

him. That a Roman should bend his pride to speak so to a Jew! Then the very humbleness of the request maddened him the more. His contempt overflowed.

"If you could save my sister's life, I would not profane our house," he said. "I would rather let her die. Understand this. If you try to walk through that door, I will kill you."

Marcus was still a soldier. His face went white, his eyes glinted with steel, and his hand moved of its own accord to his side. The two young men stood eye to eye, neither one giving way. Then the Roman heeled about and strode away, his shoulders rigid.

If she is dead, Daniel thought. I will go after him now. I will have that at least.

Leah still lived, but barely. She did not know that he had returned. She lay silent, with no strength to cry out against the demons. She had surrendered to them utterly.

In the afternoon heat Daniel must have slept a little. Sleeping and waking were all one endless sameness. But a sound brought his head up, and he saw the door of his house opening. Framed in it, against the sunlight, stood Jesus in his white robe. Dazed, Daniel struggled to his feet. Jesus moved through the door, touching with his fingers the mezuzah as he passed. Behind him came Thacia.

Jesus did not speak. He moved quietly to Leah's mat and stood looking down at her.

Thacia came swiftly to Daniel's side. "We were away," she whispered, "with Joel in Jerusalem. Joktan just found me this morning."

Daniel scarcely heard her. He saw only that luminous figure. Jesus had come! He struggled to believe. Jesus had come to his house! He wanted to cry out to him, to go

down on his knees, but he was afraid. Something about the quietness of Jesus held him silent. Jesus sat down beside Leah, and motioned for Daniel and Thacia to sit also, at the other side of the room. Then he bent his head and covered his face with his hand and seemed to rest.

If I could speak to him! Daniel thought with longing. If I could tell him it is my fault, that I have done this to Leah!

Although he held his breath and made no sound, Jesus raised his head, and his eyes met Daniel's. There was no need to speak. Jesus knew. He understood about Leah. He knew that Daniel had rejected him. His eyes, searching and full of pity, looked deep into the boy's and saw the bitterness and the hatred and the betrayed hopes and the loneliness. And then he smiled.

Unable to endure that smile, Daniel bent his head. Suddenly, with a longing that was more than he could bear, he wanted to stop fighting against this man. He knew that he would give everything he possessed in life to follow Jesus.

Even his vow?

He tried to cling again to the words of David that had always strengthened him. *He trains my hands for war-*

But Jesus said that the Victory was God's promise. He called men to make ready their hearts and minds instead.

*Was it possible that only love could bend the bow of bronze?*

He sat trembling, glimpsing a new way that he would never see clearly or understand. We can never know, Simon had said. We have to choose, not knowing.

To know Jesus would be enough.

Almost with the thought the terrible weight was gone.

In its place a strength and sureness, and a peace he had never imagined, flowed around him and into his mind and heart.

After a long time he felt Thacia's hand close over his own. He raised his head and saw tears on her face.

"Look," she whispered.

He had forgotten Leah! Now, seeing how still she lay, he thought that she must have died. Jesus had risen and stood looking down at her. Then, as Daniel watched, he saw her eyelids move and lift falteringly. The blue eyes were blank, as though she came from a deep sleep. She looked up into the master's face, and slowly her eyes filled with wonder.

"Jesus?" she breathed.

Into Jesus' face came the old smile with which he had so often looked at the children who crowded around him.

"It is-all right?" she whispered.

"It is all right," Jesus answered. "Do not be afraid."

With a sob, Daniel stumbled forward to his knees, hiding his face, feeling the tears he had never known since his childhood, not on the night of his father's death or in all the years between, hot and liberating against his hands. He thought he felt a touch on his shoulder. When he lifted his head, Jesus was gone. He saw Thacia, her own tears shining on her cheeks, her eyes like stars.

"Daniel-" Leah said, very faintly.

Not daring to speak, he reached out and touched his sister's hand.

"I know how she felt," she whispered, "the girl-Jairus' daughter-you told me about."

"I know too," he said humbly.

He heard Thacia catch her breath, and turned and

looked into her eyes. He knew he was not worthy of the gift he saw there, but he knew that at last he was free to offer her all that he had in return. In that one brief look they made a new vow together.

"How light it is," Leah murmured, "even with Jesus gone."

Gone! In sudden realization, Daniel sprang to the door. He could see Jesus far down the street, already half hidden by the people who always gathered wherever he went.

"I must go after him!" he cried. "Before anything else, I must thank him."

He flung himself out the doorway - and stopped.

Across the street the Roman soldier stood alone under the broiling sun.

Haltingly, Daniel walked, not after Jesus, but across the road, till he stood before the boy. He had to try twice before the words would come. "My sister will get well," he said, his voice harsh. "The fever has left her."

A quick guttural sound burst from the soldier. Daniel looked away. Who could believe that a Roman - ?

"I think she would want to say good-bye to you," he said.

The soldier waited, not understanding. Daniel looked down the road and caught the white flash of Jesus' robe. Then he straightened his shoulders.

"Will you come in to our house?" he asked.