

that they would let us choose for ourselves."

Daniel did not dare to look at his friend.

"The trouble is," Joel said. "Thacia is sixteen years old, and she refuses to choose."

Still Daniel could not look up. He knew that Joel had spoken straight from his heart, with the impulsive frankness that would always be Joel's way. But he knew too that his friend's loyalty had always blinded him to the truth.

"She must choose," he burst out now, too harshly. "Someone of her own kind. Your father is right. And you will have to choose too, before long."

"And you?" Joel asked quietly.

"I have no choice. How can a man who is sworn to vengeance and death take a wife?"

The angry words echoed in a silence that neither of them could seem to break.

"One more thing," Joel said finally, with an effort. "It is Jesus. Somehow he must be warned. He has enemies everywhere."

"You mean Herod's men?" asked Daniel, relieved that Joel had turned to a safe subject.

"He knows about those. I mean the elders of the synagogue. The rabbis and the scribes. They can't understand him. They're furious at the things he says and does. He is too free with the Law. They say he is trying to destroy all the authority of the Temple. Some of them even say he is in league with the devil."

"Does it matter what they say? Jesus pays no attention."

"He must pay attention now. Some of them hate him so much-I think they would kill him if they could. Will you try to warn him?"

## CHAPTER 21

It was good of you to come, Daniel. But do you think Jesus does not know all this?"

Annoyed, Daniel looked back at Simon. He had walked all the way from the village at the end of a long day's work. Twice a slanting rush of rain had drenched him to the skin, and the night air, heavy with fog, had only chilled him and not dried the clothing that clung to his body. He had fought his way through the tattered crowd in the garden, and now that he had reached the door they refused to let him approach Jesus. The teacher, they explained, was conferring with important men who had come all the way from Jerusalem to question him. Now

Simon brushed off Joel's urgent warning with no more than a shrug.

"Forgive me, Daniel," Simon said now, seeing that he had offended his young friend. "We are worried too. These priests from Judea-they haven't given him a moment's peace for three days. They pretend to be so respectful, and they're only trying to trap him into saying something they can prove is blasphemy. It keeps us all on edge."

"Why does he stay here if he knows he is in danger?"

Daniel did not dare to speak, but almost without thought he moved into the small circle cast by the lamp and raised his head till the light fell upon his face.

"Come up, my friend," said Jesus softly.

The upper chamber was completely bare and clean. On the floor was unrolled the thin mattress on which Jesus was to sleep.

"Sit down," said Jesus, and he himself sat, opposite Daniel, on the floor of rolled earth. "Why are you troubled?" he asked.

"I came to warn you," Daniel hurried into his errand. "Joel says you are in danger. He says they have turned against you in the synagogue. He's afraid they will try to kill you."

"Thank you," said Jesus gravely. "It is kind of you and Joel. Now, tell me, why are you troubled?"

Shamed, aware that he should not disturb the master's rest, Daniel sat struggling with his conscience. Then his misery spilled over. "Because I don't know where to turn. Everything has failed. Everything I hoped and lived for."

"What did you live for?"

"Just one thing. Freedom for my people. And vengeance for my father's death."

"Two things," said Jesus. "Not one."

"They are the same. I will strike for both at once."

"Are you sure?" Jesus asked.

The familiar tightness pulled at Daniel's mouth. He had come for help, not questions.

"All I wanted was a chance!" he went on. "I thought it had come at last, and I worked and planned for it. Then it all went wrong somehow. All I have is another debt to pay-Samson."