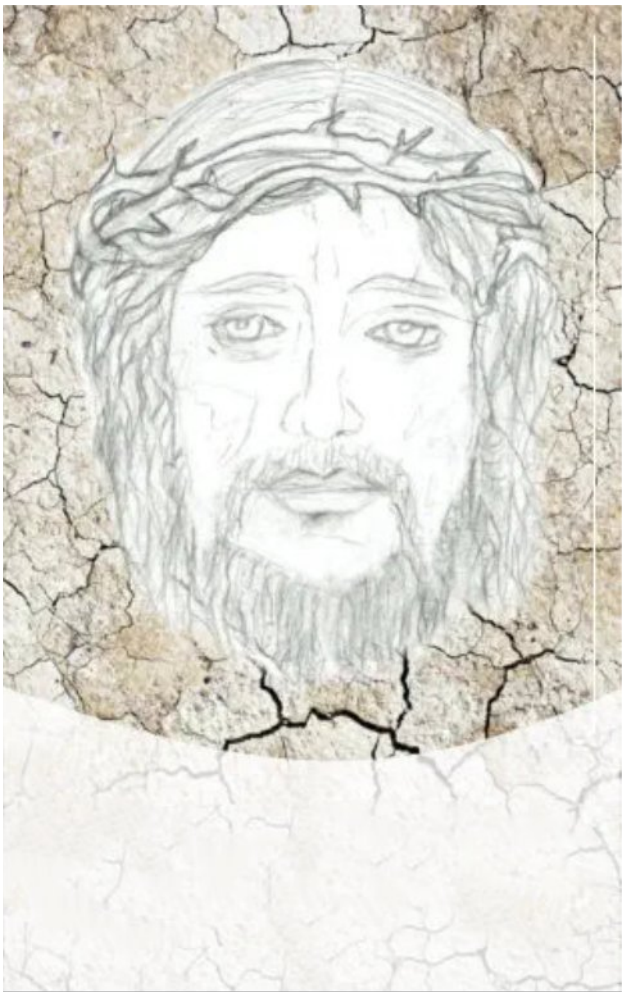
From Gethsemane to Arimathea
The Last 48 Hours



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From Gethsemane to Arimathea

In the Gardens of Gethsemane

The evening has already turned into night in the Garden of Gethsemane. Yeshua, dressed in his usual robe of white cotton, stands out against the dense, dark mass of the ancient olive trees under which he and some of his followers have, as was the custom, gathered before separating for the night.

Yehudah/Judas is by Yeshua's side. The others, seated on rocks, seem lost in thought. The sound of pebbles rolling nearby momentarily, once again, breaks the silence, but only he seems to hear it.

Yeshua looks into Yehuda's eyes and nods imperceptibly. "You will do it before the hour passes, Yehudah." The taller man averts his eyes. Yeshua cups a hand under his friend's chin to force eye contact. "The moment is fast settling in the shadows. You gave me your word."

Yehudah grumbles under his breath, "What worse favor can a man ask of his friend than that to which you bind me?"

"No favor is greater, and no friend is greater than the one bound to the promise I extracted from you." Yeshua sighs quietly. "Accept that such is my *mitzvah* to you. Do what needs to be done, my friend. Know that you make my burden lighter." He nods towards the trees where the danger lies in wait. "Think of me as the slave who sacrifices his life to obey the wish of his beloved Master for it is from *Adonai*, our one and only God, from whence comes the suffering that awaits me." Pensively, he twists an earlock around his index finger. "No matter how the situation evolves in days to come, know that I am not worth a shekel more than the weakest of slaves."

Before Yehudah can reply, Yeshua turns away to call the others closer. They look at him expectantly.

"I say to you that one of you will betray Me," he announces solemnly.
"Surely not I, Lord?' exclaims one of the men gathered in front of him.
"The Son of Man is to go," he replies, "just as it is written of Him.[1]

More inwardly agitated than he had anticipated, Yeshua speaks cryptically. His tone worries the men more than his words, which they do not fully grasp. In the branches above, an owl begins her nightly call.
"Speak words we understand, Yeshua," urges Shimon.

Yeshua furrows his brow in concentration. Long fingers weaving in and out of his earlock, a childhood habit not shed, he explains, "Yahweh spoke through the old Prophet Isaiah, may his soul be blessed," he begins again. "Far in the days when Sennacherib invaded Judea and besieged Jerusalem, the prophet spoke of a man who was wounded for our transgressions. This man, the prophet proclaimed in the fifth verse, was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him and with his stripes, we are healed." [2]

The owl stops calling into the night, and the faint sound of pebbles crushed underfoot fills Yehudah's ears more than the words freshly spoken. He senses the last of the Roman soldiers are finally assembled.

"Fear not, but rejoice for me, my friends," Yeshua enjoins, "for tomorrow, though I will no longer be one among you, remember clearly: Those who are born are destined to die, and those who died are destined to live."

Yakov and Binyamin ask their questions almost in unison, "Has the message arrived that the insurrection can finally be unleashed?" asked one.

"You are ready to lead us as our Messiah, as the leader who has been promised to us?" asked the other.

Shimon is the last one with a question. "Master, has the vision of your passing come to you uninvited?"

"What shall pass ... passes, Shimon. Talking about it is futile," Yeshua replies again cryptically. The men shuffle closer in.

Yehudah knows the content of the deal sealed between the Prefect, Pontius Pilate, and Yosef of Arimathea. Yes, he nods to himself, what shall pass will pass.

To the rich merchant of Arimathea, the Prefect had given his promise, a promise bought with a pouch heavy with gold coins and gems. This deal had come to pass the day before. It had been made on Yeshua's behalf and at the behest of the ascetic, esoteric mystics of the Issiyim sect.

Yehudah glances nervously about him. Glints of metal move silently in the shadows. His jaw tightens. He understands there can be no turning back – not anymore. Under the full glow of the moon, he deliberately delays the moment that will detach the Roman soldiers from the shadows. Only the occasional rolling of pebbles underfoot betrays their stealth. He smells them where they are, hidden behind the massive olive trees, awaiting his signal.

Yehudah anticipates the armed scuffle that will ensue. It is painfully easy to imagine how Yeshua, in spite of the daggers hidden inside the sleeves of his followers, will be shackled and driven forward at sword-point.
Yehudah prefers to think the night is his own and that, regardless of Yeshua's impatience for the moment anticipated, he will not begrudge his old friend few more minutes in this grove.

A few steps away, Yeshua is talking quietly to the men who have left their families to stand by him, the man they chose to call Master.
These men protected him as well as they respected him.
These men were solid in their belief that, since Yohannan ha-Matbil was no longer walking the land, Yeshua, in his place, would soon be the one anointed as their Messiah.

On the one hand, they thought, here was the man who would shatter the yoke of enemy dominance over their land. Here was the man who, through his immense wisdom, would return former glory to *Eretz Yafa* Israel and to her people - of that they were convinced.
On the other hand, these men also thirsted for a deeper understanding of the words

spoken by Yahweh, their one God, as written by Moses. They also desired to hear more of the words of their prophets - but not from the Temple Priests.

“Temple priests? Pawns of the Romans, all of them!” they would say, echoing the general sentiment of the population of Galilee and Judea. “No different they are than that snivelling King Herod who does nothing but lick the mud off their sandals.”

It was not until Yohannan ha-Matbil had been murdered by Herod Antipas that inside Yeshua began to germinate the concept of his own messianic destiny, according to the belief of his ancestors.
The words of the prophets and interpretations of the Torah were essential parts of the daily discussions Yohannan had led for the spiritual benefit of the ragtag retinue of men, women and Sicarii dagger-men who walked with him. He also spoke of such matters for the benefit of whoever had time off work to sit by his side and, later by that of Yeshua, after the morning ritual of *tevilah* in the *mikveh*.

More intensely dissected were the verses of the Torah that dealt with the absolute commandment to forgive whoever had stirred anger and resentment in one’s heart. This commandment was compounded by the core understanding, Yohannan’s most precious exhortation, that each individual had, as spiritual responsibilities, the double duty to atone for one’s sins and to achieve purification of the body by relentlessly submerging it in a flowing body of water.
This process involved a succession of full-body immersions, each sustained for as long as one could suspend breath, *tevilah* in the mikveh, every day in every Jew’s life, in summer as in winter, except during Shabbath.

It was in the season that followed Yohannan’s murder that Yeshua began fashioning in his own life moments that were inspired by verses of the ancients’ prophetic proclamations regarding the arrival of a messiah.
The God-sent leader they had proclaimed centuries earlier would free the people of Israel from the cruel yoke of Roman domination, bring back to Israel the grandeur and affluence it had enjoyed during the reign of King Solomon and lift the people’s spirits to unprecedented heights.

Now, in the garden, a glint of moonbeam falls low on a Roman's breastplate.
Yehudah sucks in his breath.
For Yeshua, when one recent morning, a messenger had brought him the news that Bar Abbas, his young son, had been arrested, the final cog fell into place.
From His realm, Yahweh had sealed Yeshua's destiny.
In the earthly realm, Yeshua's destiny had been sealed again by the agreement made between the wealthy merchant, Yosef of Arimathea, a covert supporter of the Jewish insurgency, and the Roman Prefect, under the patronage of the Issiyim Elders.

Upon hearing the news of Bar Abbas's arrest in the hills of Galilee, the mountainous region that was the cradle of the Sicarri insurgence, Yeshua knew it would be by divine decree that he would submit his body of flesh to the same shameful, painful death of those who are crucified.

To no one but his oldest friend, Yehudah, himself a learned man, would he confide the exaltation he felt at the thought of his body of mere flesh replacing that of his son on the Taw, the Roman instrument of torture bearing the name of the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, his alphabet.

He concealed his thoughts from his wife, Mary Magdalene. He concealed them from his mother, too. Neither woman, he knew, would be able to choose between the son and the father and the husband.
This omission, he did for the greater good. Why lace pain with doubt and more suffering in this time of great sorrow?
He concealed his thoughts, too, from the men and women who had faithfully followed him on the trails when, three years earlier, it had been decided that he would replace Yohannan ha-Matbil, his cousin, as leader of the brewing country-wide insurrection against Rome and the oppression of her Procurators.

Over the Garden of Gethsemane, the moon glides in and out of clouds. It seems to Yehudah that all creatures, the air even, have stopped breathing – except for Yeshua and the men around him.
Earlier that morning, Yeshua had confided to Yehudah that, upon hearing the news of Bar Abbas' capture, the Issiyim Elders had contacted the merchant of Arimathea,

one of their staunchest devotees.
Once Yosef of Arimathea had confirmation from Yeshua, himself, of his wish to take his son's place on a Roman stake, he had agreed that an intervention was of utmost necessity. Together, they formed a delegation to approach Pontius Pilate, and Yosef had agreed to be the spokesperson.

A substitution of bodies would be put forward – Yeshua's death in exchange for his son's. It would be the wrists and the feet of the father that Pontius Pilate's soldiers would transect with spikes. It would be the body of the father that would suffer the agony of slow asphyxiation on the Taw.
He would be the father giving his life for that of his son.

As he thought up this daunting plan, Yeshua had smiled a thin smile. This deal, he surmised, would give the bull-headed Pilate the grandest reason to glorify his pagan gods on the altar. Surely, he would think, that Jupiter himself had brought to him the gift of the big fish, Yeshua, that he, the grand and ruthless Prefect of Judea, had not dared capture himself for fear of bloodshed in reprisal.
What could he possibly lose with a deal that only ensured the release of the minnow that had floundered inside his net?

As the most concerned party in the deal, Yeshua had seen it all as clearly as the water of the village well reflected his image. The humble acceptance of death, the death of his healthy body and of his healthy mind – the death of him, man of wisdom, endowed with so many God-given abilities - would redeem all his sins, for he was accepting Yahweh's decree without a murmur of dissent.

Yet, in the hours of night, another thought had troubled Yeshua's spirit.
The sixth commandment Yahweh had given Moses was unequivocal: Thou shall not murder. Murder in his god's eyes meant the taking of any life – including one's own. There was no such thing as human sacrifice, in any shape or form, in the religion he had been preaching to all and sundry.

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1. Matthew 26:21-25 [written either in the early years of the 1st century AD or as late as the 4th century AD, a precise date of release cannot be fixed with assurance
2. Isaiah 53:5 [written circa 722 **BC**]

Father and Son

It is Yehudah who had reminded Yeshua of the inconvenient reality – the sacrifice of one's physical body for any reason was *kheth*. It was one of the gravest sins. It would result in the spiritual excision of the soul, which would wander aimlessly throughout eternity. At first, Yeshua replied heatedly that surely Yahweh's sixth commandment could not possibly apply to this very unique situation.

The son of the father - his son - had been captured by the Romans.
The Issiyim Elders had agreed that an intervention was appropriate. Yosef of Arimathea had been quick to assemble the bribe and Pilate, himself, had agreed to the deal, then, each of these steps amounted to the confirmation that Yahweh was commanding him, the father of his son, to show utter faith in the process.

Through the willingness to sacrifice his body, Yeshua would demonstrate to all faith in his God, a faith as unwavering as that of Abraham forty-two generations earlier. In that instance, however, Abraham's faith in his God was so uniquely strong that when he received the order to sacrifice his adult son on an altar of rock, Abraham proceeded with the preparations and took Isaac to the desert where the human sacrifice was to take place. Interestingly, since Isaac was a grown man, Abraham, already an old man, needed his son's complete cooperation.

And so, it is Isaac's own complete commitment to their God that made it possible for his father to carry on Yahweh's order. Their faith was rewarded. It is only at the moment of the blow that Yahweh, pleased, restrained Abraham's knife arm.

It is a similar acceptance, albeit in reverse, of Yahweh's clear pronouncement that Yeshua would proclaim from the height of the Taw and from the depth of his suffering. Yet, tentative as a caterpillar at the edge of a branch, doubt crept inside Yeshua's spirit.

By taking matters into his own hands, Yeshua was actually depriving his son, as well as himself, of the original God-sent plans each was intended to know in their own way, in their own time, in their own flesh and spirit in the course of this lifetime.

At first, all in Yeshua had rebelled against the possibility that Yahweh might cut his soul off from his people in retribution for disregarding His decree.
But, in the days that had followed the deal, while Yeshua and the Elders were awaiting news that the Roman cohort bringing Bar Abas and his fellow conspirators to Jerusalem had come through the city walls, the sickening caterpillar of doubt had become bloated as a blood-sucking leech.

Still, among the ancient gnarled olive trees and the rocks of the Garden of Gethsemane, Yeshua, pale in his robe, has his people drinking from his lips an allegory he was making up as he went, of that Yehudah is certain.

Yeshua's tale is that of a vengeful resurrected soul who knows no fear, a warrior who, by the Grace of God, has arrived from another realm atop a white, massive and winged stallion. "And, atop the horse," he said, "the heavenly being wears the crown of Solomon. Eyes red with wrath, he glowers at the worm-like folk writhing beneath the thundering hooves of his horse. Liquid carmine drips from his vest as he raises a vengeful sword. A Trumpet …" [1]

Yehudah, himself a scholar, is very familiar with the visions of resurrection from the mouths of the prophets, and Ezekiel's words move his lips.

There is no vengeful intent in any of the prophets' apocalyptic verses. How could there be when it is Yahweh who is the absolute Redeemer – the one who redeems the spirit of all those individuals whose spirit has forgiven all that had to be forgiven?
'2 Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.' [2]

Yehudah peers at Yeshua quizzically. A great icy awareness descends upon him. If all goes according to the anticipated plan, he, Yehudah, will never have the opportunity to question Yeshua about this phantasmagorical creature who, he knows, has no root inside the pages of any sacred scripture.

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1. Ezekiel 37:6
2. Daniel 12:2

The Prefect's Moment

Because Yehudah senses the bristling, ghostly impatience of the soldiers hidden in the shadows of the garden of Gethsemane, he chooses to return to his own thoughts one last time. After all, he reasoned, even the barbaric Romans do not crucify at night. Let them chew their cud a moment longer.

Yehudah returns to the mid-day hours of earlier that day. Yeshua had knocked on his door.

"Walk with me, my most trusted friend," Yeshua had said, asking Yehudah to accompany him through the hills that line the outskirts of Jerusalem. "Away from all ears," he had added. "Yehudah, only you can try to understand what needs to happen," he had begun. "The others, the ones who walk with me, they are men and women who work hard to feed their family when they are not with me. They know nothing else and aspire to nothing else. You, my friend, you are a learned one. You look far beyond the furrows that cut deep inside the fields, and you look far beyond the nets in the sea."

Yehudah had shrugged. "I understand it is your fatherly duty to protect the life of Bar Abbas. He is only sixteen, but already a fighter of note he has become."

Yeshua beamed at the mention of his son. "The boy does not take after me, but he is a worthy son and one too young by many seasons to die for the cause of our people."

Bar Abbas, a feisty rebel in his own right, and his fellow insurgents had been arrested a few days prior in Galilee. Their ambush of Roman soldiers had turned against them. As soon as the lad had eventually been presented to Pontius Pilate, hands chained tightly in front of his chest, the Prefect well knew who he was.

"Like father, like son", he had spat out as the guard shoved Bar Abbas at the Prefect's feet, the boy whose name literally meant the Son of the Father. "Pull him upright!' ordered the Prefect. Unflinching, the lad's deep-set eyes came level with

his.
The Roman gloated. Hands spread wide, he measured the boy's shoulder span. "Already tall as a man and robust as an ox fit to pull the plough," he derided.

He had reached towards the boy's face and, as quick as a desert snake, he wrapped the lad's earlock around his thick wrist. Hard, he yanked. Bar Abbas winced. Tears welled up in his eyes. His nostrils flared, but he did not make a sound. Forcefully, Pontius Pilate pulled him forward. Hobbled, Bar Abbas struggled like the unwilling calf pulled forward by the hand of a callous farmer.

"Oh, to see that meddling father of yours at the foot of your cross, come one morning soon!" sneered the Roman. "The young, aspiring Prince of Jews will do just fine for now," he mocked. "When the time is ripe, it's the King of Jews, himself, who will be nailed to Rome's cross. It is he who will be wearing nails instead of sandals!" He raised his hand. A guard stepped forward. "Take him away!" ordered the Prefect.

Before he released the boy to the guard, however, Pontius Pilate yanked again so hard on the lad's earlock still in his grasp that the lock remained in his fist.
A cry emitted from between the boy's clenched teeth as the hot bolt of pain seared his brain.

The Roman roared with laughter as the boy, in a reflex attempt to press against the wound to ease the pain, could but press to it the thick links of chain that bound his wrists. The Prefect flicked the strand of hair on the ground. It fell on the pale pavers of the courtyard. A small stain of red blood was visible beneath the discarded strand.

"Tie it around his neck!" Pilate barked. The guard picked up the clump of hair gingerly between two fingers. "Make sure Yeshua, the preacher, hears news of the arrest before the heat of the sun gathers strength. You know where to find him."

On that early morning walk through the hills, Yeshua explained in greater details how immediately upon hearing news of his son's arrest, he had sought counsel from the Issiyim Elders. He described how they, in turn, had decided to enlist the help of Yosef of Arimathea, a man of stature who, with heart and financial might, had been covertly assisting the insurgency against Rome for quite some years.

Yeshua explained how this man, whom he had not yet met, had gathered in a pouch a sufficient quantity of gems to appeal to the Prefect's well-known lust for wealth. Once a messenger had brought news that the Roman cohort that held Bar Abbas was approaching the city walls, the plan to save him from death on a Roman Tau was put into action. A few days later, the Prefect had granted Yosef of Arimathea and the Issiyim delegation an audience.

Flanked by his guards, a commanding presence in his scarlet tunic and burnished gold breastplate, Pontius Pilate had stood at full height as he watched, amused, the white-robed, bearded men, whisper among themselves in solemn, hushed tones.

By the time the group departed, the strangest political deal Pontius Pilate had ever been party to had been concluded. It was an odd deal, indeed, but not one so odd that Caesar AugustusTiberius, the Emperor, would have refused.

After all, surely, even the Emperor, himself, would agree that there was nothing to lose by throwing back into the sea a small fish when one was assured that, in doing so, he would trap the greatest catch on his side of the Roman empire. And if the old men preferred to have the moribund father of the son die of exsanguinations on the ground than on the Taw, what difference did that make to him? None.

Through the mid-morning hours, Yehudah had trekked through the fields and hills, keeping up with Yeshua's mountain-hewed pace, but he was still desperate to understand the reason behind what Yeshua wanted of him.

The sun was as hot as the sky was blue. Yehudah flicked up the hood of his robe and pulled it as far over his head as it would go, but the cloth did not afford shade to his face. "Giving your life for that of your son, that is noble, but why do you need to involve me in the charade of your arrest tonight, when the Elders and your disciples can only accompany you to Pilate for your surrender?"
He would have liked to read Yeshua's expression, but all he had to read was the back of his pale linen robe. The man's gait was as seasoned as his soles by years

of peripatetic trekking through valleys, hills and mountains. But Yehudah's soles were soft. He was a scholar, not a wandering preacher. His hours were not so much spent talking, either. What he did mostly was pore over the scrolls held in the Temple library. Scrolls and parchments were his life. They gave him a beacon from which to find his path. When he did walk through the hills, it was never as the sun approached its zenith. On such occasions, when he preferred to walk than travel atop a donkey, it was only to ingest the beauty of the land Yahweh had given him through Abraham, Isaac and Moses.

Yehudah quickened his pace and caught up with the galloping preacher. He glanced at his face. "Yeshua! Why bother with it all?" he asked sharply. "Deceit is unholy."

Yeshua kept on walking, slow to oppose a counter-argument. Then he spoke, "Have you forgotten how, upon entering the land of the Egyptians, Abraham asked his wife to say she was his sister?"

Sweat pooled between Yehudah's eyebrows and stung his eyes. "It has been said that Abraham did so to play on the lust of the Egyptians," he replied. "If they knew the beautiful Sarah was his wife, they would kill Abraham to take her. If they accepted that she was his sister, to have her, the Egyptians would have to bribe him with much wealth and prestige.

Of course, Abraham would be above temptation by any such bribes, and so they would both be safe in their union. But what is your point?" he asked sharply. "What does this have to do with the lie of betrayal you want me to perform for your play in the hours of this evening?" He tapped Yeshua on the shoulder. "Friend, we are not aimed towards any particular destination. Why walk with such haste and without pause?"

Yeshua grumbled something that Yehudah did not understand. He focused on the rocks that bit into his soles until the question that had lurked behind all his other thoughts burst forth again like a new well. "Yeshua, are you saying that it is not sinful for you to ask me to betray you? Are you saying it is not sinful for me to lie on your behalf because, though the Torah demands honesty from us in all areas of life, there are crucial times when reason dictates that a lie can exist, so as to achieve a greater good? Is this what you are thinking?"

Yeshua stopped walking. He turned to face the tall man squarely. “Yes, it is what I would want you to accept. A lie of that nature, one that leads to a greater good – a greater good for others in days to come – that lie is not equivalent to a lie which is inherently evil, such as a lie about idolatry, adultery or murder. Lies on such base matters are no more permitted that the actions themselves.”

“And how is the charade of me denouncing you tonight in Gethsemane for your greater good? Yeshua, answer me! Why have me kiss you in front of your followers and why have us watch helplessly as the Romans come to arrest you? Why not simply surrender yourself to the Prefect’s guards?”

Yeshua twisted his earlock. “My death will be shameful, my friend.” He swallowed hard. “Yahweh might cut my soul off from my people for failing his sixth commandment, by showing no faith in the way He orders the events in our lives.”

Cloying shreds of the dream he had had the previous night still clung to his consciousness. These fragments of shifting clarity were still so vivid that during the morning, he knew that the dream had, in fact, been a vision. He paused again and tweaked his beard pensively. “Oh, my friend, to tell you in words you would understand!” He shook his head slowly. On a sigh, he simply added, “I am to suffer in the most shameful of manners, yes, but my arrest must be … noble and it must be memorable. Such is the understanding that came to me in the night.”

Yehudah felt helpless. His shoulders slumped. The man is mad, he thought, absolutely mad. And yet, in his heart of hearts, he knew otherwise.

“Yes,” Yeshua plowed on. “Pilate agreed to all aspects of the deal put to him by the merchant of Arimathea on my behalf, but I must not be taken off the streets like a mangy dog, as I walk to the mikveh or to the Temple for the service. I must not walk up to the house of Pilate to be whisked away like a rat in a whole. The vision I had in the late hours of the night told me that. You, my friend, are the one who will hand me over to the Romans.
I will go to Pilate to save my son, yes, but, although it will cost you considerably, you will give me away to him. My followers will be witnesses. It will happen at the place that I favour the most, Gethsemane, where we meet at the end of each day before

we separate for the night. Our last moment together must be clean. It must be peaceful and dignified. It must remain forever engraved in your minds. You, by fate, will hand me over to the Romans. It is written. It is also written that you will be forever reviled for doing so."

Uncomprehending, Yehudah wiped his face with the edge of a sleeve and paused under the branches of an oak tree to catch his breath and gather his thoughts. He wanted to know more about Yeshua's vision.
He wanted to better understand his role in it, but Yeshua forged ahead with his argument. "Truth in some instances can be sacrificed, Yehudah. Yes, you have to do it but, mostly, you have to do this for the same reason as the sacrifice of my flesh that will begin tonight. For both of us, there is an act that we must perform for a noble cause - a cause that is much greater than you or me." Yeshua walked on, his sandals crushing soft stones under their soles.

The air was still and silent. No brook or stream lay anywhere in the distance, Yehudah knew that well and, knowing that, his already parched his throat became drier. As wax melts from the heat of the wick, the sharpness of his thoughts melted away in the heat of the morning. He licked his lips with the hard tip of his tongue.

Yeshua wheeled on his heels to proffer a lovely round fruit in shades of burnt crimson that sat in his open palm. "Here, have this," he called out softly, as he lobbed the pomegranate towards Yehudah. "Pomegranates and almonds are good friends of the parched throats, but you scholars wouldn't know such things." His eyes were smiling.

"We, scholars, know that the pomegranate is believed by the Greeks to be the symbol of ambition," Yehudah replied caustically. "Beware the numerous seeds of the pomegranate."

Yeshua countered lightly, "The belief of our ancestors is that the six hundred and thirteen seeds of the pomegranate are the symbol of fruitfulness. A good ambition is a fruitful purpose, don't you think?" he asked with a quick smile.

Yehudah rejoined, “Pomegranate, the forbidden fruit from the Garden of Eden! The means by which was forever altered the destiny that Yahweh had intended for us. He created us in his own image, but through the temptation of the pomegranate, we failed. Don’t allow the symbolism of this fruit pass you by, my friend.”
Leaning forward, Yehudah bit hard into the ruddy fruit. Juice exploded through the tough skin and glistened on his dark beard. He spat pomegranate seeds between his teeth.

In the garden of Gethsemane, the owl hoots again, jolting Yehudah out of his reverie. Yeshua’s nearness startles him. The moon has shifted through the branches and illuminates his robe. “The time has come, Yehudah, my friend,” he whispers. “Free yourself of the promise made to me by honouring it in this precise moment.” Yeshua leans closer into him. “Now!”

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The Arrival of the Pilgrims

The women, Myriam, her sister, Salome, and her sons, Yeshua's brothers, Yacov, Yosei, Yehudah and Shimon, had left their homes near Magdala twelve days earlier to begin their pilgrimage to Jerusalem. They had been filled with the exalted exuberance of the fervent engaged in a most important mitzvah. Indeed, the Torah's commandment was unequivocal: three times each year, all the males among you must appear before God.[1] Of course, like all others of Yahweh's commandments, this one was observed only by those who chose to observe it.

Though each of Myriam's sons had accomplished the pilgrimage most years since they became grown men, it had been many years since she, herself, had journeyed to Jerusalem. Life had been different for her back in those days.

In those days, Yosef, the carpenter, was still walking by her side. Though he had known for many years the affection his wife had for her uncle, Cleopas, Yosef was always protective of her first-born. He taught him the trade his own father had taught him and his father before him.

Myriam counted that already twenty years had passed since her first and last pilgrimage to Jerusalem. With her firstborn, Yeshua, with her second born, Yacov, who was still young enough to play with girls and with Yosei, a year younger, who sat mostly cradled against her atop a donkey, they had travelled. All of them, as a family, had been *olei regel*, walkers, on their way to the Jerusalem Temple. It had been the year Yeshua had reached the age of thirteen.

With a sigh, Myriam remembered how Yosef loved to recount, even many years later, the impression her eldest had made on the temple priests with his knowledge of the Torah. With them, Yeshua had brazenly debated points of difference in the interpretation of the texts and Yosef was as proud of the lad as if he had been of his own flesh.

It was almost two weeks ago that Yacov, Yosei, Yehudah and Shimon, Myriam's four other sons, had gathered to prepare their hardiest donkeys for the journey. For their kin and for their mounts, they had filled jars with water.
To fortify themselves, they had filled small jars with sweet wine from their grapes. They had sharpened their knives and they had sharpened their daggers. The women had come together to grind grain using a quern made of basalt. Myriam would make bread for the family to eat during the long journey ahead, the journey that will lead them to Pesach, Passover, in Jerusalem.

As Myriam rubbed olive oil over the mounds of barley dough to be shaped into separate round breads, she mused that in the days of the Israelites' exile from Egypt, the state of everything was clearer.

In those days, Elohim, her one and only God, spoke to Moses, and Moses took God's words to the Children of Israel. Unlike her children, especially Yeshua, Myriam did not have much empathy for the Children of Israel.

In Myriam's eyes, the Israelites had lacked Faith in Elohim and in Divine Providence. Yet, He guided them through the wanderings with a pillar of cloud by day and with a pillar of fire that gave them light by night. [2] Still, they did not have faith in His absolute protection.

Myriam liked the softness of the risen dough, yielding to the pressure of her palms. As she pinched off the amount needed for a first pita, she considered again how Elohim had safeguarded the Israelites' great herds of cattle, as He had protected the Israelites themselves, when they walked through the passageway in the Sea of Reeds. Yet, the Israelites wailed so much that they were starving that *Elohim* brought them a flock of quails that swarmed the area where the Israelites were camping. This provided enough meat for everyone to eat until sated [3] "Like infants," she murmured.

Myriam knew well the details of the Exodus from Egypt and the years passed in the Wilderness. She knew from the many conversations she had had with her eldest son before he left to study with the Issiyim in the Negev. She knew, too, from her own readings of the Torah.

Myriam laid the disks of dough side by side on a large clay platter. Invariably, at the time of Pesach, the evening conversations returned to the years the Israelites had endured in the Wilderness.
When the people of her village wailed again about the many years of hardship the Children of Abraham had to endure before Joshua led out to Canaan, Myriam argued that Elohim had decided wisely to keep all the Israelites in the Wilderness until those with the slave-mentality had died. “They were too weak of spirit to be allowed to access the Land of Israel, the land flowing with milk and honey,” she would explain quietly. “These people always looked backwards. They never looked forward.”

Myriam would patiently argue the lack of moral strength shown by the Israelites. Pointedly, she would ask, “Did they not say to Moses, and indirectly to Elohim, ‘Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness’? [4] I ask you, how could it have been better to serve the Egyptians than to be free, guided by *Elohim*, and surrendering to Faith in the Divine Providence?”

Leaving her kindred to ponder the question later, she would add, “Even the mounds of gold and silver vessels, theirs and the ones the Egyptians gave them as bribes to leave and never come back, failed to fortify their spirit. Even before the Angel of Death passed over their houses, *Elohim* had the Plan that His Children would lack for nothing while they camped in the desert.” Myriam’s soft voice would strengthen, as she made her pronouncement gravely, “Only one thing they lacked and that, Elohim was not able to give them. They had all except Faith.”

Myriam flicked droplets of milk onto the hot rock that glistened at the edge of the fire pit. When they bubbled and hissed on its smooth surface, she slapped the first pale disk of dough on its surface. “Our Devoted Father was more attentive to the hearts of the Israelites than they were to the hearts of their own sons and daughters!
Did they not know that the Lord would fight for them, even if they were too frightened to fight for themselves, even as they were too frightened to have Faith? Moses said the people were crying out in hunger and God sent the people mana, his holy food. And always, the pillars of God stood between the Israelites and the Egyptians, always protecting them.”

Myriam had been told that she owed her name to the prophetess Miriam, the sister of Moses. One day, when the urge to celebrate the Greatness of *Elohim* overtook her, Miriam, the prophetess, took the tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her with tambourines and dances. And Miriam called to them, “Sing to God!”[5] It is Miriam, the prophetess who gave the Israelites the beautiful Song of the Sea with which to rejoice. Myriam, mother of Yeshua, was grateful for the name given to her and she did her best to honor it daily.

Myriam, mother of Yeshua, also revered the name of Moses for the man, himself, was not merely a saint in her eyes. Moses, she felt, had truly been the wisest of men. His commitment to *Elohim* was deep. It was honest and unwavering. In Myriam’s eyes, that made him unique.

Yet, Myriam thought that in spite of his great wisdom, in spite of his vast knowledge, and notwithstanding his faith, Moses failed to have faith in his own Faith. “Always, he ran to Elohim like a *naar*, a boy, runs to his father for counsel and strength,” she would explain to the women. “He needed God to hold up his arm,” she added. “ God told him to stretch his hand over the river and the frogs multiplied. God told him to extend his staff over the Sea of Reeds and it parted.
God told him to strike a rock to find fresh wells of water and the rock yielded water. God told Moses to throw the Israelites gold into the fire, and the first *menorah* was fashioned in that fire.” However much Myriam wanted to feel that Moses’s faith gave him courage, she could not feed that thought. “Moses feared the people would rebel. He feared they would kill him.”

There were times when a zealot or an Elder would argue with Myriam that her understanding of such events and her knowledge of the character of Moses were flawed. At such times, she would lower her eyes and bow her head humbly. She would pull the veil further over her forehead and with quiet dignity, she would reply softly, “Rabbi, the story is yours to say now that I have said.”

In her heart of hearts, Myriam felt that it was a mistake, these days, to think that God stood further away from His Children than in the days of *Yetsi'at Mitzrayim*, the Exodus. Instead, what seemed very clear to her was that it was His children who had moved away from His Radiance and that, though they tried to honor the *mitzvoth* He

commanded, the people only followed the commandments they found easiest to follow. To atone for their weakness, they found it fair to offer Him burnt offerings in exchange for His Forgiveness." In that understanding, Myriam and her eldest son concurred.

A few steps away, Myriam watched Shulamit work near another fire. Shulamit was her only daughter. She had named after the peasant maiden who, in the Song of Songs, in spite of young King Solomon's already considerable retinue of wives and concubines, had captured his heart with her simple beauty.

Shulamit, almost as tall as Myriam Magdalene, was chatting companionably with the other women, as their hands deftly shaped unleavened *matzoth*. These, they would keep very separate from Myriam's round breads as, in commemoration of the Israelites' precipitous flight from Egypt to the Wilderness, only unleavened bread was allowed during the days of *Pesach*. These, they would eat over the period of *Pesach*.

The women made cheese from their goats' milk, and they dried the flesh of a lamb in a clay oven. For each in their clan, into the donkeys' panniers, they had stored a change of robes as well as a blanket of woven sheep wool with which to ward off the cold chill of the nights.

Then came the day the family was ready to guide their laden donkeys to the appointed place, at the foot of the mountain where they would join the caravan.

Though tiring and arduous by nature, combined with the tedium of hours atop donkey backs, and hours of walking over rough, mountainous and hilly terrain, the journey to Jerusalem was enlivened in many ways.
There were the sounds of drums and tambourines. There were the staccato claps of castanets. There were the lilting cascading sounds of bow harps. Too, were the inspiring sounds made by the blowers of the hollow *halil*, tibia and aulos. There was also the happy flutter of banners in the breeze.

There was the endless flow of news to hear, to share and ponder. There were friendships to be made on the trail. There were myriads of exotic trinkets to barter among the many clans and families also making the pilgrimage.

Between the tranquil pace of their camels and the more energetic trot of their short-legged donkeys, depending from whence they came and the route they followed, the thousands of pilgrims, many of whom had begun their journey as far away as Babylon, Mesopotamia and Asia Minor made good progress. They blended as one with the throngs of local Galileans and Judeans who made up the caravan.

Simple pleasures were bound together by the anticipation of, once again, celebrating *Pesach* at the Temple.

Only the thought that the fate of Bar Abbas had suddenly become terribly uncertain marred moments each day. Myriam Magdalene, mother of Bar Abbas, as well as her mother-in-law, Myriam, her sister-in-law, Shulamit, and her brothers-in-law, each understood and accepted that sadness was not allowed to settle inside the spirit of any pilgrim.

Each of them knew that during the days of a pilgrimage, as during Shabbath, Yahweh commanded the attention of all His people on to Him and on to His Teachings. Worrying and fretting were not to dull such holy moments.

Each of them understood and accepted, too, that anxiety and sadness showed a lack of Faith in the Divine Purpose – a sin for which they would have to atone by way of more sacrifices, once at the Temple.

“Emunah tamid!” Myriam would remind them quietly, “Faith always!” And so, instead of letting sadness cloud their spirit, the women danced to the sounds of their tambourines and the men mingled with other men.

A few days before Myriam Magdalene was to join Myriam and her sons, while drawing water from the village well, she had been surprised by a Sicarii courier who had kept searching for her after he failed to find her in her small house of wattle-and-daub. He said her son, Bar Abbas, and many other young rebels were being held captive by the Romans.
He said that though their fate was uncertain, these men were the lucky ones.
He said that on that day, many rebels had perished under the iron blade of Roman swords.

He said that, of their carcasses, already not much remained, for the birds of prey and other creatures had feasted upon them.
When Myriam Magdalene pressed the Sicarii messenger for more detail, he said it had happened in the area of Har Ha-Karmel, after the ambush they planned for a cohort of Roman soldiers had led to their own undoing.

On the way back from the well, Myriam Magdalene had stopped to do *tevilah* in the *mikveh* and purify herself. It was as if she hoped, somehow, that the pure waters washing over her head might deflect evil when the burning gaze of the Prefect, Pontius Pilate, bore through her first-born child, her only-born.
She prayed that her purity might make her son safe under the Gaze of God.

She thought of her husband, Yeshua. She wondered whether a courier might also have sent word to him. When asked, the Sicarii messenger replied that he did not know. Though Myriam Magdalene's heart was laden with doubt and apprehension, she trusted that her God would cast a benevolent gaze over the son who had been fighting for the greater cause of His people.

The fate of Bar Abbas, still unsealed, they hoped, made the family's pilgrimage to Jerusalem even more meaningful than could have been anticipated. Thus, unaware of the cruel twist of fate that would await them on their first morning there, they had busied themselves in readiness for the long journey.

Though nights had, at times, been warmer earlier in the season, the ones they spent on the mountain range were cold. Fortunately, wood was plentiful, and camp fires were kept blazing through to dawn each day.

Come nightfall, the men organised vigils to keep safe the caravan and all that was in it - men, women, children, cattle - and the combined riches each pilgrim, according to his means, was bringing as offerings to the Temple.

Though the caravan disturbed wild creatures as it moved through their natural habitat, the fires, to some extent, would keep them at bay. But, an equally real danger was that the fires might inadvertently reveal the presence of the caravan to passing watchmen.

They were men who watched through the night - thieves, Roman soldiers and mercenaries.
They were men who would be very attracted to the gold offerings brought to the temple by powerful clans and wealthy individuals. Even the humble folk, if gold was beyond their power to sacrifice, were journeying with coins of silver tucked in the folds of their robes.
As bears were attracted to ewes, the watchmen would also be extremely attracted to the women; to the children, to the maidens and to the crones alike, for brutality more than pleasure was in their spirit.

For unescorted women, a pilgrimage alone through the wilderness, even in a caravan, would have been beyond anyone's wildest imagination. As it were, every Jew, man and woman, was familiar with the eerie Song of Songs and the verse that warned of the watchmen, "The watchmen that went about the city found me, they smote me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me."

When the winding caravan finally reached the ramparts of Jerusalem, the pilgrims had been welcome by priests and Levites who guided them to the vast area of tents erected as free shelter during the week-long Passover celebrations. There, among the hundreds of tents and the cacophony made by the thousands of pilgrims and their animals, Myriam and her kin tended to their donkeys.

Like all Hebrews, Myriam and her kindred valued their donkeys, for they ploughed tirelessly and carried great loads over long distances. They respected the animals' strength and loyalty. And so, before Myriam and those who travelled with her could rest their trail-weary bodies under the tent that had been allocated to them, they unsaddled the donkeys, removed the panniers and brought them water and fresh hay.

Once all their belongings had been transported to the tent, after twelve days on the road, the women prepared a simple meal of goat cheese blended with olives and herbs which they folded inside the last of the round pitas Myriam had baked. As of the next day and for the rest of Pesach, they would forsake all leavened bread, as commanded by Yahweh, and only eat the *matzoth* baked by Myriam Magdalene and Shulamit. Eating chametz in awareness, they knew, would incur *Kareit*, one of the

most horrible of Divine Punishments - spiritual excision. The soul would wander eternally, forever cut off from *Olam Ha-Ba*, the place where souls go after the death of the body.

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1. Exodus 23:14-172
2. Exodus 13:21-22
3. Exodus 16:13-15
4. Exodus 14:12
5. Exodus 15:20-21

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The Flogging

The merciless bites of the flagrum had gouged strips of flesh off Yeshua's back, legs and buttocks. This public act of overt sadism never failed to attract a crowd of off-duty soldiers, gentile onlookers and loiterers.
Bone was exposed, liver, kidneys and spleen were ruptured.
Blood blended with blood likes estuaries come together to the mouth of the river.
The crowd cheered and jeered there, as they did in the arena but the notable difference here was that their champions were the whip-wielding Roman soldiers.

After all, the appreciative Roman public understood the craft involved in inflicting the maximum of pain with each measured cut of the leather thongs. They knew how that pain could be further tweaked by the calculated hitting angle of the shards of sheep bones and iron balls attached to each strap – a pure art form, some would say.
And then they twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head.
They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said.[1]

The repulsive blood fest was over. It was followed by the dreadfully long walk to the site of the crucifixion. The final destination was Golgotha, the place oddly remembered as The Skull, although **גלגלת,** its original Aramaic name, simply referred to The Wheel - the sort of wheel with which artisans extracted oil from plants.
The more specific final destination would merely be whichever upright beam happened to be vacant at the time.

A purple cloak, the symbol of his status among his people, was thrown over Yeshua's shredded, naked body by a waiting Issiyi. The cloth clung to his wounds. Patches of dark blood quickly soaked through the fibers.
Forced to kneel on one knee, Yeshua's accepted the load of the crossbar. His fingers groped for its square ends. He grasped each end firmly and heaved himself

up in the semi-crouch of the condemned man. Whatever parts of the royal cloak that did not cling to the back of his bleeding legs dragged in the dust.

The procession was led by a centurion. Head held down by the weight of the beam, Yeshua could see no more than the dusty calves and heels of the military escort of the soldiers marching directly ahead of him. Their many feet marching in cadence raised clouds of dust that penetrated his nose and stung his eyes. Blinded by the blood that ran from every thorn the crown kept fastened to his skull, he stumbled and fell to one knee. A soldier shouted an order. Another soldier echoed it.
The cohort stopped.

Yeshua sensed more than felt a steadying hand. A bearded face peered at him from under the beam. "*Ani Shimon. Ha-Shalom alecha*," the face said softly.
Quickly, the man dampened Yeshua's face with a wet cloth. Voices talked above the crossbar.

A Hebrew voice, repeating the same words, bounced off Yeshua's eardrums.
A Roman voice barked an order. Another barked back.
The flat side of a spatha hit hard against Yeshua's flank.
He struggled to rise to the semi-crouched position of the weakened cross-bearer, just as the blades of daggers sliced the ropes that held his wrists pinned to the patibulum. His precarious balance suddenly affected by the shift of weight lifted off his shoulders, he stumbled again.
A rough Roman hand steadied him. Dazed, at first, he did not understand.
Shimon, a man of heart, had been allowed to carry Yeshua's load for the rest of the procession through the Lions' Gate and beyond the city walls - only there were the dead to be buried and the live ones to be crucified.

Once the cohort had dispersed, and Yeshua was allowed to drop to the ground, he had confirmation that Pilate, as vile a man as he was, had honoured at least one request of the agreement made the previous morning with the merchant of Arimathea and the Issiyim Elders.
Though Yeshua did not know where he was, it was immediately clear to him that he was not on Golgotha.

Pontius Pilate had accepted to receive members of the local Issiyim chapter who had sought an audience. He knew their request would be linked to either the Jew son of the insurgent leader who masqueraded as a preacher - or to the man himself.

Plot, pray and preach to plot some more is how Pilate summed up the body of Yeshua's activities.
He knew the preacher to be the son of one named Yosef of no known patriarchal lineage.
He knew him to be an obscure carpenter, long estranged from the man's mother, one named Myriam - aunt of the deceased Yohannan Ha-Matbil – a woman who, according to the records, had for the past twenty years shared her bed with Cleopas, her uncle.

Whether the delegation was coming to him on behalf of the father or on behalf of the son, the Prefect's cunning intuition led him, like an ant to a drop of honey, to think there would be some personal gain in for him, in one form or another.

The mystics, each sporting a neat beard of many years framed by very long earlocks, came to the audience with the strangest list of requests.
They asked that the body of the father be substituted for that of the son and that the site of the father's crucifixion be in the private burial grounds of the respected member of the Council, the rich merchant present, Yosef of Arimathea.

The rock-cut family burial chambers in an orchard dotted by many jasmine bushes was a grand affair flanked by two columns topped by a gable featuring the carved petals of the lily. It had been hewn out of pink limestone rock.
Inside, a lidded stone chest contained the bones of each of Yosef's deceased relatives.
In the dry, ventilated air of the caves, bodies dried up quickly and, one year after their entombment, bones were ready to be swept up and reverently added to the ossuary.

"You belong to people who believe that crucifixion, this most abhorrent of all death sentences, is a deterrent," began the stooped, white-robed Elder who had detached himself from the delegation. His words were oddly accented, but he expressed himself correctly in the Roman's language. "Surely, the hundreds of bodies on your

Tau crosses, each to his own suffering, sickness, death and putrefaction should indicate to you that such a disgusting punishment only serves to placate your barbarian urges and nothing more."

Aware that his tone threatened to cut short the audience and ruin all chance of negotiations on Bar Abbas' behalf, the Elder adjusted his delivery. "Be that as it may," he sighed. "Let the death of one of ours on your cross satisfy you." His fingers combed his beard slowly. "Free the son, Bar Abbas, for his father will take his place. But the one appointed by the Grace of our one and only God to rule over our bodies and the land of Abraham and Moses and our spirit, that man will not be subjected to the added indignity of having his nudity exposed to all on Golgotha. Prefect, you must make an exception to the rule and allow him a loin cloth." The Elder concluded his plea, "One who gains honor through the degradation of his fellow human has no share in the World to come." [2]

Pilate categorically rejected the request of affording Yeshua the modesty of a linen cloth. "Old man, your world to come means not a thing to me. The one who has such lofty aspirations as to conquer Tiberius' territories shall make his last public appearance as naked a man as the day he took his first breath as an infant," sniggered the Roman. "He was born naked. He shall perish naked."
Caught in the strands of his beard, the Elder's fingers hesitated. He averted his eyes to keep the fire he felt burning within from betraying his true sentiments. A few steps behind him, the delegation shuffled uneasily.

Another Elder took one step forward from the group. "Die, he will, by your decree, but die decent in his suffering he shall, and for this show of heart, we are grateful to you, Prefect Pilate."

"In this humiliation, all criminals are equal." Pontius Pilate's pronouncement was categorical. "That foreskin you so grandly offer your god makes neither your piss nor your bowels smell any better than any other's. A rebel's innards, no matter how holy, smell no fruitier than a whore's."
The Prefect had however shrugged at the request of a secluded site for Yeshua's crucifixion. It made no difference to him where this man guilty of sedition aspired his last breath. "Let this crucifix adorn your garden," said the Prefect to the merchant of Arimathea, the prominent member of the Council, "if such is your wish."

Yosef of Arimathea tapped the Elder discreetly on the sleeve and whispered something in his ear. The Elder nodded and the man, gathering the courage befitting his stature and his status, asked the Prefect to let them have, by the end of the crucifixion day, the ‘soma’ of Yeshua, his living body - if his body was still breathing at the time. The Prefect’s nostrils flared. He said in a hollow voice, “Old men! Be gone before I order both the father and the son strapped to crossbars! And you, too, by association and therefore guilty of sedition.

After the delegation had departed, the Prefect picked the leather pouch the youngest of the ascetic men had laid at his feet. The pouch was made knobbly by the many coins and gems it contained. He hefted the leather sack between his thick palms. “Soma or Ptoma? Body alive or body dead?” He shrugged and lobbed the pouch in the air. A lustful grin altered the coarseness of his face. “Every honourable deal has one who gives and one who takes. The true skill of negotiators lies in knowing how to take more and how to gives less.” His roar rolled around the empty hall.

Once the procession through the streets had reached its destination, the family burial site of Yosef of Arimathea, a Roman gruffly ordered Yeshua to wait as ‘his’ stake and iron spikes were being prepared. He shoved Yeshua against the oak tree immediately behind him. Yeshua fell heavily at the base of the trunk, and there he sat, bloodied and dusty. The purple cloak of the King of Israel hung limply over his slumped frame.

Through the haze of pain, Yeshua’s heart ached. He thought of his son, Bar Abbas. Mary Magdalene had named him The Son of the Father.
“He is like you,” she had smiled. “Always stretching for what is higher than his reach.” Though she was a good woman, Mary Magdalene’s womb had become dry after her first birth. Daily, she had implored Yahweh to allow her husband’s seed to grow again. Season after season, Yahweh had ignored her supplications.

The understanding that Yeshua would not see his son grow beyond his sixteenth year filtered upwards into his consciousness. He would not see the boy become a man among the ones who had kept him, the father of the son, safe from the moment

he had left Capernaum to bring people of Galilee and Judea together on all matters of soul and politics.

Yeshua's throat constricted at the thought that the Prefect might have reneged on the agreement to release Bar Abbas.
What if Bar Abbas had already known in his body the pain of the floggers and in his heart the miserable humiliation of his nakedness exposed to all?
Had the spikes already pierced his wrists and feet in spite of the assurance the Prefect had given the merchant of Arimathea? He shut his eyes tight and willed himself to breathe as best he could. He, the father of the son, would never know whether, in fact, the sacrifice of his own flesh had saved the life of his progeny. He would die without the confirmation that Bar Abbas, under the protection of the Issiyim, was once again safe within the fold of the insurgency.

The veil of pain tore momentarily. Yeshua remembered: in the garden of Gethsemane, the owl hooted again. The moon shifted through the branches.
"The time has come, Yehudah, my friend," he had whispered, lips close to Yehudah's ear. "Now!"

With thoughts as deeply churned up as the sea under a storm, Yeshua sighed helplessly at the memories.
He remembered the hiss of swords being drawn, the clatter of daggers against shields, the flurry of brass and red in the moonlight, the fury of his men swiftly cut off from him, as soldiers positioned themselves in a tight rectangle formation around him - lances and swords pointing outward.

He remembered: Yehudah, off to the side; pale Yehudah, harangued by a Roman for refusing to accept the pieces of silver he was intent on giving him - his reward for a successful denunciation.
He remembered: Mordechai, clutching the side of his face while blood gushed from his shoulder.
He remembered. Aaron's hot gaze, eyes blinded by pain, blood spurting out from his wrist. On the ground, his dagger-hand leaked blood onto the rocky ground near his feet.

“My son!” Yeshua’s moan was barely audible. “It is not in your name that your father has inflicted such pain on these good men. It was done in my name alone. Oh, Adonai! Forgive me my sins for I have sinned often!”

Crucifixion, having been used at a high rate since the sixth century BC, wood had become scarce around Jerusalem by the first century AD. The Romans had to bring it back for their siege machinery from many miles away.
Death by torture on upright beams, stipes, had been the Roman punishment of choice reserved for Jewish insurgents, the enemies of the State.
It was also the punishment for those judged as violent criminals, thieves, pirates and run-away slaves, although Roman citizens, regardless of their crimes, were exempt from this disgusting retribution.
For any Romans found guilty of a crime commanding the death penalty instead of exile, wherever they were in the Roman Empire, a Tarpeian Rock of sort, a cliff from where they could be pushed and left to die on the rocks below, could always be found.

Because of the shortage of wood and the endless roll out of condemnations, wooden stakes were at a premium. Each beam was permanently planted deep into the ground where it became the instrument of torture for an endless succession of men. Blood smears were hardly dry on a stake when, already, the next man was thrown on his back, wrists nailed to the patibulum and lifted to the height of the upright beam. There, arms outstretched, he was secured by the simple slotting into place of mortise and tenon joints.

A few meters away from the oak against which Yeshua was slipping in and out of consciousness, a soldier began picking at the soil. He hefted the pick high above his head. With a metallic clang, the point struck the rocky ground but failed to make enough of a mark below the crust.
The man cursed. “May a dog fornicate with your mother!” The soldier hefted the pick one more time. Again, the terrain refused the bite. In anger, the soldier picked up a clump of the rocky soil and threw it at Yeshua. The soil dispersed in a thin grey puff, but the rock shards and pebbles landed hard on Yeshua’s exposed stomach. “ King of donkey asses!” the soldier called out. He pointed the pick towards Golgotha. “Too royal a king to be nailed out there alongside your mangy brothers?

It’s you, Jew rat, that should dig up this hole. You’re a traitor to my Emperor. It’s for your Tau that hole, not for mine!”

Yeshua did not speak the language of the Roman anymore than the soldier spoke his. Then again, no words were needed to feel the scorn of the one for the other.

Yeshua didn’t know precisely where, outside the city gate, he was, but he knew enough to understand that the hole that would support the upright stake upon which he would be crucified was being planted on the private burial grounds of someone trusted by the Issiyim. There was a network of such persons, powerful men on the Council, merchants by trade – the only profession by which Jews could, if persistent, derive any form of wealth.

Wealthy merchants, and merchants aspiring to be rich, were strung across Judea and Galilee. They were the lifeblood of the resistance. They moved freely through the regions and abroad.
As they went about their business of buying and selling, they brought news to the isolated Jewish townships and villages they passed on their long journeys east and west. Such areas were generally bypassed by the swift couriers.
They rode on camel or on donkey back, depending on the terrain and stealth factor. Their mission was to reach the point of their destination, travelling through the night if need be, as speedily as their mounts would allow.

In spite of the bevvy of spies considered the eyes and ears of Rome, these merchants humble and meek in their demeanour at checkpoints, ferried weapons and other essentials in the laden baskets of their caravans.
Hidden they were amongst weighty baskets of silk cloths, thousand pieces of imported pottery and hundreds of jars of exotic fragrances – all in support of the insurrection – always heartened by the knowledge that sooner or later, one God-chosen man would be anointed messiah and lead the people to rise against Rome.

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1. Matthew 27:29
2. Jerusalem Talmud, Chagigah 2:1; Midrash Genesis Rabbah 1:5

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The Temple

Unsuspecting of the events unfolding a few kilometres beyond the city gates, on the morning of *Sheeshee*, Friday, their first morning in Jerusalem, the women and their menfolk emerged from the tents that would be their home for the duration of the pilgrimage.
They parted to go to separate *mikvehs* near *Shaarei Chulda*, the gates in the southern wall of the Temple on the Mount.
They dipped below the waters again and again to purify every centimetre of their body. Their thoughts returned again to young Bar Abbas. They prayed that His Divine Providence contained the makings of a blessed life for the *naar*, Myriam Magdalene's only son.

Once dressed in clean robes, they made their way to the Temple with their offerings of oil and wheat. Once there, in the hope to draw Yahweh close to Bar Abbas, in the hope that He would be merciful towards the *naar*, it was agreed that, together, they would buy the ritual offering of *qorbanot*, a sacrifice to Yahweh.
From the words of the prophet Hosea, they knew that their God desired kindness rather than sacrifices and knowledge of God more than burnt offerings [1] and so they would each buy a *yona*, a pigeon, to offer as *olah*.
Walking modestly with their God, as admonished by the prophet Micah, they would present the birds to the priests who would set them on the fiery altar as burnt offerings to Yahweh. Not even a feather of their precious offerings would be wasted.

As the family climbed the many steps that led to the gleaming mass of the Temple, their spirit soared. Even the men who had made their pilgrimage a yearly ritual were still moved by the sight.
Massive, God's House was but, more importantly, it was beautiful. In fact, such was its magnificence that it was said that whoever had not seen the Second Temple had yet to see beauty. [2] Understandably so.

The temple complex contained four courts to accommodate various areas of worship. Libraries, shops, storerooms and workshops had been built behind

colonnades, but not out of the common sand-colored rock found locally.
Every component of the Temple had been built with imported gleaming white marble from Carrara.
For the Jews, this Temple was truly the House of God and, for that reason, there could ever only be one Temple in Jerusalem.
Should that one temple be destroyed by conquering hordes, the Jews knew their Temple would never be rebuilt anywhere else for it is within the rocks on this mount that their God had His House.

Each day, while in Jerusalem, possibly many times a day, Yeshua, eldest son of Myriam and husband of Myriam Magdalene, had walked past the Outer Court of the Temple, the area where non-Jews were allowed to pray. In that court, gentiles had to share the space with all manner of animals that had been found healthy and blemish free - fit for sacrifices.

Once sorted by the priests, the animals were confined to various enclosures.
Birds, oxen, fowl and cattle were bought by anyone who hoped God would reward their gesture by being merciful. Some offered burnt offerings because they felt it necessary to make amends with their God or they felt it proper precaution to buy themselves advance credit.
The offering they chose reflected their perception of the gravity of their sin.
Sometimes, too, the offering was intended to consolidate their status - or need thereof - in the eyes of the priests who, once the ritual was over, took the ‘cooked’ carcasses to their families where it became a part of their meals.

It is in the Outer Court that Myriam and the women walked among bird and fowl cages stacked one on top of the others over many rows. It was near these cages that a few mornings ago, Yeshua had exploded in righteous anger.
Once again, the temple priests had allowed the vendors to ply their trade on the seventh day, the one day Yahweh had ordered as a day of rest and, most importantly, as a day of reflection on the commandments of the Torah.

“7 Remember the Shabbath day, to keep it holy,” Yeshua, the brown-robed Galilean, had thundered at the vendors. “8 Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work; 9 but the seventh day is a sabbath unto the LORD thy God, in it thou shalt not do any

manner of work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates."[3]
He had leant heavily against a stack of cages and with one forceful push forward, they came tumbling down. Birds squawked and cackled. Feathers flew, and tempers rose.

Shoulders covered by a white, fringed tallit through which ran a ribband of blue, Yacov and his brothers walked through the marble colonnades. They passed by the money-changers' booths, unaware of the commotion their brother had created there, also, by upturning their large and heavy wooden tables.

"11 Observe the Shabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD thy God commanded thee!" [4] Yeshua, the Galilean preacher, had shouted at the men. They cursed him as the many neat piles they had made with their coins had clattered and rolled on the pavers – many never to be recuperated.

The Second Court could be accessed only by Jews, both men and women, provided they were free of any defilement and that they had purified their bodies in the *mikveh* just before coming to the Temple.
The brothers walked past a pillar of stone that carried a dire warning to the non-Jews: No foreigner is to go beyond the balustrade and the plaza of the Temple zone. Whoever is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his death which will follow – presumably by stoning.
The warning did not worry the brothers any more than it had worried Yeshua, for their bodies had been cleansed in the *mikveh,* and they considered themselves righteous in spirit.

They ambled gravely into the Third Court, the one restricted to pious Jewish men, to attend the early morning prayer. Once inside the immense prayer hall for the first *shaharit* of their pilgrimage, among the thousands of worshippers already in place, Yacov, Yosei, Yehudah and Shimon were fortunate to find a space from which their eyes could feast on the beautifully crafted cabinet in which was housed the collection of scrolls that made The Torah. Its gold and silver motifs shone against the dark Acacia wood.

As always, the brothers were awed and humbled by the beauty of the House of God. Heavy tapestries flanked luminous windows. Exquisitely ornate silver lamps floated at different heights above the worshippers' heads, like sparks of the Divine Spirit. Dense panels of carved wood stood massive against the white Carrara marble of the walls.

Cast over the marble of the floor, huge carpets, rich in color, softened the footsteps. Into each of the many, thick, dark supporting pillars of cedar were inserted in hammered gold the symbols of Judaism – the ones Yahweh gave to Moses in the Wilderness – the ones that adorned the Ark, the original menorah and the Holy of Holies. Every object in the prayer hall was significant. Every detail had its purpose. Every hand-span had been crafted to please, appease and celebrate the glory of their one and only God.

In the book of *Devarim*, Deuteronomy, Yahweh gave all Jewish males the commandment to bind to their body two tefillin, as a sign Allegiance. Commanding His people to wear His Word on their body, He said, "You shall put these words of mine on your heart and on your soul; and you shall tie them for a sign upon your arm, and they shall be as *totafot [tefillin]* between your eyes."[5]

And so, as they went about their days' work in their village in Magdala. Yacov, Yosei, Yehudah and Shimon, like all Hebrew males, were bound to their God by the *shel yad* bound to their weaker arm, the place closest to their heart and by the *shel rosh* attached to their forehead.

In silence, Yacov rolled up the sleeve over his left arm to adjust the arm *tefillah* around his biceps. Quietly, he acknowledged his God with the same words he had pronounced earlier that morning, as he had done every morning since his thirteenth year when he had attached the tefillin to his body after his cleansing immersion in the mikveh.

"*Barukh atah Adonai, Eloheinu, melekh ha'olam,*" he whispered to himself. "Blessed are you, Lord, our God, sovereign of the universe Who has sanctified us with His Commandments and commanded us to put on *tefillin*." With these words, Yacov accepted the need to control all thoughts of lust, greed and envy. He embraced the

need to control the many equally destructive emotions that, he knew, could overtake any man, even an honourable one such as himself. He prayed that such thoughts, when they occurred, would become easier to redirect to the service of Yahweh, as commanded by the Torah.

“May the *mitzvah* of wearing the *tefillin* respectfully influence me and bestow upon me long life,” Yacov added, as he tightened the strap that wound seven times around his forearm, three times around the middle finger.
The black strap travelled from each finger to criss-cross the back of his hand with a neat sign of *Shin*, the letter that represents *Shaddai*, one of Yahweh's many names. Yacov tucked the end between the strap and his palm before turning his attention to his head *tefillah*.

He adjusted the little leather box more squarely on his forehead just below the hairline. He felt for the knot to make sure it was against the middle of his neck so that the straps formed the Taw, the last letter of the alphabet. Shimon nudged Yacov and tilted his chin to the front of the room.

The officiating priest had appeared by the reading table. Dressed in the long sleeved *kutonet* of pure linen that reached to his wrists and down to his ankles, barefoot, as a sign of humility, he was facing the worshippers. His white sash was the reminder to him as to all men of the Faith that they were expected to make their ‘belt tighter’ to forestall all temptations of the flesh.

The gold plate affixed to priest’s cone-shaped turban glinted in the early morning light that came in through the wide window. Holiness unto YHWH commanded the words engraved on the plate. Quickly, Yacov pulled his prayer shawl over his head.

Yacov, stood by his brothers Yosei, Yehudah and Shimon, as they tuned their thoughts to the priest’s chant, a feeling of peace descended upon him. At that moment he felt that, in his world, all was as it should be.

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1. Hosea 6:6
2. Inspired by Babylonian Talmud Bava Batra 4:A
3. Exodus 20:8

4.Deuteronomy 5:12

5. Deuteronomy 11:18

The Crucifixion

The morning sun rose above the line of trees that blocked Yeshua's view of the world beyond. A profusion of jasmine bushes, their flowers harvested for their perfume, held its space between massive oak, fig, tamarisk and pomegranate trees. Nearer to Yeshua, gnarled olive trees were in full bloom. The explosion of their white flowers brought to his lips a verse from the *Bereishis*, Genesis.

"When the dove returned to him in the evening, there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf! Then Noah knew that the water had receded from the earth,"[1] he murmured.

Yeshua surmised that the rock-cut burial chamber would be sheltered by more rows of trees and fragrant bushes. He imagined two ancient Frankincense trees exuding their hardened tears of resin, as they flanked the entrance to the cave.
The image of his body laid out on one of the rock benches inside the cave and covered with a white shroud flitted through thoughts that slipped in and out of focus.

A second soldier had come to join the first one. Their picks alternated in perfect rhythm. Lulled by the soft regularity of the thuds, Yeshua stayed inside his spirit. From Isaiah 64, rose a verse he had recited as often as he had pronounced the name of his beloved Mary Magdalene. "But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away."

More soldiers arrived carrying the long stake from a nearby cart. Together, working as one, they planted one-fourth of its length into the freshly dug hole and compacted the broken soil around the base.

A soldier's toe kicked Yeshua's side. The jolt of pain stirred him awake, but opening his eyes required an effort. Burgundy red, the color of Rome, fluttered across his vision. "Oh, my son," he mumbled. "To me, father of the son, you gave the gift of redemption. For you I sacrifice my flesh."

“Here’s the drink of the condemned one, Oh, King!” cooed the mocking voice of the soldier. An old scar split his weathered cheeks. “Apologies for the earthenware goblet, Oh, King” he continued, “but all the golden ones have been stolen by passing rabble.”

In a tokenistic gesture of compassion, it had become customary to give the condemned men the mild narcotic drink, just as the nailing of their wrists on the patibulum was about to begin.

The acrid odor of wine and myrrh assailed Yeshua’s nostrils. Eyes suddenly focused, he waved his hands in front of him, indicating that he did not want the foul-smelling drink. *“Lo!”* he grunted in his native language, *“Ani lo rotze.”*

“Not ambrosia, that’s true, but if it’s not good enough for you, Jew, more for me,” the soldier riled, as he quaffed the potion. “No pain is too strong for this crucifix!” he called out. The empty goblet rolled at Yeshua’s feet.

“Jew dog, you will regret that gall soon enough,” rejoined another soldier, “but it is as you wish. Better you than me.” Other male voices joined in the guffaw.

The Duty-Centurion arrived to oversee the nailing to the crossbar the one Prefect Pilate had called the Almost King of the Jews. “Move yourselves off and find something useful to do, you lot of idiots,” he barked at his men. He was accompanied by a thin, stooped patriarch dressed in an immaculate white robe.

The man’s beard and earlocks positioned him as a Jew and, though Issiyim mingled daily with the local population in streets and marketplaces, the soldiers eyed the newcomer with curiosity. They were familiar with such ascetic mystics, easily recognizable by the whiteness of their robes, but none of the soldiers recalled ever having seen one of them anywhere near a crucifixion site.

Urging the soldiers to hustle, the centurion began inspecting the tools for the incipient session of torture. He pointed to the top of the stipe. “By the time the sun walks beyond these trees, the man had better be up there! If not, it’s your measure of black wine that’ll quench the thirst of your mates at the end of their shift!”
The bribe he had accepted from the Issiyi in exchange for letting him talk to the crucifix lay inside the helmet he carried in the crook of his elbow.

“Old man,” he called out to the mystic, “your moment here is only as long as the short time between now and the lifting of the patibulum to the stipe!”

Yeshua gave the Elder a thin smile. It was accompanied by a deep sigh of relief. “You … Father. From the hills of Qumran to me ... From there, you came ... here.” The religious scholar had been Yeshua’s mentor throughout the years he had spent studying with the Issiyim in their cave settlement on the dry plateau that borders the Dead Sea.
The elderly mystic deliberately turned his back to the soldiers and their preparations. Over his disciple’s exposed loins, the Elder pulled a fold of the ample purple cloak. He sat on his heels, one hand light on his protégé’s lap.
The thorns were not merely resting against his skull, he noticed but had been pushed against bone.
Blood leaked from each of the many biting points, but once it reached the barrier of his eyebrows, it was channelled off to the side of his cheekbones. Wiping Yeshua’s forehead would be futile.

From the age of thirteen until the year Yohannan Ha-Matbil had asked his cousin, Yeshua, to accompany him to Jerusalem it was from this man, a Master of esoteric knowledge, a particularly advanced being, that he had learnt to manipulate, for the greater good of the person and the greater good of all, the body’s many meridians, life points and its wheels of energy.
The Master had also led his most promising disciple to the trove of arcane knowledge he possessed regarding the sacred dimensions of the invisible world.

Since Yeshua was not asking for news of his son, all thoughts of the son escaped from the Master’s mind as he tended to the father. A focus on the moment underfoot was always preferable to a focus on a moment past. Leaning closer to the condemned man, the Master smiled from the heart. “I have come to you, as it was decided, my son.”

Yeshua looked at him dully. Peering deeply into the dark pools of pain that had become his disciple’s eyes, the Master began a snapshot diagnosis of the sorry state of his damaged insides.
The spasmodic movements of the corneas, the thin welts of swollen blood vessels, the dull sheen that coated them, the shrunken rim of the irises - all gave him as clear

as indications of Yeshua's broken organs as if he had traced each with his fingertips. The creases on his lined forehead deepened.

From the ample folds of his robe, the Master pulled out a square of white linen and a tiny vial made of glass. Lips pinched with concern, he humidified the cloth. He quickly pressed the cloth under Yeshua's nose. "Breathe, my son, breathe. Breathe, as if this were the last breath you ever take."

Yeshua inhaled as deeply as his shattered lungs would allow. The Master shook his head. He could tell that the vapors were not being aspired deeply enough to achieve the desired profound narcotic effect Yeshua would need while his flesh was further tortured. If the mind was unable to escape the body at such a time, the mind would lose all sense of sense and purpose.

From the folds of his robe, the healer retrieved another vial. Green was the color of its glass. He stood up and, back still turned to the men, bent over his disciple's haggard face. A few droplets from the vial fell on the parched lips. With the tender care of a father preparing his ailing son for the night's rest, the mystic rearranged the fold of purple cloth over Yeshua's stomach.

"Father, hear me." With his eyes, Yeshua motioned for his Master to lean closer in. "Suffer … I must suffer," he mumbled haltingly. He struggled to move his thoughts through his lips. "I must suffer … I must … in the depth of my flesh ..."
On an exhalation, he added, "From the deepest part of me, I ask ... for the forgiveness of Adonai ... my Lord." Words were difficult to shape.

The Master spoke soothingly. "Son, why fight so hard to speak when all your strength must be conserved?"
The hard knot in the front of Yeshua's throat moved erratically. He paused to catch his breath. On the next exhalation, he continued humbly, "I have sinned. I have not forgiven those who have trespassed against me.
He closed his eyes and stayed quiet for a moment. "On my son's behalf," he began again, "I refused for him, for me ... his mother such events as ordained by Yahweh, my one and only God. I lacked Faith in his --"

"About the redemption, our Lord, *Adonai*, wants to grant your soul, my son, of this I cannot speak. Yes, you will suffer in your flesh, but know you will not die on that

Taw. Mark my words as a promise and to deliver this promise is why I am here."
He paused to give Yeshua time to process his words. "Pilate accepted the most generous bribe made to him by Yosef of Arimathea. The bribe secured this very private site. Privacy is essential for what needs to be done during the next hours, Yeshua."
Again he paused and waited for Yeshua to return his gaze to him before his resuming the explanation of the plan Yosef of Arimathea and the Elders had agreed to. "Something needs to be done, now, between the two of us. What we have to do goes much beyond the stated intention of shielding you from the ignominious public display of your naked loins and of your suffering."

His gazed fixed on a point beyond Yeshua's forehead, the Master paused again. "Do you understand, my son, that for you to accomplish your destiny, as the prophets foresaw it, you must not die today on that Roman Taw?" Yeshua held his gaze briefly but remained silent. "Your flesh and your spirit must be fortified. You must not suffer more than this repugnant situation requires of you – and this is why I am here." He looked at the pale sky as if seeking heavenly advice. "Your body and your mind both need to be strengthened.

The flogging has disturbed your insides, and the massive loss of blood has weakened your body even more." His eyes settled again on the crown the Roman had pressed over Yeshua's head. "The worse of your ordeal has yet to begin."
He added, "Your body and your spirit must sustain you together. They must assist you in the hours coming. Many hours, too many, remain till the last shift of the guard and the arrival of the hour of the Shabbath."
Shoulders squared but loose, back straight but muscles yielding, the Master inhaled deeply, eyes focussed on a little point ahead. Invisible threads of healing light began taking shape in the air around.

With the gesture of one who refuses the advance of an unwelcome invisible presence, Yeshua slowly raised his hand, palm up, in front of his face.
He muttered, "*Hanach li* ... Leave me alone," he whispered.

The Master was so taken aback by his disciple's rejection that he called out forcefully, "My son!"

Yeshua moved his head slowly, and for the second time, he raised his hand, palm up, in front of his face. “My suffering on the Taw... instead of that of my son.
My agony on the Taw is what I must give to Pilate.” The Elder blinked. His eyes brushed over Yeshua’s body as it lay with its life force ebbing.

The centurion called roughly in the Elder’s direction. “Say your farewell, old Jew, and depart from this area! This is a private crucifixion or haven’t you noticed?” he added roughly.
Though sorrow constricted the Elder’s chest, he knew he was not allowed to force, not even one small shimmer of spiritual energy, on anyone who failed to welcome it.

Strengthening Yeshua’s energy field without his consent would be tantamount to a most terrible breach of the oath he, as all Issiyim, have taken since the dawn of time. Never impose divine energy on anyone, not even on one of their own, not even on one of the many adopted children who thrived in their midst – never without the explicit acquiescence of the concerned being.

A sigh of resignation fused between the Elder’s lips but never had any resignation been so painful. Never had the Elder felt so lost, so abandoned by his god. He, who had brought back so many from the grip of death, was as helpless as a father bidding farewell to a son taken away as a slave.
All he could do was behold Yeshua one last time, mindful to keep at bay the threads of energies that were hovering. “Farewell, my son, but know you are not journeying alone.” The ascetic looked at Yeshua gravely. His heart trembled in his chest.
How far was he prepared to play on words and devise the deceit of his disciple for a cause greater than any one of them? “My son, your time on the Taw will be well-guarded,” he said softly, before turning his back on the condemned man.

Yeshua breath pushed more words out of his mouth."Do you not think ... I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?” He waited for another exaltation before continuing. “But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled ... that say it must happen in this way?"[2]

His disciple’s words cut through him like an unsharpened blade. The poor man is escaping from his pain by going away from his mind, he thought, as his spirit constricted under the pain of his helplessness.

“Soldiers, throw the Jew King on his back and nail him!” ordered the Centurion. As he walked away, helmet in hand, the pouch the size of a lemon clutched in his fist, he added, “Add a sedile to that stipe. The command from the Prefect is clear: that to this man death shall come slowly as the shadows grow; that death be carried on the bite of a thousand fiery barbs.” As he walked on, the centurion loosened the drawstrings on the little sack. Hard and hungry, his fingers prodded inside to extract some of its content. Gold coins trapped in the vice of his index and thumb glinted coldly in the midday light.

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1. Genesis 8:11
2. Matthew 26:54

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The Agony

The titulus, the compulsory parchment label affixed above every crucifix read: Iesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudaeorum. As per another of Pontius Pilate's explicit orders, the epithet had also been inked in Hebrew and in Greek.

The wide head of the iron spikes stood dark and flat against the soft skin of Yeshua's upturned wrists. They had been hammered straight through, transecting median nerves, but not breaking bones. From a distance, these flat heads of iron looked like odd wrist ornaments among tendrils of ruby threads. The third spike further down the upright beam nailed one foot over the other. The awkward angle of the ankles forced the knees into a cruel twist. Yeshua's wiry but torn body sagged to the left, thus irremediably compressing the side of his ribcage.

However slightly his ribs did expand with each constricted intake of breath, the multitude of biting wounds made by the flogging thongs scraped against the rough wood of the stipe pressing against his back. The dull fire of the thorns wrapped around his forehead prevented him from resting his head against the crossbar.

Of the soldiers, only four remained in the burial grounds of Yosef of Arimathea. "Don't make a long face, Antonius," said one soldier to a younger one who had been appointed to guard the site, after the remainder returned to their other duties.

Antonius had pulled the shortest straw, and bad luck had designated him as the one who would stay to guard the site until the Jew had expired or until his legs had to be broken with the iron crurifragium to hasten death by asphyxiation. After all, four soldiers were hardly needed to guard one half-dead man, nailed by wrists and feet to a wooden cross.

Guard duty in this secluded garden would provide the soldier with many hours of solitary boredom. On Golgotha, it was different. There, many Gentiles went about their business. Outside of the city walls, there were many soldiers coming and going. Though the Jews watched, prayed, grieved and mourned from adjacent hills, they were never to be found on the crucifixion site. They knew the energies of death to be

unhealthy. They knew it made them spiritually impure. Yahweh, himself, had admonished Abraham. “He that toucheth the dead, even any man's dead body, shall be unclean seven days.”
Every Jew knew the commandment written in Bamidbar 19:11. Girls and women were not to see a man’s nakedness. They all knew that was written in Bereishis 2:24.

Of dying men on Golgotha, there were many, many scores of them. Soldiers and Gentiles threw taunts and jeered at them**.** All of these elements brought together provided numerous moments of great hilarity and bonding between the Roman soldiers. Men in the throes of the most degrading of agonies exude their suffering through wails of different patterns, pitches and intensity.

The soldiers made great fun of imitating the oddest sounds with the utmost disrespect. Though the sight of exposed circumcised genitals had long ago ceased to fascinate them, the soldiers guffawed, whistled and put up their thumbs every time a crucifix, one on a cross, surrendered the last shred of his dignity to loosen the constrained pressure in his bowels.

By contrast, standing guard in front of a lone cross, alone in the vast garden, was for Antonius, a punishment from Parcae, the Fate who ruled his destiny.

The soldiers jovially slapped him on the shoulder. “Don’t worry,” said one of them. “ You won’t be here long. The floggers did not hold back their thongs. The hammering and slashing done to this man are of the best I’ve seen in a long time. His crime must have made him most deserving!” The jocular men laughed in unison.

“To be still alive, he must be a very strong man for such a dress-wearing Jew,” another soldier enjoined, a glimmer of manly respect in his voice. Roman men liked to ridicule Jewish men clad in robes. They taunted them, calling out that they were clad in their women’s dresses. “Me, I’d already be dead for sure,” added the soldier.

“Truth? If it was me, I’d rather already be dead by several hours.”“Ergus is right, Antonius.” A soldier tilted his chin at the cross. “He’s strong as an ox, but his body is broken. With the added strain of the sedile, he won’t last long. It’s the Jews'

Sabbath again today, so you'll be un-nailing this at the end of the afternoon. Still, I wager he'll be long dead before then. I'll even bet you won't have to use your crurifragium."

Any moribund Jew who, by law, had to be taken down before sunset on Sabbath had his legs shattered by the blow of an iron club. Within minutes, his last breath was drawn. The soldier looked briefly at the sky and at the shadows lengthening below the trees. "Seven hours remain till then. I wager he won't last more than four or five hours. Who says more? Who says less?"

The men placed their bets by scratching a rock face with the point of their daggers. Each scratch represented one hour. The man who carved the exact number of hours till Yeshua's last exhalation would be treated to a round of wine at the tavern. Antonius scratched the rock face six times.

His three companions departed, Antonius resigned himself to his duty.
As he reached for his pack, he spied the old man in the white robe amongst the furthest rows of trees that lined the merchant's house. He was at a fountain by the rock sepulchre, splashing water profusely over his head and arms, rubbing himself briskly with the cleansing properties of the flowing water.

Tevilah in a *mikveh*, the act of total immersion, is what the Elder's spirit was longing for. Oh to immerse himself entirely, many times in quick succession, in uncontained water!
From his deepest belief in Yahweh's commandment, as dictated in the books of the Torah, proximity with death made one unclean, impure for seven days. Privately, he thanked the flowing water that spouted out of the clay fountain for allowing him a modicum of spiritual cleanliness.

Unsure as to what he should do about the old Jew, Antonius shrugged. After all, he reasoned, this was a garden owned privately. It was not army-held grounds, and the old man had distanced himself from the actual site of the crucifixion under his guard. Let him be, he thought.

"Suit yourself by staying around, old man," he called out, not expecting to be understood, "but if I had my choice, it's not here I'd spend the day." He settled

himself against the trunk of the tree nearest him. Out of his pack, he extracted a chunk of coarse grain bread, two plums and a small canteen half-filled with posca.

The silence in the orchard garden of Arimathea was broken only by the moans of the delirious man on the Taw. It was as if even the doves knew to stay away from the place that, for the moment, harboured evil.

The eyes of the Issiyi Elder were open. They seemed fixed on Yeshua, on the harrowing scene unfolding on the other side of the rows of trees, but his thoughts were not on that scene. They were inward looking.
Yeshua, his most unique disciple, had refused the sustaining energies of the life forces Yahweh allows only a few to access. Yeshua, the Son of Man to whom he and his fellow Issiyim had taught all that they knew, including the making of miraculous events!

The sole purpose of the body of their teachings, they had come to realize, was to enable him, the Son of Man, chosen by their God, to lead the people of Israel out of the morass that had become life under the yoke one Roman Emperor after the other.

The true purpose of this most favored disciple was not merely to enable the Jews to rise and terminate the oppression of the Roman Procurators. Even more grandly necessary, it was to enhance the glory of Galilee and Judea - the homeland passed on to them through the millennia and the Patriarchs - as willed by Yahweh, with an honest and intimate connection with their one god.

Though Yeshua was not a shoot, not a descendant of the House of David, it was by the Grace of Yahweh that it had become accepted that it would be he who would lead the people of Israel by enlightening their heart and their spirit when the hour was ripe.
He would lead them in the way of the Messiah proclaimed by the prophets – of that, they, the Issiyim, the Sicarii and a great many in the population of Judea and Galilee, were certain. But, then, had come the unfortunate news of Bar Abbas' arrest in insurgent territory.

The Elder spoke to his God. He said, “Was there any course other than to protect the life of the son with that of the noble father?” Hands raised to the heavens, he continued, “When Yeshua forgot his messianic duty, should I have opposed his plan to suffer in his flesh and in his spirit in the place of his son, Bar Abbas?” Knees bent, he rocked his body forward and backwards as he spoke. “Yes! I assisted him but, contrary to the final plan of which he knew not, his spirit is now unassisted.”

The Elder glanced at the body of his disciple on the cross. “Have we unwittingly sacrificed our people’s right to the Age of Glory, to the World To Come,” he asked, “if they were to be ushered him? Are the cataclysmic repercussions of his premature death on that Roman cross your punishment for having assisted the burning grief of one father instead of letting life or death come as You decreed them?” His fingers ran through his beard. “Was Yeshua not allowed to accept the sacrifice himself as a noble a father? Were we, who made the false deal with the Prefect, not allowed to deceive the Roman by feigning our Messiah’s death?”

The Elder’s mutter, shaped deep within his spirit, had the flat, hard edge of rock rolling over rock. Chin tilted towards the Taw, he said, “Have we erred in thinking that, once the debt of his agony was paid in full, his life energies would be repaired? Have we erred in thinking that his true destiny would be restored, as willed by You, Oh, *Adonai,* my Lord?”

Seemingly bewildered, he paused and looked about him. To the heavens, he shouted, “Is this man not the Messiah sent by your Grace to redeem our spirits and to redeem the glory of *Eretz* Israel for your children?” Head pounding and, spirit as dark as his heart, the Elder slumped heavily to the ground.

While the Roman soldier sat under the shade of the closest tree, the Master, the merchant and Issiyim Elders sparked thoughts on the nature of the developing situation. The great distance that separated each from the others was reduced to nought by the power of their minds.Yes, they were all companions in a deceitful plan. Yes, they had compacted with the Roman Prefect himself!
The son, Bar Abbas, would be freed.
The father, Yeshua, would suffer in his flesh and in his soul.
The Prefect Pilate would gloat about the suffering, about the humiliation inflicted, both being the primary intentions of crucifixions as deterrents. He had granted

himself the most callously morbid satisfaction of seeing, exsanguinous on a Roman cross, the one the Jews had been about to anoint; the man who brought nightmares to his sleep. From the Elders, he had accepted an unusual amount of precious stones and gold coins as bribe.

The end plan of the Issiyim had to go on as planned. Even if Yeshua chose to sublimate his pain till his breath stopped in his throat, the final stages of the scheme would be executed, one by one, at the time Yeshua's body would be released from the iron spikes that held him to the Taw.

It had been agreed that neither Yeshua's heart nor his lungs would be pierced by a Roman lance.
His legs would not be shattered by blows of the iron crurifragium.
Once in the burial chamber, the wounds and internal damage would command the most involved of esoteric ministrations.
The King of Jews would survive the night.
Once ensconced back to the safety of the Negev, there, he would be fully healed.
In the fullness of time, this Chosen One would step into his destined role of Messiah of the Jewish people.

Inexplicably though, Yeshua had refused God's divine energies. He had refused the ministrations of his spiritual Master – his mentor and most trusted confident.
What, pondered the Elder, had made Yeshua refuse for himself the energies he had so often manipulated for the good of so many?
Was his refusal driven by the utmost integrity of his word given, the Master pondered, or was it driven by muddled thoughts through the burning fog of delirium?

Through the trees and dwarfed by them, the cross and the body pinned to it appeared small and insignificant. "I am a lowly worm in your radiance, Adonai, my Lord. I ask for your forgiveness." As he resumed his rocking, the Elder closed his eyes again. In a powerful voice, he implored "Forgive him, as you forgive me, oh, Adonai!"

Hours went by in the burial grounds. The shadows lengthened some more but they grew faint and dull. The sun had preferred to not be radiant on such a day as this one.

The Issiyi Master thought about events that had led to this. He had not seen much of Yeshua in the three years that followed his departure from the spiritual land of Qumran by the Lake of the Dead Sea.
When he left them, he also left behind Mary Magdalene and his young son in their flat-roofed house. He also left behind Mary, his mother. Widowed from Cleopas, she and her sister, Shulamit, lived nearby on the plateau.

When he left the Elders and their cave depositories of ancient esoteric knowledge to walk the land and spread the Word of God through the Torah and the Prophets, wherever his feet took him, he also spread the word of the brewing rebellion against Roman rule.

Throughout the past years, they had all remained linked through an exchange of parchments delivered by couriers. In between written news, it had not been uncommon for Yeshua to connect telepathically to his Master, as happened the moment Yeshua heard news of the arrest of Bar Abbas, the only shoot from his tree.

It is the Master, himself, who had speedily instructed the Elders of the Jerusalem chapter to assemble a small delegation fortified by a large bribe, one so large that the Prefect's lustful greed would be unable to resist.

From mind to mind, one simple thought at a time, the order had been received to request a substitution of bodies between the father and the son. By the early morning hour the following day, flanked by a discreet escort of Sicarii, the Master had already travelled a long way towards Jerusalem.

In the garden of Arimathea, a long, high-pitched wail of pain broke the silence. Antonius jumped to his feet. Yeshua's contorted visage held him riveted.

12 "This … the LORD says," Yeshua spoke in a shrill wail. "Your ... injury beyond ... be... yond healing. No one to plead your cause ... no remedy for your ... sore ... no healing for you --" [1] Exhausted by the effort and the pain, Yeshua fainted.

Antonius was transfixed. Never, in all the hours spent on Golgotha had he heard such an eerie wail. He did not know the words spoken by the dying man, but the lament touched his heart. He looked at the old man in the white robe.
Still as a pillar of salt among the trees, the Master held his eyes fixed on the point in the ground from which the stipe protruded obscenely.

The fourteenth verse in Jeremiah 30, the verse that followed the words spoken by Yeshua filtered to his consciousness: [14] All your allies have forgotten you; they care nothing for you. I have struck you as an enemy would and punished you as would the cruel, because your guilt is so great and your sins so many. [15] Why do you cry out over your wound, your pain that has no cure? Because of your great guilt and many sins I have done these things to you."[2]

The Elder lifted his eyes to Yeshua. Why? Yeshua, why such thoughts from you, innocent lamb? He silenced his own thoughts. The time for questions had long ago passed. He sighed deeply before focussing his senses on the quality of the air about him. It was mild and dry. The sun was mostly hidden by clouds – a blessing.

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1. Inspired by Jeremiah 30:13
2. Jeremiah 30:15

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The Last Moment on the Cross

The soldier, Antonius, picked up his lance and stepped forward. Often, he had glanced cursorily at a dying man on a cross, only to mock him, but he had long ago stopped truly looking at this one. For the first time in a long time, Antonius tried to imagine the burning pains flashing through the man's arms. He noticed the hands seized in a claw-like grip. He saw the stomach trembling like the pulsating throat of a lizard though the ribs no longer moved.

The entire body was pale as wax, drained of blood. *He's probably pissing blood inside his innards,* Antonius guessed. *Plus the blood lost on the way here.* He looked more closely at Yeshua's face. The mouth was gaping. Dry like the inside of my sheath, he surmised. Rivulets of sweat pearled from the man's forehead, from the chest too, and lost themselves on the contours of his body. Not long now, he thought.

Surreptitiously, he searched again through the trees for the old man.
Many a crucifixus he had pierced, but this one was different.
Everything about this moment was different; the isolation of the condemned man in this luscious orchard, the invisible but palpable presence of the old Jew holy-man, the stillness of everything and the oppressive silence that had been shattered by that awful lament voiced from another world. Oddly, he found comfort in the distant but real presence of the old man in the white robe.

Antonius swallowed hard and, remembering he was a soldier, a soldier in the Roman army, not a mere lad anymore, he seized his lance firmly and strode towards the cross. His eyes were level with Yeshua's feet.
Swarms of insects buzzed around the iron spike that held his left foot skewed to the right, forcing the knees outward and the waist into a cruel twist.

Blood had stopped flowing in rivulets over the toes. He walked to the back of the cross. Some insects, he could see, were crawling inside the blood encrusted wounds cut into the buttocks and the back of the legs. It was not uncommon.

He knew insects burrowed inside the wounds, eyes and nose of the dying. Within the minutes that followed death, flies would make the corpse their nesting ground. Often, he had seen the ravages made to a dead body left overnight on the cross. By morning it would, most usually, be found torn by the teeth and claws of wild animals. He also knew that while the condemned man was still alive, it was not uncommon for birds of prey to pick at his eyes and at the flesh of his body.

Antonius turned around. His eyes were magnetized to that of the old Jew, lone figure, dwarfed by the dark mass of centenary trees.

“Return to your rest, young soldier,” the Issiyi called out in heavily accented Latin. “He is not dead yet.” He folded a hand under his cheek in the gesture of sleep.
“How do you know?” questioned the soldier.

“I know,” the Master replied and, silently willing the young Roman to do the same, he adopted a cross-legged position under an oak tree.

“Too bad it is so, old man, for of this place, I’ve had enough,” the soldier called out, his composure regained. “Most boring day of my life!”

Impassive, the Master had already returned inward. As he had done so often in the past, he tuned his thoughts into those of his disciple’s.
As in the thoughts of every man dying, the desire for forgiveness was also in Yeshua’s.
Forgive me for my sins. I have been too weak to forgive those who have trespassed against me and now, I lack the strength of will.
Forgive me, *Adonai*, my Lord, his spirit implored silently.

As the sun began its downward curve,[34] At three o’clock Jesus cried out with surprising power, *“Eli, Eli! Lema sabachthani?* My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” [1]

Antonius turned again to the Issiyi, this time of his free will. ‘What’s he saying?” he called out, his heart caught in his throat.

“Nothing for you to fret about, Roman, but, for him, it’s terrible,” the Master replied. “His God, he feels, has abandoned him. And not even the prophet Elijah can help him. Only he can help himself, as we can all,” he added cryptically.

What can the poor sod do to help himself, wondered Antonius. “Easy said,” he replied dryly. Antonius was about to shrug and return to his place, when he asked, “Who is the man? What’s his crime?”

“The answers to both your questions depend on who is asking the questions. The Prefect says he is guilty of sedition, of crimes against Rome. His wife and son know him as a compassionate man.” Without turning, he pointed to the hill behind the orchard. “Together with his mother and his brothers, they are already mourning him on the escarpment.”

Antonius never thought that he and the old man were not the only watchers. He shielded his eyes to better see in the distance. Though it was too far to discern them clearly through the trees, he was most surprised to see a few men and women on the side of the hill.
“I, my brethren and our people in Israel and abroad,” continued the Elder, “we said our God had blessed him. We said he was to be the King of Israel and the King of the Jews. We said he would be anointed as a messiah, our true Mashiah.” Weary, the Elder added softly, “But, clearly, to fulfil his destiny, this man has to live.”

Antonius looked at the limp and twisted body on the Taw.
He was not familiar with the concept of a messiah. Therefore he did not understand all of the old man’s explanation, but he did recognize a dying man for what he was. “I am not a man that wagers and thus I say your man is going to fall short of his destiny,” he said bluntly. He shrugged. “Your King, you said?” he asked as an afterthought. He sounded perplexed. “Your King is the half-Jew, Herod, but it is to Titus that you owe your lives, all of you, Jews.” Still hesitating between staying and going, he sucked in his bottom lip. “And if I ask you why he is here, what say you?”

Lips tight, the Elder glanced at the cross. “His crime, you ask? He is guilty of not one.” He paused, his attention seemingly arrested by the water spouting from the fountain. He said, “If you ask him why he has thorns digging at his head, spikes

inside his wrists and inside his feet, he'll say that it's to save the life of his son, Bar Abbas. This very young rebel is the only shoot from the stump of Yeshua." [3]

Antonius asked again, "Why is he calling out in this way?"

The Elder sighed. He glanced at the body of Yeshua through the trees. Alone in the clearing, it looked small as an idolater's statue. "Naked as a worm, he already is. His soul now demands he becomes more humble than a worm. And so does mine."

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1. Matthew 27:29
2. Matthew 27:45-46
3. Inspired by Isaiah 11:1

The Market Place

The *shuk* is always a busy place full of color and full of clamors but never as colourful, loud or busy as during the influx of hundreds of thousands of pilgrims to the city of Jerusalem. The vast alley in which Myriam and her kinfolk were walking was no exception.

The heady scents released by the myriad of cone-shaped mounds of spices spilling out of woven baskets mingled with the sweetness of the women's perfume and the thick smell of donkeys walking humbly in the dust, a step or two behind their owners.

It was at this marketplace that Yacov and his brothers, walking a few steps ahead of their women folk, came across a group of men talking in controlled, but tense tones. What had attracted Yacov's attention, even from a distance, was the peculiar agitation that seemed to link the men and how they had assembled, one near the other, as tightly as grapes in a bunch. The men were on edge - that much was clear.

As he observed the men, Yacov sensed that these were not merely involved in the common pastime of collectively cursing the Romans for everything, from their pagan gods to the amount of manure their horses dropped on every walking surface.

The seething outrage, palpable even from a distance, had to be about an issue vastly different from the usual complaints of the imposition of yet another tax.
Its cause had to be beyond the steel grip ‘those vile pagans have on us, the Children of Israel’. Of that Yacov was sure.

On the issue of Roman abuses, the bitter consensus among the Jews was that, sooner or later, in the name of Tiberius, Herod Antipas, the sly client-king from the land of Edom who was supposed to defend their interests, would passively concede the imposition of yet another tax. While doing so, why not make it a tax on every household in possession of more than one donkey and why not call that tax the Asses tax, the people riled grimly.

Yacov tucked one earlock behind his ear and looked sideways at Myriam Magdalene, the wife of Yeshua, the elder brother who, two years earlier had left his beautiful wife and the home she had made for him and Bar Abbas, their first-born, to lock step with their cousin, Yohannan ha-Matbil, the Baptist.

For years, after their wedding at Cana, Myriam Magdalene had walked with her husband and those who followed him out a faith borne out of duty, not to him, but to their God. She had understood his Gift. She had understood the mission that had become his by Divine Decree.

She understood, when the day came that her husband had to walk further and without her.
She understood that he would be protected by others, by many others, but mostly protected by the Light of God.
She understood such things clearly because Her Lord spoke to her about such matters.

The soft green of Myriam Magdalene's veil fluttered lightly as she walked by Yacov's side. It shielded her profile, but Yacov was very familiar with the features protected from his gaze; the narrow sweeping wings of her eyebrows and the gravity of the luminous brown almonds that were her eyes. Surely Yeshua knew her very well, Yacov thought, as he walked by her side.
For this reason, he loved her more than anyone else except Adonai, our Lord.
It is for his Faith in God that he left her, as he left us, to preach the Word of our God and the ways of the Torah.

When Myriam Magdalene did turn her face to Yacov, the silver ring that pierced her nose glinted sharply in the morning sun. As common as a nose ring was, Yacov thought, the noses of very few women are served as well by this adornment as is the nose of Myriam Magdalene.

Born into a family of means and a woman of valor in her own right as a reputed hairdresser of women, his sister-in-law always walked more lightly than any other woman Yacov had ever noticed.
He, as awkwardly as always, smiled at her and, with a tilt of the chin, he signaled his

brothers to walk over to the group of men gathered about a situation of utmost importance - of that he had no doubt.

Myriam, his mother, called out, “Son, do not overlook the jars that have to be filled. Water and sweet wine are needed for the Shabbath dinner.”
“Mother, my brother and I will be walking again by your side before you turn into the alley of the butchers.”
She replied, “Then go, my sons.”

Flanked by her daughter and her daughter-in-law, Myriam walked on looking for the ingredients needed for the stew the women aimed to prepare and let simmer ahead of the Shabbath once they got back to the pilgrims' camp. The good-natured donkeys saddled with their panniers followed the women half a stride behind them.

Yacov watched on as the earth-warm tones of the veil that covered the head of his beloved mother disappeared amongst the throngs of people and donkeys going about their business among the endless rows of stalls. Myriam Magdalene was taller than his mother, so he was able to keep his eyes on the fluttering soft green veil a moment longer before it, too, was absorbed by the crowd.

Yacov's mother was known as the best dyer of cloth in the region of Magdala where he and all his kindred had settled with their herd many years ago.
Other women could only coax spices, petals of flowers, the blood red aril of the pomegranates, elements in the earth and life in the sea to yield an imitation of the color given to them by Yahweh, the God Who Created All.

To his mother, each yielded their character, and they yielded their purity.
Of her skill, it was said the whiteness of the white veils women bought for the wedding of their daughters was as pure as the snow that covered the highest nook in the mountains of Galilee.

It was out of Myriam’s craft that appeared the array of veils and sashes that adorned the beauty of his brother’s wife, as petals adorned the heart of a flower.
With a sigh, he remembered the prayer he had whispered only a few hours ago during the early morning, as he had wrapped the *tefillin* around his biceps, the

closest place to his heart. And his thoughts returned to his obligations and to the *mitzvah* he knew so well: Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy brother's wife: it is thy brother's nakedness. [1]

As he had done earlier that morning in the Temple prayer hall, Yacov tightened the belt over his robe and strode towards the group of men still gathered off the main alley. His brothers followed him. Yacov accepted that the stirring he felt when close to this sister-in-law was the challenge sent to him by His God. It was a test of his morality. He accepted that his God sent His People ordeals of such magnitude only when He knew they could meet the challenge if they tried with all their spirit.

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1. Leviticus 18:16

Mary Hears News of Her Son’s Agony

“Shimon, the son of my sister, said he carried the crossbar for him!” cried an elderly man. A Pharisee, eyes shielded by a cap shaped like a mortar, he preferred the inconvenience of seeing less of the world in front of him than to be confronted by the sight of a woman. *“Him!* Mocked by a Roman victor's wreath made of thorns around his head! Blood poured from a thousand wounds, said Shimon, the son of my sister.”

Beard and earlocks as black as the feathers of a crow's wing, a tall man asked, “It is said that when he was made to walk, the purple cloak of Kings clung to his wounds. Has anyone seen this?”

“It is true!” the Pharisee shouted again. “An Issiyi quickly threw the cloak over his shoulders as soon as he could pass between the guards. Shimon, the son of my sister, saw this with his eyes.”

Yacov glanced from the man’s mortar-shaped cap to the frayed edge of his sleeve. The glory of the pomegranates embroidered among the fringes had paled many seasons ago. Yet, he envied the determination of this Pharisee to keep himself pure of lustful thoughts by blinding himself to the beauty of the clouds, to the beauty of the horizon, even to the beauty of olive and almond trees exploding with white blossom. But then again, Yacov thought wisely, even a blinded man can still see beauty once glimpsed. Besides, he surmised, if Yahweh has created such natural beauty, including the beauty of women, surely it is a mitzvah to be grateful for such beauty and surely it is a *mitzvah* for us, men, to control our loins, and not blind our eyes. Yacov tucked a thumb under his belt and returned his attention to the crux of the harangue.

A man in the growing crowd called out, “Where is he now?”

“I've said already!” a voice snapped back. Yacov found the man's face. He noticed the eyes darting from one face to the other. “The Romans have already driven the spikes through his wrists and through his feet. His remaining hours will be very few,

but he still breathes.” The man's impatient fingers plucked at his beard. “This much is clear, for this I have seen with my own eyes!”

“We hear you, Boaz, but they did not take him to Golgotha, so where have they taken him?” the man called out again. The soft cloth of the brown *halug* gathered at his waist by a leather belt fell in soft folds over his chest and legs.

“*Ma ze?* Not on Golgotha?” exclaimed someone else. “The Romans have made it so that every crucified soul is forced to take the last breath on Golgotha where the very ground is the work of Satan!”

One man became more vociferous than the others. Against the black cloak worn clasped at the neck, the man's face was the color of flax seeds. His fists shook in anger. His lips were so pinched, they were pale. “*Lo!* Not on Golgotha! In the garden of Yosef of Arimathea, the merchant! That's where they planted his Taw.”
Spirit curdled by sarcasm, he spat. “Special consideration for the King of Jews and the King of Israel is what the Centurion shouted this morning to all who asked!”

The Pharisee called again from under his mortar cap. “The worst of all Roman murders to ever befall our people! And like ones cursed with a hollow head, all of us here only talk about this most sacrilegious murder with words and more words!”

“With useless, dead words!” someone thundered.

Yacov sensed the energy that synergised the men. “Who is this man of whom you are talking?” he interjected.

His question got lost in the swirl of anger. No reply came forth. Instead, the tall man spoke again, “Useless words in truth! Time has come for us, Children of Abraham, to toss onto the pile of wood the blaze of our kindling sticks!
Let the crucifixion of the Son of Man be the undoing of the Roman Prefect – a man of blood! Mark it that this absolute, most odious deed against our people will be his last! Mark it that this deed is the one that will bring down Tiberius. May he and the hordes of his unwashed heathens become lepers,” he yelled, shaking a vengeful fist. “And his pagan gods, too!” he added for good measure. Spittle flew from the corner of his lips. “This deed is an attack against the Divine Plan!”

“*Be- emet!* So true!” agreed the voice in the crowd. “The Galilean has been chosen by our Lord! By his death must come to pass what in his life had been decreed. Even dead, Yeshua, the Galilean, is our intended Messiah, our Savior. Yohannan the Baptist, himself, said this!”

Sudden shards of apprehension pierced the hearts of Yacov, Yosei, Yehudah and Shimon. At the mention of ‘Yeshua, the Galilean’ within the context of the ignominious crucifixion and juxtaposed to that of Yohannan the Baptist, their cousin, murdered by Herod Antipas, the client-king, less worthy of respect than camel spit, they shuffled apprehensively closer to each other.

Eyes rounded in dread, Yosei whispered in his Yacov’s ear. If what he was thinking was true, God had abandoned their elder brother. A glimmer of macabre understanding dawned on each of the brothers.

Blood pounding hard against his eardrums, Yacov called out again, “As the nation of crucified ones that the Romans have made of us, on the Taw we are numbered in thousands this year alone.” Dark eyebrows knotted in apprehension, he asked, “What more do you know about this Galilean that you should be so embittered about one man among hundreds?”

A man of stature had joined the group a moment earlier. Majestic earlocks framed the face buried inside a thick beard the color of polished iron. “Brother, your question paints you as a stranger to Jerusalem. It says that you were not one of the thousands who acclaimed this man as he rode through the Eastern gate, at the time of *Succoth* past.”
The Elder continued, “Hossanah, we shouted. Save us! Hallelujah! Praise Yahweh!” The man’s tone was fervent, and no one interrupted. “The Galilean is known to us by his teachings, and we know him as a *navi*, a prophet, a man of God. We know him for the promises he held - the promise to lead us against the oppressors and the promise to return to us the land *Adonai*, our Lord, gave Abraham – through His will.”

“Many of us walked by his side, as he preached the way of the Torah,” added the tall man. “We talked about salvation from under the yoke of the Roman Procurators. The Galilean is the one designated to lead us to Redemption.” The man sighed

heavily. His body slumped. “This, we believed! We believed he was not another false messiah, but now ....”

Someone called out from the edge of the group. “Before his death, Yohannan ha-Matbil did as you said. He said this about the Galilean preacher: ‘This is he of whom I said *After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me.*’ [2] Yes, he said that of Yeshua, the Galilean! I was there early one morning doing *tevilah* in the Jordan where Yohannan preached.”

“Brother, we all thought Yeshua, the Galilean, would one day be our Savior, but already while we were chewing our evening meal, *Adonai*, our Lord, showed He had a different Plan for us, His Children. It is to the Gardens of Gethsemane where he always finished the day that, last night, he was taken.”

“His son was taken before him!” shouted a voice.
“What news do you have on Bar Abbas?” replied another.
“No news!”
Shimon, the youngest of the brothers, found his voice. He asked, “What is the crime blamed on our brother? On Yeshua?”
“Sedition!”

The man in the brown *halug* shouted, “Sedition? Which one of us, here, is not guilty of sedition? Which one of us, in his own heart, does not have the thought of a dagger cutting across Pilate’s throat?” He glared at Shimon. “What is the crime committed by our Savior?” He pointed an angry finger. “Did you ask this question? Are you with no shame to ask this?”
His voice almost strangled by righteous anger, the man continued. “How can he, the man chosen as our Messiah, the one marked to be anointed .... How can such a man be guilty of any crime?” He addressed the crowd menacingly, “All of you!” he shouted. “Hang your heads in shame for tacitly collaborating with the Romans!”

The tall man nodded. “Debir is right!” he replied hoarsely. “They’ve murdered Yohannan and they're murdering the Son of Man in the cruellest, most ignominious manner. If we rise against Pilate now, Yahweh will carry us on the wings of eagles!”

Arms outstretched above the many heads, he embraced the realm of his one God. “We will soar! In His name, we’ll avenge the blood of the Galilean lamb.”

The man with mortar cap and the frayed robe added a curse of his own. He shouted, “May Yahweh bring to the Romans the burning lesions of a plague that never ceases!”

Another man replied darkly with a voice choked by an anger that was centuries old, “May He put an iron yoke on their accursed necks!”

Another one called out gravely, “May Yahweh strike Pilate and Tiberius, their children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation with the boils of Egypt!” [3]

“With haemorrhoids and dry boils which cannot be cured,” yelled another.[4]

In their words, Yacov recognized verses from Devarim, Deuteronomy. With gravitas, he added his voice to the clamor. “May Pilate grope at noontime as a blind man gropes in the darkness.” [4] The veins on his forehead were salient.

“May he be cheated and robbed all the days of his life,” added Yosei.[5]

Shimon called out, “Who ... can ... give ... back ... last night!” he intoned. “Who can give back ... this morning!” Overcome by emotion, he, the youngest of the brothers, brashly redirected against the Romans the warning His God had given the Israelites in the Wilderness. “For the fright of their heart that they will fear and the sight of their eyes that they will see!” [6]

Swirls of outraged anger were thick. Their dark energy moved too quickly through and around the group of men. Yacov, Yosei, Yehudah and Shimon looked at each other with the uncomprehending eyes of rabbits caught in a snare.
Around them, the men pressed on with their harangue, but the brothers heard no more.
Silently, as one, they pushed their way out of the writhing throng and walked on. They passed by stalls laden with produce. Eventually, Shimon broke the silence.

He said flatly, “Yacov, will you be the one to bring this news to our sister-in-law and to our mother and to our sister.”

As Yacov was about to reply, from the direction the women had taken towards the butchers’ alley, the cries of *“Chazak, Chazak! Venischazeik!”* [7] rang out. Young men, beards still in their first growth, earlock barely longer shouted, *“Chazak, Chazak, Venischazeik!* Be strong and may we be strengthened! A son of Israel had been freed!”

As they ran through the alley with the hem of their robes tucked under their belts, the youths did their best to awaken the vendors from their apathy. They ran past the brothers. *“Chazak, Chazak! Venischazeik!* One son of Israel has escaped death on the Taw. One of us! He shows us the way out from under the iron grip of the Romans!”

Their spirits addled by the blow of sudden grief, the brothers remained uncomprehending. Not one of them thought to stop a young man to ask what their rejoicing was really about.

Yacov, Yehudah, Yosei and Shimon rounded the corner of the alley, as Shulamit, their youngest sister, came running ahead of her mother and her sister-in-law.
Her veil had slipped off her head and soft brown tendrils stuck to her hot cheeks.

“Bothers ... how can you walk so ... solemnly?” she asked, gulping for breath. “Did you not hear the news?” The brothers looked at her as if the lovely girl had snakes pushing out of her eyes and ears.
Bursting with joy, she exclaimed, “Bar Abbas has been released, my brothers! These men that ran past are some who fight with him. They have seen him released this morning! They will take us to him. Come speedily, my brothers! Our sister-in-law and Mother are waiting to rejoice with you. Together, we will show gratitude to our Lord for His Radiant Benevolence!”
With the one hand, Shulamit slipped the veil back over her head and, with the other, she grabbed the hand of Shimon, the brother youngest before her.

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1. Leviticus 18:16
2. John 1:30
3. Inspired by Deuteronomy 28: 27-29
4. Inspired by Deuteronomy 28: 27-29
5. Inspired by Deuteronomy 28: 27-29
6. Inspired by Deuteronomy 28: 27-29
7. The words of the traditional praise found at the end of each of the Five Books of the Torah.

On The Escarpment

In the distance, Yeshua's body was small, almost insignificant. It was barely visible through the trees. Though the women silently yearned to call out to him, to go to him and hold him, religious protocol explicitly forbade them to do so.
Not only had Yahweh warned the Israelites against impure energies generated by the atrocious agony of torture and incipient death, but casting even the most cursory of glances over a man's nakedness was absolutely forbidden. The women knew they could edge no closer to the Romans' cross than they already had.

They knew that when Yeshua's body would be taken down, they would not be able to hold it. They knew they would not be the ones to take it to the burial cave.
They would not be the ones to lay the body of their husband, son and brother on the rock bench inside the chamber.
They would not be the ones to wash the blood, the dust, the filth and the insect droppings off the body.
They would not be the ones to cover the body with the shroud of the dead to protect it from the gaze of others. Women were never allowed to minister to the soul-less body of a man, not even at the moment of his 'first burial', the twelve months that preceded the gathering of the dry bones and their final 'burial' either in the family's ossuary or in the ground.

Myriam Magdalene, wife of Yeshua, accepted that wanting to be close to a dead soul, even if the dead soul was her husband, meant longing to get close to what was not Torah. Come the day of Shabbath, for such thoughts she fleetingly entertained, she would atone at the Temple by making a new offering.

In their misery, the grieving women were grateful that the man they knew not, a rich man from Arimathea, they had been told, had paid a handsome sum to the Prefect to guard against pagan eyes the shameful and undignified agony of their Yeshua.
This man had thus performed, the woman had earlier agreed, the greatest mitzvah imaginable. "This man is a man of God," Mary Magdalene cried through hands wet

with tears. “May Yahweh look favorably upon his pure heart, upon his children and upon his children's children and upon the third and the fourth generation!”

Myriam, mother of Yeshua, sat semi-prostrate on the escarpment that overlooked the most peaceful and beautiful burial grounds she had ever seen. Judging by the width and height of the façade carved out of the cliff, and judging by the lily-decorated gables, she estimated the rock-cut chambers to number four or five.
The land, she had been told, belonged to one named Yosef of Arimathea, a rich merchant, a judge in the Sanhedrin, no one her family knew personally, except perhaps her son.

Twenty years after her first and last pilgrimage to the Temple, Myriam’s first-born was near death at the far end of the majestic orchard that sprawled at her feet. “Please, I beg you,” she murmured against the joined hands she held pressed to her lips. “I beg you for my son, the flesh of my flesh, my Lord. I beg that Your Divine Providence keeps us in good health - all of us, but particularly Yeshua, my eldest son.” She pulled the henna-died veil further over her forehead and crossed its folds over her breasts as if they could shield her heart from more pain.

Twenty years have passed already, Myriam thought. She shivered under the thin folds of her woollen robe. Shulamit shifted against her shoulder.
Twenty years ago, that same son had run through the pilgrims’ caravan with the boys his own age. Mostly, she remembered, he tried to make himself useful to the men who did serious things. It was then that an old but favorite memory hit her; Yosef, her husband, recounting how well Yeshua had debated points of the Torah with the priests. How proud they had both been of the *naar*, the son of Myriam!

Twenty years ago, already! The now bitter-sweet memory of that pilgrimage constricted her throat, but her spirit tugged at her. Her spirit wanted her back in the present, back on the escarpment above the garden of Arimathea.
Her spirit would not allow her more than a mere few seconds of escape from the vision so infernal that no number of demons could have driven such disturbance into her spirit.

Down below, directly in front of her but visible only through the tangle of tamarisks, oaks, scented jasmine and olive trees covered in white blossom was the Taw on which, in place of Bar Abbas, the son of her son - her own first born was nailed.
To her, he appeared as vulnerable as an insect under the cruel hand of a child.

Together, the women prayed that Yahweh would know that Yeshua had not been one to raise his eyes to the heaven to be blinded by the sun, the moon and the stars; that he had not been one to be drawn astray by their beauty; that he had not bowed to them and worship them. The women prayed that Yahweh would know that Yeshua had led his life moved by the exemplary, utterly selfless devotion of Abraham to God, his exceedingly great reward.

Myriam pulled the hem of the brown veil over her forehead to shield her eyes from the afternoon sunlight. She found temporary solace by turning her thoughts back to her village in Magdala.
Two weeks earlier, she and her family had guided their donkeys to where they would join the caravan travelling to Jerusalem for the celebration of Pesach. Yacov, Yosei, Yehudah and Shimon, her four other sons, had gathered to prepare their hardiest donkeys for the journey.

Now, Myriam's thoughts returned to the present. Down in the orchard, each hour that passed brought Yeshua's last breath closer to his lips. Each of these hours moved too fast for the women on the escarpment. Myriam Magdalene prayed to *Adonai*, her Lord.
Her heart was absolutely rent by the power of conflicting emotions.
All of her heart exuded love for Yahweh. She thanked Him for the merciful hand he had extended over her son, Bar Abbas, the only fruit of her womb.
Equally, all of her heart fought to resist cursing Him for being so cruel toward Yeshua, her husband, the father of the son.

"Nothing ever happens to us, your creatures, unless it is by your decree!" she cried suddenly. "Why punish so cruelly the only one, who, in this generation as in many others past, has dedicated his entire life to you? Has he not held you forever in his spirit since he first heard the words of the Torah as spoken by Yosef, the carpenter?"
Myriam Magdalene rocked on her heels. "Why do this to him? What Greater Plan will

his death fulfil than the plans You made with him alive? How can the death of such a righteous man fill any plan at all?" She dropped to her knees. "Answer me. *Aneni na*!" Her forehead touched the rocky ground under her hands. "*Eli!* You know me!" she sobbed. "Answer me, my Lord!"

Shulamit, her sister-in-law, sobbed under the veil she had pulled over her forehead so far that it hid all of her face. Still as a rock, eyes vacant, Salome, Myriam's sister, stared ahead.

As the women watched from the unbridgeable distance, eyes rounded in horror, hands gripping hands, a Roman soldier stepped out from under a clump of trees. Transfixed, they watched as he hefted his spear.
They watched as he stood still in front of the Taw. Perhaps he was asking Jupiter to steady his hand before making the customary stab to hasten death.

Perhaps the soldier was deciding through which intercostal space to thrust the iron tip of the lance - the one that would puncture a lung or the one that would pierce the heart.

It was later said that when the Roman soldier pierced through a section of the ribcage, water and blood flowed forth. From their remote viewing point, however, the women were spared the sight but overwhelmed by grief, they sagged to the ground.

Down in the orchard, the Roman soldier brought out a ladder. He climbed until his chest was level with Yeshua's wrist nailed to the patibulum. He manoeuvred the gaping wound until the tendons cleared the dark head of the iron spike.
Yeshua's head and shoulder slumped forward.

The Issiyi Elder appeared out of the dark mass of trees and bushes. Though Myriam could not see his face, she liked to think that he was the Elder her son had called Father for most of his adult life.
Beside him, in the brocade robe of a wealthy merchant, stood a man of status.
Yosef, our benefactor, she thought, eyes blurred by fresh tears.
Together, the merchant and the Issiyi propped up as best they could the limp body of Yeshua, while the Roman soldier prised the other wrist free from the iron spike.

Clumsily, together, they held up the weight of Yeshua’s torso while the Roman freed his feet from the third spike.
The body was eventually laid at the foot of the cross. The two men walked heavily to the fountain where they rinsed their faces and rubbed their hands free of Yeshua’s blood.

To the soldier, Yosef produced the compulsory official paper sealed with Roman wax that confirmed that the body of the crucified Jew could be released to whoever claimed it for burial.
Into the man’s palm, he dropped a dark pouch the size of a plum – the pre-arranged reward between him and the Roman soldier for having accepted to control the penetration of the iron point through Yeshua’s ribs.
The soldier closed his blood-stained fingers over the pouch as, hours earlier, the Centurion had done over his own reward.
Well worth a weak thrust of the lance, he thought.

On the hill, only the breeze moved. It fluttered through the women’s veils while, silently, huddled together, they wept. It is there, on the escarpment, huddled together, that Yacov, Yosei, Yehudah and Shimon found their womenfolk, as they returned from their own vantage point.

The brothers, being men, had been allowed to stand watch closer to the Taw but, as Jews abiding by Yahweh's ruling that the energies of deep suffering and death are impure, they, too, had not approached the cross. As on Golgotha, they could only observe from a distance.

The brothers helped the women to their feet. The family had to get back on the trail that led to ramparts of Jerusalem a couple of kilometers away. They needed to pass through the Huldah Gate before it closed for the twenty-four-hour duration of the Shabbath.

Though the men were more than able to keep themselves safe in or out of the fortified city, they would never allow their women to risk becoming prey to the watchmen who roamed from dusk to dawn.

The moment of *kriyah* is the time of rending one's clothes as symbol of the heart being rendered by grief, at a loved one's passing.

"Now is the time to tear *kriyah*," said Myriam Magdalene, hand over heart.
Her words jolted Myriam back to the grotesque reality of the present moment.
Her first-born had expired, murdered, after hours of suffering from the blows and cuts of the flagrum and from the ignominious atrocity of death on the Taw! So absurd and incomprehensible it was that her mind had lagged behind the reality of what had come to pass below the escarpment, in the orchard of the merchant of Arimathea.
Yes, she thought, she's right. It's time for *kriyah*.

Shimon put his arms around his mother's shoulders. She let herself fall back against his chest for a brief moment.
Then, unequivocally, she slipped her son's dagger off his belt. As if testing its sharpness, she ran the ball of her thumb across the tip of the blade. A carmine drop beaded and welled followed by another. Along the first knuckle of her thumb, they ran.

Surrendering briefly again to the private world of her thoughts, Myriam watched the irregular dot of red cast against the dusty grey of the soil on which she stood before lifting her eyes to the pale shape of her son on the other side of the leafy barrier of branches.
She sighed and, into that sigh, her shoulders slumped. Yet, she knew that it was not her place to question her God's will. It was not anyone's place. And so, with the last shred of strength she was able to summon, she intoned, *"Baruch atah Adonai."*
Her voice rose. *"Eloheinu Melech HaOlam Dayan HaEmet."* With the point of the dagger, Myriam, mother of Yeshua, rendered her robe at the place where it shielded her broken heart.

One after the other, her daughter-in-law, her daughter and each of her surviving sons rent their robe. Gravely and openly, they addressed their God, as Myriam had. “Blessed are You, God,” they spoke, “our God, King of the World, the true judge.”

Yacov, Yosei, Yehudah and Shimon untethered the donkeys that had brought them thus far. Hearts heavy with thoughts, they patted the undemanding beasts on the withers and flanks, as they always did before mounting them.
The panniers still contained the produce bought at the market earlier that day. They adjusted the strap that kept them secure over the beasts’ back and, with the burial grounds at their back, they turned the donkeys towards the Huldah gate through which they would enter Jerusalem.

With not a word exchanged, Yacov took the lead with Yosei. They spurred their mounts into a rib-rattling trot. The women’s donkeys followed as they always did . Yehudah and Shimon bracketed their womenfolk from the rear. As fast as their mounts carried them, the group regained the pilgrims’ tent grounds.

Once inside the grounds, they would push their grief aside. The Torah demanded that no sadness, no grief be indulged during Shabbath, the twenty-four hours of every week during which Jewish hearts and spirits were commanded to have no other focus than a reflection on the teachings of their one God and the ramifications and applications of these teachings to their daily lives.

In the meantime, down in the garden of Arimathea, ladder balanced over one shoulder and the pouch of gold coins ensconced in the depth of his backpack, the Roman soldier, who presided over Yeshua’s death, departed. Though he had been moved by the agony of the crucifix, at the precise moment he walked away from the site, Antonius’ thoughts dove-tailed over a conundrum of the

sort he had never had before: how to make the most of the incredible great fortune that had befallen him. How to keep its origins a secret?
Three years of his soldier's pay, he had already estimated, were contained in the pouch ensconced at the bottom of his backpack.
Doing his best to hide a grin, he strutted away from the cross.

In the garden, the Elder felt for signs of life under Yeshua's jaw.
He closed his eyes and his spirit searched for a sign of breath, however weak.
Seconds passed and, still, he could not detect the sign that Yeshua was still able to draw breath.
The Elder closed his eyes again. He emptied his lungs and inhaled slowly.
Finally, Yeshua's energy field revealed itself to the Elder's inner eye.
Deep inside the aura of God's chosen Messiah, he perceived an indicator of physical life that could not be mistaken. Quietly, he whispered, "*Adonai,* my Lord, I give you my humble gratitude!"

Yosef of Arimathea echoed softly the Elder's relief and gratitude. He knelt on the ground and bowed four times. Each time, his face touched the rocky soil.
Each time he thanked Yahweh, his one and only God, for his mercy. "Hallelujah! Praise Yah,' he added quietly.
That day was the 14th day of *Nisan* - the eve of Passover.

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Rigors of Pesach

Observance of religious rigor confined all mourners to their homes during the hours of Shabbath. They all adhered to the added dictate applicable to when one was laid to rest on the eve of Shabbath, which also happened to fall on the eve of Pesach - not forgetting the seven compulsory days of 'sitting shiva', the days of wake. Myriam Magdalene, Myriam, and their kin knew that it would be many days before they could go to the body of Yeshua.

It was on a *yom sheeshee*, a Friday afternoon, that the Issyi Elder and Yosef of Arimathea had laid the body of Yeshua on a rock bed inside the chamber.
Thus, the seven days of shiva, the compulsory days of the wake, would be counted down only from the day that followed the end of Pesach.

All totalled, it would be many days before the family could speak words of farewell to Yeshua, bless his memory, who slept the eternal sleep under the linen shroud of the dead. They knew they could not be reunited with him before *yom sheeshee*, the 29th day of Nisan – fifteen days after they had witnessed the hours of his agony on the Taw.

Mourners were not to do *tevilah* in the *mikveh* to purify their body and uplift their spirit. They were not to wash their body.
They were not to wash their hair.
They were not to cut their nails.
They were not to change clothes, for comfort and vanity have no place in the heart of the mourner.
They were not to go to the Temple, the House of their one God, either.
They were not to leave the house and, there, they were not to be left alone to their own thoughts.

Thus, until sunset on the seventh day of shiva which followed the last day of Pesach, Myriam Magdalene, the women, and Yeshua's brothers, sat in their tent in the pilgrims' compound.

Surrounded by well-wishers who came and went, each bringing simple meals to share while attempting to keep the mourners distracted from their sorrow, they each did their best to comply with all aspects of religious observance.

No matter how they longed to weep, Mary Magdalene, the wife, Myriam, the mother, Shulamit, the sister, Salome, the aunt, Yacov, Yosei, Yehudah and Shimon, the brothers, each knew well that their God would not favorably view any hint of self-pitying indulgence.
Thus, as commanded by Yahweh, lead by Yacov, they turned their thoughts away from their heavy heart to find delight in the wisdom of His Word.
At times, various members of the family took turns reading out loud the Book of Job, a classic story of mourning. They read words from the prophet Jeremiah.
They reflected on the journey of souls coming to earth from Above to rise back to God, back to their source, once their earthly missions were completed. In this, each of Myriam Magdalene's kin found as much solace as she did.

Finally, on the 29th day of Nisan, elated by the freedom to tend to their own emotional needs but weighed down by the sadness of all mourners about to pay their last respects, the family guided their donkeys out of the fortified city.
Through the Huldah Gate, they made their way towards the hills that nestled the orchard of Yosef of Arimathea.

It would only be after their return from the visit to the body of Yeshua that they would go to the mikveh to purify themselves, body and soul.
After their full-body immersions in separate mikvehs, the men and the women would finally shed the clothes they had worn since the Friday of the crucifixion.
They would wash their hair and cut their nails - they could return to the natural rhythm of their lives.

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Mother and Son

Born of Myriam's womb twenty-four months after Yeshua, Yacov, like all Jews, believed in the advent of *Olam Ha-Ba*, The World to Come - the world from which souls would one day awaken to give life to the bones of the righteous ones they had once animated.

The Valley of Dry Bones from Ezekiel 37 was one of the passages he had enjoyed the most, as read by Yeshua, in the days when they lived in Capernaum.
"[1] The hand of the LORD was on me," Yeshua would intone, "and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. [2] He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. [3] He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?"

Yeshua would ask, *"Ha-tichyena ha-atzamot ha-ele?"* He would ask again, "Can these bones live?"
Yacov always replied fervently, *"Ken, hen yecholot!* Yes, they can!"

The part that moved Yacov the most was the one in which his God reassembles the bones to clothes them once again with tendons, flesh and skin.
"[7] So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. [8] I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. [9] Then he said to me, "prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'" [10] So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet - a vast army.

"Yacov, too, liked to imagine a *Yemot ha-Mashiach*, a Messianic Age.

It would be heralded by the anointing of the wisest of all men Yahweh had ever offered His People. It would be led by this unique being born as a shoot from

the House of David. From such a man's mouth, words would flourish as flourished the words of the Prophets: "[9] For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent.[19] At that time I will deal with all who oppressed you; I will rescue the lame and gather those who have been scattered. I will give them praise and honor in every land where they were put to shame. [20] At that time I will gather you; at that time I will bring you home. I will give you honor and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes,' says the LORD."

Yavov remembered how the triumphant notes of the trumpets at Jericho had altered so much the quality of the air, of the ground even, that the mighty walls shook, collapsed and crumbled on their foundations. So, he thought, would the wisdom and the spiritual integrity of such a man shake and crumble the sycophantic ways of many of his brethren.

In time, this Mashiach, this leader, would guide all men to goodness. They would pass on their goodness to their children's children and unto the third and to the fourth generation. Through this Mashiach's guidance, countless generations of Israelites would conquer the material world and all that was theirs to conquer by the Grace of their God.

Yacov was satisfied to think that, by the time his soul rose to return to Yahweh, he, himself, would have played a role in bringing on the Messianic Age through his own righteousness. This belief, as Yeshua taught from Zephaniah 3:19-20, was deeply rooted in the Jewish psyche.

Basically, Yacov believed in the afterlife because he was comforted in the knowledge that the righteous ones would, on the first day of the Messianic Age, be brought back to life.

Tekhiyat ha-Metim, resurrection in the Age of Gold, a world of wisdom, understanding and knowledge, Yacov felt would be a just reward from his God for ultimately defeating temptation and for observing purity of body and purity of spirit in this lifetime.
Resurrection, to him, meant gaining ultimate Knowledge.

Resurrection would be God's gift of Absolute Perfection. It would be the revelation, at long last, of the world, Yahweh had intended for all of mankind before Adam accepted the fig from Hava.

Yacov, unlike the rest of his family, but firmly in step with thousands of others, believed that his older brother had been blessed by their God in a subtle way.
His mother and the rest of his siblings knew Yeshua as an intuitive, erudite but somewhat delusional preacher who heard voices they did not hear.
Unlike Yacov, they believed his voice was not that of a prophet.

Though Yeshua was well-intentioned, Myriam had often feared for her eldest for he was erratic in his acceptance of the Divine Providence and God's word.
Like many of the prophets who claimed to know His thoughts, her son, she well knew, became angry, righteously angry, yes, but destructive nonetheless whenever he found his ideas blocked.
Yet, unlike the prophets, he did not have the gift of prophecy. He only imagined what had been seen by others greater than him. He adjusted only what he wanted to adjust. To Myriam's way of thinking, this amounted to defying God's Purpose.

Ever since he had been a mere boy, Yeshua had wanted to make things happen.
Five hundred years before Myriam had given him birth, the prophet Isaiah had announced King David as the real Mashiah.
Ever since he began to understand the prophets' visions, as explained by his father, Yosef, the carpenter, the boy fantasized about *being a shoot come up from the stump of Jesse*, a descendant of the King.
Patiently, Myriam and Yosef had explained to the *naar* that since Yosef, himself, was not a scion of the House of David, Yeshua simply could not *be a shoot from the stump of Jesse.*

Then came the day when, upon returning from his first pilgrimage to Jerusalem, thirteen-year-old Yeshua declared that, even if he was not a descendant of the House of David, nothing could stop him from thinking as one.
Nothing would stop him from becoming the prophet's Mashia.

“Yeshua, you cannot pretend to be someone you are not,” Yosef had replied.
“It is *kheth* to refuse the plan your God has for you. It is a sin.”

“Abba, I will not pretend to be what I am not. I will act nobly because my character is noble. I will act as nobly as one of the House of David. God will smile upon me for being noble and fair. I will be an excellent judge who makes righteous decisions. Already now, I am well-versed in Jewish law, and I am the obedient observant of His commandments. God will smile upon me again when, with His Grace, I lead all men back to Him.”

Many years later, when Yeshua left his mother’s home in Capernaum to become a disciple of the Issiyim in the Negev, Myriam knew that her son still harboured adamant thoughts of somehow making himself similar to the one the prophet Ezekiel had spoken about centuries earlier.
Then, as before, Myriam was convinced that her son did not have the utmost qualities required for one to become both the leader of men and the leader of their souls.

“Mark the words, *Ima,* for they are clear,” Yeshua had said to her at the moment of his departure. “’Their leader will be one of their own,’ it is said. ‘Their ruler will arise from among them. I will bring him near, and he will come close to me - for who is he who will devote himself to be close to me?’ declares the Lord.’[1] Why not make myself be that leader?”
The donkey, panniers packed, tugged at the rope Yeshua held in his hand.
It was as eager to move on as was Yeshua. He patted the beast and smiled at his mother as brightly as if he stood behind a shield crafted by Yahweh himself.

Myriam’s heart melted again, yet, she was quick to reply firmly, “My son, I can say to you that when Zechariah spoke and said, ‘Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!
Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey,’ [2] it was not a vision of you that had come to him.”
“Ima, you can only know what you know. Of what is unseen, you know not"

“My son, I speak to you with the wisdom that has been given to me when I say it is not for you to meddle with the prophets’ visions for they are not all about a glorious Son of Man. Never forget the words of Jeremiah [3] “[12]This is what the LORD says:
‘Your wound is incurable, your injury beyond healing. [13] There is no one to plead your cause, no remedy for your sore, no healing for you. [14] All your allies have forgotten you; they care nothing for you. I have struck you as an enemy would and punished you as would the cruel, because your guilt is so great and your sins so many. [15] Why do you cry out over your wound, your pain that has no cure.’”[3]

“*Ima yekara*, you, in all your wisdom can only know what you know,” Yeshua had replied cryptically. He swung his leg over the donkey’s back and with one last smile for his mother, he spurred the beast towards the hills.

Myriam did not discuss the matter of her eldest son with her other children. Yacov had his mind set somewhat differently on the matter of his brother’s aspirations, but he did not discuss his mind with either his mother or his siblings.

Yacov felt it right that Yeshua should put his heart and his mind on the side of the Sicarii and his spirit on the side of the Issiyim, if such choices were his to make.
If Yeshua, like the iron lump shaped into a blade, wanted to be shaped into a great God-abiding Mashiah, a great leader of the sort the prophets had proclaimed, *lama lo?* Why not?

For Yeshua, as for himself, Yacov believed that any man’s worth would be revealed through a lifetime of deeds. For any soul, only Yahweh would know how brightly it shone.

And so, for Yacov, his grief was like a shard of glass refracting light in a million of fragmented bits that bit at his spirit. It was different from the grief felt for a lost son, as it was for his mother.
It was different from the grief felt for a husband, as for Myriam Magdalene.
It was different from the grief felt for a brother, as for his three brothers and his sister.

His Lord, *Adonai*, had taken the breath away from his elder brother! Though Yacov was not able to articulate his thoughts, Yahweh, he felt, had cursed His people again. Such thoughts, which he did not share with his family, devastated him for he understood that it could only be out of retributive anger that his God would punish His people so.

Yacov had of late felt most fervently that it might be a man like his brother whom Yahweh was exhorting when He said, [6] "I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, 'You are My Son. Today I have begotten You. [8] 'Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, And the very ends of the earth as Your possession. [9] 'You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like earthenware." [4]

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1. Jeremiah 30:21
2. Zechariah 9:9
3. Jeremiah 30:12-17
4. Psalm 2:7

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Visit to the Shrouded One

Though the family had been ready since dawn to go to the body of Yeshua , they had had to wait till the sun was hot,[1] before the city gates were once again open for the day's bustle in and out of Jerusalem. In the donkeys' panniers were palm-sized oil lamps, one for each member of the family, and tied bunches of scented herbs and spices gathered for the occasion.

The stench of a decomposing body is always horrendously nauseating but, particularly so once the winter air begins to warm up in the Springtime days of Pesach. In the summer months, the stench that greets mourners as they enter a burial cave is absolutely suffocating.
Each one of Yeshua's kin knew that too well from prior exposure to bodies whose souls were in *Olam Ha-ba*, even much fresher ones than Yeshua's body already two weeks under the shroud.

Sweet, bitter and cloying, the smell of festering innards and rotting flesh assails the nostrils and churns the stomach. The only palliative help known to somewhat alleviate the side-effects of the odor was to burn lamps filled with scented olive oil and to hold under one's nose the sharp scent of herbs and spices.

Briefly, the family stopped on the escarpment. The Taw had been removed, but its absent outline shone for Myriam Magdalene more brightly than the pale edge of the rainbow. She closed her eyes to blink away the vision they held trapped inside the depth of her heart.

Solemnly, one after the other, the womenfolk made their way down to the orchard while, sombrely, Yeshua's brothers tethered the donkeys to tree trunks and rocks. They brought water to the donkeys and, absent-mindedly, they patted them on the withers. To each beast, they gave a few handfuls of fodder with which to occupy themselves.

Myriam and the women walked on through the grove towards the rock-cut burial cave that Yosef of Arimathea had most nobly offered as Yeshua's resting place for the twelve months of the customary 'first burial'.

The 'second burial' would take place when the family returned to gather Yeshua's dry bones, most mindful of the tiny Luz bone without which, at the hour of the Messianic Age, no resurrection is ever possible.

Bereishis 2:24 having stated that a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh, [2] it would be Myriam Magdalene who, at that time, would bring the bones back to her family's burial cave in Galilee. In a niche there, they would remain until the hour of *Yemot ha-Mashiach* when all the righteous ones would rise again by the Grace of God.

As she walked through the orchard, the tinkly sound of a fountain attracted Myriam Magdalene. By its carved basin, she paused, allowing her thoughts to be distracted by the transparent drops that melted again and again upon the rippled surface.

To her mother-in-law, she handed the sharp-scented bundle of leaves and spices, as well as the small, clay oil lamp she had been holding in the palm of her hand.

The water of the fountain, she knew, would be as pure as that of the running stream from which it came. Myriam Magdalene offered her wrists and forearms to the soothing coolness. A degree of tension released, she sighed deeply. Cupping both hands, she brought the crystalline water to her dry lips before applying it to her warm forehead. Myriam Magdalene gave thanks to Yahweh for the purity of the water and, again sighing deeply, she patted her face dry with the edge of her veil.

Quickening her pace, she caught up with her mother-in-law, Myriam, and her niece, Shulamit. Salome, lost in thought, was walking by herself among the trees and bushes of the beautiful orchard.

Flanked by two gnarled and dark ancient trees standing guard among jasmine bushes, the facade of the burial cave was a grand affair.
In the heart of the limestone, the fine stonework included many geometrical designs

and the suggestion of palm leaves.
Columns topped by gables featured the carved petals of the lily.
Not one of the women had ever seen such beauty carved out of a rock face.
In the middle of this enduring beauty gaped the dark maw of the entrance.
The huge rock that sealed off the cave had been pulled aside by the thick pulley that was attached to a great stone wheel.

“Someone is already with him,” Shulamit whispered.

Well-aware that solitude under the shroud was at times short-lived, Myriam whispered back, “Maybe with him or maybe with another.”

Depending on a family’s fate, it was not uncommon for one or more corpses to be laid alongside one another before the twelve months of the ‘first burial’ were over – and who but Yahweh knew the fate awaiting any member of the many generations that made up Yosef of Arimathea’s large family?
Myriam Magdalene replied softly, “First or last, it makes no difference to him of blessed memory.”

Dwarfed by the majesty of the cave and humbled by its serene presence, the women stood by its entrance.
“The time has come to warm the oil,” said Salome. Out of the folds of her robe, she withdrew an *egrofan hatzata*, a flat triangular wedge of iron and piece of flint, both roughly the size of her thumb. At the base of a tree, she squatted, and Shulamit squatted next to her, holding out a wad of dry grass.

Deftly, Salome struck the flint against the piece of iron just above the dry grass, again and again, until a spark ignited a dry tuft. Shulamit was quick to blow on it until the wad of dry grass generated smoke.
After a long and slow inhale, she blew and blew again until the wad produced a flame strong enough to light each of the women’s little oil lamps.

Lamps held in the palm of one hand and bunches held firmly against their noses, Myriam and Myriam Magdalene walked inside the first chamber, closely followed by

Salome and Shulamit. Immediately Shulamit emitted a gagging sound. She retreated hastily outside to compose herself before entering again.

Morning light beamed down from the opening in the high ceiling.
The air inside the burial chamber was dry. In the chiaroscuro, two stone benches were easily discernible. Perhaps, it was there that the women's eyes had expected to find the shrouded body of Yeshua, but both benches were empty.

Salome pointed to what appeared to be a length of white linen neatly folded in a corner near the head of one of the benches. Heartbeat quickened by the anticipation of the shrouded, inert body of her husband, breath suspended by its unexpected absence, Myriam Magdalene stepped further, but dizzily, into the cave.
The smell of death filled the chamber but where was the body of her beloved husband? In the second chamber, her eyes fell on a shrouded figure. Her hand flew to her heart.

Myriam was at her side to steady her. "*Ze lo ha-met shelanu,"* she whispered. "It is not our dead one. It is not the body of a man."

Senses reeling, Myriam Magdalene turned on her heels. Her lungs needed air, warm fresh air – the warm fresh air that filled the world on the other side of the rock walls that held the stench captive. She rushed to the entrance.
There, she collided with the nobleman who had just walked in, himself holding a bundle of herbs and spices under his nose. "It is the body of Tamar, the daughter of my eldest sister, blessed memory," the man spoke with a deep but kindly voice.
"I was waiting for you. You are Myriam Magdalene. I opened the cave for you and your womenfolk."

Not hearing him, Myriam Magdalene blurted out, "I am here for the body of my husband. Yeshua, the preacher! *Ma kara?* Where is he?"

Leading Myriam Magdalene outside by the elbow, the man replied quietly, "He is no longer with us."

Intrigued by the newcomer, Myriam, Salome and Shulamit joined the pair.
The neat beard, the quiet air of the man, the brocaded robe told Myriam that it was the wealthy merchant of Arimathea who was addressing her daughter-in-law.
“Yeshua, the Galilean, is no longer here,” he repeated. “He is safe inside his own fold.”
As the blood drained from her face, nauseous and uncomprehending, Myriam Magdalene could but stare at the man, eyes rounded, hand firm against her mouth. Myriam and Salome came to her side.

The merchant’s eyes crinkled in a slow smile. “Your husband is not dead.” He turned to Myriam. “Your son is not dead,” he added gravely. He positioned himself so as to face the four women. “The Galilean is very much alive and safe,” he announced quietly. “Let our hearts rejoice in secret. Let us be at peace.”

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1. Nehemiah 7:3: I said to them, "The gates of Jerusalem are not to be opened until the sun is hot. While the gatekeepers are still on duty, have them shut the doors and bar them. Also appoint residents of Jerusalem as guards, some at their posts and some near their own houses."

2. Bereishis/Genesis 2:24: Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.