

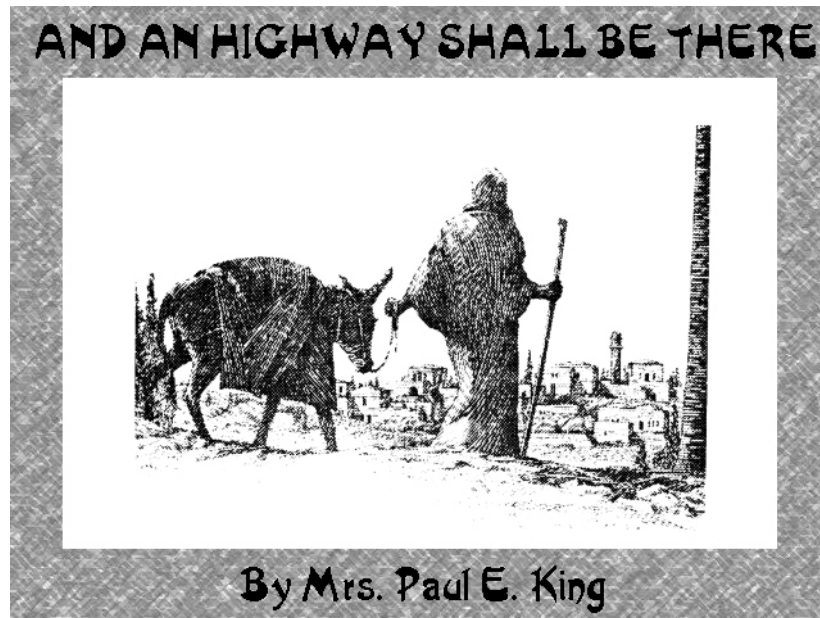
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AND AN HIGHWAY SHALL BE THERE
(Part 1)
By Mrs. Paul E. King

"Move along, Monarda." The man prodded softly in a gently-kind way as the desert sun sank beyond the rim of the horizon. "You're a good beast," he added in a barely audible voice to the donkey. "Such a faithful beast. Yes, so very faithful." As though to add emphasis to his words of praise, the man halted the animal and, from a sack which the donkey carried upon his back,

he took out a generous supply of grain which the gentle-mannered beast ate hungrily and gratefully.

"We'll rest awhile, Monarda, then we'll journey again. Yes, that's what we'll do. It's cooler at night and will be less tiring for each of us. It can't be much farther anymore. I feel we're nearing the end of my search. Oh, I can scarcely wait," and the man, talking all the while, unfastened the packs upon his donkey's back and dropped them gently to the desert floor, saying, "Rest, my faithful Monarda. Rest. Here, have a drink of water. We must go easy on the water. We will replenish our supply when the Lord Jehovah leads us to a well. And there will be one, my gentle Monarda; He who has led me in my search will not forsake me in the matter of water. Then you can drink to your fill, my Monarda, and I will fill every flask and canteen to its very brim."

The donkey whinnied softly and gently nuzzled the arm of his owner then dropped to the desert floor and rolled over and over in carefree abandon. The man smiled his approval, then, pillowing his head on one of the packs, he fell asleep, knowing Monarda would stay nearby. Before he slept, he thought about the wonderful highway of which his Uncle Ezra had talked as they sat on the parapet on a recent night.

It was a beautiful night, that night; he would never forget it. Aunt Anna had tucked the children into their little beds at their usual time while Uncle Ezra and he had gone up to the roof to talk. It was cool on the roof and the stars were wondrously bright, twinkling like diamonds and sapphires above them. They sat for a long while, Uncle Ezra and he, saying nothing, watching the stars and thinking their own thoughts. In the silence, peace reigned supreme. The feeling was so sweet and intense -- that of peace -- until tears fell from the eyes of both of them.

"Ah, my dear Joseph," Uncle remarked. "Only today, I heard Zechariah read from the scrolls. It was marvelous. Wonderful. Wonderful! I listened closely, not wanting to miss a word. He read from Isaiah. What a prophet! What a man of God, Isaiah! It is as though God unfolded the future before him. Our future, my dear nephew. Our future! Did you hear me, Joseph?"

"I heard you, Uncle Ezra. Yes, I heard you. What did the Word say?"

"What did Zechariah read? Oh my dear Joseph, the words were like a soothing balm: '. . . the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose.

"It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: . . .'

"I shall give you only excerpts tonight, dear nephew; the highlights of what was read and the things I was able to memorize. Oh, it was wonderful! Someday I shall be able to memorize it all -- perhaps by the next reading, even, as the Almighty helps me and quickens my mind. Listen to this,

"Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; he will come and save you.

"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. . . .

"And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean thing shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.'

"It ends on a wonderful note of victory, declaring that 'the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads. . . .'

"It is for a future time, so said Zechariah, and while we cannot fully understand its full meaning now, I believe every word of it, Joseph."

"It . . . it's beautiful!" he had answered almost breathlessly in little more than a whisper. "Is there anything else? I mean, did you hear anymore news concerning the Man in Jerusalem? He is quite outspoken, I believe you said to your brother one day when I was in your shop."

"I only know that some think He is our Messiah. And Zechariah said the news that is reaching his ears is that the Man performs many miracles; great and mighty miracles. Why, He even told one man that his sins were forgiven, so Zechariah said. But of course, Zechariah was not there to hear this with his own ears, you must remember."

"But I believe it, Uncle Ezra: Yes, I believe it. Why should it be thought a thing incredible and impossible for Him to forgive sins when He does all other miracles? I feel a burning desire deep within my breast to see for

myself this man." Smiting his hands together he had added, "Yes, that is it! I will journey to Jerusalem and see for myself if all these things are true, and then I will bring you word of everything I have seen and heard. Oh, I am excited, Uncle; I feel I am about to experience the greatest miracle ever in my life."

"Tighten the reins of your excitement a bit, Joseph, lest you have a letdown that will drop you to the very dungeon of depression and disappointment."

"I doubt that will happen, Uncle. In my heart I feel that I am on the verge of a miracle for my life."

"You may be right, dear boy. Still, a word of caution is in order. When do you think you will be leaving?"

"As soon as possible. Tomorrow, maybe. Now that I have decided, I want to be gone as quickly as possible. Monarda's faithful and sure-footed and strong; he will be my companion and carry my needs. . . ."

He looked up at the stars now, recalling that he could scarcely sleep for the excitement that surged like currents through his body. And long before daylight, he had readied the packs and he and Monarda were on their way.

Joseph smiled now, remembering the impatience of his faithful donkey. Monarda seemed to know that they were going to be taking a trip; he had stomped his feet and whinnied repeatedly while things were being readied; and when the packs were strapped securely on his back, Joseph felt the animal smiled at him, as he turned his head toward his master and showed his teeth. That was Monarda; his Monarda, he thought, as his eyes closed and he was immediately asleep.

It was still dark when he awoke and got to his feet, feeling revived in body and spirit. Monarda whinnied softly and pranced impatiently. Joseph slapped the faithful animal gently on his flanks then stroked his neck and said softly, "We're going, Monarda. We're going, just as soon as I have given you some grain and water. Today, my faithful Monarda, we will be there. Oh, that I may find Him! But I shall. Yes, will; Jehovah God will direct my steps and lead me to where He is. Such a busy man they say He is, and always doing good."

The donkey whinnied again then playfully nuzzled Joseph's tunic.

The sun was midway in the heavens when Joseph caught sight of the city. How beautiful Jerusalem was! How magnificent! His heart felt like a hammer inside his chest, so great was his excitement and expectation. Now to find Him!

Stopping the donkey, Joseph bowed his head and prayed, "Direct my steps, Most Holy God; please, this moment, direct my steps to Him."

They moved ahead, the donkey sure-footed, faithful and obedient, Joseph, contemplative, sober and prayerful.

The city was bustling with activity as the pair entered and Joseph, seeing a group of men clustered together near a market place, asked quickly, "where is He, the Prophet? Some think He may even be our Messiah? Please, where is He? Tell me, please."

"You must mean the One who so recently has come among us and does great and mighty miracles," a kindly, bearded man replied.

"Yes. Yes. Do you know Him? Have you seen Him?" Joseph's questions poured from his lips nonstop.

"Seen Him? Ah, my boy, once you have seen Him and heard Him you will never forget Him. Never! He speaks strange things; new things. . . ."

"Like what?" Joseph interrupted, laying his hands on the old man's shoulders and probing the depth of his eyes. "What new things, Sir? Please tell me."

"Patience, my boy. Patience," the old one answered as he brushed tears from his eyes. "The things He has said are . . . well, they are awesome. . . ."

The sentence trailed.

"Like what?" Joseph asked eagerly; anxiously.

"He said we are to love our enemies." It was said with respect and an awesome fear. "No longer is it an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth; no. No! It is love! If our enemy hungers, we are to give him food; if he thirsts, we are to give him drink; if he is in need of clothing, we are to provide him with such."

"It's . . . marvelous!" Joseph exclaimed reverently. As though he hadn't heard, the old one continued, "He said, 'Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.' 'Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.' 'Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.' 'Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' 'Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.' 'Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.'"

"Oh, it is wonderful. Wonderful!" Joseph cried. "I must find Him. I must! Zechariah, our scribe, read from Isaiah's prophecy about the desert blossoming like the rose, and about an highway that would be called The highway of holiness. I mean to find it, this wonderful highway. He will be able to point me to it and get me on it. I know He will: for, Sir, though I have never seen Him or heard Him, I believe in Him."

A smile tugged ever so slightly at the wrinkled corners of the old one's mouth as he replied softly, "This man, this miracle-performing man, said, 'I am the way, the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.' And he said, too, 'A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another: as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

"Sir," Joseph cried, "are you one of His disciples? Do you not love Him?"

"The answer is yes to both questions. I am convinced that it is He who is our Messiah. However, many of our people are much upset over this Miracle-working Man. They are highly agitated and incensed greatly because of His teachings. Some are seeking ways and means by which to silence His lips forever. . . ."

The sentence trailed in threatening and menacing meaningfulness. Joseph shivered and trembled with fright and fear. In subdued tones, he ventured the question that formed in his mind: "How . . . how do you know these things?" he asked tearfully.

Casting furtive glances over his shoulder and looking around him cautiously, the old one motioned Joseph closer to his side. Taking one of Monarda's halter straps in his hand, the man led the donkey and Joseph away from the crowd, saying gently, "Come with me; we will go elsewhere. Then we will talk. It is not safe to speak too freely or openly here anymore. Strange things are taking place and going on. Those of us who love this man called Jesus, the Christ of God, are hated and despised and rejected by our officials."

Joseph sucked his breath in quick-like; his heart hammered wildly inside his chest. In swift and instantaneous obedience, he followed the old man through the jostling, milling noisy crowd.

(Part 2)

They walked in silence for a long while, pushing their way through one after another of the crowds that filled the cobblestone streets of Jerusalem. Joseph, alone with his thoughts, wondered when he would find Jesus. More than anything, his heart was set upon seeing him and asking him how to find the highway of holiness of which Isaiah had written. The old one, white bearded but still agile, continued walking, leading the donkey, with Joseph by his side, farther and farther away from the city.

So entrenched in his silent thoughts was Joseph that he did not notice until the white-bearded, old one stopped abruptly beneath an olive tree and sat down on a rock, that they were now some distance away from the city with its noise and clamor, its sights and smells and sounds.

"Sit, my son," the old man bade cordially as he turned the donkey loose to drink of the refreshing, sweet water nearby and to graze the outcroppings among the rocks on the hillside. "I am Judah. My lineage goes back to the tribe of Judah. I am an old man, as you can see. I have waited many long years for the Messiah. And now that He has come, they seek to kill Him. . . ." The man's shoulders now shook with sobs.

"Kill Him?' Joseph was incredulous. "Why?" he asked, pacing nervously before the man. "For what reason would they dare to think such a thing, even?"

"For doing good," the old one answered simply and tearfully. "Even now, they are plotting His death. . . .

"No! No! How do you know these things?"

"It is common talk in the market place, my boy. And, too, one of my brother's sons is one of the Miracle-Worker's chosen twelve disciples. He chose twelve men to be, well, special disciples. Did you not know this?" Judah asked softly.

"No, sir. No, I didn't know. What . . . what do they do? Oh, that I, too, could be chosen. Sir . . . Judah, perhaps I have not been chosen, as you say He did those twelve, still, in my heart, I am one of His disciples. Whom having not seen, I believe in! Fain would I be content to wash and dry His dusty feet and to bring fresh water from the furthest well for Him."

Judah smiled a pleasantly-pleased smile. "In heart, you are indeed one of His disciples. And methinks He knows this. He told Nathaniel that before Philip called him to go with him to see this One called Jesus of Nazareth, He had seen him under the fig tree. It made a believer out of Nathaniel: he said, 'Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.'"

Joseph's eyes were large with wonder and amazement. Reverently, he cried out, "He is the Messiah; our King! But why would anyone wish to kill Him? Where are these men? Whom are they? We must stop them! We must!"

"That is impossible," Judah declared. "Even now, so I have heard, there is a conspiracy on to have Him put to death. Those of us who are believers in Him and followers of His, have put our lives in jeopardy by defending Him and stating that He is, indeed, the Christ of God, our Messiah. But come, the day is fast waning: night falls quickly. You and your beast need food and shelter: you must remain with me. It is not safe for you to sleep on the streets nor along the road. My Kezia may be old but she has yet to meet her equal in cooking and keeping the house. Oh, Jehovah God has been good to me!

Kezia will be overjoyed to have a young man to cook for again. Our last son, Joseph, drowned while on a fishing vessel. . . . "

"Joseph! That is my name, kind Sir."

"This will make your coming even more special and blessed for my Kezia then," Judah declared with a catch in his voice. "Now come, we must hasten."

Again they walked in silence. Joseph pondered the words spoken by his kind benefactor, scheming and formulating plans in his mind how best to help the Miracle-Worker escape from the hands of His ruthless enemies. Oh, he must find Jesus. He must! An entire day gone by and still he hadn't so much as had a glimpse of Jesus! He felt restless and impatient.

"Yonder is the brook Cedron," Judah announced, pointing to a silver ribbon of stream, breaking in upon the moody, brooding thoughts of Joseph. "And there is the garden, my boy. Ah, the garden! Often, Jesus resorts to the garden for prayer. He is a praying man, this Jesus of Nazareth. My home is nearby."

"Oh that I might find Him, Judah; this Christ of God!"

"You will, my boy, you will. Before you leave, you will see Him. He is always busy, doing good. I saw Him make a blind man to see, and I was in the crowd when He raised a man from the dead. 'Lazarus come forth,' He cried, and out walked Lazarus, alive! I never dreamed I would see what I have been seeing with my own eyes since He came into our midst. Oh, my soul sometimes feels it cannot take much more of what it has been beholding, so full is it. Our Messiah is here, Joseph, in person! and I, an old man, have been favored by Jehovah God to see Him and to speak with Him and to him."

"I wish I knew where He is: I would go to Him. I would befriend and defend Him."

"Ah, but you do not understand, dear boy: you would be marked. There is a crowd out there that hates Him. And they hate His followers also."

"I would feel it an honor to be 'marked,' Sir. A high honor."

Judah turned and looked lovingly at his guest. His eyes shone with respect and pride for Joseph. "May Jehovah God bless you with a special blessing," he said hoarsely, as he plodded onward.

It was early dusk when they entered a neat and well-kept courtyard. "Welcome to our home," Judah said, as he led the way inside the enclosure and called softly to his wife, "Kezia, my love, we have company for supper."

A smiling, pleasant-faced woman greeted them from the open doorway, saying, "It is always good to have company, Judah. So, tonight we have a young man. Yes, a fine looking young man."

"This is Joseph, Kezia," Judah said softly. "He has come a long way -- to see Jesus of Nazareth."

Kezia's smile broadened. Then, in the softest, sweetest voice he had ever heard, Kezia cried, "What joy you have brought by coming under our roof, Joseph! Jehovah God has filled me with His blessing. Come in, my son. Come in. The meal is ready: I shall lay down another plate. And for the donkey, there is grain; plenty of grain."

"I will take him beneath the shelter with my own beasts, Joseph," Judah remarked, as he led Monarda to a far side of the courtyard then returned quickly for the evening meal.

"Strange things are happening in Jerusalem, my dear Judah," Kezia said soberly and brokenly as they sat around the table partaking of the delicious food.

Judah raised his eyes quickly from his plate and searched his wife's face for the meaning of the statement.

Kezia passed the plate of freshly-baked, heavy, brown bread to Joseph as she said, "Sarah's son, Jacob, came home from Jerusalem with frightful news. It . . . it seems unreal, my dear Judah: but I fear it is only too real."

"What is it, my Kezia? Tell me, please."

"Jacob works in his uncle's shop on the main thoroughfare in the heart of Jerusalem, as we both know. And today, while on an errand outside the shop for his uncle, he came upon a group of men who were making plans to... to silence the wonderful Jesus of Nazareth forever. They said He -- Jesus -- is getting too many followers and. . . ."

"Did they know Jacob heard what they said?" Judah asked quickly. "Where were they? These men, I mean? Jacob's life may be in danger, Kezia." Fear registered in the old man's eyes; fear for Sarah's son.

"Sarah said Jacob's errand took him near the temple site. It was while he was hurrying in and out among the trees and bushes surrounding the area, trying to make time by avoiding the crowded and well traveled streets, that he heard angry voices. He stopped dead-still, fearful that anyone may see him and label him a spy or, at the least, an eavesdropper, and that's when their voices floated plainly and clearly to his ears.

"Sarah said he was extremely agitated and nervous when he got home after work. He's sure these wicked men are part of a plot to get rid of Jesus of Nazareth."

"Did he see their faces, Kezia? Did Sarah say?"

"He stayed hidden behind a thorny bush," Kezia said. "Also, there was a rock there, which provided a hiding place for him. He said the voice of one of the men sounded much like one of the disciples of Jesus; but he couldn't be sure, since he dare not make his presence known by revealing his hiding place.

Joseph's body tensed, and the food which he had been enjoying and relishing before hearing the conversation now seemed to be choking him.

"Oh, my dear, dear husband," Kezia cried, "I fear for this Jesus of Nazareth. With all the innate womanly intuition with which Jehovah God has blessed me, I fear for Jesus. Something evil is about to befall Him. Oh, Judah, what can we do?" and Kezia buried her face in her hands and wept.

(Part 3)

Joseph lay awake long after his host and hostess had retired for the night after showing him to his room. It was a comfortable room, well furnished and cool. The long journey had tired him, but the disturbing news regarding Jesus of Nazareth made sleep an elusive thing. He tossed and turned, wishing he knew where he might go to find Him. Oh, if only he knew.

The day's long walk plus Joseph's exhaustion, finally brought on the desired results; but only in part, for even as he slept, his mind was busy, busy--with dreams. Frightful dreams they were, of angry men beating, whipping and spitting upon the One whom he had learned to love and believe in though he had never had so much as a glimpse of Him, even.

He seemed to be in a palace -- or was it the courtyard of the palace?-- where a mob of angry men were discussing the outcome of a decision made by Pilate. He heard their curses, venom-filled and vile and spewing out hatred. Hatred? No! No! But they were; against Jesus of Nazareth!

He rolled over, thinking he heard someone calling Judah's name. But it too was only in his dream. Or was it?

Sitting up straight now, Joseph knew whomever was at the courtyard gate calling Judah's name out softly, almost just above a whisper, was not a dream. This was real. Someone was in need of Judah. But who could it be? And at such a late hour, too!

Slipping silently from his bed, Joseph walked to the open window and looked out. The night was too dark to see far. The stars were up in the heavens he knew, but their light was not far-reaching enough to reveal what he had hoped to know and to find out.

Hearing the voice call again and sensing the urgency in the tone, Joseph hurried along the cool corridor, calling softly, "Judah. Judah."

Not far from where he stood, waiting for an answer, he heard Judah's voice. "What is it, my boy?

Why do you call me? Are you afraid? Surely not. . . ."

"Someone is calling for you, kind sir. At your courtyard gate, Judah."

Emerging from his room with a lighted candle in his hand, Judah exclaimed, "Someone is calling for me, Joseph? Are you sure?" he asked. "The hour is late. It is a time when people should all be in their beds."

"Come with me down the corridor. You will hear for yourself then," and Joseph walked back toward his room, which was nearer the gate than Judah's and Kezia's room.

They stood in silence, listening. And then, in what sounded like a more urgent call than ever, and a soft lifting and falling of the gate's knocker, Judah heard his name being called. He recognized the voice immediately.

"It is Jason," he cried. "My sister's son needs me. Oh, Joseph," he cried, "carry the candle for me, please. My hands are feeble; they shake so when I become excited, anymore. Come, my boy, we must let him in.

He has a message for me. Something is wrong. Something has happened, for Jason would not be here at this hour unless there was a need. Or . . . or trouble."

With trembling hands, Judah unfastened the courtyard gate's lock and drew the weeping Jason inside.

"Oh, Uncle Judah," the young man cried. "It is awful! Awful! They have taken Jesus of Nazareth. . . ."

"Who, my boy? Who has taken Him?" Judah cried. "Those wicked men! They hate Him! Hate Him! They want Him killed. Why, Uncle, they went into the garden -- you know, the garden where He so often has gone for prayer. He was in the garden tonight, with His disciples. He was praying. Tonight, while others slept, He prayed! Oh Uncle Judah, they came with torches and staves and swords and . . . and Judas betrayed Him with a kiss. Judas, one of the twelve!"

Judah groaned. Tears rolled from his eyes and wet his beard. "Where is He now, Jason; the Christ, I mean?"

"They're leading Him to the high priest, with swords, Uncle! He may be there already. Oh, we must stop them! We must! Please, Uncle Judah, your words have always carried much weight in Jerusalem and in Judea and. . . ."

"Not any more, Jason. Not any more. I am despised and hated because I love this Jesus of Nazareth and have defended Him and stood up for Him in every way possible. But He told us -- those who loved Him and believed in Him and were following Him -- that if they hated Him, they would hate us also. So this is of no wonder or amazement to me. I have openly admitted to believing in Him and to being one of His devoted followers. But tell me, Jason, does your mother know you are here?"

"She knows, Uncle Judah. She sent me to you. She is weeping. And praying. She is sure they will kill Him unless we can stop them."

Joseph began pacing back and forth on the cobblestones of the courtyard. "Please, kind sir," he cried, as he faced Judah, "do something! Stop them, Judah! Your words . . . they will help. Surely, surely, this multitude of angry men will listen to one whose hair has the frost of age upon it. They will listen, and heed your words, out of respect for the hoar head. Please, Judah. . . ."

Joseph buried his face in the palms of his hands and wept openly; unashamedly. Walking to his guest, Judah spoke kindly; softly.

"My boy," he said, as his voice trembled and shook with emotion, "there was a time when my words would have been heeded and my counsel would have seemed as the counsel from heaven itself. I was respected, honored, revered and looked up to. All of this has changed since I became an acknowledged and openly-avowed follower of Jesus of Nazareth. Always, there is a price that goes with following right, and doing what is right and upright and righteous. You will be misunderstood and slandered, many times, and charged with being an heretic. You will be maligned and hated and, yes, even cast out. Such is my case. No, my boy, my words would only add fuel to the fire that rages in the breasts of these Christ-haters and Christ-rejecters. They are villains."

"But they must be stopped, Uncle Judah," Jason cried out in exasperation. "Surely, you will not allow them to . . . to . . . kill this innocent man!"

Judah turned from Joseph and faced his nephew. "Jason," he said sadly, "I would gladly lay down my life for Jesus of Nazareth, if this would

help. At least, the way I feel now I would be willing to do so. But, do you remember the words of Jesus after He healed the blind man by putting spittle on his eyes and laying His hands upon him?"

"Oh, Uncle, how could I remember everything? He said ever so many wonderful things. Deep things; profound things."

Judah sighed heavily and deeply. Then, taking a deep breath, he said, "How could I have forgotten! It all comes back to me now. Yes, I recall every word as though He had just said them. . . ."

Joseph listened with bated breath. Then, in a rush, he cried out, "What do you recall, kind sir? Oh do tell me! You have been so fortunate and . . . and blessed, to have both heard His words and to have seen Him personally. Quick, please! What did He say, about which you make reference to now?"

Judah stroked his frosty-white beard. Joseph saw tears swimming in his eyes, by light of the candle which he held in his hand.

"I cannot help but weep now, as I remember His words spoken kindly and free from any and all malice or hatred for His enemies. He said the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again."

"He said that?" Joseph was incredulous.

"Those are the Man's exact words. I remember them as though they were burned on my brain with a hot iron. At the time, I thought He hadn't realized what He said. But as I looked at Him and He focused His eyes upon me, I knew that He knew what He had said.

And I knew also, that, somehow and for some reason, He had opened His heart to those of us who were His followers; like He was, perhaps, preparing us -- or trying to prepare us -- for a tragedy that was going to befall Him somewhere along the trail of life."

"And you . . . you. . . . " Joseph couldn't say the words that had formed on his lips. It was as if someone was about to take away a most treasured gift which he had just suddenly and recently received.

"I am afraid that . . . that . . . His hour of departure has arrived," Judah declared solemnly and brokenly. "Jesus never minced words nor spoke anything but the truth. It cut sometimes, this truth; cut like a razor-sharp two-edged sword. But always, He spoke the truth."

"And this is the price of truth, then? Is this what you mean, Judah?" Joseph asked, marveling.

"In part, yes. But they hate Him also because He called them hypocrites and vipers and serpents and, even, murderers! Also, because of all the mighty miracles He has done, they hate Him; and because of His message to do unto others as we would have them do unto us. Always, the dog that gets hit, howls. But, say, I think I shall go to where He is. My words are no longer respected and revered, 'tis true. But oh, if I can only be near Him and with Him in this dark, dark hour. I know it will mean much to my own soul to let those murderous men know that, even now, I am still His devoted follower and disciple."

"Please, may I go with you, kind sir?" Joseph pleaded. "I am no mere boy, Judah: I am one score and ten plus two -- a young man!"

"I am younger than you," Jason added, looking at Joseph, "And while I am not yet a full score, I am not far from it. I too must go; for I am one of His followers.

Are you a . . . a disciple?" Jason asked Joseph quickly.

"In my heart, yes. Yes!" Joseph cried. "I have come to see Him. We have heard much about Him in our country. I have traveled far to see for myself what He is doing. I am Joseph. Your uncle was kind and gracious to me and has provided both food and shelter for my donkey and me. May Jehovah God repay him abundantly for his kindness to a stranger."

"The blessing be upon your own head, Joseph. Kezia feels as though an angel of God placed you here for this brief stay. She has been overjoyed by your presence. And now, let us hasten and dress for our journey back to Jerusalem. . . ."

(See Part 4) -- Missing