family was speaking our native tongue for the first time in the whole afternoon.

My mother looked at me, ready to nurse my cuts and bruises. “Why, they’re gone,” she whispered. “You’re healed.”

“It wasn’t much,” I said. I was so happy we were going home.
THAT NIGHT, AFTER SUPPER, while the men were dozing on their mats in the courtyard, Philo came.

He sat down to a cup of wine with Joseph, just as if he wasn’t wearing white linen and wouldn’t be soiled, and crossed his legs like the other men. I sat beside Joseph, hoping to hear all that was said, but then my mother took me inside.

She listened behind the curtain and she let me listen. Aunt Salome and Aunt Esther were there too.

Philo wanted to keep me and instruct me and send me back to Joseph an educated young man. Joseph listened to all this in silence but said no. Joseph was my father and Joseph must take me back to Nazareth. He knew that this was what he had to do. He thanked Philo, and offered him wine again, and said that he would see to it that I was educated as a Jew.

“You forget, my lord,” he said in his gentle manner, “that on Sabbath all Jews are philosophers and scholars the world wide. It’s no different in the town of Nazareth, believe me.”

Philo was pleased at that and nodded and smiled.

“He’ll go to school in the mornings, as all the boys
do,” Joseph went on. “And we will have our disputes over the Law and the Prophets. And we’ll go up to Jerusalem and there at the Feasts, maybe he’ll listen to the teachers in the Temple. I have many a time.”

When Philo offered a gift for my education, a little purse that he wanted to put into Joseph’s hand, Joseph said no.

Philo took his ease awhile, and he talked of many things with Joseph, of the city and of the jobs our men had done, and of the Empire, and then he asked Joseph how Joseph was so certain that King Herod was dead.

“The news will reach here soon with the Roman post,” Joseph said. “As for me, I knew it in a dream, my lord. And it means for us we will go home.”

My uncles who had sat quietly all this time in the dark came in with their agreement, and how much they had despised the King.

The strange words of the Teacher, his talk of murderous rampages, were in my mind, but the men never spoke of that, and finally it came time for Philo to go.

He didn’t even dust off his fine linen as he stood up, and he thanked Joseph over and over for the good wine, and wished us well.

I ran out. I walked a way with Philo up the street. He had two slaves with him who carried torches and I’d never seen the Street of the Carpenters so brightly lighted at this hour, and I knew people were watching from the courtyards where they took their ease in the breeze from the sea that came with the dark.

Philo told me to always remember Egypt and the map of the Empire which he had shown me.

“But why don’t all the Jews go back to Israel?” I
asked him. “If we are Jews, shouldn’t we live in the land the Lord gave to us? I don’t understand.”

He thought for a moment. Then he said, “A Jew can live anywhere and be a Jew. We have the Torah, the Prophets, the Tradition. We live as Jews wherever we are. And don’t we take the Word of the One True Lord wherever we go? Don’t we establish his Word among the pagans wherever we live? I live here because my father lived here and his father before him. You go home because your father wants you to go home.”

My father.

A chill passed over me. Joseph was not my father. I had always known this, but it wasn’t something to be said to anyone, ever. And I didn’t say anything about it now.

I nodded.

“Remember me,” Philo said.

I kissed his hands, and he bent down and kissed me on both cheeks.

He was going home to a fine supper perhaps, in his house of marble floors and lamps everywhere, and rich curtains, and the upper rooms open to the sea.

He turned back once to wave to me and then he and his servants with their torches were gone.

I felt sad for a moment, just a moment, enough never to forget it, this stabbing sadness. But I was too excited to be returning to the Holy Land.

And I hurried back home.

In the darkness, I came up quietly on the courtyard, and I heard my mother crying. She sat next to Joseph.

“But I don’t know why we can’t settle in Bethlehem,” she was saying. “It seems we were meant to return there.”
Bethlehem, where I was born.

"Never," said Joseph. "We can't even consider such a thing." He was kind as always with her. "How could you think this, that we could ever go back to Bethlehem?"

"But I've been hoping all this time," my mother pressed. "It's been seven years, and people forget, if they ever understood . . . ."

My uncle Cleopas who lay flat on his back with his knees crooked was laughing softly, the way he laughed at so many things. My uncle Alphæus said nothing. He appeared to be looking up at the stars. I could see James in the doorway watching, and listening too perhaps.

"Think of all the signs," said my mother. "Think of the night when the men from the East came. Why, that alone—."

"That's just it," said Joseph who sat beside her. "Do you think anybody there has forgotten that? Do you think they've forgotten anything? We can never go there."

Cleopas laughed again.

Joseph paid no mind to Cleopas and neither did my mother. Joseph put his arm around my mother.

"They'll remember the star," said Joseph, "the shepherds coming in from the hills. They'll remember the men from the East. Above all, they'll remember the night that—."

"Don't say it, please," said my mother. She put her hands to her ears. "Please don't say those words."

"Don't you see, we must take him and go to Nazareth. We have no choice. Besides . . . ."

"What star? What men from the East?" I asked. I couldn't hold back anymore. "What happened?"
Again, my uncle Cleopas laughed under his breath. My mother looked up at me. She hadn't known I was there. "You mustn't worry about it," she said.

"But what happened in Bethlehem?" I asked.

Joseph was looking at me.

"Our house is in Nazareth," said my mother to me. Her voice was stronger. It was a voice for me. "You have more cousins than you can count in Nazareth. Old Sarah's waiting for us, and Old Justus. These are our kindred in common. We're returning to our house." She stood up and beckoned for me to come.

"Yes," said Joseph. "We'll leave as soon as we can. It will take us a few days, but we'll be in time for Passover in Jerusalem and then go on home."

My mother took me by the hand and started to lead me inside.

"But who were the men from the East, Mamma?" I asked. "Can't you tell me?"

My uncle would not stop his soft laughing. Even in the dark, I could see the strange expression on Joseph's face.

"Some night, I'll tell you all of it," said my mother. Her tears were gone. She was strong for me as always, not the child she was with Joseph. "You mustn't ask me these things now. Not now. I'll tell when the time comes."

"This is true," said Joseph. "I don't want you to ask, do you understand?"

They were gentle, but these were clear and strange words. All the words they'd spoken were strange.

I should have let them go on talking. I would have learned more. And I knew it was a great secret, this that
they talked about. How could it not be? And as for me hearing it, they knew they’d made a mistake.

I didn’t want to sleep. I lay on my blanket trying to sleep, but sleep didn’t come and I didn’t want it. I never wanted it. But now my thoughts were racing. We were going home, and I had so much to think about because so much had happened, and now they were saying these strange things.

And what had happened today? What had happened with Eleazer and what had happened with him, that, and the memory of the sparrows insofar as I could remember it—these were like bright shapes in my mind for which I didn’t have words. I’d never felt anything before like the power that had come out of me just before Eleazer fell dead in the dust, or the power that had come out of me just before he’d risen from the mat. *Son of David, Son of David, Son of David* . . .

Little by little everyone came in to sleep. The women were in their corner, and I had Little Justus snuggled up to me, Simon’s youngest son. Little Salome was singing softly to Baby Esther who was, by some miracle, quiet.

Cleopas was coughing, talking to himself but saying nothing, then sleeping again.

I felt a hand on mine. I opened my eyes. It was James next to me, James, my elder brother.

“What you did,” he whispered.

“Yes?”

“Killing Eleazer, bringing him back?”

“Yes?”

“Never, never do that again,” he said.

“I know,” I answered.

“Nazareth is a small place,” he said.
“I know,” I said.

He turned away.

I rolled over, my head on my arm. I closed my eyes. I stroked the head of Little Justus. Without waking he snuggled closer.

What did I know?

“Jerusalem,” I whispered. “Where the Lord dwells in the Temple.” No one heard me. Philo had told me, It is the biggest Temple in all the world. I saw the clay sparrows that I had made. I saw them spring into life, heard the flap of wings, heard my mother’s breath, Joseph’s cry: “No!” and they were gone, tiny dots against the sky. “Jerusalem.” I saw Eleazer rise from the mat.

Philo had said on that day when he received me in his house that the Temple was so beautiful that thousands came to see it, thousands, pagans and Jews from all the cities of the Empire, men and women journeying there to offer sacrifice to the Lord of All.

My eyes snapped open. All around me the others slept.

What did I think had happened in all this? A great stumbling.

Where had that power come from? Was it still there?

Joseph hadn’t spoken one word to me about it. My mother hadn’t asked me what had happened. Had we ever talked of the sparrows made on the Sabbath?

No. No one would talk of these things. And I couldn’t ask anyone, now, could I? To talk of such things outside the family, that could never happen. Any more than I could stay in the great city of Alexandria and study with Philo in his house of marble floors.

I must be very very watchful from now on, that even
in the smallest things I might misuse what was inside me, this power that could make Eleazer die and come back to life.

Oh, it had been all very well to make everyone smile at my quickness at learning, Philo and the Teacher and the other boys, and I knew so much of the Scripture in Greek, and in Hebrew thanks to Joseph and Uncle Cleopas and Uncle Alphaeus, but this was different.

I knew something now that was beyond what I could put into words.

I wanted to go to Joseph, to wake him up, to ask him for help in understanding this. But I knew he’d tell me not to ask about this any more than I should ask about the other things, the things I’d heard them saying. Because this power, this power was somehow linked to the things they’d been saying, and to the strange talk of the Teacher which had made them all go silent and look at him. It had to be linked.

It made me sad, so sad I wanted to cry. It was my fault we had to leave here. It was my fault, and even though everyone was happy, I felt sad and to blame.

All this was mine to keep inside. But I’d find out what had happened in Bethlehem. I’d find out some way, even though I had to do as Joseph said.

But for now, what was the very deep secret of all this? What was the inside of it? I must not misuse who I am.

A coldness came over me. I felt still and I felt very small. I pulled the blanket up around me. Sleepiness. It came as if an angel had touched me.

Better to sleep as all of them were sleeping. Better to drift as they drifted. Better to trust as they trusted. I stopped trying to stay awake and think on these
things. I felt drowsy, so drowsy that I couldn’t think anymore.

Cleopas was coughing again. Cleopas was going to be sick as he so often was. And that night I knew it would be bad. I heard the rattle down in his chest.
WITHIN DAYS THE NEWS ARRIVED in the port that Herod was dead. It was the talk of the Galileans and Judeans everywhere. How had Joseph known? The Teacher came storming back, demanding to know, but Joseph said nothing.

We were busy long hours completing the tasks we'd taken on, finishing doors, benches, lintels, and such that had to be leveled and smoothed, and finished, and then delivered to the painters. After that came the picking up of the items already painted and the putting of them into place in the houses of those who had hired us, which I liked because I saw many rooms, and different people, though we always worked with our heads down and our eyes down out of respect, but still I saw things. I learned things. And all this meant coming home after dark, tired and hungry.

It was more work than Joseph had thought but he didn't want to leave any promise unfulfilled, and meantime my mother wrote home to Old Sarah and her cousins that we were coming, James penning the letters for her and both of us taking them to the post, and all life was excited with preparations.

The spirit in the street was with us again now that
everyone knew we were soon going. Other families gave us presents to take with us—small pottery lamps, and one a stoneware cup, and another a fine bit of linen.

It was almost resolved to go by land, with the purchase of donkeys planned, when Uncle Cleopas rose from his bed one night coughing badly and said:

“I don’t want to die in the desert.” He had become very pale, and thin, and had not been working much with us anymore, and this was all he had to say. No one answered him.

And so it was resolved, we would go by ship. It would cost us, everybody knew, but Joseph said we would do it. We would go to the old harbor of Jamnia. And we would reach Jerusalem in time for the Feast, and after that Cleopas slept better.

Then came time to leave. We were dressed in our finest woolen robes and sandals, everyone loaded with packs of goods. And it seemed the whole street turned out to see us off.

Tears were shed, and even Eleazer came to nod at me, and I at him, and then we were pressing our way through the thickest crowd I’d ever seen in the port, with my mother herding us together, and I clutching Salome’s hand tight, and James telling us over and over to stay together. Over and over the heralds blew their trumpets for ships. And at last came the call for a ship to Jamnia, and then another, and another. Everywhere people were shouting and waving.

“Pilgrims,” said Uncle Cleopas, laughing again the way he used to before he got sick. “The whole world’s headed for Jerusalem.”

“The whole world!” Little Salome shrieked. “Did you hear that?” she said to me.
I laughed with her.

We went pushing and shoving and clinging to our bundles with the men hollering and gesturing over our heads, the women cleaving together, and reaching out to snatch our arms and pull us in, and suddenly we were on the gangplank, very nearly falling into the murky water.

In all my life, I had never known such a thing as hitting the deck boards of this ship and as soon as the bundles had all been set down all together, and the women had climbed on top of them and faced each other with veils drawn, and James had given us his more serious and warning face, Salome and I dashed off and made for the rail of the ship, slipping under everyone to reach the point where we could see the port and all the other hurrying people who were still waving and disputing and carrying on, even though we were all but crushed by the bellies and backs against us.

We saw the plank drawn up, the ropes tossed aboard, the last sailor jumping onto the boat, and the water widen between us and the harbor, and suddenly there came that lurch as the boat moved out, and all aboard gave a loud shout, and we slipped away onto the belly of the sea and I squeezed Little Salome to myself, and we laughed for joy to feel the boat borne along beneath us.

We waved and hollered to people we didn’t even know, and they waved back and I could feel the high spirits of everyone around me.

For moments, I thought Alexandria would disappear behind all her ships and their masts, but the farther out we moved, the more I could see the city, really see it as I’d never seen it, and a shadow passed over me, and if it
hadn’t been for Little Salome’s happiness, I might not have been so happy too. But I was.

The wind picked up; the smell of the sea was suddenly clean and wonderful, and it caught at our hair and was cool on our faces. We were really leaving Egypt behind, and I wanted to break down and cry like a baby.

Then everyone was shouting for us to look at the Great Lighthouse, as if we could not see it looming over us to the left.

Now many times, I’d looked out to sea at the Great Lighthouse.

But what was that to passing before it now?

Heads were turned, and people were pointing, and finally Salome and I had a good view of it. It stood on its own little island—a great torch reaching the sky. And we passed it as if it was a holy thing, wondering and murmuring.

The ship moved on, and what had seemed slow now seemed very fast, and the sea was tossing up and down, and there were cries from some of the women.

People began to sing hymns. The land grew ever more distant. The lighthouse became small and then disappeared.

The crowd of those looking broke up, and for the first time I turned and saw the sight of the giant square sail filled with the wind and the sailors working the ropes, and the whole scene of the men at the tillers and all the families now huddled around their bundles, and I knew we had better get back to our own who were no doubt missing us.

People were singing louder and louder, and soon one hymn gripped the whole crowd, and Little Salome and I
joined in, but the wind came scurrying to take the words away.

We had to pick our way through the families to find our own, but at last we did, and there were my mother and my aunts trying to sew as if their veils weren’t being almost torn from their heads, and my aunt Mary saying that Uncle Cleopas was feverish and he himself curled up and sleeping beneath a blanket tucked tight and missing everything.

Joseph was just a little apart, seated on one of the few trunks we had with us, quiet as he always was, staring at the blue sky, and the mast above the sail where there was a topsail, but my uncle Alphaeus was deep into arguing with other passengers on board about trouble ahead in Jerusalem.

Now James was all ears for this, and I was soon listening to it too, though I didn’t dare move too close for fear they’d leave off if they noticed me. They were shouting against the growing wind, standing together, in a little space, fighting to keep their mantles from being blown off, shifting this way and that as the boat moved uneasily over the water.

At last, I had to hear what they were saying, and moved away towards them. Little Salome wanted to come, but her mother snatched her back, and I made a motion for her to wait, trying to tell her I’d come back to her.

“I tell you it’s dangerous,” one of the men said in Greek. He was a tall man with very dark skin and richly dressed. “I wouldn’t be going to Jerusalem if I were you. For me it’s home, and my wife and children are there. I have to get there. But I tell you, it’s no time for all these pilgrim ships to be sailing.”
“I want to be there,” said the other, his Greek just as easy, though he was a rougher man. “I want to see what happens. I was there when Herod burnt alive both Matthias and Judas, two of the finest scholars of the Law we ever had.” He nodded to both my uncles. “I want justice from Herod Archelaus. I want the men who served his father in this to be punished. How Archelaus handles this will argue for everything else.”

I was amazed. I’d heard many bad things about King Herod. I didn’t know a thing about the new Herod, his son, who was Archelaus.

“Well, what does he tell the people?” asked my uncle Alphaeus. “He must tell them something.”

My uncle Cleopas, having roused himself from the company of the women, suddenly joined in. “He probably tells whatever lies he has to,” he said as if he knew all about it. “He has to wait for Caesar to say whether he’ll be King. He can’t rule without Caesar confirming his crown. Nothing he says means anything anyway.”

My uncle gave one of his mocking laughs.

I wondered what they thought of him.

“He tells everyone to be patient, naturally,” said the first man in his good Greek. It flowed easily like Greek did from our Teacher, or from Philo. “And he waits for Caesar’s confirmation, yes, and he tells the people to wait. But the crowds don’t even listen to his messengers. The crowds don’t want patience right now. They want action. They want vengeance. And they just might get it.”

This puzzled me.

“You have to realize,” said the rough man, the more angry man, “that Caesar didn’t know all the evil that old Herod did. How can Caesar know everything that
goes on in the Empire? I tell you there has to be a reckoning for the things he did.”

“Yes,” said the tall one, “but not in Jerusalem at Passover, not when pilgrims have come from all over the Empire.”

“Why not?” said the other, “why not when the whole world is there? Why not when the news will carry to Caesar that Herod Archelaus is not master of those who insist upon justice for the blood of those who were murdered?”

“But why did Herod burn alive the two teachers of the Law?” I asked. I did it suddenly, surprising myself.

At once Joseph turned from his thinking, though he was far away, and he looked over at me and then at the men.

But the taller one, the calm one, was already answering me.

“Because they pulled down the golden eagle Herod had put above the great Temple gate, that’s why,” he said calmly. “The Law says plainly there shall be no image of a living thing in our Temple. You are old enough to know that, child. Don’t you know it? Just because Herod built the Temple did not mean he could put an image of a living thing in it. What was the point to labor rebuilding a magnificent temple so that he could transgress the law and put on its walls an image that was a desecration?”

I understood him though his words were not so simple to understand. I shivered.

“These men were Pharisees, teachers of the Law,” the tall man went on, fixing me with his eye. “They led their pupils with them to take down the eagle. And Herod took their lives for this!”
Joseph was at my side.

The angry man said, “Don’t take him away, let him learn. He would know the names of Matthias and Judas. Both these boys should know.” He nodded to me and James. “It was the right and just thing to do. And they knew what a monster Herod was. Everyone knew. You in Alexandria, what did it have to do with you?” He looked at my uncles. “But for us, we lived with him and his monstrosities. They were visited on great and small, I tell you. Once on a whim, a mad whim, fearing a new King had been born, a Son of David, he sent his soldiers two miles’ walk from Jerusalem to the town of Bethlehem and . . . .”

“No more!” Joseph said, though he smiled and nodded as he put up his hand.

He drew me away. Quickly and firmly, he brought me towards the women. James he allowed to stay there.

The wind swallowed up all their words.


“You’ll hear stories about Herod’s deeds all your life,” Joseph said under his breath. “Remember, I told you that there were some questions that I didn’t want for you to ask.”

“Will we still go to Jerusalem?”

Joseph didn’t answer. “Go there, and sit with your mother and the children,” he said.

I did what he said.

The wind was blowing hard now and the boat was heaving. I felt a little sick. I was getting a little cold.

Little Salome was waiting to question me. I snuggled in between her and my mother. It was warm here and I felt better.

Joses and Symeon were already asleep in their lumpy
bed among the bundles. Silas and Levi were huddled together with Eli, who was the nephew of Aunt Mary of Uncle Cleopas, who had come to live with us. They were pointing to the sail and to the rig.

“What were they saying?” Salome wanted to know.

“Trouble in Jerusalem,” I said. “I hope we go,” I said. “I want to see it.” I thought of all the words I’d heard. I said excitedly, “Salome, just think of it, people from all over the Empire are going to Jerusalem.”

“Yes, I know,” she said. “It’s the best thing we’ve ever done.”

“Yes,” I said with a big sigh. “I hope Nazareth is a fine place as well.”

My mother sighed and threw back her head. “Yes, you must see Jerusalem first,” she said sadly. “As for Nazareth, it is the will of God it seems.”


“A village,” she said. “But it was once visited by an angel.”

“People say that?” Little Salome asked. “That an angel came to Nazareth? It really happened?”

“No, people don’t say it,” said my mother, “but I know it.”

She went quiet. It was her way. To say small things, and nothing more. After that, she wouldn’t say anything even though we asked her over and over again.

My uncle Cleopas came back, sick and coughing, and lay down and my aunt covered him and patted him.

He heard us talking about angels in Nazareth—saying that we hoped we would see them—and he began his not so secret laughing.
“My mother says Nazareth was once visited by an angel,” I told him. I knew that he just might tell us something. “My mother says she knows this.” And his laughter only ran on as he curled up to sleep.

“What would you do, Father?” Little Salome asked him. “If you saw an angel of the Lord with your own eyes in Nazareth?”

“Just what my beloved sister did,” he answered me. “Obey the angel in everything he told me to do.” And again came his low private laughing.

A terrible anger came over my mother. She looked over at her brother. My aunt shook her head as if to say let it all go. This was her way with her husband.

And usually it was my mother’s way too, to let things go with her brother, but not this time.

Little Salome saw all of this, this look of anger on my mother’s face, something so surprising I didn’t know what to make of it, and I looked up and saw that James too was there, watching, and I knew that he had heard it. I was very sorry to see this. I didn’t know what to do. But Joseph sat quietly away from all of this just thinking to himself.

I had a sense of something then, and why I’d never sensed it before I don’t know. It was that Joseph put up with Cleopas but never really answered him. For him, he’d made this voyage over sea rather than land. And for him, he’d go to Jerusalem, even if there were trouble. But he never answered him. He never said anything to all Cleopas’ laughing.

And Cleopas laughed at everything. In the House of Prayer, he would laugh when he thought the stories of the prophets were funny. He would start to laugh very low and then the little children, such as myself, would
start to laugh with him. He had laughed in that way at the story of Elijah. And when the Teacher had become angry, Cleopas had insisted that the story had parts that were funny. He had said that the Teacher ought to see that. And then all the men had begun to argue with the Teacher about the story of Elijah.

My mother turned back to her mending. Her face became smooth. She had a piece of fine Egyptian cotton that she was mending. It was as if nothing had happened.

The Shipmaster was hollering at the sailors, and it seemed they had no rest.

I knew not to say another word.

All around us was the sparkling sea, so blessed, and the boat rising and falling beneath us, sweetly carrying us along, and other families were singing, and we knew the hymns and we too picked it up, singing with all our hearts. . . .

Never mind about the secrets.

We were going to Jerusalem.