

I, JUDAS
A
NOVEL

By
George A. Blair

Ndala

Copyright © 2013

By

George A. Blair

Ndala

4049 Victory Parkway
Cincinnati Ohio 45229

One

‘**D**ΑVID.’

“Yes, Master?” he said.

“David, as I have often and often told you, I am not your master.” replied Matthew.

“I know,” he returned. “I am sorry; I cannot help it.”

“Well, it is of no consequence, I suppose. But you would be doing me a favor if you would remember it.”

“I will try, Ma—”

“Matthew.”

“Ma— I cannot say that either.”

Matthew laughed. “Well, I do not want to cause you distress. Do what you can, but do not fret over it.”

“Yes, Master. Thank you. But what is it you wanted to say?”

“You saw how we left Judas on that horrible night?”

“How could I forget it?”

“Well, I am all but certain that no one has taken him down and buried him.”

“Good!”

“But you must remember that the Master—our only *real* Master, David—loved him—I know he did—and died for

him, as well as the rest of us; and he told us at the dinner before he died that our new commandment was that we were to love each other as he loved us. And so we cannot leave Judas thus.”

“But he was *responsible* for the Master’s dying! Hanging there and letting the crows and vultures pluck at him is far too good for him!”

“I feel as you do, David; but the way we feel is not relevant. Jesus would want us to cut him down and give him a decent burial.”

“Are you asking *me* to help you in this?”

“I thought you told me that you had forgotten to hate.”

“Well, the more I think of what he did to the Master, and the more I remember the Master hanging there on the cross—because of *him*—I am beginning to learn it over again.”

“All the more reason, David, why you should help me.”

“Master, I cannot be the kind of holy person he wanted us to be! Let him rot there, I say! Perhaps I would not do anything to him, much as I would like to—rub his face, or what is left of it, in the dirt, for instance—but it is too much for you to ask me to actually *bury* the—there is no word for him!”

“David, I know you will help me. I cannot do it alone, and there is no one else I can ask.”

“Well—well, if I must, I will do it for *you*. You cannot ask me to do it for love of *him*!”

Matthew smiled. He had won his point, and pressing the matter would not help. David would do what had to be done, and the very act would have its salutary effect—he

hoped.

The result was that he and David found shovels and a wheelbarrow, as well as knives to cut down the corpse, and headed out to Judas's mansion on the outskirts of Jerusalem. As they walked along, Matthew said, "There is no point in taking him anywhere else to be buried; no one would accept the body. So we might just as well dig a grave there in the yard, and put him in it."

"You are *not* going to wrap him with spices and things, are you?"

"I think not. It has been over a week. Whatever the spices could have done for the body is of no avail now. In fact, I brought some cloths soaked in vinegar for us to tie over our noses and mouths because the smell may be overpowering."

"We should cut him down and put him as far away from the grave as we can, so that we will be able to dig it, if we must do so. Then we can drag him over and dump him in and cover him and rid the world of the pollution which he is!"

"David—"

"Well he is. Spiritually and now physically and in every other way! Who can deny it?"

"Well, there is the house—Dear God! I can smell it from here! He must be buried if only to preserve the whole area from contamination!"

"You see?"

"I know, David, I know. Let us go and get it done."

So they went first to the horror that was still hanging from the branch of the terebinth tree, and David righted the box that Judas had stood on and then kicked out from under him, and with a few swift strokes cut the body down—it was

not someone that either wished to look at, half eaten by the birds and insects, which were crawling all over it. They let it fall on a large cloth that they had laid under it, and took the edges of the cloth on either end and pulled it as far off to the side as they could, and then went to the other extreme of the yard, and each, as quickly as possible, began digging a grave deep enough to keep it from animals, where it could finish decaying in peace. David, of course, who was used to farm work, though he had done little in the past two years, did by far most of the digging.

It was hard work for both of them, and as they toiled, both Matthew and David relived the time when each had done this for his own father. Tears fell from their eyes, not only because of the vinegar in the cloths around their mouths and the stench that worked its way through, but because of the memory that each of them could not escape..

Finally, David pronounced, “That is deep enough. He will bother no one, and no one will bother him, more is the pity. Let us get him in there and fill in the grave, and be done with it.”

With an exhausted sigh of relief, Matthew rose stiffly, and climbed out of the—rather shallow, it must be said, but probably adequate—grave, and the two walked over to the skeletal figure in the cloth, and picked it up by the corners, averting their faces not only because it was sickening to behold, but because they could not stand the smell, and dragged it unceremoniously over to the grave and all but threw it in.”

“There!” said David. “Let us cover it and leave here! I need a complete wash!”

They hastily filled the grave and left a considerable

mound over it, knowing that it would settle as the body decayed as well as with the normal settling of earth, and finally it was done, and the smell had been vanquished.

“Let us go!” said David, turning to leave.

“A moment!” replied Matthew. “I am not as young as you, my child. This has taken more out of me than I expected. Let me sit for a few minutes. I will go inside, where there are comfortable seats. He will not mind our using them.”

“You sit if you wish. I cannot be still.”

So Matthew went into the luxurious house and found a richly covered seat upon which he sat, feeling a bit guilty that he was making the upholstery filthy with the robes he had been using to dig the grave, but realizing that it made no difference. Now that there was no odor and no scarecrow out in the back hanging from the tree, it would not be long before thieves stripped the house bare.

Matthew thought of all the Scripture passages that spoke of those who amassed wealth only to leave it to someone else. Judas, however, had no one to leave it to, and so his wealth, which he essentially stole, would be stolen from him, and what did he have to show for it all?

What could he have been thinking, all this time?

“What is this, Master?” asked David. “It looks as if it might be a book of some sort.”

“That is a codex, David. Some people, instead of making scrolls, as most do, make books that are little sheets of papyrus bound together on one side as this is, and find them easier to read than scrolls.”

“This seems to be something *he* was writing. I found it over there on that table, with a quill and an inkwell that is just

about dried up.”

“Indeed? Perhaps he kept a diary, or something. What does it say?”

“I have no idea! I cannot read.”

“Oh, of course. Let me see it.”

He took the book from David’s hand, and said, “It *is* a diary. He seems to have begun it just after he met Jesus for the first time, because the beginning speaks of the meeting. It seems he thought that he would be joining a movement that would change the world. I wonder if he also thought that he would be ending it.”

“Who cares what he thought?”

“Well, it might be instructive to read. I often wondered what was going through his head; he was such a brilliant person, but he had misinterpreted Jesus so badly. I wonder if at the end he realized this.”

“Let us leave, Master, if you have rested enough. This place makes me feel as if things are crawling all over me.”

“Yes, let us go; I must say I share your sentiment. But I think I will take this book and see what is in it. Do you wish to hear it?”

“I suppose.”

“I can read it to myself.”

“No. Go on. Let me hear it.”

Two

What follows is what Matthew read to David from the diary.

Note: (from Judas) I have endeavored to make this into a connected narrative, rather than leave it as diary entries. It involved a good deal of planning, since I did not necessarily have a fixed time every day for writing down my thoughts. I flatter myself, however, that I have succeeded in making it readable. But that is for posterity to judge.

I, JUDAS, KNOWN AS ISCARIOT from my birthplace, write this for posterity. I have always believed, from my earliest youth, that I would be an important person, and a recent event gives me some evidence that this will indeed be the case. I decided, therefore, to keep a record of the event and what happens afterwards, so that future generations may know the facts, and might be aware of my role in shaping them.

The event concerns an assignment I had as a member of a delegation to investigate one John, who was standing by (and sometimes in) the Jordan river and bathing people “for a change of their way of thinking.”

My colleagues, of course, were not enthusiastic about changing their way of thinking, unless it meant developing it along the lines they had mapped out, and so we went to see what this mountebank was up to. I myself, however, was open to new ideas; I had done extensive studying in Greek philosophy, and found the ideas of Plotinus, among others, very similar to what had been conveyed by those Hebrews who have been in close contact with what Plotinus would have called “the One” and Plato “The Good.” There are some obvious differences, but once one strips away the legendary and mythical accretions to the Biblical accounts, the similarities are all but astounding.

But this is to be a report of what happened, not a lecture in philosophy or an exegesis of Scripture; and so let me leave the topic there. Suffice it that I was not so rigidly locked into what had been taught in the schools here in Jerusalem.

Things did not start off in a promising way. John, who was a hermit, fresh out of the desert, was given to ranting, and proceeded to alienate those in our group for what he considered the “hypocrisy” of the tassels of our cloaks, among other things.

The others were indignant, but I dismissed this, especially when we questioned him and he admitted that he was not the longed-for Messiah, the Prince who was prophesied. The others tried to shame him into silence if he was no one special, but he claimed that he was the forerunner of someone, and his duty was to announce his coming, so that we could prepare for him.

The others left in disgust, but I remained. Though he said he was not Elijah, it was conceivable that he spoke in the

spirit of Elijah; the Power that created and sustains the universe doubtless was capable of such a thing, and so his inspiration might well have been that of Elijah, and therefore, the one he was announcing could conceivably be the one we had all be awaiting for so many centuries. After all, for the Power that made us, a thousand years are like a day after it has passed.

At any rate, I stayed behind, and listened to John, whose rhetoric, though inflated, was certainly forceful and worth listening to, and after a while a single man—an ordinary-looking man until one looked closely, and saw that he was a man in complete control of himself and apparently of everything around him—came up to him, as so many did, to be bathed in the Jordan. Interestingly, when he approached, there was no one with him or near him, in spite of the fact that people tended to throng toward John. The two were quite alone for some time.

I approached as near as I dared—the two together presented a formidable aspect, which was perhaps why they were alone—and I heard the alleged penitent ask to be bathed.

John, who evidently knew him at least indirectly, said, “I should be being bathed by you, and you are coming to me?” From this I deduced that the “penitent” was in fact either the Prince, or the one John suspected was the Prince.

He answered, “Allow it for now, so that all of the formalities will be fulfilled,” and John led him a little way from shore, where he could be easily immersed in the river, and, somewhat reluctantly, put his hand on his head, and pushed him under the surface.

He emerged immediately, and suddenly the sky, which was clear as usual in the desert, seemed to open as if the clear

sky was a cloud mass, and a bird flew out of what seemed the hole in it, and alighted on the man's shoulder.

And then, out of that clear sky, came a thunderclap, which seemed to say (though one wonders whether words as we know them were used), "This is my Son, the one I love." or something to that effect. As I say, they were not actual words, but the sounds *meant*, or seemed to mean, what I quoted just above.

It was in many ways a terrifying experience. For the only time in my life, I felt my hair stand on end. I had heard of this, but this is, as I say, the only time I actually experienced it.

The phenomenon lasted only a few moments, and then everything reverted to normal. Needless to say, however, I took it that the cosmos was telling me (and anyone else who heard) that this was the Prince, who if he was the "Son" of the Cosmos, was greater even than Moses.

I immediately saw my opportunity to make a difference in the world, through him. With no very clear idea of what I was going to do, I approached him as he paced up and down on the shore to dry himself off, and said that I had experienced an extraordinary event connected with him, and I wondered if he would take me on as a follower of his, to learn from him. I thought it more politic to say that I wished to learn rather than "assist" him or some such word, since conceivably he might take it ill if I presumed to instruct *him* in any way. Dealing with him would require considerable diplomacy.

But I judged that, whether he was aware of it or not, dealing with him might be necessary. If he was the Son of the Cosmos—or rather, the Creator of the Cosmos, whatever "He" is (doubtless this Creator is beyond personhood)—his

main contact with the Force that coursed through him as it did through Moses, Elijah, and others, would be by way of inspiration, and might very well be erratic. He would need a rational guide to help him distinguish what in fact he was inspired to do, and when, and how. Too close a contact with this Force seemed to lead to madness, not to reshaping the world. It was my hope that my considerable rational—and diplomatic—skills could direct him in the practical implementation of what he was inspired to do.

This was reinforced by the fact that the thunderclap was intelligible, but, not being actual words, could be interpreted in many ways. So his inspirations might be open to various ways of being implemented, some of which might be destructive and not beneficial.

All this flashed before my mind as I approached him and asked if I could follow and learn from him. He looked at me and stroked his beard for several moments—a habit of his, I later discovered, when an inspiration came to him—and finally said that if I wished to join a group that he was about to form and help in changing the course of history, then I should be in Galilee in some forty or fifty days or so, by the Sea of Tiberias (which, as everyone knows, is actually a very large lake) on the north-western shore, and I would find him.

As I left, the number “forty or fifty” intrigued me. It seemed he had something private to do, now that he had been named by the thunder, so to speak (I thought of the psalm, “you are my son; today I have begotten you.”), and needed, perhaps, forty days to accomplish it. And Moses was on the mountain forty days, and Elijah made a forty-day pilgrimage to Horeb also.

I suspected that this man (who, I learned, was named Jesus) was going to do something similar, and so I undertook to follow him. It was not an easy task, but he did go some few days' journey into the desert, and there knelt down and simply prayed or went into a kind of trance, not moving at all. I came back in a week, and he was still there, apparently not having moved, and thirty days later, he was in the same position.

I took care to be somewhere where I could watch on the fortieth day, and he did indeed at that time begin to move. I expected he would go and fetch food and water, but it seemed that some Presence met him. He spoke aloud to it, as if it were another person; but I could hear nothing of what it said. Evidently, it gave him some means of obtaining bread, but he answered, barely loud enough for me to hear at my distance, "Man does not live on bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God," which was a quotation from Moses. Later, he seemed to look down at the ground, but as if from a great height, as if he were on the edge of a cliff, and told the Presence, "You are not to challenge your God—"and he gave the divine Name. And still later, he explicitly said, "Begone, Satan. You are to worship your God YHWH (I replace the name with its letters) and serve only him." After this, other Presences provided him food and water. I hastened back to Galilee, so that I could be there to meet him.

I was, of course, by this time convinced that I had met the man who was to be the pivot of history, and it seemed as if I would be admitted into his entourage. With my experience of the Judean priesthood (I am a priest), I was sure I could be one of his most trusted advisors.

At the shore of the “sea,” I met no one, except some insignificant fishermen, whom I greeted politely enough, though I spent no time with them because of the odor they unfortunately exuded. So I wandered around, and after a day or so, I saw Jesus approach two of them and ask if he could borrow their boat as a platform to speak from; it seems a number of people had gathered to listen to him.

He gave a little speech or sermon from the boat to the effect that the Reign of God was about to begin, which excited me considerably, and when he was done, he asked the oarsman to put out into deep water “for a catch.” The man with the net objected that they had spent the whole night fruitlessly doing just that, but at his command they would make one more try.

Suddenly, the nets were bursting with fish. They came to the shore with astonishment—since apparently, they had thrown the nets out merely as a matter of form, to a place where there would be no fish—and immediately busied themselves with taking the fish out of the net and putting them into vats they had in the boat, all the while exclaiming that it was a miracle.

Indeed it seemed to be; and another interesting thing I learned from their remarks was that they had seen Jesus earlier “in Judea,” and had apparently had uncanny experiences there also. Possibly, they had heard the thunder speak, as I did.

But Jesus left them and went on a bit to another boat, where two others were trying to untangle a net. One—hardly more than a boy—had taken out a knife to cut it, and the other had put himself behind him and pinned his arms until he calmed down. At this point, Jesus came up to them and told them to follow him—and then remarked that they would have

to hasten to their house, for their father had suffered a severe accident, and seemed about to die.

They ran off, and I followed as well as I could while still keeping aloof from them, and Jesus, with the two young men, entered the house, and exclaimed loud enough for me to hear that he had been cured. At any rate, he soon strode out on legs that gave no sign that a hay cart had run over them. Jesus came out with him, saying, "As I say, I would really prefer that this not be known."

"How did you do it?" answered the father. "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!"

So apparently what he did was touch the legs, and they were healed. The Force that coursed through his soul inspired him to perform this miracle, as I found out later, because the father—Zebedee—was adamantly opposed to having his sons

and his partners going off as members of Jesus's entourage, and It (or "he," as I said) devised a means of rather forcefully persuading him that he should allow Jesus to have his way.

It promised to be a very exciting time.

But an enigmatic one. Granted, he had accepted me (at least it seemed that way), but so far all I saw was these rather noisome fishermen, people one would not favor with even a passing glance. Evidently the Force directing him had singled them out for some inexplicable reason—or he had misinterpreted what It had intended. True, the mere fact that one was a fisherman said nothing of one's intelligence or one's leadership abilities, since fathers, as in this case, trained their sons in the occupation; but still, it was not the most promising of all beginnings.

It turned out later that young John, the lad who had the knife and was going to cut the net, had spent a week in Jerusalem, in the house of Annas, no less, to see if he wanted to be a rabbi, since he had learned to read on his own. From the little I saw of him, he was an attractive sort, with curly hair and rather bulging muscles from rowing the boat so much, so he may have had qualities that would suit him, with the help of the Force, to greatness. Well, we would see. The others, however, did not give the impression of being promising.

I mentally held my nose and joined them as they stood there chatting, and met a few others, one, named Simon, like one of the fisherman in the other boat, who had been a member of the Zealot party, and who immediately tried to recruit me into trying to persuade Jesus into staging a revolution à la Judas Maccabeus. Granted, I knew a good deal of swordsmanship, and had also studied hand-to-hand fighting

(my attractive appearance tended to induce bullies larger than I to pick on me, and I had to be able to teach them a lesson or two), but fielding a military force to overthrow Rome seemed the very worst way, in my opinion, to gain control over the world, if that was Jesus's goal—and from his remarks it did seem thus.

My own view is that if this is to be done, it will be done by persuasion, and not violence. Regimes have been toppled in the past by astute advisors, and I was eager to see if I was indeed as astute as I thought I was.

Jesus had begun saying that we had to change our way of thinking, and I believe this applied to most, if not all, of the people he was gathering around him. One was even the son of a wine-merchant, and, as far as I could see was, if not stupid, as simple and literal as a fool. I could see no use for him anywhere. Nor could I see how a man named James, like the elder brother of the one who had cut the net, would be of much use. He had a most annoying habit of clearing his throat after every half-dozen words; it made one not able to pay attention to what he was saying, because one was waiting for the “hem, hem” and gritting one's teeth.

I mentioned that Simon (not the revolutionary) was the one in the boat that caught the huge number of fish; and his brother was positively enormous, Andrew, also well-muscled from rowing; either of them *might* be suitable for great things, if properly trained. But there was another, named, like me, Judas, that people began to call Thaddeus, who was dreadfully shy, intimidated by being in a group of people who were, whether they deserved it or not, apparently quite confident of themselves.

When one considered that they were to be the intimate companions of the Son of the Cosmos, who was even greater than the mythical gods and demigods of the Gentiles, their self-confidence was positively astounding, and spoke rather of their ignorance than anything else. I myself sometimes trembled at the thought of the person I was involving myself with.

He was, however, extremely easy to like, because he gave himself no airs at all. It seemed that until just before that day in which the thunder spoke, he had been nothing but an ordinary carpenter, though those who knew him even then said that there was something about him that set him apart, in spite of the fact that they could not say what it was, exactly.

Three

I had assumed, with considerable misgivings, that the people I saw was going to be the heart of what Jesus was planning to do, and it seemed I would have my work cut out for me to weed out the misfits and populate his entourage with competent people—and apparently he was not finished.

I had met John and spoken to him, and thought that he, of anyone in the group, would be the one Jesus would use for his purposes, but I was taken aback when he took Philip, of all people, aside, and said that he had a task for him; he was to find one Nathanael and bring him to join them. Philip demurred, saying that he had not seen Nathanael since a person named Thomas disappeared after he had killed his brother Samuel in an accident (another pair of fishermen).

One received the impression that finding Nathanael would lead to a rescue of Thomas, who, I learned, was a drunk who apparently was in a cave somewhere trying to drink himself to death. His rescue was, I suppose, a humanitarian gesture, but it looked as if he might be joining the group, which boded less favorably, as far as I could see, for the value of the group itself.

I tried diplomatically to bring this up, and Jesus simply looked at me incredulous and said, “The man will die unless he is rescued. He will be a great man, Judas, but even if he were not to be, should we not do something for him if we can?”

What could I say? His rescue might help *him*, but what would it do for *us*, or for Jesus himself? A *drunk* among the very entourage of Jesus—even if, perhaps, an ex-drunk! I tried to lead up to this, but when I mentioned that it might not advance Jesus or his cause, he absolutely could not understand what I was alluding to. One would have thought that he was either completely ignorant of his mighty mission, whatever it was, or that he was deliberately choosing misfits to show his own great power as he led them to do things impossible for such blockheads.

In any case, when Nathanael appeared, Jesus remarked that he was a true Israelite, with nothing devious about him, and when Nathanael said, “Where have you ever met me?” he completely shocked him by saying, “Before Philip called you, I saw you—under the fig tree.” Apparently something happened to Nathanael as he sat under the fig tree, something that implied that Jesus knew of him there and because of that was willing to help him, however impossible it appeared.

Nathanael seemed to confirm this by blurting, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” at which Jesus laughed, and said, “Do you believe because I said I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than that. 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!”

A fascinating statement. He had just been called the Son of God, as the thunder had called him (most people would

interpret the Force creating the universe and a kind of person they called God, who had the Name no one pronounces), and now he called himself the “Son of man,” just as if he *were* some kind of god, who found it amusing to see himself in human skin. But he *had* to know better than this.

But also, he now claimed to be a new version of the ladder Jacob had seen at what he named the House of God, Bethel, reaching from earth to heaven, with angels ascending and descending on it, where God said he was with Jacob and his offspring and would bring them blessings. That is, obviously, that Jesus was to be the bridge or mediator between the Creator of the universe and earth, upon which his forces would bring miracles upon earth, and upon which the prayers and wishes of mankind—at least those in his favor—would be answered.

So if he was not God, he might as well be, because God was in him somehow, and acted through him. All this, I realized, was consistent with the One of Plotinus or the Good of Plato: the single Director of everything that happened in the world. But Jesus was claiming to be, from now on, the Channel through which all this occurred.

So perhaps he did not need anyone special to do what he wanted done; what he needed, however, I began to see, was someone who could—should I say, suggest?—to him how he might direct this infinite power, so that it would not destroy him, and the rest of us in the bargain, and accomplish nothing lasting on the earth. That, I took it, was my mission, if I could be clever enough to fulfill it. And I was confident that, at least with practice, I would be clever enough. It was daunting, but I felt I ought at least to try; no one else seemed anywhere near

capable of it. All were too awestruck with Jesus's power, and could not conceive that it might be misdirected by him—or by him as human, whatever that might mean.

He then entered into a discussion with Nathanael about the rescue of this Thomas, and Nathanael kept saying that he could not do it, and Jesus returned that he *would* do it because Jesus, though not present, would be with him—another fascinating statement. At one point, Nathanael almost shouted, “Master, I am nothing *but* fear! I can do nothing! It was from fear that I did nothing and let Samuel die!” Apparently, then, Nathanael was in some way responsible for the death of the twin of Thomas, and thus Jesus wanted him to participate in his rescue, in spite of the fact that even he admitted that he was a coward. Not a promising figure to have around one, unless one were to show his power to overcome overwhelming obstacles—because fear is, perhaps, the most overwhelming of all obstacles.

In any case, Jesus succeeded in persuading him (as one would expect), and he and a black slave of his whom he had just freed went off in search of Thomas, and Jesus himself left for the house of Simon bar-Jona (the fisherman Simon), where he had something to do. The rest of us stood about discussing what had happened; and no one had the slightest inkling of anything except me, and even I could not see clearly what was to come of this.

We were all agreed, however, that Nathanael would return with Thomas, and after a considerable time, he did—with a Thomas who had obviously been starving himself, but who showed no sign of drunkenness, nor of the filth he had doubtless been wallowing in. From the look on the ex-

slave Ezra's face, I took it that he had had the unenviable task of cleaning him. It would have been interesting to see how Nathanael had persuaded him, since he could no longer command him; but Ezra's self-satisfied smile made it clear who was responsible.

Philip the Fool went up and remarked "I never knew it was you, before you came to me yourself, after you k—" and finally it came to him what he was about to say, and he caught himself. "After the accident. Before, I thought it was Nathanael."

Thomas, who looked as if he might punch him in the face, took in a 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—a simple enough task.

"Not completely," said Thomas, "I remember once you told me I looked as if I was drunk."

Philip returned, "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.’”

Evidently, Thomas was astute enough to know what had happened and was likely to happen with him. He sounded, actually, like a reasonably intelligent person—and one with a sense of humor. Referring to hallucinations Jesus had rescued him from, he said, “At least I no longer see things that are not there.” He looked around. “You all *are* here, are you not?”

Something could be done with Thomas, perhaps, if he stayed sober; and it was likely he would do so, if the Master was by him. So perhaps the selection of Jesus’s followers was not simply random—indeed, the Force that inspired him would preclude that, I supposed. There was hope.

Interestingly, at this point someone remarked that there

was to be a wedding in Cana in a couple of days, and that Jesus had gone to Simon's house to see if his followers would be invited. This would provide a severe test for Thomas, who of course, would be expected to at least take a cup of wine to celebrate the marriage. Would he be able not to drink from it? How would Jesus handle it?

The first hurdle to be jumped, however, in this invitation was to find decent clothes for everyone. They were, most of them, workers, and looked at what they had on with dismay. I decided to lend some of my clothes to those who could get into them, and some swapped with others, leaving everyone except the giant Andrew taken care of.

He looked about in despair until the black slave—ex-slave—Ezra came up to him and said that he had some garments that might fit him, though possibly they would be a little tight. And it did seem that he was right, when one looked closely at him; in himself, he was a magnificent specimen, tall and well-muscled, though the whole effect was spoiled, of course, because he was as black as polished ebony.

Andrew inadvertently uttered a *gaucherie* by saying, "Why, thank you Ezra, if you think that Bartholomew (a name Nathanael had adopted) would not mind," and Ezra smiled and said, "They are *my* clothes, Andrew; they only *were* his," and Andrew muttered apologies for still thinking of him as a slave. It is difficult to think of a freedman as not "really" a slave; I have done so myself.

In any case, in two days, we were all at the wedding feast, and a crisis arose about a third of the way in. The chief steward nervously looked at the supply of wine, and Jesus's mother went up to him and said something, at which he at first

demurred and then stroked his beard and looked around pensively. (That stroking of the beard, as I mentioned, seemed to be a sign that either an inspiration from the Force had occurred, or that he was anticipating one.) His eyes lit upon the water-jars people used for washing, and he told the servers to fill them with water from the stream outside the house; and when they did so, he told them to draw it out and take it to the chief steward.

It had become wine—and superb wine, I tasted it—and there was enough there to keep a small army supplied for a month. A magnificent gesture, and a perfectly impossible feat. He clearly had the Creator of the universe at his beck and call—as his mother had him at hers. Though she was but a woman, I resolved to cultivate her, and went over to engage her in conversation, but, like a woman, she had apparently conceived an irrational antipathy for me, and with a few polite remarks, she withdrew and, I saw, went off to converse at great length with Thomas! There is no accounting for tastes.

Speaking of Thomas, shortly after the water became wine, the groom himself had noticed Thomas standing there without a cup, and he gave him one he had been bringing to his new wife. Thomas took it nervously and held it for a while, wondering what to do with it. He looked at Jesus, who nodded that he should take a drink. Astonished, he took a sip, and then his face showed a comical mixture of being at once astounded and profoundly disappointed. Nathanael came up to him to suggest that what he was doing was not wise, and he told him to taste some—at which Nathanael was astonished also. Word spread discreetly that Thomas's cup held nothing but water.

This, it turned out as one learned about Jesus, was typical of him. He seemed fond of playing little jokes upon people, but always, it seemed, gentle ones, giving them unexpected pleasant surprises.

One other incident occurred about this time. Nathanael—who preferred to call himself by his patronymic Bartholomew—had sent his black slave—ex-slave—Ezra to his father to tell him that he had joined Jesus, and to ask for money for the group. Ezra returned, and showed the money (a considerable sum) to Jesus, who stroked his beard and said, “Take it to Judas. He has a house somewhere in Jerusalem, and will know how to keep it safe.” This raised an eyebrow of Ezra, but he brought it over, and showed it to me, and I remarked, “And what am I to do with all this?”

I should remark here that, before the wedding, Ezra had the presumption to come up to me apparently to start a conversation, and actually extended his hand as if he expected me to shake it! I, of course, simply turned away; there are proprieties, after all.

But of course, this gave Ezra an opportunity to talk to me, because Jesus had all but commanded it, and so I could not ignore him, much as I wished. He said, “It is a gift from Bartholomew’s father, and Jesus said that you would know how to give it safekeeping.”

“Oh, so apparently I am to be our treasurer.”

“It rather looks that way.”

“One thinks he could have come and appointed me himself.” I continued, as if to myself, because one does not really engage in conversations with a slave, even a freed slave, “But no, I suppose that is like him. He simply knows that I

would be glad to undertake the duty—though I know next to nothing about how to keep accounts. But I suppose he is not really concerned about money. Not if he can make wine out of water.” I said this with a glance at Nathanael. “In fact, I suspect he wants to have nothing to do with it himself.” I turned back to Ezra. “Very well, I will undertake the task. You can put the money in that saddlebag over there, and I will see that it is safe. I will count it later, when we get to Jerusalem.”

I resolved, however, that this was not to be an opening for Ezra to act as if he could become my equal, still less my friend. I chose from then on to ignore him completely.

And as to my “office,” I was never, in fact, officially appointed treasurer, though that is what I was in practice. But my attitude was that if Jesus cared little about money, I was not going to bother myself with keeping records of each shekel either. I assumed that if we ever needed money, Jesus would either persuade someone like Nathanael’s father to give us a good deal, or could make it appear out of thin air.

And in fact, as time went on, more and more people began to give us gifts of gratitude for the cures they had received. Jesus simply referred them to me (politely, of course), and I took the money and stored it in a safe place in my house.

Eventually, as it happened, my house became inadequate for the purpose, and I purchased another, rather more elaborate, one, I will admit, and in the course of time, I decided that I could keep a good deal of the money available by spending it on furnishings for the house, and on clothes that I could sell if ever we needed to do so. If I was to be treasurer, I felt that it would be wise to let it be known that we were not beggars.

And it worked out rather well. Whenever anyone needed or wanted anything, he came to me, and I gave it to him, no questions asked, and no accounting tricks to keep track of what went out—because there was always a good deal more coming in than going out.

So in fact, I spent very little time keeping track of the finances of our little group; after all, there were but twelve of us even at the peak of our—I suppose one could call it “ministry.” No one complained, at any rate, or lacked for any comfort that he wished. Though I must say that none of them seemed to wish for any particular comfort.

In any case, shortly after the wedding, Jesus gathered us and told us to prepare for a trip to Judea for the Passover. I was wondering whether he would do this, and what would happen there, if anything. We had been speaking of how to begin preparing people for the advent of the Reign of God; and I pointed out in Jesus’s hearing that it might be politic to begin in Judea, and also to be diplomatic about it, since the Judeans, and especially the Pharisees, regarded Galileans as almost Gentiles, and would not react kindly to some upstart telling them what to do. Jesus nodded when he heard this, and smiled.

So we prepared tents and food supplies (there were a number of women who had joined us by this time) and made the journey down the Arabah by the Jordan river.

As Jesus entered Jerusalem, rumors of miraculous cures he had performed in Galilee began to spread, and quite a crowd of sick, lame, and possessed people began to form around him, creating quite a disgusting sight, not to mention the noise they made to attract his attention. He looked as if he

had been expecting this, and touched all those within reach, and they were immediately cured, and added to the din by shouting “Hallelujah!” and showing everyone how they were now whole.

They were not the only ones, of course, who were creating a commotion, since at the time there were many vendors of sheep, calves, pigeons, and other animals for sacrifice there in the Temple (something everyone regarded as a scandal), as well as money-changers, to convert the Roman denarii into Hebrew shekels, since only the latter could be used to purchase the sacrifices.

When the crowd around Jesus had thinned a bit from the fact that most had been cured, he heard the lowing of the cattle and the bleating of sheep, and looked around at all of the business transactions in the very Temple itself. He stopped, and shook off those who were still importuning him for help, and with a face that made it clear that he did not wish to be disturbed, he stroked his beard.

Suddenly, he took off the rope that he had tied at his waist (which had knots at the ends to keep it from fraying) and asked John to lend him his cincture also, and with the two of them made a rather formidable whip, which he began slapping against his hand. He went up to the animals and beat them on the rump, yelling “My house is called a house of prayer, and you have made it a den of thieves!” The animals bellowed and ran off, their owners chasing them; and when he reached the money-changers’ tables, he simply kicked them over, to the screams of their owners, and sent the coins flying all over the pavement. I noticed, however, that when he came to the pigeon-vendors, he did not overturn their cages (which would

have set the pigeons free to fly away), but simply shouted, pointing, “Take those out of here!” You are not to make my Father’s house a market!”

Well!

I had not been swift enough, it seemed, in insinuating the best course into Jesus’s mind, and the Force had inspired him to do immediately what everyone knew needed to be done at some time. But some Pharisees had begun to gather, and one had the temerity to shout (Jesus’s aspect did not encourage debate, to say the least) “Who gave you authorization to do this sort of thing?”

Jesus looked at him with fire in his eyes, shifted his whip to his left hand—at which the man backed off—and beat his chest with three fingers of his right hand. “Destroy this Temple (or this temple? His body?)” he shouted, “and in three days I will rebuild it!” Anything but conciliatory, not to mention that it made no sense—except perhaps to him. It was even unclear, as I hinted above, whether he was referring to the Temple he was in or the temple which he was—in which case, he seemed to be saying, “Kill me and I will return to life in three days.” But that, if anything made less sense. He probably *could* rebuild the Temple, however, doubtless aided by a legion of angels.

The person in the audience, in any case, was cowed into silence, as were all the other bystanders, because no one could understand what he could possibly mean.

But one intrepid soul scoffed, “This Temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and you will rebuild it in three days?” No one laughed or seconded him, however, because, based on what he had done in curing people before he

drove out the buyers and sellers, they thought him might just be able to do what he said.

But after a time, matters gradually quieted down, and the animals and money-changing tables were removed from the premises; and Jesus and we went into the Courtyard of the Judeans to pray.

I was devastated. I could not believe that Jesus had gained any followers by his gesture—except perhaps from the rabble, who counted for nothing—and I spent my time there, trying to discern how to undo the damage, and not really finding a way to do so. Jesus was still not in a mood to be approached with anything that had the slightest odor of advice, so I thought the most prudent course of action was to leave matters alone for now.

FOUR

TOWARD evening, Jesus had finished his prayers, and we left the Temple to go to a place he knew on the Mount of Olives, opposite Jerusalem on the east, when a slave approached Jesus and said that Nicodemus, a member of the Sanhedrin whom I knew well enough to speak to, wished to have an interview with him.

“Indeed?” said Jesus. “This is not an arrest for my audacity, I trust.” I had suspected something of the sort, since he had called the Temple “my Father’s house.”

But the messenger put on a conciliatory tone and said that Nicodemus merely wanted to see what Jesus had to say. Conceivably, he saw something of the Power that was in Jesus; and after all, the Messiah had to come at some time.

“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 us to the east, up the hill from the Kidron Valley, as the sun began to sink behind us 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.

We entered a garden full of olive trees, with their gnarled trunks, and tried to make ourselves comfortable on the ground. This was something of a hardship for me, since I had not been used to the nomadic life that we were now living, but I endured it, because eventually, when Jesus became King of Judea and then the world—as I was convinced he would—we, his close followers, would be living in the lap of luxury.

As I mentioned, I had a house in Jerusalem to which I could have repaired, but I did not want at this time to put myself above those around me; our respective places in Jesus's entourage would be sorted out as time went on.

It seemed that Jesus and Nicodemus entered into a long conference; Jesus appeared well after midnight, and settled down beside Simon and Andrew, remarking in a whisper to Simon, "The seed, it appears, has been planted. It is not what I would have planned, but it will do; it will do."

So the inspiration of the Force was not a total disaster, it seemed; at least one influential Judean reacted favorably to Jesus—and who knew how many more, seeing his miraculous cures, would also forgive him the presumption of actually doing what needed to be done. The problem was, of course, that many other influential Judeans had been making a great deal of money from the abuse, and they would be hard to persuade, to put it mildly.

And, as I lay in bed, when I considered everything that night, I found I could put aside my disappointment that Jesus had not followed my path of diplomatic persuasion, since it was now clear that no amount of persuasion would induce most of the important people here to give up their power to an upstart, however persuasive he might be, still less a Galilean upstart. Perhaps his inspiration was correct: he should do spectacular things to bring the ordinary people on his side, who, if ignorant, were hundreds of times more numerous than the leaders of the people; and they could, conceivably, exert sufficient pressure—at least over time—to force even the authorities to recognize Jesus.

I had learned, incidentally, in talking to some of the others, that Jesus was actually born here in Judea, and in Bethlehem, David's city, no less. I kept that knowledge for use when people began to scoff at him as a Galilean Gentile. The fact that his parents, out of fear of King Herod, chose to live in Galilee, ought not to count against him. Well, we would see what would develop. So all in all, the day was not a total disaster, by any means.

After celebrating the Passover the next evening at the house of a friend of Jesus, we went to the banks of the Jordan, not far from where John had originally been bathing people. He was still doing so at Aenon, near Salim, but his followers had diminished somewhat, after rumors about Jesus and John's pointing him out had begun to spread.

Jesus himself did not bathe anyone, which I considered wise, since it would have confused him with John, but he enlisted several of us to do so. I demurred, myself, since standing in cold water for any length of time did not do my

health any good. But others, especially the younger ones, took to the task with a will, and the result was that Jesus, who of course, was on shore in the group of those who were bathing and being bathed, increased his following greatly, especially since he continued his practice of healing with a touch the sick and the crippled.

But word of what was going on, I discovered, began to reach the ears of those in authority who were ill-disposed toward him, and so I took the liberty of suggesting to him that it might be politic to leave here and return to Galilee. If he acquired a following of thousands there, the authorities here would merely note it as a remarkable phenomenon, whereas if it happened here, especially at this early stage, they could not but look upon it as a threat.

Jesus indicated that he agreed with me, which gave me a good deal of satisfaction, and so we left; but instead of returning by the Arabah, we went straight through Samaria. Jesus evidently wished to capitalize on his success as quickly as possible, a course with which I was in complete agreement.

It was not possible to travel through the country as quickly as I was accustomed, since I am considerably more fit than most—even than some of the fishermen—and of course we had to accommodate ourselves to the slow members of the group and the women, who carried the *impedimenta* of the group on donkeys.

In any case, we arrived by Jacob's well around noon, and Jesus told us to go into the town of Sychar nearby to buy food, while he sat down for a while to rest. I decided to stay behind and watch over our Master from a discreet distance; I did not expect anything serious to happen to him, but one

never knew; so I gave Andrew's brother Simon and John's brother James a sum of money each for them to buy food.

"There should be plenty there," I said, and you can return what you did not spend; only do not let them talk you into giving them more than what the provisions are worth." I had heard that Simon was good at haggling, and James could take his cue from him. And so I went a bit into the woods, as if I were going to relieve myself, and watched.

And sure enough, a woman came to the well to draw water, and Jesus, to my astonishment, asked her for a drink.

She was as astonished as I was, and answered, "What is this? You, a Judean, are asking a Samaritan like me for a drink?" The Judeans and Samaritans have been all but at war with each other for generations—not to mention that men do not speak to women.

But even more astonishing was Jesus's reply. "If you knew the gift God is giving, and who it is who is asking you for a drink, you would be asking favors from him, and he would give you living water."

The woman laughed. "You have no bucket, sir," she said, "and this is a deep well. Where would you get running water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob? This is what he drank from, and so did his sons and his cattle." I noted that she had astutely brought up that the Samaritans were descendants of Jacob as well as the Judeans.

Jesus answered, "Anyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again; but a person who drinks the water I give him will never afterwards feel thirst, because the water I give him will turn into a spring inside him, gushing up to eternal life."

The woman laughed again and said, "Then give me this

water, sir, so that I will not be thirsty and have to come here and draw this.”

Jesus looked at her, insolently mocking him, and said, “Go call your husband, and come back.”

She tossed her head. “I do not have a husband.”

It was now Jesus’s turn to laugh. “You are right,” he declared, “when you said you have no husband.” He held out his hand, fingers splayed. “You have had five men, and not even the one you have now is your husband. What you said was true.”

She looked at him, startled, and then to recover herself replied, “I—er—I can see that you are a prophet,” and suddenly changed the subject. “Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, and you people say that Jerusalem is the place where one must worship God.”

Something like this was what Jesus was looking for, and he answered, “Believe me, Madam, the time is coming when you will not worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem either. You are worshiping what you do not know, and we worship what we know. But the time is coming—it is here already—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. God is a spirit, and those who worship him should do it in spirit and in truth.” Was he also planning to free us from having to go to the Temple? If he was to be King of the whole world, perhaps so. And the One was not confined to a place, certainly. It looked as if “worship” was going to take on a new meaning.

Taken aback by what he said, she pondered, and answered, looking hopefully at him, “Well, I know that the Prince is coming, and that when he comes he will explain

everything to us.”

“I am, speaking to you,” he answered. I put that literally. The obvious meaning is “That is who I am, speaking to you, and it is the ordinary way of saying it. But there was a nuance there that disturbed me somewhat. I had been looking for signs that Jesus was not simply aware that God—the one who called himself YHWH, or “I AM”—was not merely flowing through his soul, but that he might be beginning to think of himself *as* God, since he could do so many amazing things.

I might have been making too much of an ordinary expression, since clearly it meant, “I am he (the Prince), speaking to you.” But when young, and without studying, as I had done, he might think of God (the Creator of the cosmos) as a kind of super-person, one that one could speak to and who would reply as one man to another. Many of the early Scriptures gave that impression, as when Moses spoke with God “as one man to another,” for instance.

But those of us who have studied the matter deeply, especially, as I have, in the light of Greek science, realize that God, YHWH, the One, or whatever one chooses to call Him or It, is as much beyond personhood as we experience it as we are above, say, a lily plant out in the field. It would be like the lily plant picturing us (supposing it could do so) as a kind of glorified plant—and the distance between us and YHWH is infinitely greater. So we cannot conceive of It as a kind of glorified man. Moses did not, though he talked to YHWH; but he was not so intimately connected with the Force that made the universe as Jesus was; YHWH, for Moses, was something *outside* him, and not something within him as It was for Jesus;

the power seemed to be *his*, not that of something infinitely beyond him. That is, when he referred to himself as the Son of Man, it was as if he thought of himself as a diminished being, one who “emptied himself,” as it were, into human limitation, while somehow being infinitely beyond it.

But that, of course, is absurd. Still, one could see how a man as full of the Infinite Power as he was could think thus, especially if he had no special training. And if this continued, as it seemed to be going to do, I feared that it would drive him mad. He would imagine that he indeed was the Creator of the Universe, the “I AM” who made and controlled everything, and it would lead him to do wild and attempt impossible things.

But not even the Infinite Being cannot actually do impossible things. He cannot make contradictions, such as white which is black, or hard which is soft, and so on. These are simply ways of speaking, and do not express anything. That is elementary.

But there are things which are in fact impossible—contradictory—which do not seem so. For instance, that the Infinite Being could be finite (i.e. a man) while remaining infinite. One must be careful to exclude such things from one’s thinking. And the fear I had was that Jesus would consider himself as a limited Infinite, which is a contradiction in terms. If, because united with the Infinite, he could do amazing things, it did not follow that *he himself* was Infinite. Clearly, he was not; he was a man, and all men are limited to being only men.

But once he was convinced that he himself was the Infinite who limited himself to being (only) human while being

simultaneously beyond all limit, it would drive him mad. It was my noble goal to prevent this; and this was why I was disturbed by the innocuous phrase he used to the woman.

But perhaps I am making too much of what is, in fact, a perfectly ordinary expression; and in any case, the other students of Jesus arrived at this point and the woman ran off, leaving her water jar, presumably to tell her neighbors what had happened.

Jesus was walking excitedly back and forth, and when James said, “Rabbi, eat something,” he answered, “I have food to eat you know nothing of.” They asked each other whether anyone had given him something to eat (which I could have refuted), and he answered, “My food is to do the will of the one who sent me, and finish the task he gave me.” It seemed that the conversation with the woman had a much greater significance for him than it appeared to have—which reawakened my fears.

He looked out at the fields, which were just beginning to sprout. “You would say, would you not, that it is four months before the harvest comes? But I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields; they are ready for the harvest.”

Everyone looked out, bewildered. “The reaper,” he went on, has already had his pay and is gathering a harvest for eternal life, so that the one who planted and the one who reaps can enjoy themselves together. This is where we verify the saying, ‘One person plants; another reaps.’ I sent you to reap what you had not worked on; others have done the work, and you have received the result.”

No one but I had the faintest inkling of what he was saying; but I had seen the woman, who was the “firstfruits,” as

it were, of the “harvest” he was referring to. And indeed, the Samaritans came up with her shortly afterward and wanted Jesus to stay with them—which we did, for two days; and I am told that they said to the woman that they now did not have to take her word for it; they knew from their own experience that he was the Prince, and the Savior of the world.

And that was why I considered my task to be supremely important. If he was to save the world, he would have to be sane to do so; and I, I hoped, would be able to mitigate his megalomania, and keep him sane long enough for it to occur. Nothing like him had ever appeared in the world, and I had to see to it that his mission could be accomplished. This is why I am writing this diary; so that people will be able to see how I managed it—because just as the Force that created the cosmos made him, that same Force put me here to see to it that he did not go beyond his limits and destroy himself and all the rest of us.

Five

ONCE WE ARRIVED IN Galilee, several things of interest happened. We passed through Capernaum, by the “sea,” and people who had seen Jesus in Jerusalem began to gather to be cured by him; and, as he had done there, he cured many sick and even possessed, by a single touch—or sometimes a mere word.

Then he decided that it would be good for him to go to his home town of Nazareth. It was night when he made the decision, and he arrived there before dawn—as apparently he planned, since he did not want to be mobbed by the people there, but to make a formal entrance, so to speak. He simply visited his sick father and his mother, who was staying up during the night watching over him. They quietly greeted each other, and spoke a bit to the father, while we waited at a discreet distance.

Then around dawn, he went into the synagogue, shortly before the morning service was about to begin, and spoke briefly to the rabbi there, who was waiting outside.

Then, shortly after dawn, Jesus entered the synagogue, where the men were gathering to pray. We students stood at the back, John, I noticed, very near a man in quite expensive

clothing, but who seemed to have been rolling in the dirt, and who also appeared as if he had been in a fight and had not slept all night. As we came in, he looked as if he were trying to escape, but was trapped by the crowd, and cowered in the back.

Jesus went up to the front, and the rabbi, knowing that he wished to speak, asked him to do so. 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.”

A Messianic text. I had read it many times, but now it had a whole new meaning. Interestingly, as Jesus read, “set broken people free,” he looked up, almost at John, but then clearly to the man beside him, who was a “broken person” if ever there was one.

The black man, Ezra, who had a knack for not being conspicuous despite his striking appearance, took note of this, 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 Capernaum, 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!” 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.”

Jesus clearly did not yet have the knack of ingratiating himself with his audience. And they reacted accordingly.

“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.

I was about to enter the fray to rescue Jesus, when 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.

The “broken man” made his escape during the confusion, and hid, I noticed, behind a bush, followed by Ezra, who seemed to be making himself his shadow.

After a while Ezra returned to Thomas, whom he had befriended, 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. He made me jump.

He seemed to appear from nowhere. “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.”

This was a development. It rather looked as if Jesus would not be captured or harmed if he did not wish to be—which might explain why he did not particularly concern himself with antagonizing people, and could simply speak the truth without bothering with diplomacy and the consequences of what he said. If someone tried to do anything to him, he would just not be there.

On the other hand, it made my task that much more complicated, since even though he could not be harmed by anyone against his will—if what we saw was any indication—it did not follow that he did not create enemies, which would make difficult if not impossible the “change in the way of thinking” that he was trying to accomplish. People who have been thwarted do not make good listeners.

Connected with this was also the fact that the “broken man” had disappeared with him, and had not reappeared. He had evidently spirited him off somewhere; but where? And would we see him again? I was inclined to think so, since he was to “set broken people free.” Yes, we would meet him again, and perhaps soon.

Jesus, acting as if nothing unusual had happened, gathered us and led the way back down to the lake—and another interesting aspect of this was that no one noticed us either, who were a relatively large group. So he apparently could protect his followers as he was able to protect himself.

But when one thought about this, in all probability he did not actually have to disappear, but simply misdirect people’s

attention. In any case, people would not see or notice where he and those he wished not to be seen were.

The students, of course, 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, rather astutely, “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.”

Precisely, I thought. There would have to be a progression of more and more spectacular cures accompanied by more and more detailed sermons, to that the cures would be taken to verify the truth of what he was saying. I suggested as much to Jesus, and he simply nodded, as if to say, “Obviously. Be patient.”

All of us spent the day discussing these events, without much success; and Jesus passed the time in curing those who came up to him. Toward evening, he led us up to a river ford, at which there was a tax-collector’s booth, where behold! 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 seemed 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 thus 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.

So now we were not only to have an ex-drunk, but presumably an ex-tax-collector as one of our group. Jesus evidently thought nothing of the adage that “a man is known by the company he keeps” though I was certain that many of what would have formed his audience from now on would advert to it, and distance themselves from him.

It was interesting. He clearly had no interest in being popular, but in doing what he considered the right thing—in this case rescuing a tax-collector from a life of what amounted to crime, however legal it might have been. The man had evidently had some kind of experience the night before we found him in the synagogue, which made him change completely his way of looking on himself. And this was reinforced by his expression just before we met him at the tax-collector’s booth. He seemed to have been considering whether to kill himself or to go on with what he had been doing for years; it had become, for some reason, intolerable to him. And now Jesus was going to take him away from this and make him into one of his lieutenants.

And, when one thought of it, he might be useful at that. He was clearly skilled in keeping accounts (as I was not), and almost certainly spoke Greek and probably Latin as well as Aramaic, and doubtless could write well in these languages also. If he were to “change his way of thinking” he would certainly be an addition to our group, far more promising than any of the others except myself.

There was a soldier standing by, and he and the two assistants came up to the man, while Jesus said to the soldier, (in Latin, I noticed, though no one else seemed to) “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 the fool came up to Thomas, and whispered, “Was he not in the synagogue this morning?” and Thomas, who evidently had also seen him there, had probably decided that this should not be bruited about, said, replied, “I know not. The synagogue?” This did not satisfy Philip, who went to someone else for confirmation.

Now Ezra, who saw him, approached Thomas, and also whispered, “It *was* he, you know,” 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.” That was interesting. This did not seem the first time Levi had met Jesus. Perhaps he had done some carpentry work for him in the past. If so, the transformation of Jesus into the Son of Thunder must have been a hundred times greater than whatever it was that Levi had undergone.

“Perhaps,” answered Jesus. “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.”

No one made any attempt to speak to this Levi. A tax-

collector, of course, was considered the worst of the worst—if anything, worse than a prostitute, let alone a drunk, because everyone thought of tax-collectors as traitors as well as thieves. All we would need, it would seem, would be a reformed prostitute and our coterie would be complete.

It was only I, who had an open mind, who could see that the qualities that made one a successful tax-collector—which included a kind of blind obedience to the dictates of Jerusalem and Rome—would be tremendous assets, if the “change of one’s way of thinking” could be guaranteed. And it seemed to me that Jesus had already done most of this.

There was also this allusion, spoken ironically, to a “friend” who would be glad to have eyes and ears in our entourage. Who could this be but Pontius Pilate himself? I am willing to wager that Levi had some connection that could be designated a “friendship” with him.

But he had to be a “friend” that Levi had somehow escaped from. Evidently, Pilate, if I am right, thought of him as a friend, but Levi knew that he might as well be a slave. Perhaps he even was a runaway slave whom Pilate had found through something that the soldier had discovered.

So in himself he was an addition to our group, and to boot could possibly be a kind of liaison to the Roman occupiers, which Jesus would need if he was to move from being King of Judea to being King of the world. But this is all pure speculation, of course. We will see.

Levi whispered something private to Jesus, and Jesus stroked his beard, and seemed to assent to whatever the request was. Interesting.

We went with him to his Roman-style mansion, which

was as sumptuous as one would expect—except that it had a bronze fence around the treeless grounds, which were patrolled by vicious dogs. He quieted them down, and we they left him, after which discussions kept going on in low tones among us, while Jesus acted in his typical fashion as if nothing unusual had happened. As we began to go to rest (which increasingly was in the fields or woods; there were more and more of us day by day), he even said, “I believe that we now will have the nucleus I was waiting for. We will see.” Aha!

The next day, however, when we 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”?

Of course, the little matter of the “friend” was not lost on Simon the Revolutionary, who expostulated at considerable length on the topic, certain—as I was—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.”

Nathanael had a brain.

Six

When we returned on the next day, 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 us, 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. Levi paused, thinking, and I wondered “Where have I heard this before?” And then I remembered, “Destroy this Temple (my body?) and in three days I will rebuild it.” Just as there were forty days at the beginning, there seemed to be something about dying and returning to life on the third day. I would have to keep note of this.

“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.”

Judging by the outside of the mansion, the inside would have to have been finished by a skilled carpenter, or team of carpenters. Almost certainly Jesus and his father. That made perfect sense of “you are certainly not the one I once thought you to be.”

“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 have I? 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. And

Jesus seemed to be behaving with him as he did with Thomas, who, indications were, had a mind that could perform well once he had been rescued. It almost seemed as if Jesus was gathering about him people who needed to have him about them for their rescue.

But of course, how could that apply to me? What would I need to be rescued from? Of course, Jesus had not sought me out, and so perhaps that was the difference. And his stroking his beard may have been his request to the Force within him as to whether he should take on someone who did not need him, and perhaps he himself needed. So that would fit even in my case.

Then I need not worry about the others. However unpromising they seemed (and in some cases, it was *very* unpromising), Jesus, with his infinite Power inspiring him, could make them into effective instruments of what the Power had in “mind,” if one wished to call it that. Of course, it was greater than anything *we* would call a “mind.”

Interestingly, I overheard at one time a conversation with Ezra (which I was interested in, since I had serious misgivings about any role he could play), in which he indicated that he would prefer to take on the role of a mere observer, and perhaps return to Ethiopia to spread the Good News there. It seemed a wise move, and Jesus apparently assented to it. That took care of the incongruous member of the group.

He, by the way, seemed attracted to John, which was understandable, since John was in many ways very attractive. And, to be sure, John seemed attracted to him—as he also was to me, and if I am not mistaken to Andrew, based on the way he sometimes looked at us when he thought we were not aware

of it. But John was resisting this, presumably because of interpreting Leviticus a bit too broadly. But it was interesting, and perhaps something could be done with it. I made a mental record of it; it might be useful in some way.

Jesus now introduced Levi to the rest of us, and afterwards 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.'"

Did I see someone praying in the front of the synagogue? Certainly, as I looked at Levi, he took it that the "tax-collector" in the Temple was the tax-collector we saw at the back of the synagogue; and *he* seemed to think that there was another one there 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, evidently reacting to Jesus's knowing what he had been doing, though he could not have been there to see him. But of course, the Power could know things—"see" things—that Jesus himself as a man could not. One wondered, nevertheless, why Levi was there, and why he had come to see himself as a sinner—no great feat, one would think, except for someone who had to have blinded himself

quite thoroughly to the real situation he was in, or he could not have brought himself to do what he had been doing.

“—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.”

In the silence that followed, Levi’s face turned from deadly pale to scarlet, as he noticed everyone looking at him. For all of us, this was a new experience; Jesus had not told stories—or perhaps spoken in analogies or parables—before, and some of us had trouble making the connection between the fiction, such as the Temple, and the fact of the synagogue.

James the throat-clearer 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.”

This change of name indicated to me more clearly that he had somehow escaped from Pontius Pilate, who now had discovered who he was. But doubtless he was as safe as anyone could be in the entourage of Jesus.

But the intriguing thing here was that Jesus was saying that Matthew’s admission that he was a sinner effected his forgiveness. He had had the “change of way of thinking” that made him (mentally at least) a new man, as if he had been born again, as Jesus indicated. But what this meant, evidently, was that such a change of heart erased all the sins—and they had to

be many and serious—he had committed in the past. Of course, the Power that possessed Jesus could forgive sins, just as It could do anything else, and what Jesus seemed to be saying was that under certain conditions, It actually did so.

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. He had doubtless seen already how naive and literal Philip was, and had given him a true answer that was not responsive to his question. No doubt he *had* been in that synagogue but once, and that was the time. It was obvious that this was the way John, Thomas, and Ezra, took it, since they nodded at each other.

Andrew, interestingly, had a problem with the forgiveness. He said to Nathanael—a good person to consult, unless one came to me—“But how can he say that the Pharisee did not leave the Temple virtuous? 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, who heard this, and did not quite understand it, shrank as if stung, but the two took no notice of him. I felt like telling him that sometimes a change of heart meant a

complete change of life; one becomes a different person. But they did not see fit to consult me.

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." True, but clearly, he had not completely changed his personality, as could be seen from the fact that Bathsheba was the mother, not only of the boy who died, but of Solomon also.

"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?" Probably, I thought, it would take time, but the change of personality would lead him to restitution in the future. One did not have to revolutionize one's whole life all at once.

"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~~ 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.”

Nathanael, I suspected, had hit upon the basic point. It was not enough to act virtuously, if one thought that one was doing favors to the Almighty by doing so. No one does favors to the Almighty and constrains “Him” to make a return. It is not a bargaining process; “He,” not being a person in our sense, does not operate in that way. We are all insects or worse in “His” sight, beneath his notice. The best we can do is beg like the tax-collector and acquire the attitude of receptivity.

The fascinating thing was that Jesus had enunciated what the greatest scholars had tentatively arrived at; one learned this sort of thing only after years and years of study—or, as in Jesus’s case, by being “instructed” by the Force inspiring one.

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. Of course, thinking of God as the Power that made the universe solved this problem, since “He,” though “He” knew everything in some sense, could not be affected by anything that went on in the universe “He” created.

But suddenly there was a commotion behind Jesus in the house, drawing everyone’s attention. Something was going on on the roof, but we students were too close to see what it was.

All at once, 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.

Another “change of thinking!” But it was intriguing that Jesus was now saying that *he* forgave the sins! Well, not in so many words, but what else could it mean? But perhaps it simply meant that he saw 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—a true statement, if an exceedingly dangerous one. Another of his purposes. How he could manage to get this idea across, especially to the Pharisees, without telling them that he himself was God (that is, the one whose name we do not pronounce) was going to be a feat of ingenuity greater than any miracle he had performed so far, including "forgiving" sins.

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.”

I myself did not understand it for a moment. He seemed to be saying, “Only God can forgive sins, and I forgave sin”—but he did not explicitly draw the conclusion. “I—the Son of Man—have the ‘power on earth’ to forgive sins,” presumably because I am the channel by which the true Power is exercised on earth. This would make a distinction between him and the One we do not name, and yet one and the same Force forgave the sins, because he was the chosen channel by which the Force acted.

Still, it was an extremely tenuous distinction, and what disturbed me about it was that Jesus, not having studied widely (though he seemed to know whatever he needed to know) might not be clearly aware of it. It might be that Jesus was beginning to think that *he himself* was the author of such acts as forgiveness of sins, especially since he had followed up the statement by the act of curing the cripple, something presumably only the Infinite Power could do, by simply commanding him to get up and walk, as if he had by his *own* power, effected the cure.

If he believed this of himself, he was on the road to insanity, simply because a (finite) human being cannot be infinite. It was *my* task, foreordained by the Power, to rescue him from this, while leaving him his ability to act as a channel for the “Father,” as he called him. It would be exceedingly difficult, but I had to try, and I felt I had the talent to succeed.

Seven

As people were *μιλλῶντες* about, discussing what had happened, Matthew approached Jesus, evidently, I suspected, to find out if his sins were forgiven, and whether he would have to make restitution. But they were talking in a very low voice, and it was mere speculation to say about what. One statement only came out of it, when Jesus laughed and said, loud enough for us to hear, “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.

Ezra, who seemed to wish to “observe” everything, noticed it, and 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?” A trenchant question, that.

I decided at this point, to try to clarify to Simon, Andrew, and Thomas, what all this meant about who Jesus was. “He is obviously filled,” I said, “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.”

“As if?” said Andrew. “You think it is *not* by his own power?”

“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.’ 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, as one might expect of a person whose mind was not of the most acute. Even 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. But let us face

it; absurdity is absurdity.

Jesus joined us after a while, looked over at John (who was standing a little apart, listening) with a rather amused smile on his face—which I could not decipher—and then said to everyone that Matthew had an errand to perform, and would rejoin us on the morrow.

And, indeed, the next day, Matthew came up and joined us. He was near John, and John approached him to ask if it would be possible for him to teach him Greek. Apparently, Matthew thought him worth a try, and agreed to teach him.

“Thank you, Matthew.” said John. “I would be very grateful.” And sure enough, I saw them at their little meetings afterward. But once this had been settled, Matthew went up 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.

We had divided ourselves (or rather, been divided by Jesus) into pairs, going around the different towns and villages in Galilee, collecting followers who joined us 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.

Since all we knew was the abstract fact, there was considerable discussion among us as to what Jesus meant.

John, for instance, asked Andrew, “Could he mean that what Isaiah prophesied was really going to come to pass?”

“You mean where everything would be at peace with everything else, lions and lambs and so on?”

“Exactly.” I had not thought of this myself; but if the world was to be “restored,” then presumably it was to be “restored” to the state it was in before the calamity that was spoken of in the story or “parable” of the fall of Adam.

Andrew, however, replied, “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 (Simon was the one I was to be paired with, which did not fill me with eager anticipation. But then, I suppose my views about what the “change of thinking” were as different in my own way from the others’ as Simon’s were in his way). He went on, “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.” John could think.

“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.”

I thought that John was perhaps closer to the truth than Andrew. I was willing before to accept that the “Kingdom” might be a spiritual one, except that Jesus would be an actual King, but not much physically would change; but it seemed to me that the Force creating the cosmos would want it—insofar as It “wanted” anything—to be as it was originally “intended,” supposing the Force to be benevolent, as presumably It was.

“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?”

Typical. Fortunately, the others paid as little attention to him as I did. But it was definitely going to be a trial being his partner.

At this point, Thomas came over to befriend Matthew, evidently having recognized him as another pariah. Well, I wished them well. The thought occurred to me that I myself

might cultivate Matthew, since he was one of the intellects of the group. But I was not Thomas, and so I decided to wait until they approached me.

I did not have long to wait. Matthew had just replied to something that they had been saying, "I have a great deal to become accustomed to. A great deal." And Thomas 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!"

I turned to show that I had heard. "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"

I walked over, and said, "I hope Thomas has not been poisoning your mind about us. We *do* try."

"He has said as much."

"But I would venture that he has intimated that we are not all successful."

"How can you *say* that, Judas?" said Thomas, with one of those annoying nods to his head, as if he were chopping his opponent with that nose of his. "I have merely been making innocent observations."

"If they are innocent, I would hate to be the subject of guilty ones."

"Your main problem, Judas, is that you are too perceptive." Another nod. You know I merely try to be honest."

"No doubt. I would think the Master's view is that such honesty has its limits."

"No really," broke in Matthew. "He has not said

anything disparaging. He told me that you are brilliant, for instance.”

“Are you not?” asked Thomas.

“How am I supposed to answer that? It is true that I have done a good deal of studying, not only in Scripture but in the writings of some of the Greek philosophers; but there is a difference between learning and brilliance, and I lay no special claim to the latter.”

“You will not deny, however, that the two can go together.”

“All this is silly and otiose. I am what I am, whatever it is, and what difference does it make? As the Master seems to be saying, the trick is using as well as you can whatever you’ve got, not worrying about whether it is more or less than the person beside you. And all of us are insects in comparison with the Master.”

Matthew seemed to react favorably to this. Perhaps I could do something with him.

“Then what, as a man of learning, do you make of the Master?” he asked.

“He is an extraordinary phenomenon, without question. He has obviously read rather extensively in the Scriptures, and seems to know some of them by heart. He can quote from the prophets, for instance, at a moment’s notice. But at the same time, he does not have the same *kind* of command of them that the scholars have, who have studied all the commentaries and all of the—shall I say, often twisted?—interpretations they give of every jot and tittle. He gets at the spirit; he knows them from the inside, so to speak. It is extremely refreshing. He will go right to the heart of some

passage that commentators have worried to death like dogs fighting over a sandal, and one will say, ‘Of course! Why was *that* not brought up earlier.’ It is like reading Scripture with a bright light shining on the page.

“And that, of course, allows him to go beyond what is merely written down, because he seems to understand, more than anyone I have ever seen, *why* it was written down. That is why, even if he is not a scholar in the strict sense, I have joined him; I learn more here in one day than I did in years of study beforehand.”

“That is great praise indeed,” said Matthew.

“It is far less than he deserves.”

“He is not one,” put in Thomas, “that even a person like myself (a nod) can find fault with—except perhaps his tendency to be a bit outspoken and confrontational from time to time.”

“Confrontational?” said Matthew.

“You remember last Passover, Judas, when he went into the Temple and saw all the people selling animals for the sacrifices? Fire came out of his eyes, and he took off the rope he used as a belt and made a whip of it, and drove them all out, shouting, ‘Take these out of here! You are not to make my Father’s house a Market!’”

“That was one of the instances where he had Scripture at his fingertips, I remember,” I said. “He also said, ‘It is written, “My house is to be a house of prayer,” and you have made it a den of thieves!’ I myself was reminded of another passage from the psalms: ‘Zeal for your house has eaten me up.’”

Matthew was shocked. “He really said *that*?”

“He did indeed.”

“He had them completely cowed, because they knew he was right.” said Thomas. “But then some of the Pharisees, who had been condoning the abuse, tried to justify themselves by shouting, ‘Where is your authorization to do this sort of thing?’”

“And what answer did he give?”

“A strange one,” I answered. “He took three fingers and beat himself on the chest, as he said, ‘Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will rebuild it!’” as he waved the three fingers before him.

“What could he have meant?”

“No one knew. But it silenced them, if only for a moment, because of the force of his voice, more than anything else—and perhaps *because* it was so incomprehensible. The obvious implication was that if they tore down the Temple, he—and perhaps a legion of angels—would restore it.”

“To save face, in fact,” interjected Thomas with his little chop, “some of them scoffed, ‘This Temple has taken forty-six years to build, and you will rebuild it in three days?’ But the problem was that they were afraid he just might be able to do it, and so they drifted away.”

“The people did not, however,” I went on. “They were not enamored of the Pharisees to begin with, with all their rules and regulations and interpretations and exegeses, and it delighted them to see someone stand up to them and best them. They hung on his every word.”

“Actually,” said Thomas, “*I* think that he was saying that if they tried to kill him, he would escape and return in three days. Because they would dearly love to get rid of him,

and he *was* pointing to himself, not the Temple. ‘Destroy *this* Temple, you see.’”

“You may have a point, Thomas,” I said. “But it does not make a great deal of sense no matter what. I think perhaps he was carried away by the heat of the moment. There is no question that he was angry.”

“I refuse to believe that he was not in complete control; I saw him. And after all, did you notice that he kicked over the changers’ tables and drove out the animals, but did not set the doves and pigeons free, because the vendors would not have been able to recover them.”

“There is that, of course.”

“What is that commotion up ahead?” said Matthew. “Why are we stopping?”

Eight

We 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 in a linen cloth, with the napkin tied over the head. The mother, evidently a widow, was frantically wailing in despair beside it.

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 sometime 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 seemed to catch sight of Matthew, and his expression changed in an instant to a gaze of horror and disbelief.

So we now knew that Jesus not only could cure the sick "by his own power," but raise the dead—at least if they were just recently dead. "I tell you, sit up." Again, what worried me was his increasing use of "his" power as if it were really his. How could I convince him that he was simply a vehicle for a Power that was infinitely beyond him?

And then there was the boy's reaction to Matthew, as if he had some reason to hate him—as if *he* had been responsible for his death. Matthew turned to see if he had noticed anything behind him, and there might have been six or seven people that he could have seen. Clearly, if Matthew *had* been responsible for his death, he was totally unaware of it—which left him in considerable danger, if the boy wanted to take revenge.

The boy, meanwhile, recovered from his astonishment, and was asking his mother and everyone around him where he was, and what he was doing on this stretcher.

In the middle of his questions, 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!"

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. That confirmed my suspicion. He seemed to be joining the group so that he could be near Matthew and

could then kill him at a suitable opportunity.

“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?” He made it clear to the youth that whatever happened to him—and was that not a red welt about his neck?—was due to a rash act on his part. Had he hanged himself?

The boy blushed. “It would seem not, indeed.”

“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.”

Another case of forgiveness of sins. Though the boy seemed to be contemplating at least one more. And when he said to Jesus that there would be “no more of that” in the future, he seemed to be acting the young Pharisee, saying that he was not going to try to kill *himself* again.

He hung his head. “Thank you, Master.” He was doubtless unaware that harming Matthew would be all but impossible with Jesus watching over them—and evidently knowing what was going on in his mind.

Be that as it may, the boy spoke to his mother, telling her that he would go home and bathe and dress in decent clothes and then return, and, with another glance at Matthew, he ran off.

Jesus, meanwhile, was telling people to put on a new way of thinking, because the reign of God was about to begin, and was advising them that things were going to be very different from now on. The people were beside themselves, very few actually listening to what Jesus was saying, because

they were too busy discussing whether the boy had actually been dead or not, and whether it made any difference one way or the other, since even if he were merely in a coma, Jesus' knowing it and his intervention was clearly miraculous in bringing him out of it.

Some seemed to want to question the mother about his death, but she was obviously distraught, looking off in the distance to see her son return, and Jesus shielded her from questions which would have upset her greatly. Of course, the skeptics saw this, and concluded that Jesus wanted to keep them from uncovering the conspiracy to make him look like a miracle-worker; but even they were afraid to incur Jesus' wrath by trying to approach her.

Matthew took this opportunity to approach Jesus and ask if he would mind if he left to see to the feast on the morrow—and as he was saying this, the boy David came back and overheard 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!”

Matthew, somewhat surprised, said that he would not trouble the boy, who turned to him and answered, “There is no trouble, and besides, I would prefer not to have people gawking at me and asking me what it felt like to be dead!”

“If you are certain you would prefer it, then,” said Matthew, “I think we might be able to use you. I suppose that my slave Gideon has hired some help, but I imagine that another person would not be unwelcome. I will pay you whatever the others are paid. Gideon knows.”

Jesus, who suspected—no, *knew*—what was going on far better than I, stroked his bearded chin thoughtfully for a

moment—a custom of his—and then nodded approval, and the two turned in the direction of Matthew’s house. After traveling in silence for a while, I heard the boy said, “I need no pay, Master.”

“God forbid that I should be your master!”

“I meant nothing by it, Sir. It was merely a manner of speaking.”

“You do not know that I am the least—” and by that time, they were out of earshot. They seemed to be getting along well enough; perhaps I was mistaken, but it still seemed to me that there was something there.

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, 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, but Matthew (or more likely his slave) had been astute and diluted the wines (which were excellent, but not up to the standard Jesus had set at the wedding) very little, and so tongues began to loosen.

There was an incident shortly afterward; something

happened out in the back where the dogs were chained up. Jesus suddenly let out a whistle and dashed out, but no one observed what was going on, except perhaps Nathanael, looking out a window, and Matthew himself, at the back door. I myself did not pay much attention, since I was engaged in a rather fascinating conversation with one of the guests, who seemed receptive to my views on Jesus.

In any case, shortly afterward, one of the tax-collectors came in, evidently frightened, but, from what I could see, not harmed in any way. Perhaps the dog had barked or growled at him. He spoke perfunctorily to those who were near him and left, and everything settled down.

A few days later, Jesus informed us all 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. I suppose, since I now had the office of treasurer, I was not chosen for this task.

Neither Jesus nor his mother appeared to be in great sorrow, which was certainly consistent with who they were. And if, as some of the Pharisees held—and Jesus seemed to intimate—there was a life after death of reward and punishment, as the Book of Wisdom indicated, then Jesus's parents had very little to worry about.

I myself was of two minds on the subject. True, our thoughts were spiritual, and therefore, one would argue, not subject to decay as our bodies were; but Plato and Plotinus seemed to conclude that all our spiritual acts were absorbed into the “consciousness” of the One, in which case, we would share, in some sense, in Its happiness, but not as the individuals we are here on earth, since matter is the source of

individuation. Still, the Scriptures at least hinted that our personal lives—whatever that might mean—would continue after death.

Jesus himself had spoken obliquely about “eternal life,” but up to this point, he had not made himself very clear. Perhaps the Force in him did not reveal to him what happened to a person after death. I would have to pay attention; he would have first-hand knowledge, so to speak, if he said anything on the subject. We *did* know already, of course, from the restoration of David to life, that personal life did not cease at the moment of death, and even physical life could be restored, at least if the death was recent.

After Jesus and the others returned from the funeral, we 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 the man was a Gentile, who had probably 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. 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 me for the group.

I was receiving many gifts now; it was certain that we were never going to want for whatever we needed. I actually mentioned to Jesus that if this went on, we would be quite wealthy, and he dismissed the whole idea of wealth and poverty as not worthy of consideration.

Well, if he felt that way, I was not going to concern myself either. But the interesting thing about this cure was that apparently Jesus did not need even to be in the presence of the one he cured—and presumably, as long as there was *someone* who could be said to “believe,” the actual beneficiary did not even have to know that Jesus existed. Of course, this was perfectly consistent with Jesus as a channel of a Force that was in fact the Force that created and governed the whole universe.

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. Interestingly, Matthew seemed to have the same attitude toward this Ezra as I had; he barely existed for him, 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.

I hoped that the soldier was right; I had a certain affection for Matthew, in spite of his disgusting past.

Nine

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 rest of us, now including Matthew, of course, 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. But he was clearly keeping an eye on him; but it was as if he were waiting for something—some slip on Matthew’s part—that he could take advantage of. I could have told him it would not happen, because Jesus would not allow it—but he did not see fit to ask me.

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 I was certain he would be there) and told us that if we were willing, they were to be his emissaries to the various towns of the area.

This, then, was the formal announcement that I had been anticipating, in which I would be paired formally with Simon the Revolutionary. Oh, well.

“It is time,” Jesus 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.”

It would certainly be helpful to know what it was that we were to announce. So far, it had only been the abstract “reign of God,” and would be “different.” One wonders whether Jesus really had an idea about it himself.

A number of people of the area knew where we were, 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 someone near by me. “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.

So all the things we think are blessings are curses, and all those we think are curses are in fact blessings. We certainly *do* have to change our thinking. What could he possibly mean?

Presumably because—because why? Because when the Reign of God was instituted, these things would be reversed; he had all but said as much. So be glad when you suffer now, in anticipation of a happiness far beyond what you could dream. It did sound as if the Reign of God would involve a restoration of the condition of the world before Adam ruined it with his sin: no suffering, no death.

But wait. Those who were enjoying themselves now would suffer. Would they be excluded from the Reign of God? It sounded so. He *did* talk as though sinners would be punished in the Reign of God, and perhaps more immediately and visibly than now. The problem with sin now is that it did not receive any obvious punishment, or virtue receive its clear reward, as the Book of Job and certain psalms pointed out.

True, the Book of Wisdom said that the virtuous who suffered were happier in their disembodied state than they could have been on earth, and presumably the reverse

happened to those who had sinned.

This seemed to mean that the justice meted out in the Reign of God was to be on this earth and visible.

The people, of course, 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.”

Clearly what that meant is that one should not pay attention to what happens to himself now before the Reign of God. Any injury or slight would be more than made up once it began.

But many of the the people were saying, “This is even worse!” 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 obviously had some kind of vision of the future when he would be King, and it made sense to him; but it required a complete change of thinking for it to make sense to anyone else.

He had paused for them to get some of their reactions out of their system, and then 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.”

In one sense, this would placate the Pharisees, because one would have to obey them, but in another sense, it was sure to infuriate them, because it implied that one would have to surpass them in virtue, and they considered that impossible.

“I am not too certain,” said one man, “that I *wish* to be in such a kingdom, 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.

It makes a difference, I thought, if one has no interest in oneself. The secret here seemed to be “forget yourself.” And that made sense. If the One created us gratuitously, It did so with no self-interest; and we were to imitate It—and presumably if we did so, we would share in Its happiness, whatever that meant. Some of the Indian sages had said as much.

“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 you only knew, I thought. If you knew the Force that was coursing through his veins. But you must be *willing* to change your thinking.

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.”

That seemed to be the end. Basically, then, he was saying, “You must conform your thoughts to “those” of the One, and to love—that is, have no self-interest—and you will escape the calamities and changes of this world to a life of peace and serenity. The Indian sages had been preaching this, and Plotinus had adapted Greek philosophy to it; and now Jesus was saying that the God the Hebrews believed in—the only God—intended the same thing, except that in the Reign of God it would be manifested on earth, instead of its opposite being so. There would be a time of joy and peace—for those willing to accept it.

Yes, it made sense. Jesus had but enunciated the truths that others had struggled to achieve for centuries now; and his task was to put them into practice on this earth. And I, who understood this, could help him—if I could keep him from going insane and thinking that he was God, instead of the instrument by which God did “his” work.

Jesus in the next few days began giving us instructions on how to behave as his “emissaries,” and what to do if people rejected our preaching. But it seemed that we were also to have the miraculous powers—at least some of them—that Jesus had, and this was a terrifying prospect. It was extremely exciting, in one sense; I found the prospect of driving a demon out of a man supremely satisfying; but it entailed a good deal of responsibility. Demons were more powerful than humans, and

one had to be careful that they did not leave the victim and enter oneself. Of course, in that respect, I had little to fear, since I had a good deal of control of myself. But some of the others were in severe danger. Well, but Jesus would be watching over them, even from a distance. All would be well.

And shortly afterwards, we began our mission, in which I had the added task of not only explaining in simple terms the profound insights of Jesus and his vision of the future, but of countering the revolutionary rhetoric of Simon. It was a supreme chore for me, because Simon was busy trying to convert what I said into something political, while I was trying just as hard to convert what *he* said into some semblance of what the real situation was. He definitely was not happy, nor was I. Frankly, I do not think our mission ever succeeded; the people left us, scratching their heads.

But then, Jesus had to have expected that some of these missions he sent out would be failures, which he would have to rescue; and so I decided not to worry, and simply tried to minimize the damage that Simon was doing. In any case, the Force reforming the universe would not be thwarted by the likes of us, especially since we *were* trying to do Its work. It could turn our disasters into victories.

One day, before we 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.” Interesting, this. It implied that he recognized after all that he was not actually the Force that was acting in him.

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.”

Matthew reacted with shock at this. Evidently, he had the idea that he could not be a true follower unless he got rid of his wealth.

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—and 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.

I myself was a bit disconcerted for a time, since I had charge by now of a good deal of wealth. Of course, it was not mine, but that of the group. And he *did* say that those who had given up wealth, as I had (all my wealth was in the common pool) would receive a hundred times as much. And that was true in my case. I had nothing to concern myself with. If we wished some luxury, then we could have it as our reward for not claiming ownership of it. That was well. I thought it a good thing for me to have clothes that would allow me to move in the circles of the wealthy, so that they would be

disposed to give us more, and not treat us like beggars.

Ten

We 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 we walked along, Jesus asked, as if casually, "Tell me; who do people say that I am?"

We had all heard much in our 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 us intently, each in turn, as if the 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!"

That was a development! One of the last I would have expected to come anywhere near the correct answer—or at

least, the answer that Jesus was apparently waiting for. And apparently the Force within him accepted it, so there was *some* interpretation of it that was true and made sense.

I myself, however, was in considerable difficulty making sense of it. He *seemed* to be saying that Jesus was—the Prince, surely, but everyone knew that—and the Son of the Living God. True, the thunder had called him “the Son I love,” but I took it that the words meant that what he said was inspired by the Force that created the universe.

There were two possibilities here, as I saw it. Either the “Son” was meant in the same sense that the thunder meant: an intimate union between the Agent and the Vehicle through which It acted, or Jesus was beginning to think of himself as a kind of Son, a kind of God from God, imagining God as a sort of super-person, but basically the same as our own personhood, and someone who could *have* a Son, presumably by making his mother pregnant.

That was insanity, and must not be allowed to develop! It made YHWH little more than Jupiter, and would be instantly repudiated by all the Pharisees to a man, not to mention myself. It was absurd.

But there was more. Jesus was saying, “—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!”

Another amazing statement. Simon, of all people, who simply happened to stumble upon a formulation that Jesus found acceptable. That dolt! And Jesus at first was surprised by

it, as if he had expected someone more intelligent—like me, for instance—to be the spokesman.

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*?”

There was even more! 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 was explicitly saying that he would be killed! And there was the ‘third day’ again! It sounded very much as if—with this particular choice of the “Rock,” he foresaw that he would not be able to assuage the authorities and would be killed. And we now saw what was meant by “the third day.” He explicitly said that he would come back to life on the third day, as he had hinted in his joking way to Matthew who “came to life” on the third day, and seriously about himself when he said “after three days I will rebuild it.” His “plan”—or rather, the plan of the Force that guided and directed him—was becoming clearer, and it looked, more tragic.

He could bring himself back to life “on the third day” (that is, after his death had become definite and not simply a

coma) if he were God the Son who was one and the same as the Father. But if he were—was—the Son in the sense of the instrument by whom the Father (to use his term) acted, then he was still in himself a mere human, and death would be final.

Yes, he was gradually going insane. It had not yet reached the point at which he said, “The Father and I are one and the same thing,” but if he was not corrected, it would, and that would be a calamity for the whole world. A calamity that I alone could see, and therefore I alone could stop.

Well, the Force that created him also created me, and gave me the insight to see what was happening. And so It would have to give me also inspirations analogous to his, so that I could check his excesses without destroying either him or myself.

And, indeed, I *did* feel inspirations every now and then, some of which I acted upon, such as the inspiration to make myself a follower of his, and many which I did not. I would have to be more attentive in the future.

During all this time, everyone was in shock. But 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 could make sense of the whole incident. It *could* not mean what it sounded as if it meant, they were thinking.

But it did. It tragically did.

And not only for him. I happened to hear part of a conversation between John and his brother James. John, who had a head on his shoulders, was saying to something James had said, “You have no idea, I think. But we should leave that to him. He seems to be going about it gradually, and as events unfold, it will become clearer. (That was what I was worried about.) 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?

John answered, “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.”

Or, I thought, it would establish that he was mad.

I tentatively approached Jesus that afternoon. “Master,” I said, “several of your followers are concerned—they are *all* concerned, but with different things—but several of them are interpreting what you say as if you are saying more than that God is in you and working in and through you, but that you

are God.”

He answered, “And?”

“And,” I answered, taken aback, but being more convinced that he himself believed that he was God, “do you not think that words of clarification, or of qualification, might be in order—to us, at least, so that we do not get the incorrect idea?”

“Judas,” he said, “anyone who wishes to be a follower of mine must learn to make a complete change in his way of thinking. Anyone. They are trying. Let them try.”

I paused a bit, looking at someone who was on the verge of being insane. What could I say? “Whatever you say, Master,” I answered. “I simply thought I should bring it up.”

He looked at me and said, “Anyone,” and turned away.

Of course, what he evidently meant was that I, as well as the others, had to accustom myself to regarding him as the Infinite God “finitizing” himself somehow. But that was absurd. I could not do it, because it could not be done.

And he had to know this; he could read minds. He had to realize that I, at least, not only would not, but *could* not change my way of thinking, if this was what it meant. And what *that* meant was that he and I would likely be enemies.

What a tragedy! Would I have to give him up?

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 by remaining absolutely motionless when he wandered over to Thomas afterwards. I did the same.

“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.

Exactly what I had expected. It confirmed that it was good for me to be the treasurer and not Matthew, because the temptation of all that money would be too much for him to bear. I, on the other hand, had no interest in money, and so had nothing to worry about on that score.

But Ezra went on, “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 now we have a poor Matthew, and Simon who is the ‘rock.’” said Thomas. He paused.

“Of all people!” he went on, and John, moving, joined them, 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.” As I heard, I wished that I did not make too much of it, but I feared it was ominous.

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.” Not quite, I thought. But much more disturbed.

It looked as if the capture and death were about to be brought up, but it seemed to be something no one wanted to think about. Instead, John mentioned 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.”

eleven

We 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. Lazarus was an insufferable fool, who looked on Jesus as a kind of clown; and Jesus not only tolerated him, but encouraged him, as if he found his idiocy refreshing.

The next morning, we 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?”

I suddenly realized that it was a Sabbath. This could be crucial.

“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.”

I thought as much. 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 I conjectured that it was what I 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.

Of course, this did not imply that he himself was God, or that he thought he was. But it *did* mean that he had authority from God to perform cures on the Sabbath, which included telling people to carry things. True, there was nothing

in the Torah that explicitly forbade anyone to carry the mat he had been lying on—which otherwise would be stolen—but it at least came close to forbidding it by implication.

And “What?” answered Thomas. “He *did* nothing.” *He* did nothing, to be sure, but he *told* the man to do something—something eminently sensible, but something certain to be vigorously objected to by the Pharisees. I knew.

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. Shortly, 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, a great number of people following, among whom I numbered myself, and found Jesus, surrounded by a throng 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.”

Another very dangerous statement. Whatever he himself meant by “my Father” would be taken by his hearers that he was somehow God the Son. They could not 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.”

He still had not *said* that he was the same thing as the Father, but what he *did* say was open to that interpretation. He was playing with them, I thought. It was one thing for him to “give life to anyone he pleases” because of the Force flowing through him, and it was quite another to do so because he thought he *was* the Force—especially if the Force was a Father and he a Son, presumably equal, as he was implying, to the

Father.

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. This was even more revealing of Jesus’s view of himself. He can do things because he is the Son of God, and he can judge others because he is the son of man. He is God, and he is also a man. But that it a contradiction, an absurdity. Yet he seems to believe it!

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.”

True, John himself all but called him God. “The God God fathered,” I remembered his saying, not thinking anything of it at the time but rhetorical exaggeration. Of course, John was his cousin, and perhaps had caught the madness by discussions with him earlier.

And the people seemed to recall it. “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?”

So he was saying that there was an interpretation of Scripture that verified his claims. Not that I could see. No, his “interpretation” was that of a madman.

But he had silenced them. They were evidently trying to find something that would corroborate what he was saying. In any case, no one came up to arrest Jesus. How could they? On what grounds? For saying something? Still, their hatred was palpable.

I did not know what to think. Should I abandon him? I knew better than argue with him. He would simply tell me that Moses predicted that there would be “another, like himself” to come after him, and that he was the one. But Moses did not say that there would come God Almighty in

human form, which is seemingly what he believed himself to be. But how could one convince a person so exceedingly intelligent that he was simply wrong?

But there was more. What of his followers, who were increasingly “changing their way of thinking” into believing that he was in fact God almighty in human skin—even if, as I had heard, they seemed to sense *some* distinction between him and what he now called “the Father” or “my Father.” Should they continue in the path to delusion?

Or, in other words, should I direct my intention to saving them, since Jesus was beyond my help. And was sure to be my enemy, however much I respected him.

I would have to see what I could do to wean their attention away from him. And I seemed to have an inspiration or two in that direction. The Force seemed to be taking me there, and perhaps I should answer it.

Twelve

The **DINNER AT LAZARUS'S HOUSE** was, of course, a farce, Jesus making it even more so with a story he told about a rich man and a beggar he named "Lazarus." The implication was pellucid: that the rich who paid attention to nothing but their own comfort in this world were in serious peril—but since Jesus had called the "hero," who was poor, "Lazarus," Lazarus was flattered that he was taken to Abraham's bosom, and it was the rich man who was tormented for eternity. I heard him actually praising Jesus for his stories "that did not have an atom of sense in them," which he only told for his own amusement. If Jesus was hopeless because he was mad, Lazarus was hopeless because he was an idiot.

There was one interesting thing. At the end of the story, Jesus had Abraham there was this little exchange between Abraham and the rich man in torment, "'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.’” Obviously, Jesus was saying that if he came back to life “on the third day” as he predicted, it would make no difference to those who “refused to change their way of thinking.” He knew those he was dealing with, and that even if he returned to life, his mission of changing the world was doomed.

Interesting. If Jesus *did* somehow come back to life “on the third day,” would I then believe that he was God? The one whose name we do not pronounce? Impossible, even then!

Of course, all of this flew completely over Lazarus’s head. All in all, I was supremely gratified when we finally left. Lazarus was insufferable.

On our way back to Galilee, we passed through Sychar once again, and the people welcomed Jesus, though he did not stay with them.

And when we reached Mount Tabor, Jesus told us to wait at the foot, and climbed the mountain himself with the Rock, (who looked more and more like a loyal Lazarus, to me), James, and John.

Something happened on that mountain, but the three who went up with Jesus were totally silent about it. The Rock said that they were not to speak of it until—“something happens, which I do not understand.” Clearly, Jesus had somehow shown himself to be Godlike; the Force had revealed itself in him or through him visibly. And the “something” which was to happen must be the death and return to life on

the third day. Why they must not mention it until then must be because no one would believe the mere recounting of it until then (when they could see the “divine work” for themselves). The fact that this happened earlier, and quite clearly had terrified the three onlookers would give more force to the “divine nature” of Jesus when he reappeared from death.

—Except to those who still could think. Perhaps I could persuade them somehow not to give in to appearances, but to think.

Shortly after their return, there was an incident of a man whose son had a demon, which Nathanael, the coward, could not exorcize. Jesus, of course, took care of it, and all was well—except for Nathanael, of course.

Shortly afterward, as we walked along, by ourselves for a change, since the crowds realized they we gone to Judea and were not expecting them back as yet, we 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. For some reason, what had happened made the death more certain. And I 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.”

Matthew came over to Thomas, and spoke to him. I had explained what I thought about Jesus to Thomas, who at least listened to what I said, but when he got to the part of Jesus’s being under a “delusion,” Matthew remarked, loud enough to be overheard, “A delusion! If there ever was anyone who did not suffer from delusions, it is the Master!”

That, of course, was the difficulty. Jesus was so self-confident that it was harder to believe that he was under a delusion than that he was in fact God-making-himself-finite. Thomas answered, “You must question Judas about it. He has a whole theory worked out—which I confess I do not subscribe to.”

John, who was nearby, heard also. He seemed relieved by Thomas’s response. And it must be remembered that he had seen whatever happened on the mountain. Still, as a frantic Nathanael suddenly came up, obviously looking for someone to talk to, and said, “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!” John, as I said, had a brain. Perhaps I could do something with him. Well, we would see.

The next day, we crossed the huge Lake of Gennesareth for some reason, this time all of us 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; he was trying, but not terribly successfully.

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. I was not afraid, of course. Not that I would have been afraid in any case, but the Master would not let anything happen to the boat while he was in it, whether he was awake or asleep. The Force would not permit it.

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.

And so the Force coursing through Jesus’s soul *was* the Force that created the universe. He could make even the winds and the sea obey him. But the question was, could it bring him back from death? That it could prevent him from dying, I was certain. In Nazareth, he had simply disappeared from those who would kill him. But if he let himself be killed, and was no longer the living Jesus, but a corpse like any other, *then* would the Force revive him? As his soul left him, the Force would have left the corpse also.

Jesus 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!”

But there was more. On the shore we reached, there was 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!”

Nathanael cowered to the back of the group, as one

would expect. 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, even I. It was terrifying that 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 horrified 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 we returned to the boat, crossing over to Capernaum. Jesus looked at Nathanael and smiled an amused smile.

We had thought of casting out demons as an interesting display of our power. What we had not reckoned with was *their* power. It was sobering, to say the least. I was fortunate in that I was confident that no demon could get

possession of me.

That evening, as we walked along 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!

It seemed as if I knew her. . . .Who could it have been? Perhaps from years ago—Of course! That innocent face shining through the demonic voice! That was the young girl who had seduced me years ago in the very Temple! She acted like a young saint who had been wronged, and then she said she could “show me” what had happened, and we went into a room together—and she was so incredibly beautiful! I was completely swept out of my mind!

And when it was over, the she-fiend screamed, “You are as bad as he was! I came to you for help, and look! All you men are the same! I hate you all! You have ruined me!”

And, of course, weeks later, when I could think, I realized that *she* was the one who had ruined *me*! But I could not get her out of my thoughts, for over a year, I remember. And I searched and searched for her “to explain things,” but really, I finally realized, to be with her again—but she had disappeared. Thank God! If I had seen her again, I would have been totally insane!

And here she was! And apparently, possessed by seven devils! She was as attractive as ever, but the diabolical voice coming from her mouth provided something of an antidote.

The woman slowly approached Jesus, as if she were being dragged toward him.

“Ἐλείσον 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.” She had said, “Have mercy on me, Son of the Most High God!” So the demon—or demons—knew who Jesus thought he was.

“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.” *Only* seven! Of course, if she had been practicing the wiles she tried on me, then there was opportunity for another legion, in all these years!

“Does she know you?”

“Oh, yes, merciful Master. She invited ~~you in.~~ ^{you in.}”

She cringed and groveled again in the dirt of the roadway, “It was not truly a lie, merciful Master. She did not ~~refuse us.~~ ^{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. ~~Stop!~~ ^{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 she cursed God. As a matter of fact, I believe she did so during that tirade after our sin. And it allowed the demon—at least the first one—to enter.

“—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.”

“As if, in other words, it meant that she would understand the evil that had been done to her, not in what way she herself was evil.”

“It could have been interpreted in that way, one supposes.”

“One supposes! You knew perfectly well that that would be the only way in which she would interpret it.”

“You know, treble merciful Master, that we cannot be certain of such things.”

“I will play no games with you. We both know what you knew and how well you knew it. So she accepted having you enter in order to discover exactly how she had been wronged.”

“But she did accept, Master, and so she must have at least suspected the truth and been willing to accept that, because in fact we were allowed to enter, and you know that

we cannot enter a person who has been totally deceived. Why do you torment us in this way?”

“You would speak to me of tormenting someone? But is it not the case that the ‘knowledge’ you gave her of the malice and deceit of others was in fact your malice and deceit—it had no relation to reality?”

“Master, merciful Master, you know that sometimes it was true—often and often it was true! Spare us!”

“But when it was true, it was true by accident. Is it not so that she thought it was true, not because of something she discovered, but because you made her believe it true, whatever the facts happened to be.”

The demon in the woman answered, “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 continued protesting, but Jesus finally broke in, “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. I marveled at her temerity, even knowing what she was. 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!”

THIRTEEN

‘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. I must say that I quaked in terror. It was uncanny.

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. Aha! I had always wondered if Mary of Magdala was the little girl who had ruined me! Those who dared talk about her (and what happened to *a friend of theirs*) mentioned that she used something like the technique she tried on me, turning the tables so that her victim seemed the guilty one. It took me months to get over that and see what she had actually done. It would be interesting to see how she came to live in

Magdala of Galilee, of all places.

“Then you are master,” she was saying, “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!”

As I watched her go, some of the desire I had had after that encounter revived in me. It began to say, “Well, why not, after the devils have left her? She is certainly beautiful, and you, you know, are extremely handsome.”

And so we would make a lovely couple, I thought. Rubbish! I would have to be *very, very* careful around her, not to get caught in the net again! Perhaps she knew me not,

perhaps I was simply one of hundreds, and perhaps she would lead me on and toss me aside as she had done then. I would kill her this time!

And it looked as if she would be welcomed into our group by Jesus—though not by anyone else in the group. They had had extreme difficulty tolerating Matthew, and now they were going to have to tolerate a sinner whose name was synonymous with the filthiest sin in the Decalogue. Reformed, of course, we would have to believe.

But reformed did not necessarily mean that she could not be deformed again, and some of the self-righteous followers of Jesus could very well be ripe for the deforming: Andrew, for instance. I had seen him look at her with desire even while the demons were within her. Not John. He was more likely to be seduced by a man, I think. True, he fought against the attraction, but it was there. Thomas might succumb, if he could forget his attraction to wine for a few moments.

No, her presence among us would be a testing, that was certain. Fortunately, I could steel myself against her. I would simply ignore her. It was well I knew who she was, and that I had such consummate self-control.

And, of course, the next night, as we were outside Simon the town Pharisee's house (he had invited Jesus to dine with him—and from what I knew of Simon, which was considerable, he would be planning to instruct Jesus, and would receive an earful in return) we wondered whether Mary would seek Jesus out in the very lion's den (though in all probability, *Simon* had sought *her* out, and more than once, or I was much mistaken). The encounter would be *very*

interesting. He would not dare to denounce Mary or keep her out if the Master wished to see her; she knew and could say too much that he would not have known.

And there she came, running down the hill, as if she knew that Jesus was there! And she was admitted! The door closed behind her, and I tried to picture to myself the scene—but I confess I did not have the imagination.

In any case, she was within for an inordinate time, so Simon had not simply seen her and thrown her out, as I suspected he would not. She was receiving forgiveness from Jesus, though I was willing to wager all that I had that Simon was not also doing so, and was trying desperately to remain a mere bystander. The whole situation was delicious.

I 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, of course, was perfectly correct. He had to be so. And we waited.

Eventually, the door slowly opened, and Mary emerged, looking bewildered and lost—and beautiful and, shall

I say? seductive. Matthew looked at her with pity. He was evidently smitten with her already, though doubtless he had no idea of it. If she had ever been seductive, she certainly was now—especially now, since she presumably had repented of her evil ways.

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. It is interesting how hatred can overcome all attraction anyone has, because Mary’s attractiveness was unquestionably considerable, with that “I am lost! Who can help me?” look.

She bridled for a moment 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—” ~~He~~ ^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 I saw that John had gone too far—as did he, immediately. His face turned even redder than it had been from the slaps. How could he undo the damage he had done to his good friend? Would they ever be friends again?

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.” That left an opening for an apology from John, I thought; but he had to be *very* diplomatic.

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.”

And, indeed, the next morning, I saw John and Andrew together, with Andrew’s great arm on John’s shoulder. He said something to him, and it seemed they were reconciled. A masterpiece of diplomacy on John’s part.

I heard John say, “You are a great man, Andrew.”

“Nonsense! If you knew!”

What he “did not know” was Andrew’s jealousy at Simon’s taking a higher place in the group than he, when he had the qualifications and Simon did not. It was obvious in everything he did around Simon. True, he fought against it, as John fought against attraction to men, but it was there and evident to anyone who had eyes.

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. Matthew had clearly fallen deeply into the pit, and did not have the least notion that he was there. It was a blessing for him that she was not the tiger at the bottom any longer.

“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 allegory the burden of which was that Mary had abandoned a life of virtue and then repented, and

since “the father” of the two sons welcomed him when he came back repentant, the rest of us, “the elder brother” should do the same.

It was interesting. Quite a few took it simply as a story at first, and only gradually made the connection with Mary; and when they did, they were of a mind with the elder brother, who thought the spendthrift had no right to be in the family, let alone have a fattened calf slaughtered in celebration.

In any case, 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.”

And as we headed down the road which would pass Magdala, continuing by the huge lake to Capernaum on the northeast shore, Jesus told us to walk on ahead, and he would come up with us later.

FOURTEEN

AFTER we had been alone for a while, John's brother James seized the opportunity 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." He was correct. The showdown was not far off.

"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, waxing skeptical.

"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, maintaining his skepticism. I must say I shared it.

“And so if the Master is above naming people for these positions—I mean no disparagement of him, far from it—then should not we, as more down-to-earth, undertake to decide who should be in charge of what in this new Kingdom?”

“I know not whether we should,” said the other James. “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. Not, by any means, the only problem. We were not dealing with an ordinary king here, certainly not one who thought of himself as in any way an ordinary king. “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—^{None} 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.” Or if he is so infatuated with his own infallibility that he can make anyone into anything he likes.

“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. What was there to say?

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.

So we were supposed to become "like this child," presumably accepting as true everything that he said. Did he not even say once that he *was* the truth? Or rather "Truth," with a capital T, as he would be if he was the Force who built the universe. But I, for one, could not give up my ability to think; I would be ruled by evidence, not by what some person said, however many powers that person had.

Did he not glance at me as if he had heard what I was thinking?

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. The girl was alive and well when they returned, and the news spread immediately, but, interestingly, it took the form, “We were not supposed to speak of this, but—” Jesus obviously thought that bringing the daughter of so prominent a person back to life was taking too long a step forward; it made him look too much like God the Son and not the channel of the Father’s power. He was undoubtedly correct.

How could I save his followers from making that mistake?

Shortly thereafter, I had what I was convinced was an inspiration from the same Power that animated Jesus. I happened to be walking with Thomas, who was evincing signs of thirst. He asked me for a drink of water, since it was obvious that I was carrying two canteens.

It was a golden opportunity. He had been convinced by Jesus that he dared not touch his lips to wine, or he would be right back to the blithering drunk he had once been. That was clearly nonsense, but it was consuming Thomas’s life. I decided to help him see that drinking a little wine was no harm at all if one had no intention of getting drunk on it, and so I “absently” gave him the wine canteen instead of the water one.

Suddenly, Thomas, who had just taken a deep draught, 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 the wine onto the ground. He turned to me in fury.

“What are you trying to do?” he shrieked. “Kill me?”

“What?” I said. “Oh, Thomas, I am sorry! I thought it was the canteen of water! Here! Drink this!” and 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.

He handed the canteen back. “Well,” he said, “no damage was done.” A pause. “Thank you.”

“I am dreadfully sorry, Thomas. I cannot think! I was sure that one was the water!”

“It is of no consequence,” said Thomas.

“I am happy to think that you suffered no ill effects,” I said. “Very happy.” He smiled a rather rueful smile, and we walked on together in silence.

Well, did he draw the proper conclusion? That he was by this time free of the curse of drunkenness? I saw him with Ezra afterwards, and I *think* I heard, “Fear not, Ezra, I will try no experiments,” and so it appeared that he did not. But he was talking to Jesus himself not long after that and I heard Jesus tell him not to worry. So perhaps the seed had been planted. Perhaps I should be listening more to my inspirations.

I had another one, in fact, just a day or two later, when we neared 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 he seemed to be studying her, as if to find out why everyone thought she was so attractive. 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.

I thought I should break up this little wordless conversation, before it went too far, so I walked into the clearing between the two, apparently not seeing either of them, but noticing that *both* of them looked at me with desire, and that broke the spell between them. I was gratified that I could do this. John *was* an attractive young man, with his curly hair and his muscles that still bulged, and Mary was—Mary.

Around this time, Matthew had apparently come to some sort of resolution of his own theory, or whatever it was, about what the Master was all about, because he came to me to discuss it. I was beginning to explain myself when Mary came up and joined us—I supposed because the signal I had given, while unacknowledged, was working. I glanced up as if in some surprise, but then could not hide the annoyance that a woman should have joined a serious conversation. But she merely sat down.

“I agree, Matthew,” I was remarking, “that he is saying that we ought to be willing to be treated unjustly. But I think your explanation does not go deeply enough. What is behind almost everything he says is that we should not consider ourselves as of any importance whatever. The question is why.”

“Well, why, then, according to you? I told you what I think.”

“Quite simply, because from God’s point of view, we *have* no importance. He made us, but he has no need of us. How could he? The whole cosmos is a game, from God’s point of view; he is completely self-sufficient, from which it follows that each and all of us, and in fact all of everything but himself is completely superfluous.

“This, of course, is nothing very new, though the

Master did not learn it from the philosophers who have worked it out, especially in Greece—but there are some good Roman ones also. The Master’s genius—or I suppose I should say, his gift from God, since that is what it is—is to amalgamate Stoic philosophy with the Hebrew creator-God; and not only to do it seamlessly, as he has, but in such a way that it seems the logical consequence of Hebrew theology, not Gentile philosophy. He seems to be indicating that it will spread the Hebrew theology over the whole world; and he might just be correct.”

“But . . .—I do not understand. What of God’s choosing Abraham and Moses, and all the rest of it?”

“Ah, Matthew, I am a bit surprised at you. You are so astute at untangling the sayings of the Master, and you do not realize that Abraham and Moses and the Exodus and the Judges and so on are stories rather like what the Master tells; they may have something to do with what happened—I suspect that there really was an Abraham, and a Moses, of course—but a Moses who was reared to be a Prince of Egypt, and who only *began* to lead the people out when he was eighty years old? This alone should tell you that they are myths written to make a point to people who were too primitive to understand the truth unless it is encapsulated in a story.

“It is only now, when we have come in contact with the greatness of the Gentile civilizations, however humiliating it may be politically, that we are sophisticated enough to be able to grasp the truth of the world God made.”

“But then,” said Matthew, “if we are of no importance to God, why did he choose his people? And why did he bother to send the Master?”

“To show through us the way to peace. If you do not consider yourself or anything concerning yourself to be of any importance, then no pain, no suffering, no reverses or humiliations can touch you. You are totally free. ‘The truth will set you free,’ he said recently, remember.

“But I think Matthew, you are interpreting ‘sent by God’ a little too literally. The Master was certainly ‘sent by God’ in the sense that he learned what he knows, not by studying, but by a kind of instinct for the truth; he is in contact with the Creator of this world in some intimate way that I do not understand—and no doubt he does not either—but that I have heard about, and which has occurred earlier, but less spectacularly, in the prophets, and especially Moses.”

“You think he is another Moses.”

“No, I think he is even greater than Moses. What I do *not* think is that it means that God looked down and saw him and said, ‘I choose you, because I care about these fools down there, and I want to send a message to them through you for their own good.’ Jesus was ‘sent’ in the sense that the Power that created the world flows through him and into his consciousness; and he can put into words—words not always easy to understand, not surprisingly—how this Power relates to the world he has created, and how we should behave to be consistent with our place in it.”

“But then what is the meaning of all his talk about everlasting life?”

“Ah, that! That simply means a life different from the one we live ordinarily; it is a life like his, in contact with the Creator, and at peace with itself and with everything around it, removed from the cares and sufferings of this world. It is

‘everlasting’ because it is the same kind of life, as it were, that the Creator himself lives—and his *is* everlasting, of course. It does not mean that we will never die. We will not, naturally, be concerned about death or dying, if we ‘change our thinking,’ as he demands we do; if you care nothing about anything that happens to you, why would it concern you whether you live or die, or how? So it is a life not preoccupied with death, that is all. You see?”

“I see what you are saying, Judas, and it makes a good deal of sense. A great deal. But . . . I do not want to believe it.”

“I can see that. We would all like to be like that child Philip, and simply take everything literally, swallowing contradictions as though they were pieces of bread. Or would you rather be like Simon the Revolutionary, and have to twist the Master’s profundities into silly plans for the conquest of Rome? Your problem, Matthew, is that you have a mind, and a mind that can reason. Be glad you have that kind of mind, and not one like the Master’s.”

“What do you mean? How could I compare my mind with the Master’s?”

“You cannot. And that is your salvation. He can save you; but I will tell you a secret. I am afraid he might not be able to save himself.”

“What are you saying?”

“Even he sees it, I think. Have you noticed how he has more and more often been dropping hints about how he is going to be killed?”

“How could I not have done? I have been hoping and praying that it is just another metaphor.”

“I fear it is not. He does not know why he will be

killed, I think—or rather, he does know, but since it deals with him, he is misinterpreting it.

“You see—I have been noticing this for some time, and with increasing pain and sorrow—this power flowing through his body is driving him insane.”

“Insane!”

“Yes, Matthew, I fear. You have no idea how much it grieves me to say this—to think it!—and I have spoken not a word about it up to this moment to anyone. But you have a mind and a tongue which can be discreet, and I simply must tell someone.”

Well, the seed had been planted. Both Matthew and Mary were shocked, but upon reflection, they would see the truth in what I was saying.

Fifteen

BUT THE INSPIRATION WAS STILL upon me, and so I decided to fertilize and water a bit what I had done. They would soon confront what I was driving at, or I was much mistaken.

“The first time I noticed anything of the sort,” I went on in the silence, “was when he named Simon the Rock, do you remember? Simon called him the Prince, which he certainly must be if there is to be one, and which we all knew; but Simon also said, if you recall his exact words, ‘The Prince, the Son of the Living God.’ Do you remember how surprised he looked?”

“I remember. I took it that he was surprised that it was Simon who said it.”

“Most of us did. *I* think he was surprised at what he said, because I think that at that moment, it occurred to him for the first time to believe that it was true; that he was in fact the Son of God.

“That is, since God is inside him, inspiring him all the time, and giving him the power to cure and even to bring the dead back to life—I personally think, if they have not been dead long—he seems to have begun thinking of this sonship a

good deal more literally than we imagine. Notice how he has been acting lately. He now calls himself the Son of Man, as if he were something else that took this upon himself, so to speak; and notice how secretive he has become with some of the more spectacular cures. It is as if he does not—yet—want people to know something.”

“But what?”

“But what? Exactly. That he is a prophet, and God is with him? No, everyone knows that. No. What he does not want people to know just yet is that he is God Himself!”

Matthew fell silent, and Mary held her breath in shock for a long time.

I waited a few seconds for it to sink in, and then went on, “I see that you are dismayed, because it sounds like blasphemy. But what I think it is is that he has become insane. It is perfectly understandable, but insane. And, of course, it *is* blasphemy. He thinks that it is true; but he is astute enough to realize that everyone else is going to think that it is blasphemy. No one is going to believe that the God of Abraham is another one in the Greek pantheon who comes down as a bull and rapes a beautiful maiden, having a son by her who is half-divine, half-human. It is unthinkable. God is not that sort of thing. Those gods do not exist and cannot exist. Our God is the only God there is, and he is a spirit, not a male in heat.”

“Of course. But then, what are you driving at?”

“Simply that, since he believes that he is God—God the Son, if you will, since he does not believe he is some kind of hero like Hercules; he knows too much about God for that—he is looking for the right moment to inform people of it, and some day, he will find it, and the people . . . will kill

him. He foresees it himself.”

“But this is terrible! Dreadful!” said Matthew.

“It is tragic! He is without question the greatest man, and the holiest man, who ever lived. No one has ever been in closer contact with God; but the very source of his greatness is destroying him, by little and little, every day. I know not what to do about it; as I said, I have not uttered a syllable of my fears until today. If I were to so much as suggest it to anyone but you, I would probably be killed myself!”

“I cannot believe it.”

“I fear that you will not have to, and quite soon. Now that I have pointed it out to you, you will see it happen yourself. It is like one of those Greek dramas. His statements about himself are becoming wilder and wilder, as he thinks we are more and more prepared by his wonderful deeds to accept them; and eventually, he will say something no one can accept—something so outrageous that no sane person can even listen to it—and he will be denounced to the Council. I know; I am a priest myself, remember, and I know that they are already looking for something that will remove him from bothering them. His lack of meticulousness about the Sabbath does not endear himself to them, especially when he makes them look foolish for objecting to it.”

“So you think that he will finally say something openly blasphemous.”

“I do, because he will not think it blasphemy, because he will sincerely believe it to be true. And once he says it, they will bring him to trial, and he will be too honest to deny the charge, precisely because he believes it to be true—and believes it sincerely, since he is mad. And he will die.”

“You mean he will literally be crucified?”

“I fear so. Unless—unless the Power that courses through him gives him some spectacular means of escape at the crucial moment. But in a way, that might be worse, because then he will have won the conflict with the authorities, and we will be ruled from then on by a man who is convinced that he is God. But as I say, the Power, I think, enables him to save others; but I do not think it will be effective if he turns it upon himself. You see, what I consider inevitable is that the Council will find some way to twist what he says into sedition against Rome—and this will be simple if he lets Simon the Revolutionary have his way to the least extent—and once Rome comes on the stage, then it will be out of our hands, and all the force of the whole far-flung empire will be against him. He sees this too; because after all, he is saying that he will be crucified, and we do not crucify people. Yes, you will see him hanging on a cross.”

“No!”

“He has said so in so many words.”

“But he keeps adding that he will come back to life on the third day afterward, like Jonah.”

“Ah, well, of course, he *would* come back if he were really God, to prove that this is what he is. But . . .”

“No! No! No! It cannot be! You are mistaken!”

“I am sorry Matthew. You have no idea how sorry. Perhaps I should not have told you.”

Matthew stared at me openmouthed for what seemed forever. Finally, he said, in a calmer voice, “No, you are wrong, Judas. You must be. The Master would never allow him to perform miracles, if—”

“You must remember that the Master is more of a Power than a person.”
 NOW ~~that~~ I *cannot* believe! That *is* blasphemy!”

“Have it your way,” I said. “But you have quite a few of the Judean priesthood against you. I admit that there are many who would agree with you. The trouble is that facts are facts, and whether you believe that I am right or wrong makes very little difference to what the facts are.”

“But that also goes for you, Judas. You are extremely intelligent, and you seem to have reason on your side, but what will happen will happen. Your thinking that you are right will not make you right, if you are wrong.”

“*If* I am. Believe me, Matthew, I would be overjoyed to be proved wrong. I love the Master, and it crushes me that his own mind is betraying him into destroying himself—and so needlessly! But we have not long to wait, I think. If I am correct, very soon he will be making some claim about himself that only a madman can accept. And he will ask us to accept it with no compromise. I am no prophet, but I see everything converging on this.”

And we parted. I was overjoyed in one sense that what I had said had received a hearing—and a hearing by Mary as well as Matthew—but saddened that it crystallized what I had been thinking, and made me see it as inevitable. Well, I would be able to extricate myself from Jesus’s entourage in time, I was convinced, and perhaps so would Matthew, whom I was quite fond of, and Mary, whom I longed to pair myself up with when all of this settled down. Her poison was still in me, it seemed.

But I did not dare really approach her, more than to let her know that I was interested, should she wish to approach me. It was quite conceivable—likely, in my opinion—that she

and Jesus had already formed a liaison, and my taking her away from him would result in something not to be thought of: something that would make crucifixion child's play by comparison.

We were all wandering aimlessly in the woods, pondering what I had said and its implications. I was apparently deep in thought there in the dark, but on a path ahead of me was Mary. It was a narrow path, and as I passed by, I brushed against her back, lightly enough so that she *might* think I did not notice. Of course, it was also possible that she might think I intended the gesture and was saying that I was willing to have her again, in which case, she would follow me and make some remark about my touching her. This was my signal, should she choose to interpret it thus, that I would accept her if she came to me. Doubtless this had happened hundreds of times with other men.

She did turn, but stopped, and after looking at me for a few moments, resumed her walk. It seemed that she chose to reject the signal, or interpreted it, not as a signal, but as a slightly clumsy gesture of one who was not attending to what he was doing. Conceivably, the fact that she was Jesus's mistress was making her, for her sake—and even for mine, for mine, because I knew she cared for me—avoid any contact with me.

But then in a little clearing ahead of me I saw John. I hesitated, since angering him might be dangerous—I had had an unpleasant experience with young David recently, who took me by surprise when I made an overture to him and punched me hard in the solar plexus, knocking the wind out of me. He will have to pay for that in the near future.

But I did not wish to repeat this with John, who was fully as strong as he if not stronger, but the more I hesitated and thought what we might do together the bolder I became, and so I steeled myself against a sudden blow, and barely touched his lower back as I walked by, going on as if I noticed nothing, and not even daring to look back. When I got far enough away, I paused in my walk and took an oblique look at the trees near John, and saw him irresolute, but with his hand balled into a fist. I had been wise to be prepared.

But I was not fooled. He was attracted to me. How could he not be, handsome as I was? It was just a question of how I could exploit it, and the force in me was already providing me with several options.

But things in our little group were now beginning to happen thick and fast—things that I had predicted just now with Mary and Matthew, in fact. Jesus’s revelation of himself as God would, of course, be accompanied by more and more spectacular miracles, the first of which occurred the next day.

We 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 we should have a little time by ourselves; we would return on the morrow. But it turned out that a positively enormous throng of people had divined where we were going, and had walked around the lake from Capernaum and all the surrounding area and caught sight of us; 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 us 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. There was something afoot.

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 us 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.

I thought at first that this was a bit silly, and tore my little loaf in half, intending to discharge my duty immediately—and finding, to my amazement, that after I had given away both pieces, I still had half a loaf in my hand. I gave it away, and when I blinked, it was still there. I tore it in two and gave away one of the pieces, and still had the two halves.

I could not fathom when the bread duplicated itself; it

was just there during one of the hundreds of little distractions one encounters—as I looked up for someone to give the piece to, for instance, or when I so much as blinked. It all *seemed* quite natural, but it was in fact perfectly incomprehensible.

Suddenly, Mary appeared, glancing at me, but not approaching me, and met 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 we 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.

I suspected as much. He would let the spectacular miracle and the implication that he was to be their King simmer for a while. Because obviously, his goal, I was sure, was to have the people name him as King, but realize that the one they were naming was in fact God in human skin. They were nowhere near that now.

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 our 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.

Sixteen

BUT NIGHT WAS FALLING Apace, and Jesus was still somewhere on the hill—or nowhere, or perhaps already in Capernaum. “What shall we do?” the students 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). At first, we flew over the water (ordinarily, only two manned the oars),

toward the middle of the “sea,” which was the direct route to where we were going.

After a while, the conversation among those riding died down, as people looked up at the sky and saw the stars disappear. Nathanael, of course, 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 I, as someone strong, though a bit inexperienced, 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. We 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 certainly looked like him. “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!” But I suspected not. The miracles were becoming more spectacular, and this one was obviously directed at us.

Something serious in the way of revelation was going to happen: that statement that only a madman would accept, I ventured to guess. I prepared my mind.

“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.

“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, I thought again. 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 we found that we were on the shore we had been trying to reach. It was well. I am by no means a weakling, but I was not practiced in rowing, and it was beginning to sap my strength.

As it happened, we were at the place where Simon’s boat (which we were in) was moored, and we tied it up and waded ashore. No one said a word, all awed 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.

—But of course. The Force that animated him was the Force that animated the whole universe.

I saw Matthew glance over at me, as overwhelmed as all the rest. But it all fit in, did it not? It was when one experienced it and lived it, it knocked one off one’s feet, and one had to struggle to see how it made sense.

We 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.” I thought as much. The bread was a sign—reinforced for our sake by his walking on the water and stilling the storm.—and now he was going to tell us something we must believe. I braced myself.

The people missed what he was driving at—obviously, because they were interested 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.” As I predicted. It meant belief.

“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.”

“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. Faith in him meant, I suppose, spiritual food. This was nothing startling, actually. Why the huge buildup for it?

“Ah! Then give us this bread, Master, all the time!” they exclaimed.

“*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.”

The people, however, began to 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,” he answered; “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.”

So we had an advance here; he said he came down from heaven, and was evidently sent by God, whose will he was fulfilling. Dangerous, but there were ways of interpreting this. So far, nothing to overly antagonize the Pharisees.

At this point, Mary came into the synagogue; I could not avoid seeing her; she was a lodestone for my eyes. And—of course—Matthew went over to her immediately. The incident distracted me for a few moments from 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.”

This was closer to blasphemy. 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 it was still open to innocent interpretation. In effect, he was saying that he had intimate contact with the Father, which was true if the Father’s spirit was inside him.

“—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.”

There it was. That was what I had been expecting—not exactly that, but something as outrageous. The meat of his body was bread that presumably we were to eat!

And the people caught it. “How can this man give us the meat of his body to eat?” said the people to each other. They had been less favorably disposed already, and this tipped the scales. I saw Mary cover her eyes with her hands.

And then followed the demand that we accept what he had said, with no conditions. Instead of explaining himself, Jesus 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—exactly like a madman who had finally given in to the Force within him. For him, 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. I myself could not look up, and took to examining the tiles in the floor.

“—for the 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?” I was more than inclined to agree with them. Unless he found some allegorical interpretation that explained it.

Jesus looked around at all of them, as they murmured to one another in their outrage. But no explanation was forthcoming; it was as I thought. People would have to accept what he said as true, no matter how obnoxious.

And in fact, he was going on, “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!”

There was no one who believed it—except perhaps Philip, who would believe black is white if Jesus said it was. I could see that a few—John, for instance—were trying, but even they were obviously still hoping against hope that Jesus would explain himself somehow.

“—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 we Twelve and one or

two others. Jesus looked at us, as we 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. I stayed. What could I do?, but I could not look up off the floor. I was almost ashamed. It was so predictable, and so unnecessary, had he been more vigilant. But he had condemned himself to crucifixion; the Romans would hear from some of the Pharisees in Jerusalem, who would trump up a charge he would not deign to answer, and it would be all over. It was horrible!

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!”

Seventeen

One of you is a devil. He knew. How could he not know? He could read minds. How was I to handle this? Clearly, we were enemies from now on, and how could I stay under those circumstances? Well, he had not killed me—yet—and, one would think, given the principles he lived by, it was unlikely that he would, unless I attacked him and he could justify it as self-defense. I wandered about in the woods, pondering my dilemma.

—And met Jesus himself, walking on the path toward me. There was no way I could turn aside as if I had not seen him.

“Judas,” he said.

“Yes?” I answered.

“You are aware of the one I was referring to there in the synagogue. I wish to clarify myself somewhat. When I said you are a devil, I meant the literal meaning of the word: an accuser, a slanderer, but in its broader sense an enemy. But if you are an enemy to me, I wish you to know that I am not an enemy to you. I love you, Judas, and I will save you if you will let me. And I also wish you to know that it may be that in the end you *will* allow me to do so; but that is for my Father and

others to decide. But if you do change your way of thinking and return to me, then I will be to you as the father of the spendthrift son was to his son on his return. Remember that. You will need it at the worst moment of your life.”

I could find nothing to say. It was exactly what Jesus would have said; to what extent he meant it was another matter. For someone as full of his own importance as Jesus was, it was all but unthinkable that he would not harbor a deep hatred for someone who stood against him—and in that, I was clearly Satan.

“You need not speak,” he said after a short time. “I realize that now you are incapable of taking advantage of what I said.” He left, leaving me to ponder.

Later, In my wanderings, I happened to notice John talking to Ezra. It seems he had an attraction to him, despite his coal-black color—and I suppose, if one ignored that, there was a certain primitive beauty about him—such as one might see in a piece of driftwood on the shore of the ocean. They were certainly friendly enough. Perhaps John had freed himself to some extent from the influence of Jesus, and was seeking something more than companionship—in which case, I might be willing to accommodate him, I thought.

And then as I watched, something like what I suspected seemed to be going on. Ezra put himself behind John and hugged him—and then stood in front of him with one of his blazing smiles, and hugged him once again—but kissed him passionately, and put his hand over John’s privates, which had become prominent, as had his own; and then moved John’s had over his own organ.

But John resisted, though reluctantly, it seemed. They

stood for a while talking, John almost panting with desire, and Ezra, who doubtless was skilled in such matters, doing what he could to increase it.

But he evidently failed. They parted with what might almost have been a chaste embrace, and that was that.

—At least, as far as that incident was concerned. But, interestingly enough, he had awakened a desire in me, though in general I preferred women. But Mary, as far as I could see, was taken by Jesus, and in comparison with her, all the other women were hags. *Any* woman would be a hag beside her. So I would wait my opportunity, to see if another inspiration would aid me. I was good-looking enough to be able to do better than Ezra at attracting John, and I was quite astute enough to answer any simplistic objections he might have from his superficial reading of the Bible.

But there was soon a distraction from all this. We were with Jesus, as usual in a synagogue, and, surprisingly, the insanity of his previous statements had not diminished his popularity. Of course, there were still throngs of people to be cured—which was what the people really cared about, not abstractions and mysteries—and Jesus obliged with his usual good grace. In any case, 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. Conceivably, he could make something of the meat of his body and his blood, if he emphasized the “spiritual” nature of whatever it was he was thinking of.

Jesus, having heard the news about his relatives, curtailed his discourse and went outside, where he found his mother and a number of people who seemed to be his relatives. I had heard he had a number of 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?”

Ah. The cousin, the merchant who now lived in Alexandria.

“—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 would not be any help. Not that it mattered. It did not look as if anything was going to be any help, now that Jesus was set on his course. *I* could see no way to steer him in the right direction, since he was convinced I considered him an enemy. What a tragedy!

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, Joses—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.”

At least, he was not so mad that he was unaware of the effect what he said would have on those who really were his enemies—which I hoped somehow I did not eventually have to join. But if he was intent on destroying himself “so that he could come back to life on the third day,” I simply could not accompany him. Of course, he said he would forgive me if I changed heart. But how could I? I would have to accept a contradiction. Well, I would see how things unfolded.

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, I noticed, was especially happy to see her. She walked back with us to the place where we 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 us for 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 notes with relief, hoping for the peace and comfort of summer, and simultaneously forgetting the heat and agony that lies ahead.

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. I, however, stayed behind, since I had some donors to see to replenish our funds.

I happened to notice Nathanael with his black ex-slave, and went up and said to Nathanael, "Are you going to Jerusalem?" It seemed he was. "I was detained here also. Shall we go together?" I could ignore the shadow that accompanied him, I thought.

"If you like," he said, rather reluctantly, it seemed, and we set off together.

"I had some contributors that I had to see, for them to help out in our excursion to Jerusalem; and fortunately I was reasonably successful. Were you here for something similar?"

“No, I—no, it was merely that I wished to see my parents, and—and to say farewell to them.”

“Oh? Are you planning to go somewhere?”

“No. No, it is just that when I left earlier, I did not realize that I would be gone so—so constantly, and I—I wished to tell them that—that I was going to be occupied with Jesus from now on.”

“I see. He *does* usurp a great deal of one’s time, does he not?”

Nathanael seemed to bridle a bit at this, but replied in a conversational tone, “I know not that ‘usurp’ is the proper term.”

It was interesting. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see Ezra, who was doing to me what I was doing to him: acting as if I were not there. He would nod at what Nathanael said, as if he were answering Nathanael’s musings, not replying to me.

I smiled. “Forgive me; I meant nothing by it beyond that he tends to keep one occupied.”

“He does that,” said Nathanael.

“I wonder how he is faring in Jerusalem. He is not—universally admired there.”

“Well, he knows what he is doing, as you once said.”

“Sometimes I wonder, lately.”

We walked on in silence for a while. Finally, I said, “I think if we pick up our pace a bit and go to sleep quite late, we might make it to Sychar before morning. We can catch a watch or so of sleep and then continue. I have rather pressing business in Jerusalem, so would you mind?”

“Not at all,” said Nathanael, and looked a question at

Ezra, who shrugged. We set off at a very brisk walk, which precluded conversation. I, of course, kept myself in very good physical condition; when Nathanael, and then finally Ezra, were panting, I was still in control of my breath, though it took some effort to be so. The Force that inspired me, I thought, was going to give me an opportunity, and I was wondering what it would be.

“This is far enough for tonight,” I said finally. “We are fairly near Jacob’s Well, and can refresh ourselves there when we awake.”

“I have some bread and cheese in my pouch,” said Nathanael.

“Very good. And we can refill our canteens at the well. I have something I can lower down.”

So we found a place under some low trees and slept. During the night, I waked to relieve myself, and as I walked into the woods, I felt strongly that an inspiration was upon me.

And as I looked down, there in the dark, almost invisible, was a large black tarantula, gazing up at me with those spider eyes. I would wager that a coward like Nathanael would be terrified of tarantulas, and that I could turn his fear to my—to his—advantage, and make him doubt Jesus as his protector. That would save him from sharing Jesus’s fate.

I gently picked the animal up. It squirmed a bit, but did not seem overly disturbed; it was as if the Force went through it also and made it cooperate with me. I gently carried it over to where Nathanael was sleeping, and inserted it into the pouch.

Ezra woke shortly after me that morning; Nathanael was still asleep. This was well. When Ezra returned from

relieving himself, I said, “Would you mind going to the well and getting us some water? I have a few things to do here before we continue the journey.” His eyes widened that I had decided to speak to him; but it was necessary to get him out of the way for a while.

When Nathanael woke, he found that I was already awake, and Ezra gone. As I suspected, the first thing he did was pick up the pouch by the strap that normally went over his shoulder, and reach in for the bread,

—and felt something furry.

“Aiee!” he screamed, jerking his hand out as if it had been burned, and dropped the pouch. It fell on the ground at his feet, and the flap covering it flopped open.

And the tarantula, startled, crawled out and began looking around.

Nathanael sprang backward, screaming uncontrollably, pointing at the thing. I looked on with amusement. “It—it—it—” he kept saying, as the creature looked up at him, decided that he was not something it wished to eat, and then turned and dashed away under a rock several cubits distant.

Nathanael looked down at the pouch, afraid to go near it lest there be another horrible thing there. He was now making grunting inarticulate noises that he could not control. He wanted to run, but was afraid to do so lest he step on something.

Finally, I came over, picked up the pouch and dumped it out onto the ground. There was nothing inside but the bread and food and a knife Nathanael used for eating.

“It must have crawled in during the night,” I said. Nathanael shuddered. I went on, “But there is nothing to fear.

Tarantulas rarely bite, and their bites are not fatal—generally. They are quite painful, they tell me, but the pain of the nails on a cross is much, much worse.”

“What do you mean?” snapped Nathanael.

“You do not expect Jesus to be crucified alone, do you? But I really must be going. As I said, I have pressing business in Jerusalem, and last night we traveled a bit slow for my taste. I will see you there, doubtless.” And I left. I had to hasten, because I wanted to be away before the man of pitch returned, since he would be very angry, and I did not wish to cause a disturbance trying to fight the two of them. He looked to be rather strong—as he would be, since he was a slave.

Nathanael was shaking so badly, he could not stand. He sat on the dirt next to the pouch, staring at it, making the noise that is usually written “Ugh! Ugh! Ugh!” and kept wiping off the hand that had touched the spider. Presumably when he recovered from his terror, he would remember what I said, and realize that joining Jesus on the cross was not to his liking. Well, we would see. I did what I could. All in all, as I walked briskly along, I felt that this was one of my true successes.

Eighteen

IARRIVED IN JERUSALEM A BIT AHEAD even of the group itself, and joined them when they came up. It gave me time to visit my house and deposit the money I had acquired safely. It was too late to do anything, and so we went to the Gethsemani garden, where we ate. We were to sleep there, but it was too early to do so, so I walked in the woods nearby in the twilight and then the dark, musing. I could not develop a plan of action, and began to wonder if I should simply leave. I had enough to live on comfortably by this time.

John spotted me, and dashed over, saying, “Judas, did you put a tarantula in Nathanael’s pouch?”

“What?” I said. “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.

I had another sudden inspiration. “Very well, strip, and let me teach you a lesson or two.” I had seen him fight, and he obviously had not studied the skill of hand-to-hand combat—and I knew a good deal about it. So we stripped—the place where we met was very secluded, beside a little stream, with woods covering everything except the tiny clearing we were in. I noted that John was in fine shape; he had been exercising, doubtless, not to lose the muscles he had acquired rowing. It would be a distinct pleasure to teach him the lesson he needed.

John threw a punch, which I had no trouble dodging, and as I suspected, his feet were perfect for the maneuver I had ready. In an instant, I had tripped him onto his back on the

ground, and threw myself on top of him, and pinned him down.

“You thought it would be easy, did you not?” I panted, grinning. He struggled to get free, but I held him fast, and began moving my naked body back and forth on top of him. I was beginning to be aroused, and I felt that he was also. It was what I had expected. And there was nothing he could do about it, since he could not escape.

“Admit it, you enjoy it!” I said, as I kept moving. Both of us were receiving intense pleasure.

Then John stopped struggling for a moment, which made my task a bit easier. I suspected that he might be giving in to the sensation, but it seems that he was worried that he might be cooperating with what was going on, for he suddenly resumed struggling, harder this time, giving me quite a bit more trouble keeping him down while I worked on him. I had no breath for comments any longer; he was a very strong young lad.

Fortunately, it did not last long. John reached climax first, and I was not far behind him. I kept moving while it was happening, sliding on what was now between our two bodies, and enjoying myself considerably.

But after a short time I 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 I picked up my tunic and put it on over my reeking body, and donned my mantle and walked away. I would wash soon, and clean my clothes, because after

all I had to sleep with the other fools in the garden, and they might be able to detect the odor.

If John wished another fight, I could explain to him how there was nothing wrong with what we did, and how it was not what many commentators on Leviticus were referring to. But I supposed he would not have much stomach for it. Still, perhaps it planted a seed which would grow and save him trouble with people like Ezra.

That day, Jesus entered the Temple courtyard reserved for the Hebrew people. A few recognized him, and the rumor began spreading that he had after all come up to the festival. He sat down on the top of some steps leading up to a porch and waited, chatting with the Twelve, until what he evidently considered a sufficient crowd gathered about him.

“I would have you consider a story,” he said, in a voice that carried throughout the space. “There was an owner of an estate who planted a vineyard, put up a hedge round it, dug a winepress in it, and built a tower, and then rented it to farmers and went to live somewhere else.” He paused.

People began saying, “Where have I heard that?” “He is quoting, is he not? Who is it? Isaiah?”

Jesus continued, “When harvest time approached, he sent his slaves to the farmers to collect his produce; but the farmers took his slaves captive and beat one up, killed another, and stoned the third.”

There were murmurs of “Outrageous!” “But what does he mean by it?”

“The next time, he sent more slaves than the first group, but they did the same thing to them.” There were further murmurs from the crowd. “Finally, he sent his son,

saying that they would respect his son, but when the farmers saw the son, they said to each other, ‘This is the heir; let us kill him here and then we will have the inheritance!’” And over the increasing comments of the crowd, Jesus said, “So they caught him, dragged him out of the vineyard, and killed him.”

Jesus now waited until the cries of indignation died down. There were a number in his audience, however, who held their peace, and looked at him quizzically. I knew why.

When reasonable silence was restored, Jesus asked, “Now, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those farmers?”

One or two began to blurt something, and one of those who had been listening silently took an arm and said, “Be careful, now,” but finally the answer came, “He will slaughter those devils and rent the vineyard to farmers who will give him the crop when the harvest comes!” There was a roar of assent. The man caught the meaning I saw, and said, “God forbid!” in a low tone.

After a dramatic pause, Jesus concluded, “Have you never read in Scripture, ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this has been done by the Master, and is a marvel to our eyes.’”

“What is he saying?” said one. “Do you not see?” answered the man by me. “Isaiah was referring to the people of Israel as the vineyard. Clearly, the farmers are the priests and the Pharisees, who have been trying to kill him, have they not? So he is saying that the Kingdom will be taken away from you and given to Gentiles, who will produce a crop from it! Anyone who falls on this stone will break into pieces, and anyone it falls

upon it will grind to powder!”

“You see?” said the man. “But that is outrageous!” was the reply. He shouted, “What makes you think you know the Scriptures? You have never been taught!”

“My learning is not mine,” answered Jesus. “It comes from the one who sent me. And if anyone chooses to do his will, he will know whether what I say comes from God, or whether I am speaking on my own. A person who is speaking on his own cares what people think of him; one who cares for what the one who sent him thinks is trustworthy, and has no dishonesty about him.”

“Trustworthy!” they shouted. “Who do you think you are? Moses?” “How dare you speak thus!”

“Moses gave you the Law, did he not?” said Jesus. There were cries of “Of course!” “What then?” “But none of you are doing what the Law says. Why are you trying to have me killed?” It was true, of course. They were planning and planning how they could get rid of him and not themselves suffer for it. Evidently, it would involve some charge of treason to the Romans, since they were the ones who crucified people.

There was another uproar, among which was heard, “You are out of your mind! Who is trying to kill you?”

“I performed one deed here,” said Jesus, “which shocked all of you. He was referring to the man by the Bethesda pool that he had cured on a Sabbath. “And yet because Moses gave you circumcision—” some tried to object at this, but Jesus went on, “—not that it came from Moses, but the Patriarchs—you will circumcise a man on the Sabbath. Now if a man can accept circumcision on the Sabbath and not break the Law of Moses, should you be indignant with me for

making a whole man healthy on the Sabbath? Do not judge by appearances; base your judgments on the facts!”

“I thought he would say something like this,” said the man who had spoken. The other said, “But do you not realize that he as much as said in the story that he was God’s Son?”

—And that was the problem, was it not?

“No, no,” returned the man, “he means the Prince, that is all. But he *is* the one they have been wanting to kill; my uncle said he heard a Pharisee say that it would be a blessing if someone took a knife to him. Yet behold him here, speaking openly now, and no one is saying anything to him.”

The other turned to him. “Can it be that the authorities have found out that he really *is* the Prince?”

“No, no! First of all, he is from Galilee—and we know where, from Nazareth. When the Prince comes, no one will know where he is from.”

As if he had heard, Jesus rose to his feet, held out his arms, and shouted, “You know me! You know where I am from! But I did not come by myself! Someone who does not deceive anyone sent me—someone you do not recognize. But I know him, because I came from him, and he sent me!”

“I told you!” said the second man. “Can you not see what he is claiming? And in the very Temple of God! Down with him!” And he rushed forward, along with a number of others, but Jesus could not be found.

“What happened to him?” “How did he escape?” they asked each other, milling about.

“Blasphemy, that is what it was, on the very steps of the Temple!” said the man, still indignantly looking for Jesus.

“But perhaps he *is* the Prince,” said someone.

“He is certainly a holy man,” said another.

“The priests think—”
“The question is,” said the man who had been beside us thoughtfully, “when the Prince does come, will he do more marvelous things to prove his claim than this man has?”

It took a while before the crowd satisfied themselves that Jesus was no longer there, and after some discussion, they dispersed.

He came down from heaven from God, and that is why he “knows him”; and not only that, but God “sent me.” Closer and closer to blasphemy, but still one could wriggle out of an accusation. It would be interesting to see how long this could go on before he said something that could not be construed but as his claim that he was what he called “the Father” in reality, even though he would make *some* distinction between him and the one whose name we do not pronounce.

But there was something interesting about this episode did not involve who Jesus was. I saw John come late to the meeting, around noon, and he was met by Andrew. They stood beside each other, and Andrew had his arm across John’s shoulder. I wondered if Andrew realized how that would make John feel. He evidently did not think anything about it. Perhaps I could enlighten him at some time.

The next day, following what was essentially the rebuke about the vineyard, a number of Pharisees were waiting to pounce upon Jesus, and after letting him speak for a while, collecting a huge crowd, a delegation of them came up, and asked, “Rabbi, we know that you are truthful, and that you pay no attention to what others think, because you care nothing for public opinion, but teach honestly the path to God. So—is it

permitted to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Which is it?"

Interesting. If he said, "Yes," he as much as admitted that Rome's occupation was legitimate; but if he said No, he would be able to be charged with treason. They were all silent, in anticipation of how Jesus would extricate himself.

I myself saw a way out, and it was not long before Jesus answered, "Show me the coin you use to pay taxes."

A man close by, evidently the one who had asked the question, fumbled in the folds of his robe and brought out what must have been a denarius. "Whose image is this," asked Jesus, "and whose inscription is on it?"

"Caesar's" was the answer.

"Then give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and return to God what is God's," he said. There was laughter and cries of "Brilliant!" "Excellent!" Exactly what I had thought.

Jesus sat down on the steps leading up to the courtyard of the Judeans, as his questioner withdrew in chagrin. He seemed to be preparing to preach again.

But at that moment, 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?

I saw Matthew look over at the other side of the crowd, and there was Mary, no less. I wondered why I had not seen

her for a while. What was she doing apart from all the others? And was she not with Lazarus and Martha? Was the long-lost sister of Martha the notorious Mary of Magdala? And had they received her back into their family? Clearly, they did not know who she was, or Lazarus would have created a scene that the actors in the theater at Caesarea could use for lessons.

But it did look as if she had left us. That was a fascinating development. Had Jesus grown tired of her? That opened numerous possibilities.

Jesus, musing, was writing in the dust on the steps, and erasing what he had scribbled. He glanced up at the person who had been questioning him, and said, "Have some sinless one among you throw the first stone," and bent down and continued writing.

But now he was writing words, and looked up at his questioner, and then down at what he had written. The man, whose face turned scarlet, turned and left without a word.

Then Jesus erased what he wrote, and looked up again; but this time, the one he looked at did not bother to see what he had written, and turned as if he had seen nothing, and also left.

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.

Instead of leaving, they remained off to the side 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, and spoke to them at some length. Finally, I heard John say, "Thank you, Master," 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. I wondered what that was all about, but it was private. I would be willing to wager, however, that at least in John's case, it had to do with the fight we had. Well, Jesus had assured him that he had no fault, and so I supposed that my goal had been at least partially accomplished.

I was beginning to follow John, but thought better of it, and it occurred to me that Jesus was not finished. I thought, in fact, I heard him talking to me in that voice of his that could be heard all around the courtyard, saying, "You will die in your sins." It sounded like it.

I went nearer. And sure enough, he had said, to the group, not specifically to me, "If you do not believe that I AM, you will die in your sins!"

Nineteen

BUT DID THE PEOPLE REALIZE WHAT he had just said? “If you do not believe *that* I AM, you will die in your sins.” They took it to mean, “If you do not believe in *what I am*,” meaning the Prince. But he did not say that. He said “if you do not believe that I am—that is, that I am ‘I AM.’” He called himself by the Divine name.

But he then said, “When you lift up the Son of Man”—and he held his arms out in 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.”

Still, there was a way one could construe what he was saying that he was not calling himself God Almighty, using the Name one must not pronounce. It was very, very close, but it would not stand up in court. And he knew it. He was mad, no doubt, but he was exceedingly clever. Could he keep up “informing” people of who—he thought—he was and still make it impossible for two witnesses to agree that he had actually called himself God, the One God, the only God?

Some of the people now 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.”

“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.”

Free from what? Free from our sins, presumably. Jesus had before now claimed that he could forgive sins.

“—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!”

Jesus looked on them sadly. “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!”

But it was not that simple. If you were not a madman, one could believe in you; we all know that you have miraculous powers from God. But you are a man, and a man is not God.

The people were making outraged cries to that effect, and 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!”

I felt he was talking to me as much as to everyone else. True, I could not name a single sin he had committed—which was unlikely if he were possessed by a devil. But it did not mean that he was not deluded by the strength of the Force that took over his soul. He was “possessed,” as it were, by the Holy Spirit, which was fine, except that his finite mind could not bear it, and so he thought he was one and the same as the Spirit who possessed him.

I could *hear* him, but I could not *listen* to him, because what he said was impossible. A man cannot be God. What is finite cannot be infinite. There can be no discussion here.

“—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 quiet 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.

We dispersed, intending to go to the Mount of Olives, but as soon as we left the Temple precincts, there was Jesus, walking among us. I had an errand to do, however, and went ahead by myself, and Andrew, who had spotted me, raced after me.

It was a while before he caught up with me; but finally, he came behind me and, grasping me by the shoulder, spun me around, and said, "I saw what you did with John!"

Another fight. Well, he would discover that size was no match for skill. Besides, I had little time. I quickly tripped him onto his face upon the ground, which left me standing behind him with a foot on his back, and his arm held in such a position that if I moved it toward his head, it would break. I saw no point in going further; he was hopeless in his ineptitude. "What do you mean, 'what I did with John? It was what John did with me!'"

"Oh, please! I *saw* the two of you!"

"Then your eyes are defective! He came up to me as you did, and challenged me to a fight, spouting some nonsense he got from that slave Ezra that I had put a spider in Nathanael's pouch or something, and then I showed him that I knew a thing or two about fighting. But as I was trying to pin him down, he decided to pleasure himself against me—I had seen him look at me with lust in his eyes many times—and I was trying to keep him motionless, but I could not."

"Oh, of a certainty!"

"You may think what you may think, but facts are facts. And no doubt you have seen him look at you thus also."

"What!"

"Good heavens, Andrew, you *are* blind! What, did you

think he admired you?” I laughed. “He admired your shoulders and your arms and your chest—and other parts of your body. Admired you? He *wanted* you, just as he wanted Ezra and me! Wake up!”

I could see that what I had said went through him like a shock. It had never occurred to him until this moment! The fool! the blind fool!

I looked down, and with pity and scorn in my voice said, “It does not seem as if you are quite so eager to come to his defense now. No, Andrew, he is not the exemplary, holy young man that you thought he was. In a way, I feel sorry for you, and so I will let you go with just a bit of a warning to think before you try such things with such as I.” and I moved Andrew’s arm to the point where it gave him intense pain, but did not break it, and went away.

As I returned to the group, Jesus had joined us, but evidently still using whatever it was that made him disappear, because we were the only people who were aware of him. It seemed that he planned on making a reappearance that day, however, from the way he was acting. I must say, it was confusing to be with him.

We 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 with some contempt, and answered, “It was no sin of his or his parents either.” He stroked his beard. Aha! This was the inspiration he was anticipating. Cure of a man blind from birth was a colossal miracle. It would enable him to make an advance in his

claims. "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."

The night is coming. We were reaching the point of no return. Could he save himself? Evidently not; he foresaw that he would not. I noticed that a crowd had begun to gather; evidently, Jesus was now letting himself be seen.

Jesus, one supposes to create a little fanfare to call attention to what he was going to do to the blind man, spat on the ground and made 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 someone 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 again 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.”

That statement hit me for some reason. Suppose I could be wrong. Then I am blind and think I can see. —Bah! Nonsense! Jesus is a man claiming to be infinite; but men are finite. A man simply *cannot* be God! It is unthinkable to anyone who has a mind. Much as I admire and love Jesus, I cannot accept absurdity!

But was that the question? Not could a man be God,

but could God be a man? But how could he undo himself while still remaining God, since clearly the universe still existed, and he had to act as his infinite self in order for it to do so? No, there was no rational way out in this direction either. The only answer was that the man was insane.

Jesus was now talking about sheep and shepherds, but I missed practically everything he said, since I was wrapped up in my own internal debate, trying to justify him if I could. But Jesus was once again gathering an audience, and he broke into my musings with “—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.”

There was the proof that his claim was valid. He would come back to life on the third day after his death. But he had to die first. And then, of course, it would be all over.

—Unless he was what he said he was. But then we run into the wall of absurdity again!

“We are going back to Galilee in a short time,” he said to me, “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.—and Judas,” he added quietly. “Cannot what can do more, also do less?”

What did *that* mean? Clearly, he had “heard” my thought that perhaps the question was whether God could be a man, even if a man could not be God. If something was infinite, could it “add” a finite dimension to itself without altering its infinity?

But I was again distracted by the fact that the speech he

had just made had set off another controversy among the Judeans. Numbers of them said, "He is crazy! He's possessed! Why do you listen to him?" and others answered, "This is not the raving of a madman; and can a demon give sight to the blind?"

I wandered off by myself to think, and suddenly, Thomas appeared as if out of nowhere and almost ran into me, since his eyes were on the ground, and he was desperately concerned about something—as were we all. As he straightened up to apologize, he realized, with supreme loathing, that it was I.

"I am sorry, Judas," he managed to say through his teeth. I was—preoccupied."

"One can see that. A pity you did not learn the lesson a while back in Galilee."

"Lesson? What lesson?"

"Are you really so dense? Did you not see that I showed you that you could take a little wine with no ill effect?"

Thomas stared at me, and the light began to dawn. "You mean that that was deliberate?"

"And did you suffer any ill effect from it?"

"How did you *dare*?"

"Come, now, Thomas. Dare what? It was nothing but a little wine."

Thomas was too enraged to reply, or even move.

"But if you want to continue drinking nothing but water, that is your prerogative, I suppose. No harm was done, as you yourself said." I put my hand onto his chest, just above where he had "hidden" his little wineskin that everyone knew about, and said, "And you *do* act admirably in that

regard, with one small exception, that we are all aware of.” And with a sudden snatch inside his tunic for the the skin—which turned out to be a sheep’s bladder or some such thing—and yanked it out, tearing the cloth, and with my dagger in my other hand, I slashed it open.

Thomas stared in horror at the stain the pungent liquid inside had made, as if his soul was in it. I tossed the useless bladder down beside it, and its odor filled the air. “Well!” I said. “It was *not* wine, then, but something special, it seems.”

Thomas looked slowly up from the stain into my smiling face, and softly said, “You know, I killed someone once for doing that.”

I answered, “I always wondered how accidental that ‘accident’ was. We learn something new every day, do we not?—But I doubt if you would attempt killing with your bare hands someone with a dagger.”

Thomas stared at me, too full of helpless fury to speak.

Then I said, calmly and quietly, “Consider, Thomas. I have done you a favor. You have drunk nothing but water for—what is it? A year and a half now. You have no need of that wineskin, or whatever it is, if you never drink from it. But you have been trusting in it all this time, relying on it. Jesus would have you trust in him. Now you *must* trust in him. I have but made it possible.”

And I *had* done him a favor. If he would not resume drinking wine, he at least would not have the temptation at his very side at every moment. He could do without it; he *had* done without it, and all he needed was a little push. Without what I had done, he would still be patting that bladder for years and years. Now he had either to go through the trouble

to find and new one and prepare it and fill it with his super-wine, when all the time he would know that he would never drink from it, or he would go back to being sensible—or, I suppose, Thomas being Thomas, he would give up in despair and drink himself to death as he had planned originally. But I suspect he would not take that course—unless, of course Jesus was crucified and did not have the decency to return to life on the third day. How absurd! What had I been bothering my mind with? It would not happen.

I decided that I needed to calm myself down a bit, so I went back to my house and looked at the little treasure that I—that we—had amassed. If Jesus was killed, then it really would belong to no one, and of course, if it belonged to no one, it was as much as mine. I could live quite comfortably on this for years. But I had better begin distancing myself from Jesus, since he was clearly doomed, and coming back to life was simply an insane dream. I had to begin cultivating those who were on the other side, seeing how I could curry their favor, so that when the crisis came, they would receive me instead of having me join Jesus in his condemnation.

But how? Especially without antagonizing Jesus, who could apparently—certainly—read thoughts. I had best, before I began “plotting,” stay as far away from him as possible, on the assumption that he could not discover what I was thinking unless I was reasonably close to him. With many people between us, the noise of many thoughts at once would not make my thoughts stand out.

Or so I hoped. If not, I was doomed myself. And when I was near him, I could toy with the idea that if God could do “more” in the sense of infinitely more, then why could he not

do “less” and restrict his activity in this one space to no more than the activity of a human being?—since a human being was, after all, simply activity that was limited in a certain way, and the limitation was itself nothing at all.

When I put it that way to myself, it even sounded, if not plausible, at least possible. Still, there was the problem of why the Infinite would do such a thing, even supposing that It could. What possible interest could It have in imitating and joining the limited creatures It had made?

And let us face it, Jesus, for all his powers, displayed too much of the finiteness of his reality to be simply a manifestation of the God who was above everything. *That* God was impassible; he could not suffer; and Jesus did suffer various human ailments, and he became angry, as at the Temple when the animals were sold, and at Philip and others when they acted in egregiously stupid ways. If he was human, he was all-too-human at times. No, the whole theory that God, the infinite God, had decided to partially finitize himself had too many holes in it to be tenable. And that left me with the man Jesus, intimately connected with this infinite Power, becoming mad because of its influence on his mind—which made perfect sense. What was I to do? What was any rational human being to do?

Twenty

In the course of my musings, I happened upon Thomas (who did not see me) talking to Matthew, who had an expression on his face that mirrored his. Evidently, if Matthew had any prop like Thomas's that he relied on—a secret cache of wealth, perhaps—he had just discovered that it was gone. It seemed that all the members of the group were now rapidly being left with nothing to rely on but Jesus, and on a Jesus who openly said that he was going to be killed. None of them, except perhaps Philip, had the temerity to have faith that he would rejoin them *after* being killed, and so they faced the prospect of being alone.

As did I, but I was preparing myself for it. With this, we all went to the garden to sleep, though I noticed that most of them did not actually sleep much.

That evening, I went for one of my walks in the woods, and I encountered that Man of Shadow, who was almost invisible, but who made his presence felt by grabbing the front of my tunic. "What?" I said. "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!" Fortunately, he had shiny skin, and the little light that was left glinted off it.

We threw off our mantles and tunics, and squared off at each other. I, thinking that he was as unskilled as John, tried what I had done to him; but he evidently had been schooled in fighting, and took me by surprise. After a very brief skirmish, in which I lost the upper hand, I found myself standing in front of him, with my arm in more or less the position I had held Andrew's. I was convinced he intended to break it; but he simply held it that way bending it up a little from time to time, causing immense pain—and then the fiend, the disciple of Satan, violated me, and I was not able to prevent it.

It was much more painful than I had ever imagined (how some people can find this *enjoyable!*), and he, seeing my anguish, prolonged it beyond measure. I regret to say that I began pleading with him to stop, and that only seemed to give his fury greater fire. I thought I was going to die. Eventually, I began to collapse, and he held up my hips as he continued until he reached a climax inside me and let me slip, groaning, to the ground.

And left me there.

When I could move, which was far into the night, several hours later, I decided to hobble to my house and rest, which I did for four days, until I could manage without help. Even then, when I went back to the group, I held myself aloof for a time. It was just as well; none of the people there now considered me a companion, though I had once been quite popular. Such is the fate of those who adhere to the truth.

The next day, we 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. Of

course, of course. What Lazarus meant was that Jesus gave promise of being a liability. Obviously, he had not yet discovered that Mary was Mary Magdalene, as he was bound to do if he had any extended contact with the entourage of Jesus. Chusa's Joanna came to mind.

But what interested me 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. My heart went out to her. She was so compellingly attractive in her despair. My desire flared up into a tormenting fury.

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.

Spoken like the One that he thought he was, to whom absolutely everything that happened, even to his “finite self” was of no significance.

Mary said again in a loud voice, “I do not *want* to be chosen!”

I imagine even Jesus did not want to be chosen, but he *was* chosen whether he liked it or not, and it would lead to his death. And the others: Matthew, Thomas, Nathanael, John, Andrew—all of them, wished to be “unchosen,” now that they had discovered what was in store for the “chosen.” I myself was not happy about it, especially that I would have to repudiate Jesus in the near future—and would have to do so without

risking my own skin. But the prospect was unbearable.

We 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 Thomas.

I was trying to see if I could find Ezra by himself. I had a sword under my cloak, and intended to run him through; I knew a painful way to kill a person with a sword. But I could not find him alone. The irony was that he and that David, the one who had been dead, were apparently watching me, and I noticed that Ezra himself now sported a sword when he did so. Could he also have studied swordsmanship as part of his lessons on how to be a bodyguard for his future master? The thought gave me pause.

I heard him talking to John about how Thomas's father had to be fired from his father's fishing business because he too was a drunk. But Thomas had "rescued" him as he had been rescued by Jesus—whereupon his father cursed him and drove him away. But apparently Ezra had shamed the father into staying sober by asking him if he wished to imitate Thomas! It was a mess.

Shortly afterward, during the winter, as the Feast of Dedication approached, Jesus said that it was time to return to Jerusalem. I had recovered completely by that time, and had no problem walking or even sitting down.

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.” Now he was making wild statements not only about himself, but about his followers. We—at least, those of us gullible enough to believe—would never die, and “no one would take us from his hands.”

At least, if he were accepted as King. I suspect that the coming Feast of Passover would be the time of crisis. I could not imagine that the authorities would let it go any farther, if that far. But who could believe not only that he would come back to life but that the whole world would be transformed, and lions would eat hay like oxen? It was absurd. Absurd.

I thought he looked at me as he was saying this about taking people from his hands. “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! He called himself the “Son of Man” because he *was* God emptying himself somehow into human skin while remaining still the Infinite God. “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!” Or, as he would have it, You are God, deciding to limit yourself to human reality in this one manifestation of yourself.

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?’”

He was right. There was a psalm in which God said, “I said ‘you are gods.’” referring, as I recall, to the ones he set over others as judges. He went on, “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, awe-struck. “Nonsense!” was the angry reply. “He is a madman, who knows a few tricks!”

Of course, what he said was sophistry. Scripture did not intend in any way to mean that those God appointed were actually Himself. That would be nonsense. No, they had the place that a *Gentile* would call a “god,” but not the Hebrew God at all.

But what did he mean by “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 us 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.

We 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.

But of course, all this was wishful thinking, since he

himself had predicted explicitly that he would be killed. —And return to life. But though the prediction of being killed was probably trustworthy, the rest was fantasy.

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.”

“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? I would have to find someone

among the authorities to talk to about Jesus, without anyone's knowing.

As we were on the way, word came that Lazarus was indeed dead, and that by the time we 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. He certainly had made himself popular, in spite of his color and status. But they were both fools, of course.

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?

We waited for a while in silence, each of us 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—it *was* 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?”

Twenty-One

‘**C**OME 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. No, they had missed the point. He was not weeping out of sympathy for Lazarus. Who could weep out of sympathy for *Lazarus*? He was weeping because no one seemed to have faith that he was really God. And he had reason to weep. Though I was all but convinced that he was but a man deeply inspired by God, every single one of the others suspected it.

We 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—why 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?”

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. It was arranged. Of course it was.

“Untie him,” said Jesus matter-of-factly, ‘and let him go.”

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.”

I must say that it was a superb job of acting, on the part of every one of the principals, especially Lazarus, who certainly *looked* as if he had been startled out of the sleep of death. They must have done a good deal of rehearsing in those days when we were traveling to meet them.

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 we began to return to where we had been.

I thought it was a colossal tactical blunder. To have the “miracle” happen to one of his good friends and not a total stranger left Jesus open to the accusation of having the whole

thing arranged—as it must have been. What could be easier? Have your friend disappear, and then hide in the grave for a few days, and come out when you called him. Of course, it would take collusion by Martha and Mary, but they could be easily persuaded. And it would require some acting skills, which frankly, I did not think they had, to this level at least. In *that* respect, it was superbly done.

But really.

The man born blind was clearly much more effective. His friends and those who knew him could testify that he had had no contact with Jesus earlier, and so Jesus had to have done an impossible thing to him, just by putting mud on his eyes.

And even if the whole Lazarus episode was true (as, conceivably, it could be, if one stretched gullibility a bit), then it was effective for those who knew Lazarus, but not for much of anyone else, since it cried out that it was a fraud.

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—allegedly—brought back to life a man who was “already decaying.” Those who were already disposed to believe his claims would take it as true, those who were not would be confirmed in their opinion of him as a mountebank.

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?

It was preposterous. If *I* could not believe it, with all my good will and my exposure to him for three years, how could any ordinary man do so? Of course, there were thousands who did not realize what his claim really entailed—so perhaps he could have some followers after all.

But not unless he came back to life after being killed, and that was simply not going to happen. It was time for me to do something about my own security.

There was also the problem of Mary. I was growing wild with desire for her, and was convinced that she was as full of desire for me. It was merely that we had not been able to get together, since there was still the possibility that Jesus had not really abandoned her, and was simply keeping her in reserve for use later, after all the fuss about the Passover was done with. It was very unlikely, but I was—originally—quite nervous about taking Mary from him and being the object of his wrath.

But it was becoming unbearable. I was walking up and down the encampment, not really speaking to anyone if I could avoid it, and in general calling attention to myself in a way I did not wish. If I was to turn Jesus over to the Judean authorities, as it seemed most sensible for me to do, then it behooved me to appear to be friendly with him until the last

minute.

But this stay in the camp at least accomplished one thing for me: I could leave on the grounds that I had to see to the funds I had stored in my house, to prepare for the Passover. It was a fairly lame excuse to get away, but I was desperate. I had to contact Zebulun and see what they would give me if I handed Jesus over; it would have to be something substantial, I imagined: fifty pieces of silver or so. That would help my little fund.

And I *had* to see Mary, somehow; I simply could not breathe until I did so. So I told Jesus I was going to see to the finances for the Passover, and left—noticing that David and that black Satan observed me and were about to dog my footsteps.

Fortunately, I was far too clever for those fools, and so I lost them quickly, simply by pretending I was going to my house, and then suddenly racing down a narrow corridor between two buildings and making a couple of other turns, and then waiting to see if anyone followed. They did not—of course.

Rejoicing at how frustrated they must be, I made my way to Zebulun's house. I chose him because he lived apart from others, but of course, had easy access to important people in the Sanhedrin.

I gave him my proposal, that I knew where Jesus went to sleep in the environs of Jerusalem—something, amazingly enough, that they had not been able to discover—though, of course, how amazing was it, since Jesus had the power somehow of not being noticed when he did not want to be seen. In any case, they were exceedingly eager for me to tell

them where he went.

And, of course, I saw through this, and said I would lead them to him *after* we had eaten the Passover meal. It would look extremely suspicious if I did not attend, and if I left earlier, they would change the place for the dinner. We arranged a signal, and on the spur of the moment I suggested that I go up to him and kiss him, thinking how ironic it would be, but little realizing at the time how I was inviting a dagger-thrust by one of the fools who was more astute than the others.

I named a price of a hundred pieces of silver, and Zebulun all but laughed me out of his house. We both knew that it was too much, but it formed a basis of haggling, and we got into it seriously. Eventually, after two and a half hours, I accepted thirty pieces of silver. I would have held out for the fifty I had originally thought I could get, but the time was dragging on, and it was becoming dangerous for me to be there any longer.

With that settled, I walked the hour or so walk to Mary's house—and fortunately found her wandering in the woods behind it, pondering some serious problem she seemed to be having.

I came up behind her and said in her ear, "You must be thinking extremely deep thoughts; you are completely lost in them." I touched her back with my chest, and she stiffened. I put my arm around her, pulling her to me. I was standing slightly to her left behind her, and my whole right side was against her. I was completely aroused, and had but to turn a bit, and she would feel it. She did not seem able to breathe—and I was having trouble in that direction myself.

Still holding her tightly against me, I said, "What were

you thinking of?”

“I was—” she tried to say, but no sound came. She cleared her throat. “I was thinking of Lazarus.”

“That is strange,” I said; “so was I. I was wondering why you did it.”

Still looking straight in front of her, she said with surprise, “Why I did what?”

“Perhaps, then, it was not you, and you had to agree. I need to know that.”

She tried to turn to look at me, but I still held her in such a way that she could not. She turned her head, and could see my face—So close!—out of the corner of her eye. She almost fainted. After a moment, she recovered enough to say, “I know not what you are saying.”

“Who was it arranged for Lazarus to appear dead, so that he could call him out of the tomb?”

She was so startled that her sudden turn to face me took me by surprise and made me release her. “What do you mean?”

“Come, now!” I said, and took her hands. “Am I so hateful?”

She looked at my face, and then dropped her eyes. “No.”

I laughed. “You have not changed, have you Mary? Not in all these years!”

She looked up at me. “What do you mean? I do not understand.”

I smiled. “You are acting remarkably obtusely, my dear; if I were not aware how intelligent you were, I would think you genuinely did not know what I was saying. But you cannot

tell me that you do not remember, that you did not recognize me that first night. I knew you the instant I saw you; and I saw you look at me. You knew me also.”

She stared at me speechless, and suddenly seemed to remember that she recalled me from somewhere that night when she first saw me in the encampment.

“I always wondered,” I went on, clarifying things a little, in case she really had forgotten, “if the little girl in the Temple was the famous Mary of Magdala; but I never dared to try to find out. I had been poisoned once, and it took me months—years—to drive it out of my system. I could not afford another dose. But I wondered; one does, you know. And when the others told me what you were like, with your apparent innocence, and your blaming them for seducing you—who else could do that as well as you?” I laughed.

“So I was all but certain,” I continued. “But I never really knew until that night; and there you were—even more beautiful, after all those years, than you were that afternoon when the little girl said so demurely, ‘I can show you what he did to me if you will take me inside.’ I knew not what I was capable of until that moment! Would you believe that that little episode in the room in the Temple was my very first time? I was virtuous until I met you!” And I laughed once again.

“But . . .” she said, “But why are you . . . here? Now?” Her very hands were burning with desire inside mine; but her mind was clearly in turmoil.

“To ask a question. Did you have anything to do with that little masquerade with your brother? Or did they do it in spite of you?”

“Masquerade?”

“Mary, Mary, I am not naive. —Very well. I suppose you would never admit it. And I suppose that that is not really what I must know. Tell me this, then: Did Jesus tell you to do it?”

“To do what?”

“Mary, please, credit me with some sense. I am not stupid enough to become involved with you again if you are still his. He may not be able to resurrect people, but I would have no doubt he could kill someone if he chose. But I thought that when you left, he had grown tired of you, and it would be safe. But just when I had made up my mind to come here and claim you for myself, he announced that he was going back to Judea to see his ‘good friend Lazarus,’ who had died. Well, what was I to think? I now had to assume that the reason you left him was that people suspected what was going on between you, and he had to part from you temporarily, but—”

“You need not act thus, Mary. He—and you—will be safe with me, believe me. And this pretense at innocent bewilderment does not really become you with someone who knows you so—shall we say intimately? —Oh, very well, you need not even admit this, I suppose; I know that you want me too much to see me killed—and so if you say nothing, I will know that you are no longer his mistress—”

She slapped my face.

I looked at her in surprise. “Why did you do that?”

“You think I was the mistress of Jesus!”

“Well of course! Why—”

And you think he grew tired of me and threw me aside!”

“That is what I need to assure myself of. Because—”

And you wonder why I slapped your face!”

I was still holding one hand. I pulled her to me and clasped her to my chest. She felt me burning against her, and I felt her burning desire also. “And now I know,” I said huskily, “and even if I did not know, I am past caring. I said you poisoned me once, and I had got over it until I saw you again; but then I had a relapse, and only the fear of what he would do to me kept me from you. You know that. You saw me looking at you. You knew. And you wanted me also; I could see it. You still do.”

She still did—more desperately than ever; it was clear with everything she did. But she started to struggle.

“Now be still!” I said, pushing her and holding her so close that she could not get any leverage. We were on a small slope, and she began going down backwards. Perfect. “I have learned a thing or two,” I said, “since last we met.”

She tried to cry out as I forced her slowly down, but I kissed her in such a way that she could not bite me, and was holding her so close that struggling was of no avail. I had my hand at her throat now, and she knew that it was too late; all her training as a prostitute told her that struggle now would only lead to her death. She made a slight move to try to escape, and felt the pressure. I also knew. She relaxed.

“That is better,” I said, but kept my hand on her throat as I—I suppose you would say—raped her, though I could see she was enjoying it fully as much as I was. Finally, I rose, leaving her sobbing on the ground.

“Really, Mary!” I said. “You would think that you were virtue deflowered! Let us hope that the next time you will allow me to be more gentle; this was a bit more exercise than I had bargained for—though I must admit, it was interesting.”

They were right when they said that you were many things, but never dull.”

Looking back toward the house to see if anyone had noticed, I made off through the woods in the direction of Jesus’s encampment.

Twenty-Two

HAD RETURNED TO THE GROUP only a short time, when John came running up. He had been somewhere, but gave no indication where. But he himself had barely returned to the group when Judith—that servant of Mary’s—also came up, running hard, and 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!”

I was expecting something or other. If Mary was silent, then she could not hide what she felt from Martha, who, I knew, had no love for me, any more than I had for her or her precious brother, who now was “resurrected” in anticipation of what Jesus thought would be his own resurrection. Well, I could remove her from their contamination. We could go away together, and forget about Jesus and all he stood for.

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.”

A shock went through me. We were to attend a *dinner* with Lazarus, Martha, and Mary? How could I avoid it? I said, without much hope, “Are we all to accompany you, Master?”

“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, as I thought, she had been the one who had told Lazarus who Mary was, and it was doubtless Lazarus’s breakdown at this—his suicide? But he was too much of a coward for that—that precipitated his sickness and death. Evidently, his “return to life” was a charade that he deeply regretted, but what was done was done. He probably thought it a fate worse than death. It would be interesting to see how Jesus straightened *this* out. After all, he had been responsible for it, and must have planned some kind of solution.

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—the fool!—looked after her with a mixture of desire and contempt, and then looked, his eyes narrowed, over at me. Why me? Did he suspect, or even see, something? That could be dangerous in the extreme, especially if that demon from the dark pit of hell found out about it.

And Ezra and Thomas met, and had a long, but

obviously private, conversation. It had something to do with me, it seemed, since they looked surreptitiously at me, and Thomas reacted with extreme shock at one point. Something drastic was obviously being talked about, and what else could it be than what had happened between Mary and me? Perhaps Ezra, when he lost me, suspected I had gone to Mary and seen our little adventure. That filled me with chagrin, that he would see me at least apparently raping someone, while at the same time, I triumphed at the fact that I could do this, while Ezra would not have a chance with someone like her. It would be like being raped by an ebony statue.

At any rate, shortly afterward, Jesus and we 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 it was simply that when Jesus did not want to be accompanied, no one somehow noticed him and his followers.

As we 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. I was wondering how she was taking all this.

In any case, as soon as everyone saw us Twelve and Jesus, the atmosphere grew, if possible, even more tense. I assumed that the guests from Jerusalem had been selected on the basis that they would not immediately report Jesus, because no one suddenly left.

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 us 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 also invited 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 us 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. I tried to see if I could have a word with her, but she ignored me completely—I presume because she did not wish to give either of us away, and was not sure she could control herself in my presence. She and Martha placed those from Jerusalem 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 we Twelve were seated in the lowest places at the table, but given what Jesus had taught about such things, we 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. I had a decent enough view of everyone important.

Martha and Judith with the servants served the dinner; and again Mary absented herself. Matthew had also tried to catch her eye earlier, but she had been very preoccupied with something-or-other—she was almost as lost in thought as she had been in the woods—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, cried, “Master! Forgive me!” and rushed to his feet, which, like everyone’s, were of course 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 was paralyzed with shock. This was a reenactment, for some reason, of what we all knew had happened at the house of Simon the Pharisee in Magdala. What was the *point* of it?

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, one heard, there had been the first time. Interestingly, Mary seemed to be play-acting at the beginning, and then genuinely remorseful. Did she regret her complicity in what happened, and wish Jesus to take her back?

What a catastrophe!

So I said, to defuse the situation, “Why this waste? Why was this perfume not sold? It would have brought three hundred denarii, and we could have given the money to the poor.”

Jesus looked over at me, at first almost vindictively, swiftly overcome. Then he said—I must say—in a gentle voice, “Let her alone. Why are you pestering her? She has done 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 the astounding, dumbfounding thing was that Lazarus seemed to reciprocate it, from the little we could hear. It certainly sounded like it. Incredible! Had Mary been planning such a confrontation to bring Lazarus to his senses? Had she known Judith's attachment, and relied on it? If so, it was superbly done! My

Mary!

My Mary?

But had she not in effect just said that she wished Jesus's forgiveness for her sin—which had to be our, shall I say, *liaison*? She wanted *him* back.

And since he did not denounce her, then he still wanted *her*!

But then what of me? *I* was certainly not going to get a jar of nard and wash Jesus's feet at our next dinner, even if—and I was sure he would—he were to forgive me. I did not *want* to be forgiven! I wanted Mary! And I was sure—as certain as that I was breathing—that she still wanted me. In fact, I saw her glance my way before she ran out to the melee in the other room, and her look was as if to say, “What have I done?” She still wants me!

But Jesus will kill us, if I take her away again!

But what does it matter? I *must* have her, and I know that if I try to have her, she will yield. We will have to escape Jesus somehow.

But of course, all this would be solved for me, would it not? If I continued with what I had planned, then as Jesus went to the garden of Gethsemani after the Passover meal, the Romans and the High Priest's retinue would meet him—with me—and he would be taken away from causing trouble for us. I could then come back and claim Mary at my leisure, and she would yield to me. True, she would resist at first, but I could persuade her that I admired Jesus fully as much as she did, and I was only doing it to prevent the whole Judean people from being crushed by the Romans, which would have happened if Jesus had seized control of the Kingship. No doubt he was

planning some spectacular miracle to change the people's minds in his direction away from following the Judean authorities; they were not disposed in that direction in any case.

And the authorities knew it, which was why they had accepted my proposal. Their idea was without the slightest doubt to capture him at night, stage some kind of a trial in which he could be accused of blasphemy, and then batter him into a pulp and put him on display as weak and disgraced. The people would turn against him in an instant. No, they were not stupid when their own interest was at stake, and all they needed was for me to show where he was at night.

No, all would soon be well.

Unless, of course, he actually was what he claimed to be. But even there, it did not matter, because he had predicted that in fact he would be handed over to them and that they would crucify him—which meant handing him over to Rome.

So all I had to do was wait and not reveal myself. If he knew, as he might, then he also knew that there was a possibility that I might not actually do it, and being the self-important fool that he was, he would leave room for me to change heart and return to him. So I would appear to do so for the next four days—and who knows? I *might* actually decide, even at the last minute, not to go through with it, and see how he would handle himself if the authorities could not get to him under cover of night. It might be very instructive.

And he would forgive me, when it was all over. Of course he would.

But then, where would I be with Mary? I could only be safe with her when he was out of the way.

Or could I?

Well, I need not decide until the last moment. Perhaps then he would do something that would tip the scales one way or the other.

—Interesting. If he was what he said he was, I would be responsible for killing God Almighty—in human form, of course, but he was “one and the same thing” as the Father. Not even Satan could boast of that!

Twenty-Three

BUT TO RETURN TO LAZARUS, he soon emerged from the other room as a transformed person—though 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 (No doubt, no doubt. *He* still had to be responsible for anything good.), 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 (The way it sounded, neither had a hair left on her head, and their faces were doubtless scratched beyond recognition.)—and, in short, he begged their pardon for suggesting that it might be well to put an end to the festivities.

Everyone pronounced that he understood perfectly, since most had the same suspicion—certainty—that I had. What bewildered most of them was the contrast to what he had been just moments before. All, including Jesus and us, 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.

We 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!” I wondered what “hope” there was for Ezra. Well, it mattered not. Once Jesus was out of the way, dispatching Ezra would be relatively simple. I was certainly far more astute than he.

After only a day in camp, Jesus informed us that on the morrow we would be entering Jerusalem, in preparation for the Passover. It was earlier than I had thought; but it meant that we would be spending the nights in Gethsemani, and so that would be an advantage for me. If unforeseen developments occurred, I could alter the date to hand Jesus over. I excused myself, and went to Jerusalem early, ostensibly to have funds ready for the feast, and informed Zebulun that he might have to be ready any night, depending on what Jesus decided to do. I did not trust him.

Everyone else 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, from Jesus's point of view—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—a child could have answered them all, but Jesus did it astutely enough 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. That was interesting. There was an ambiguity as to the date: was it Thursday or the Preparation Day? I was happy I had alerted Zebulun; Jesus might take advantage of it. The general opinion was that it was the Preparation Day for the Passover, making the Passover a very special feast, since it occurred on a Sabbath.

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. The fact was that Jesus won all the disputes, but the diehards would not, of course, admit it. Ordinary people, however, who were well-disposed toward Jesus, were not fooled.

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, we were always quite circumspect in going there. Jesus had seen to it that we 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. But he had been exercising his special talent of not being noticed.

Everything was timing. So far, Jesus's timing had been perfect.

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."

I am sorry; I could not "be where he would be;" I simply could not face crucifixion. The wonder was that *he* could.

It was obviously not easy. 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!"

For some reason, he had *not* come to be named King; he had come "just for this moment." I could not understand it. And then the thunder spoke again, as it had when John was bathing the people. This time, it said, "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!” There was no question now. It was the cross.

“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 as he was wont to do in the confusion, and went back to Gethsemani. His disappearance was a signal for us also to leave and meet him there.

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. I was among them, eager to hear what he said. 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.”

He must have known about me. So it looked as if it might be today, not tomorrow. I was certainly astute to inform the authorities. The only problem now was to get away and tell them of the fact; but they would be ready. But he sent the students in such a way that I could not know beforehand where he was going to eat it, and so I would actually have to go and share the dinner—or at least part of it—with him. I might be able to leave in the middle, giving as an excuse that I had to see to the rest of the festivities or some such thing—to give something to the poor, perhaps. And it was always possible that I might decide at the last minute that I would not do it. Unlikely, but possible.

In any case, that evening, Jesus led us to the house in Jerusalem, a house I should have been able to predict, but one never knew with all this intrigue. He told us at the last minute that we would be eating the Passover dinner that night, instead of on the beginning of the Sabbath, and everyone realized why he had done it. I heard murmurs of how clever he had been.

Ezra came over and said something to Thomas, presumably about me, who he must have suspected was going to hand Jesus over. Otherwise, how would the authorities know where to look? “David and I will be waiting in the garden,” he said audibly. Only the Twelve were to eat the dinner this night. But there was no way I could get away for even a moment to warn Zebulun. I entered, with the rest, taking care to be in the middle of those who went in, so as not to call attention to myself.

Matthew entered the room last, with the rest of us already lying on the dining-couches and as Matthew took his place, Jesus nodded as he saw 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!” The clown! And he was to be our leader! Oh, well, not for long.

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.

I could not give the least hint that I knew what he meant, because that would mean my death. The Rock even had brought a sword in from somewhere.

Well, I was not certain I would carry out what I had planned. I would wait and see what would happen, though my soul was screaming so loudly I thought it could be heard. One of the hardest things was not to flinch when Jesus, who had taken off his robe, came to me and washed my feet with a basin of water he had obtained from somewhere and dried them with

the towel he was temporarily wearing.

After he had finished and put his robe back on and lain down again, he said to all of us, “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.’ A chill ran through 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!”

Now he had actually *told* them I was thinking of “betraying” him. I put my hand on my dagger, which would not make much of a defense against twelve enraged men, some enormous, such as Andrew.

But each of the fools was wondering if it was himself that was the betrayer! I breathed a silent sigh of relief. Each began asking Jesus whether he was the one. How absurd! How lucky I would be to be free of these cretins and among intelligent people again!

Then John, who was in the seat of honor in front of Jesus, leaned back and whispered something, presumably asking Jesus who it was; and Jesus whispered something back.

He had to know. I was a marked man, at least at the moment with John, and soon with everyone. I had to get out of there! I asked Jesus “Master, it is not I, it?” just like the others, and he whispered so that only I could hear, “You are right.” And then he handed me a bit of bread that he had dipped in the sauce—as if to say, “I know, and I still accept you as one of mine if you repent.”

Repent! When he would betray *me*! No, that piece of bread had to be his signal to John, who was watching closely, that I was indeed the one. But so far, it was only John, and Jesus, interestingly, was holding him back. Jesus evidently saw that now I was determined, and said, in a voice of resignation, “Do, then, what you were to do; but be quick about it.” And I left.

It was night.

Twenty-four

As I went out, I looked carefully around to see if there was any sign of either David or the black fiend, but I saw no one. They were doubtless somewhere in the vicinity, however, and so I went by an extremely circuitous route, making sudden turns and doubling back, dagger ready, but it seemed no one was after me.

I then hastened to Zebulun and told him that Jesus was now eating the Passover with his students. He made little clicking noises with his tongue, as if to rebuke him for taking the minority view of when the moon was full, but quickly summoned a group of the High Priest's slaves and several Roman soldiers, and we rather stealthily marched out across the Kidron brook and up the hill to the Gethsemani garden. Zebulun expressed surprise that Jesus would be staying there, since it was such an obvious place, and I told him that Jesus had a way of clouding people's minds so that no one would notice him. He expressed skepticism with his expression, and said he would take the matter up later with his officers.

We had used up quite a bit of time in organizing ourselves, and it was very late when we finally arrived, which made no difference, because I knew the group was going to

sleep there—and besides, the longer we delayed, the more time the Sanhedrin would have to convene and organize a trial.

We entered through the single gate, with no one on the watch to hinder us, not even the black fiend. Not everyone was sleeping, but those who were not were as if they were drunk from exhaustion—I presume they had not regaled themselves on the Passover wine. Jesus had probably kept them listening to his final words, whatever they were. He could be lengthy when he spoke, at times.

As we entered, we perforce made considerable noise, and Jesus, who was off by himself praying, had waked John and the Rock, who looked anything but rocky, and John's brother James.

I had told the soldiers that the one I kissed would be the one they wanted, and went up to him and, feeling like a fool, said, "Good evening, Rabbi," and kissed him. He said in a subdued and extremely saddened voice, which cut me to the heart, "Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" I dropped back among the soldiers; we were clearly enemies now, and I was already beginning to regret it. But it was done.

"Who is it you are looking for?" said Jesus to the centurion.

"Jesus of Nazareth," he answered in a strong, military voice.

"That is the one **I AM**," he said, making the hills ring with **I AM** for almost a minute.

Suddenly, I caught a glimpse of him as those he took onto Mount Tabor must have seen: full of dazzling light, and immediately afterward I saw what Mary must have seen in Magdala through the eyes of the demons who possessed her.

There were three black whirlpools instead of a face, each of them going down, down, into the depths of the underworld. Unlike Mary, I did not scream; I was beyond screaming. He had showed me in one instant what he was to those who followed and loved—and believed—in him, and at the next instant, what he was to those who did not.

All the soldiers and the High Priest's guard stepped back as I did, and fell down with faces to the ground in worship.

In worship.

I knew now, with dazzling clarity, that I had been wrong! He *was* what he claimed to be, not someone who was filled with the power of God; he *was* the Almighty himself, though limiting himself to expressing himself only as human, except when miracles were called for. How did I not realize this earlier? He himself had said, "What can do more can do less," and I had dismissed it as his madness. He had given me the opportunity to believe—to realize—what he was, and I had dismissed it as ravings, when it was abundantly clear, had I only been able to open my eyes, that if there was anything that he was not, it was mad.

He asked a second time, "Who is it you are looking for?" and Zebulun answered, with a trembling voice, "Jesus of—ah—Nazareth."

What could I do? There was a skirmish as that idiot the Rock tried to use his sword and only succeeded in cutting off the ear of the High Priest's servant—something Jesus quickly remedied, to the astonishment of everyone, and then he said, "If I am the one you are looking for, then let these men go," and the students ran through the bewildered soldiers out the

gate into freedom, with no one lifting a finger.

I took advantage of the confusion and left myself, heading for the Temple, where I entered and said to the first person I saw, "Take me to those in charge!" and when they ushered me in, I said, "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood!" and held out the bag of coins.

"What is that to us?" they grinned. "You see to it."

They had what they wanted and refused my repentance! They did not care what was right; they merely wanted to get rid of Jesus! And I was complicit in it! I roared in frustration and agony and took my bag of coins and flung them into the Temple treasury, and dashed off.

Where would I go? What could I do? How could I make amends? I thought with anguish that if I returned to Jesus, *he* would forgive me, even if he could not now save himself from death. I had half expected him to disappear after he identified himself, but for some unaccountable reason, he was going to go through with it—because he knew that in the last analysis, the people would not accept him as their king.

They would not accept God, the one who had called them out of Egypt so many centuries ago, as their King! Because, like me, they did not believe because, like me, they *would* not believe in spite of all the evidence he had shown!

And if I ran up to the cross as he was hanging on it and begged forgiveness, he would forgive me! I was as certain of that as I was that he was what he said he was: one and the same thing as the Father, whatever that meant, however it was possible. How could I not have *known*? Because I *would not* know!

But I would not run up to the cross; I knew I would

not. And the reason was that I did not *deserve* to be forgiven! The fact that he would forgive me had nothing to do with the fact that I had committed the unforgivable sin! Did he not say at some time that if a man sinned against the Holy Spirit, his sin would not be forgiven? If I had not sinned against the Holy Spirit, who had? Or who would?

No, even if he would forgive me—and I knew he would, in spite of what he had said—he would not actually forgive me, because I would not allow myself to be forgiven. I would *die* before I would ask for forgiveness, not because I did not want forgiveness, but because I had no *right* to ask for forgiveness, least of all from him!

I knew now what I must do. I hastened home, and here I am putting the finishing touches in writing this; I have finished with writing. I am finished with everything forever. It is for me to enter those black whirlpools and spend eternity regretting what I had done, and rejoicing in the torture, because I deserve so much worse!

Let it be known that I bitterly repent what I have done, but *I will not seek forgiveness, because what I have done is beyond forgiving.*

There is a rope here, and a box, and a terebinth tree handy in my back yard. I will be dead before Jesus dies, and so cannot ask his forgiveness.

I know not whether anyone will ever see this, though I suppose that that black Satan and perhaps David will see it, and take it to someone who can read.

Or not. What does it matter?

What does anything matter?

Most of all, what do *I* matter?

The world had a chance at happiness, as did I, and because of me, it has lost it.

The whole thing is absur

“And that is where it ends,” said Matthew. “He must have been frantic, from the scrawl he made, and rushed out to kill himself forgetting to finish the last word.”

“And now he is in that horror that I was in when I killed myself,” said David, solemnly.

“Well, we cannot be too sure,” answered Matthew.

“What do you mean?”

“You see, we know he repented from betraying Jesus. But how do we know that, while he was choking to death—” ~~That is right. It~~
took him a long, long time to die.”

“Perhaps during that time, he saw the folly of his pride in “committing the unforgivable sin”; he knew that Jesus would forgive it, but he wanted to confirm it as unforgivable by killing himself before he could change heart. How do we know that during this time he was struggling to breathe, he saw the real truth, and repented from his suicide?”

“Oh, Master, say not that! If anyone deserves to rot in hell, it is Judas!”

“No, David, no. Each and every one of us, if we but knew it, deserves to rot in hell. But Jesus died precisely to save us from this fate. *That* I know. But he only died to save those who *wish* to be saved; he will respect our freedom, as he always does.”

“So he *is* in hell.”

“I know not. Perhaps his rescue—his repentance while he was dying—depends on how many people pray for him. We know that Jesus loved him as he loves all of us; and people’s

prayers can change hearts. And God is eternal; there is no time with him. So people praying after he dies can bring it about that *before* he died, he would receive the grace to repent of all his sins.”

“It does not sound fair.”

“You are, of course, right, David; it is not fair. Thank God it is not fair. If things were ‘fair,’ we would all be in eternal flames! All of us! *You* know that! You were rescued from the very thing that Judas was guilty of! And why? Because, certainly, of the prayers of your mother!

“But I suspect that it will require many more than the prayers of your mother to save Judas. But if enough people pray for him, he too may escape damnation.

“But still.”

“Think about it. Think of what Jesus went through for you and for me and for each of us. Because that is why he did it. For what other reason would he endure such a horror?”

Amen.