

CHAPTER 28

BORN AGAIN

EARLY THE NEXT DAY Nathanael joined us. I felt a real affection for Nathanael with his long arms and large hands—a great rangy man, probably reared near vineyards or fields. I could not forget the rhythmical way he had rowed the boat and the long sweep of the oars when we went across to Genesaret. There was something about him that was calming and quieting. He had a homely philosophy of the soil about him, and somehow I felt deep inside me that he was getting the message of Jesus better than most of the disciples. But he was so guileless, so simple and direct, he would never have the gift of organizing it and making his name known. He would never write a gospel, or if he did, he would not put his name to it, and it would go under some other's name, or never be included in the Bible when the Bible was made up in later years.

I was pondering the mystery of this man Nathanael, and it finally came to me that he was one of the invisible carriers of the Word, part of the precious leaven that was to make the entire world Christian some day.

We all stood around him anxious to hear the latest news.

"The crowds gathering for the Passover received Jesus into Jerusalem," he said. "It was as glorious a reception as a nation might give a leader about to cast off the Roman yoke. But I am afraid he is disappointing them by the quiet way he is going about the Father's business. It has been a very trying week also because the Pharisees and the Sadducees are making use of every opportunity to engage him in controversy. But more potent than any weapon they are using is his refusal to lead the revolt the people want to start against Rome. After their glorious reception, for him not to show his appreciation by accepting this leadership is like a slap in the face to them. It leaves the populace ready to believe any slander the religious leaders may devise against him. It almost makes me tremble.

"Jesus wishes to step out of this confusion for awhile. For that reason he would like to come out here all alone tomorrow to spend the day in rest and quietness with Martha and Mary and Lazarus. That is what has brought me here."

"The Master is always welcome!" said Martha, while joy lighted the faces of Mary and Lazarus.

While Martha prepared lunch, Nathanael drew me aside saying, "Let us walk in the garden." He was silent for awhile, then, turned to me suddenly and said, "Let me speak of that fear that is gnawing at my heart. When Jesus sent us out, did you notice that it was two by two? My partner was Philip, but Judas' partner was Simon the Zealot. The Zealots are convinced that if all of Palestine rose in revolt under a real statesman they could throw off the yoke of Rome, and both Simon and Judas are sure that Jesus is that statesman. With what they consider his power of magic they are convinced Jesus could set Israel free."

"Do you share that belief?" I asked.

"That Jesus is a statesman, yes. That he would ever consent to invoke his power for a political cause, no. A revolt, he says, would end with Rome's reducing every city to ashes, selling all survivors into slavery and inviting the Arabs in to take over the country."

"Oh, how true!" I exclaimed. "What wonderful insight!"

"You speak as one who knows," he smiled. "Do you know anything about Rome?"

"I know this much," and I spoke with vigorous emphasis. "Rome will not last forever. If Israel will only wait a few hundred years freedom will fall into her lap like a ripe plum. If Israel will only follow the example of Gaul and Germania, now under Caesar's yoke, she will become a great world power as they will."

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"Gaul and Germania?" he asked. "Are they the lands in the far north we occasionally hear about where wild giants roast entire oxen on a spit?"

"A great people," I replied, "and they will remain great because they will bide their time. Oh, that Israel would only be as wise!"

"Yes," said Nathanael, "Jesus is a true statesman. His refusal again and again to accept the kingship and lead this revolt, his insistence that the meek shall inherit the earth, his constant faith that love is the most powerful force in the universe, all add up to one thing: the sure way, the only way that Israel will keep this promised land which Moses and Joshua bestowed upon us will depend upon our being meek enough and nonresistant enough."

"Does Simon the Zealot still think that the revolt is what Jesus should lead?" I asked.

"He is beginning to change his mind, but not Judas. Judas insists that with the buildup Jesus has had, and the popularity he has achieved and with his power over the elements, that he *must* do it. What is more, Judas contends it is now or never. After the people from all over Palestine gave Jesus that great ovation when he entered Jerusalem, if he does not rise to their expectations the mob will turn against him as an impostor. If the mob joins with the Pharisees against Jesus a great calamity may occur. This is the fear that is gnawing at my heart."

"You think the people are that eager to revolt?" I asked.

"Yes, and they want a magician to lead them, and Jesus refuses to be that magician."

"Then I know he is a statesman!" I declared. "If all the leaders of nations would take him as their model what a wonderful world this would be!"

After lunch Nathanael and I said farewell to our host and hostesses and started up the road leading to Jerusalem.

"I have been noticing your interest in the people that Jesus has raised from the dead," began Nathanael as we left Bethany behind us. "I see you lingering around them whenever one of them joins our group. I see you straining to hear every bit of their conversation. And I noticed your close attention to Lazarus and Ruth when I first arrived. May I ask you, were you ever raised from the dead?"

"Oh, no," I hastened to explain, "I never had that experience. But it is true that I am tremendously interested in catching the views of people who have looked into heaven. That is natural to anyone, is it not?"

"Perfectly natural, but I sense in an inner way, if I do not seem intruding to say this to you, that your interest in this runs deep—deeper than you are letting us know. I had a feeling that you, too, in the land from whence you may have come, have had the experience of returning to life after tasting death."

"My interest does spring from something deep," I said thoughtfully, for his question had commenced to bring out in me an answer, just as all sincere questions have a way of drawing response from one's deeper level of thought. "But it is very hard to explain it as I have scarcely been aware of it myself until you spoke just now. If you will bear with me while I try to think out loud I shall see what the answer is. For I am just as curious about it as you are."

He smiled. "I understand," he said quietly, in that profoundly convincing way of his. "I understand."

"Unless one dies and comes back to life he really does not know what life is," I began. "I am not interested nearly so much in the literal death as I am in the symbolical death, where one dies to the outer world and is born to the real world that God has made, but which most of us are too blind to see. Perhaps I have passed through that miracle, or perhaps I am passing through it now. In a very meager way I think I experience it every day. All of you disciples have done it, or will do it, or you are not true disciples of your Lord. Jesus says to you so often that he who loses his life shall save it and he who saves his life shall lose it."

"An eminent scholar named Nicodemus," interposed Nathanael, "came to Jesus by night once and asked questions concerning the kingdom Jesus talked so much about, and the Master told him that unless one is born again he is not able to enter this realm of bliss and peace."

"Tell me about Nicodemus!" I urged, for I wanted to get any light on that famous conversation that I could. "What did he say?"

"Nicodemus went into detail with Jesus about the way people are born into such a world, asking if they must return into their mother's wombs and go through all the pangs of childbirth. To this Jesus replied that they often have to go through far greater pangs; that just as a baby is born weeping if he will live, so people are born into this new realm of consciousness mourning and poor in spirit, humble and helpless. And he went on to tell how it is possible for one, when he is reborn meek enough, to inherit the earth. Now Nicodemus could never understand how the meek could inherit the earth! There followed a long discussion, so long and erudite that the disciples sitting near went to their beds and neither those who were present nor those who heard Jesus report it, have ever bothered to write it down."

"Did they record any of it?" I asked eagerly, for here I might be learning some real secrets of the gospel.

"Not on papyrus but on their hearts, yes. They will never forget that which was said in those terms they can understand. You have no idea how long is the memory of a true Israelite, trained to remember things from his mother's knee."

"What is your conception of what Jesus meant by being born again?" I asked.

"I would say that it is very much to the inner soul what Lazarus' experience was to the body. Jesus said about the little daughter of Jairus, 'She is not dead, she is sleeping. Maid, awake.' I think that is exactly what we are doing in this world; we are all sleeping. Our Master has come to say to us, 'Friends, awake.' Yes, the time has come for us all to awake to this larger kingdom which is round about us and in which we live and move and have our being. But no one will ever find it or live there until he has died unto himself and risen, according to the words of Jesus."

"O Nathanael," I cried, "please pray that I shall always awake to that larger kingdom and that I shall never, never slip back into that old materialism in which I have been sleeping in the years of the past—I mean, in the years of the future."

He smiled. "You are the only one who seems always to get the past and the future mixed."

"After all," I replied, "it takes the silver threads of the future along with the golden strands of the past to produce the pattern of the infinite."

"You are right, friend," he replied. "No one can live long in the presence of the Master without finding himself walking down the highroad of Eternity."

CHAPTER 29**THE UPPER ROOM**

RETURNING FROM HIS REST at Bethany at noon of the day of the Passover, Jesus met his twelve disciples just outside the gate that faces upon the Mount of Olives. Mary, Martha and Lazarus were accompanying him, desiring, as were thousands of other pilgrims, to celebrate the famous feast at Jerusalem.

"Because of the crowds," I overheard Andrew telling Jesus, "it is going to be very difficult to find a house big enough to hold all those who would like to sit down with you for the Passover."

Then I looked around and saw that the Twelve had been augmented by half a dozen close friends of the disciples, ardent followers of the Christ.

"The Father will provide," said Jesus. "A humble home will receive us. The test of that home will be revealed at the well where women usually carry the water jars. A manservant must indeed be humble if he is willing to do a woman's work. Peter and John, go into the city and the first man you meet humble enough to carry a water jar, follow him, and whatever house he goes into, tell the owner that the Teacher says, 'My time is near. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.' He will then show you a large room upstairs with couches spread, all ready. Prepare the Passover for us there."

When they had left, Cleopas, who was in the group, went up to Jesus.

"Some of us came to Jerusalem especially to see you. May we share the Passover feast tonight with you and your disciples?"

"Tonight," replied Jesus, "the Twelve and I are to sup alone. But if you will accompany us I am sure there will be an extra room where those that are with you may celebrate the feast at the same time."

Peter and John returned to lead us to the home of a couple named Joab and Mary. They did have an extra room, and therein lies a story. It seems that Joab was the paralytic who had lain for years by the pool of Siloam, always too slow to reach the waters in time for healing. During the long years when all the support of the family had fallen upon Mary, she had taken over a rambling house where she was able to offer the cheapest kind of lodgings to people coming to Jerusalem. The first floor was adequate to house the family. The second floor was divided into two large rooms, each filled with a dozen or more low frame supports for mattresses which were used at night by transients. Thanks to the custom adopted from the Romans of reclining on couches while eating, it was very easy to convert these sleeping rooms into rooms for dining on such important occasions as the Passover.

Mary, who had gladly set aside one of them for Jesus and his Twelve, now, to our joy, was willing to have the second used to accommodate the nine extra followers who had come with Jesus and his disciples to her home.

Some of these "extras" I had met before; some were new to me. There were Mary, Martha and Lazarus, and a young scholarly physician, Dr. Luke, whom I did not know; a young man with bright, eyes and charming manner whom they called Stephen and two men who said frankly they were in training to become disciples of Jesus the moment he was ready to enlarge his band—Mathias and Barsabas, surnamed Justus. Finally Cleopas and I completed the list.

Now you and millions of others have already been in that house! Indeed, most of you have actually—in imagination—sat in the very upper room where the Twelve sat that night with *him*. you who understand the hunger to be close to the Master in the Last Supper can enter the portal with me and share indeed what is about to happen.

When we were shown upstairs, I glanced into that blessed room where the Twelve were assembling. I saw the long table already set and ready for thirteen guests. I saw Jesus take his place with

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John at his right hand. I saw Judas and Peter also placing themselves at the right of the Master. Then the door was closed and I turned back to the room where I was to sup that night.

When we were settled on our couches, Joab and his wife, Mary, and their adolescent son, Mark, joined us, making twelve in all.

"I prepared both rooms," explained the good wife, "so that the Master could take his choice of the two. For that reason there are thirteen places in each.

"That is very appropriate for the Passover night," said Dr. Luke. "These twelve places we occupy can represent the twelve tribes of Israel and the vacant place can represent our Unseen Host, Jehovah, the God of Israel. It is very fitting that we should sup with Him on this night of the Passover."

"Glorious!" exclaimed the young Stephen. How my heart went out to these two men, Stephen and Luke, so suddenly thrust into my acquaintance.

"Let us address to Jehovah our gratitude for bringing us together this fateful night," said Matthias and he proceeded to offer a prayer.

Rarely in reality, or *in that deeper reality which is realization itself*, have I ever experienced what I experienced that night. I shall never forget how the manservant—the same one that met the disciples at the well—came up the stairs with basin and water jug and towels and passed into the other room to wash the feet of the thirteen wayfaring men within, and how he presently reappeared, his mouth agape, and whispered to Joab so all could hear: "The Master himself insists upon doing that which only a servant is accustomed to do."

But hardly had he left before we heard the loud explosive voice of Peter cry out, "Oh, not my feet only, beloved Master, hut also my hands and my head!"

Then the manservant brought up the great hot dish, first for those in the inner room and then one for us, and the meal really began.

As the evening progressed, my yearning ear strained to catch another voice through the thin partition, but all I heard was the dull monotone of many voices. How I envied the bondservant who went through the door from time to time bringing forth the basin and towels and carrying in unleavened bread and unfermented wine.

As we talked around our table and Stephen told of a brilliant classmate of his, a fellow student of his who also studied under Gamaliel, a young man named Saul of Tarsus, who could not agree with him regarding the revolutionary teaching of the Nazarene, suddenly the door flung open and a tall, dark figure came out, wrapping the folds of his mantle around his face as if to conceal it as he hurried past us and down the stairway.

And now all twelve of us became frozen in our places and we gazed into each other's eyes as if trying to read the portent of things to come. But even as we sat and stared, and even as the footsteps of the fleeing one outside faded away, we found ourselves relaxing into quiet, listening, as a voice sweeter than silence came wafted to us through the door which Judas in his haste had left partly ajar.

"Let not your hearts be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you. And where I shall be, there you may be also.

"The words that I speak, I speak not of myself, but the Father that dwells in me, He speaks the words. And when He speaks words they immediately turn into works. He that believes in me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto the Father. And because I shall then be in the very midst of the Father and the Father in me, whatsoever you shall then ask in my name that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son."

"What a wonderful promise that is!" I thought. "And how little do we avail ourselves of it!" But even while I was musing upon this the voice repeated it again:

"If you shall ask *anything* in my name, I will do it. Hitherto you have asked nothing in my name; ask now and you shall receive, that your joy be full."

Then one after another came these precious pearls of wisdom and illumination that I shall hold in my heart always.

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can you except you abide in me. A new commandment I give unto you that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend.

"When a woman is in labor she is sorry, for her time has come; but when the child is born she remembers her anguish no longer, for joy that a human being has been born into the world."

"Can it be," I thought, "that the passage from this world to the next is nothing but a birth process even as the coming from the other world to this brings a newborn babe?"

"And so with you," continued that rich, invading voice. "Your heart is full of sorrow now at what I have told you. Yet—I am telling you the truth—my going is for your good. If I go not away, the Comforter will not come to you, but if I depart, I will send him unto you.

"I have yet many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now. But when he, the Spirit of Truth, shall come, he will guide you into all Truth. He will draw upon what is mine and disclose it to you. All that the Father has is mine; that is why I say, He will draw upon what is mine and disclose it to you.

"Behold the hour has come that you shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. These things I have spoken unto you that in me you might have peace. In the world you shall have tribulation. But be of good cheer; I have overcome the world!"

There was a pause. Then the voice was lifted in prayer:

"I pray for them that you have given me, Father, for they are mine. And all mine are thine, and thine mine, and I am glorified in them. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word, that they all may be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them as you have loved me; that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them. Amen."

As the voice came through the partly opened door I pondered how through the centuries those words would filter through millions of partly opened human hearts, and I sent up a silent prayer for the hearts of all mankind to be thrown wide to receive with joy and understanding those words that someday were destined to heal the world.

And as I listened, I found myself led to turn toward the vacant chair which Luke had said was reserved for Jehovah. It appeared not vacant now but filled with a blinding radiance and as if by a loudspeaker from a later age, the voice from the other room seemed coming to us from this place of light.

Yes, the Comforter that Jesus was describing seemed already seated in our midst.

"Arise, let us go hence," and the figures, twelve now, not thirteen, walked past us slowly and went down the stairs together.

As the footsteps died away in the direction of the Mount of Olives, conversation at our table was resumed, but I heard nothing of it. My heart was possessed with such awareness of what was going to happen that everyone around the table became almost as transparent to me as an open book. For a few moments I transcended myself in a sort of fourth-dimensional experience. Young Stephen especially drew my attention. His whole frame seemed luminous as if the body of his inner thought had taken actual form and instead of being encompassed by, was encompassing, his physical body in its embrace.

At that moment one of the guests asked for more bread and as the plate for the unleavened loaves was empty, Stephen arose, took it to a large hamper and filled it. When the mother of Mark protested that the manservant should have been called, he replied,

"If the Master from Nazareth could wash the feet of his disciples, why should I shrink from becoming a waiter on tables? This is the very least I can do to emulate him."

And then I watched with awe the graceful movements of this Stephen whom I now knew was to become the greatest layman of his time—that time of the beginning of the new movement. When he resumed his seat beside me, Mark whispered in his ear loudly enough for me to hear,

"I think the manservant followed the others to the Hill of Olives." Then he added, "As soon as we are through eating, I intend to go there, too."

"I shall remain and look after things here," replied Stephen. "I shall continue now to serve in this way until the end."

—until the end!" I thought.

Our conversation was cut short by a heavy pounding on the outer door below. No manservant being there to open it, the intruders burst in and a score of tramping feet sounded on the stairs. We at the table sat transfixed with horror as dark figures bearing torches emerged at the top of the stairway.

Judas led them. He bore no torch, but the glow of blazing brands carried by others lighted his face in a ghastly way I had never seen a face lighted before. Even the blazing light could not lighten the dark places in it, and his face seemed filled with darkness, a vast, all-consuming darkness. That face and its consuming darkness will haunt me as long as I live.

Behind him were a band of men and officers from the chief priests.

"Where is the Nazarene," demanded a centurion when they found the inner room was empty. "Whither went he?" We made no reply.

"I know," said Judas roughly. "Follow me."

But as the soldiers and Pharisees turned and followed Judas down the stairs, one figure remained. His eyes were fixed upon the young man beside me.

"Stephen!" he cried. "You here? I would never have thought it of you."

"Saul!" exclaimed Stephen. "Saul of Tarsus! What brought you hither?"

"I am on the trail of the most pernicious influence that ever endangered Judaism. I shall not cease until either he or I am destroyed."

"O Saul," replied Stephen, "You will live to regret your mistake if you join those who would persecute that man! He is the Saviour of Israel. As Moses led Israel out of bondage, this one will lead the world out of bondage. His words shall—"

"His words shall perish on the desert air." Saul's voice was sharp and filled with hate and disdain, "The words of Moses were engraved upon tablets of stone and will live till the end of Time."

"Jesus' words are engraved upon the human heart," answered Stephen, "and will live through all Eternity."

"Be careful," Saul warned. "If you speak such heresy, the stones, the very stones that Moses' words are written upon, will fall upon you and destroy you, will rain upon you and crush you."

"Be careful, Saul of Tarsus," and Stephen spoke with courage that amazed me, "lest the words of Jesus burst upon your heart someday and destroy all that remains of the proud Saul."

These two young men continued to face each other for a few moments—a tableau that I shall never forget—and then Saul turned and hurried away to overtake the footsteps now vanishing in the distance. The steady tramp of their feet beat upon my aching heart as a dirge that accompanies the march of death.

Mark, apparently bursting with foreboding and curiosity, rose and drew the soft folds of

CHAPTER 30

A NIGHT OF DARKNESS

ALL THE TERRORS of the universe were let loose that night. I found myself wandering the streets of Jerusalem alone, knowing in my heart that the ones I looked for I should not find. How true were the words of Jesus, "You shall be scattered, every man to his own!" I knew at last how a lost sheep must feel.

Then suddenly right out of the night I came upon Simon Peter. I had never seen him so distraught. It was hard to believe that a man such as he could be so shaken. His hand was trembling as he laid it upon my arm. He kept wetting his lips in a vain effort to regain composure.

"All evil forces are unleashed tonight." His voice was tired and cracked. "They have taken the Master. Hate is in their hearts. They cannot be appeased. Something terrible is going to happen. I can feel it in the air."

Certainly there was psychic disturbance. I never felt a night so heavy with foreboding.

"And I—I failed him," there was a catch in his throat. "Yes, John and James and I all failed him. He took us with him into the garden to help him in prayer and all three fell asleep. 'Could not you watch with me just one hour?' the Master said. And when we awoke the officers were there with lanterns." Peter stifled a sob.

"And I did another awful thing, a foolhardy thing. They are on my trail now—I know they are on my trail. I resisted a Roman officer and the offense is death. There is no need served by death alone. Much value for the future is gained by living. Oh, I am quivering all over."

We entered the glow of a fire which some Passover guests, not able to find rooms in the overcrowded city, had lighted in the courtyard of a public building.

"Let us warm ourselves a moment," he said. The night air was cool and sharp. An uncanny chilliness was abroad.

"Yes, let us warm ourselves," I said, looking at Peter who was still trembling. We stepped into the circle of light and Peter at once stretched his hands out before the fire. The penetrating heat striking his body for a moment made him tremble more violently than before.

"Cold, friend?" asked an old man with a white beard.

"Yes," said Peter, his teeth chattering. "A chilly night!"

Suddenly a young woman joined the group, hardly more than a girl.

"You should be home in bed," remarked the old man. "Little do you know what is going on, grey-beard. I am a maidservant of the High Priest and we are a busy household tonight. I know secrets that will shake all Jerusalem tomorrow."

Peter's knees began to give way. "Very chilly night," he quavered.

The girl glanced up, then looked at him steadily and charged in mocking, bantering tones, "Aha! You were with Jesus of Nazareth, too!"

"I do not know anything." Peter was now trying desperately to control himself. "I have no idea what you mean."

Just then from a coop back of the inn nearby a cock crowed lustily. The maidservant turned to the ring of bystanders around the fire. "I insist that fellow is one of them."

Peter's voice became sharp, "I swear I do not know the man."

The maidservant was silent and all would have been well had not the old grey-beard said in a tone of deep conviction, "To be sure you are one of them. Certainly you are a Galilean, Why, your accent betrays you!"

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Suddenly from around the turn in the road there emerged a troop of Pharisees and officers of the High Priest. Peter broke out cursing and swearing:

"I declare I do not know the man you mean!"

As the troop of soldiers went tramping by I saw a flash of the familiar garment all of one piece and woven from above! "Jesus of Nazareth!" I exclaimed.

At the words all those around the fire turned and stared as the man of Galilee passed. I caught his eye, so deep in sorrow, resting upon Peter with the same look he must have had in Gethsemane.

"I lost Judas," the look said. "Now I lose you, too, Peter, Peter—my rock. Do I lose you, too?"

Suddenly from the kitchen coop back of the row of buildings the cock crowed again. In deep despair and remorse Peter's eyes met his Master's. He dropped his head in his hands and sobbed. Presently he pulled at my garment and we stole away.

"And to think!" moaned Peter. "I wasn't being quizzed by officers or soldiers or Sanhedrin! Only a little girl meaning nothing. Why did I do it? Why did I do it? Please leave me. I want to go off and hide myself."

So I went away and left him staring at the lights in Pilate's windows.

All night long I wandered the streets of Jerusalem in agony. Knowing the triumph that was coming at the end of all this, when Jesus would rise from the tomb, it would have seemed that I could have faced that period of suffering as a temporary interruption in the stream of All-Good, as a woman who is in labor, as Jesus had put it, rejoices when a manchild is born. But what oppressed me like a weight that almost stopped my breathing was the scene I had just witnessed of Peter's denial—and back behind that, the picture of the sleeping and seemingly indifferent disciples in the garden of Gethsemane. To think that Jesus had to face all this "scattering" alone. And now there was a third agony—the way the disciples were so easily being drawn away from him at the words of accusation heard on every hand—the words of the Sanhedrin and the mob.

When morning came and people began to stir in the streets, I went seeking right and left, hoping to find someone in whom I could awaken concern for this poor forsaken One, who alone in this age, carried the love of God in his heart. If I were merely dreaming this, my dream was not a dream right now but a nightmare, for I was wandering that early dawn in a world of separate souls.

I stopped a milk vendor, coming in a cart drawn by goats.

"A good man is being crucified this day. Cannot we do something to prevent it?" I pleaded.

"What is that to me? Besides, they say he preferred the association of publicans and harlots to men such as me. He denounced my religious leaders and said that in three days he would destroy the capital temple. Please do not delay me."

I stopped a rough-faced, bearded man in working clothes. "He deserves to die!" he declared fiercely. "We offered to make him King if he would lead us against the Roman tyranny. And after the great buildup we gave him for over two years, ending in a triumphant march into Jerusalem, he double-crosses us and turns us down. He tells us to be meek and lowly. Let him taste the fruits of his own meekness and lowliness today and see exactly where it gets him."

After that I ceased to look anywhere for help. I could see why Jesus kept silent when being grilled by Pilate. Everything, anything he said would be turned against him by Pilate or by the Pharisees or by someone in the crowd.

At last I met Philip and Thomas, and received the hardest blow of all.

Said Philip, "We begin to wonder, as John the Baptist wondered when he was in prison, whether this one is truly the Messiah or whether we should look for another."

I groaned.

"You see, all the good religious leaders think he was possessed of Beelzebub," said Thomas. Perhaps he is a fanatic and not the Son of Cod. Perhaps our devotion was a kind of hypnotism; some demon may have controlled us. We could hardly think outside his teachings when we were with him, but when we are separated now, far enough away to see things in perspective, some of his teachings do sound foolish—"Turn the other cheek.' 'The last shall be first.' "

I could stand no more, so I stopped him before he could go further.

"Will you be there?" I demanded.

"Where?"

"At the crucifixion?"

"No, we couldn't possibly stand it," said Philip. "And we would be taking the risk of being caught and accused of helping to spread his teachings if we did. And what good would that do—except to suffer with him?"

"Besides," said Thomas, a little apologetically, "Simon, the Zealot, advises us to try to forget this whole experience. Jesus failed, and so have we. Let's go back to our fishing."

"So that is where you are going?"

"Yes, that is where we are going."

And they left—and a great loneliness engulfed me. When the crowd came pressing by, moving toward the hill of Golgotha, I went with them.

