

On that same morning, Clopas, the husband of Mary the mother of Matthew and James, had parted company from his wife and set out to leave the city. She had tried to reason with him, but he wouldn't listen to her arguments. She looked after him as he disappeared from sight around a corner and sighed in exasperation. Joanna was with her.

"Of all my husbands, he's the most stubborn!"

Joanna looked at her and was forced to smile a little. Mary erupted into her customary giggle.

"I suppose that sounds disgraceful - I can't help it that I've had three husbands."

Joanna smiled back.

"That isn't quite true, Mary! You married them!"

Mary giggled again.

"And I've got three children to prove it - Matthew from the first - that was Levi. James and Susanna from the second, that was Alphaeus - and now Clopas - who is the most stubborn of them all - but I love him just the same."

"Where's he going?"

"He said something about Emmaus - the poor darling thinks he'll be safe there - safe from what, he didn't say - but Emmaus is only seven miles outside the city - doesn't he think they can find him there!?"

They walked back inside the house. The rest of the occupants were in a state of excitement, now that Mary of Magdala had come back with her astounding news.

Joanna shook her head and whispered.

"She's always been excitable!"

"It must be catching! - It made Clopas run for his life!"

She giggled again.

“Is he going alone?”

Mary shook her head.

“I couldn’t get much sense out of him, but he said something about Nebet.”

Joanna’s eyes widened, her response was a touch disapproving.

“The story-teller? I know him from the time when he used to wander around the countryside telling his tales. Chuza kept a close eye on him when he came our way - he didn’t trust him!”

Mary came to his defence.

“At least he had the sense to follow Judah - that traitor! - and to spit in his face!”

“Don’t mention that man’s name to me - he came to a fitting end!”

Clopas and Nebet left the city quite early, making use of the flush of people who were setting out to return to the nearby villages after the Passover celebrations. Clopas was nervous, eyeing the guards at the gates as if he expected to be pounced upon at any moment. Once free of the city he was a little more relaxed. Emmaus wasn’t far and he hoped to find refuge there from the retribution he felt sure was to come. Nebet had chosen to come with him - whether that was an asset or a liability he couldn’t be sure.

The man was talkative - too talkative - that was always the problem with Nebet!

“Who would have imagined that things would turn out this way, Clopas?”

“They wouldn’t have happened this way, if it wasn’t for that blackhearted traitor, Judah! - He was your friend wasn’t he?”

Nebet eyed him warily.

“He was once, I suppose - we met when we were with the Baptist - we worked together, and then left him to follow the Master - “

He hastened to add.

“We were never THAT close - we worked together that’s all.”

Clopas went on gloomily.

“Who would want to admit being a friend of a traitor!?”

“Who indeed!”

They were silent for a little while, they came to the crest of a rise and turned to look back at the city. Nebet murmured.

“Who could have imagined that it would have worked out as it did. When the Master rode into the city, the whole population was stirred up, and in their eyes, there was nothing he could do wrong. In a few short days, the whole picture changed - the same voices who called out ‘Hosanna to David’s Son!’, called out ‘Crucify him!’”

Clopas muttered.

“Pay them well enough and they’ll call out anything you want!”

“Do you think they were paid?”

Clopas nodded.

“By Caiaphas and his cronies! That’s the reason why I decided to get out of the city - they can be paid to break into our houses and attack our people. I couldn’t persuade Mary to come with me - she can be a stubborn woman! I didn’t argue when she left me to follow the Master - although I didn’t like the idea at first - but she was set on it and I had to give in. Today, I put my foot down when she told me I was a fool to run away - as she put it - so I told her I was going, and she could stay!”

Nebet nodded as they resumed their journey.

“That’s why I never married - woman are unpredictable!”

At least on this, they were in agreement.

They continued to talk about the various experiences that they had made while in the company of the Master. Nebet declared eventually.

“There’s no doubt that he was a remarkable man!”

Clopas touched his lips for silence, someone was coming up behind them from the city. He eyed the man suspiciously, but there didn’t seem anything sinister about him - but one couldn’t be too careful. The stranger reached them and slowed down.

“Greetings!”

Clopas and Nebet murmured the reply. The man smiled.

“You were deep in conversation, I hope I didn’t intrude?”

He showed no sign of moving on. Clopas glanced at Nebet, but there was no helpful response from that direction. Quite suddenly, he became rash and said loudly.

“We were talking about the Master!”

Nebet eyed him anxiously. The stranger responded quietly.

“The Master?”

Clopas continued to be reckless.

“Are you the only one staying in Jerusalem who doesn’t know what’s happened in the past few days?”

“What do you mean exactly?”

Nebet belatedly entered the conversation.

“We were talking about Jesus of Nazareth - he was a prophet with remarkable powers to teach the people, quite apart from what he was able to do to heal the sick. Do you mean to tell us that you didn’t know that the chief priests and the rulers on the Council handed him over to the Procurator to be sentenced to death!? You haven’t heard that he was crucified?”

The stranger eyed them with a twinkle of subdued humour but said nothing. Nebet went on.

“We had been hoping that he was the Messiah, the man who would come from God to liberate Israel!”

Clopas nudged him nervously with his elbow, but now that he’d got started he wasn’t to be silenced.

“What’s more, this is the third day since it happened, and now, some of the women who went early to the tomb, found his body missing, and they came back with a story that they had seen a vision of angels who told them that he was alive! Some of our people went to the tomb to find out, but they didn’t see any angels - although the body

was gone!”

The stranger laughed softly.

“I’ll walk a little way with you, if you don’t object. How dull you are not to believe what the women told you. Are you so slow to believe all that the prophets said? Wasn’t the Messiah bound to suffer all these things before entering upon his glory?”

Clopas and Nebet glanced at each other, as they walked along, flanking this stranger, who, it seemed was a learned man. They assumed he had come to Jerusalem for the Passover. Just how learned he was, was proved to them when he began with Moses and worked through all the prophets, and explained the passages which referred to the Messiah in all parts of the scriptures.

The time had passed quickly, and they were surprised to find themselves at Emmaus. He bowed to them.

“It’s been a pleasure to be in your company.”

Clopas responded.

“And in yours - look, it’s already quite late in the day - stay here with us, we’ll have supper together.”

The man smiled and nodded.

“That will be a pleasure.”

Clopas was unusually generous, he hired a small room, so that they could eat together in privacy. The food was set before them, and the serving girl left them. The stranger took a loaf of bread and spoke a blessing over the food, and then he broke the bread to share it with them, offering a portion to each. Clopas cried out.

“Master!”

The stranger smiled and quite abruptly, he was gone. Clopas turned to Nebet whose mouth was gaping open and whispered.

“Didn’t we feel as if our hearts were on fire when he talked with us on the road - when he explained the scriptures to us!?”

Nebet nodded his head and rose.

“Never mind about the supper! We must go back to Jerusalem without delay.”

They retraced their steps to the city, walking as quickly as they could along the dark road. All thoughts of caution were gone from their minds, they marched through the city gates without a second glance at the guards, and made their way to Mary of Cyrene’s house. Mary, Clopas wife, eyed him with some humour.

“Didn’t you like it in Emmaus?”

“Never mind whether I liked it or not, we must talk to Simon and the others!”

Mary eyed him speculatively, he was very agitated - and that went for Nebet too. She led the way to the upstairs room without another word, and stayed while they blurted out their story. Simon listened, staring at them intently and looked at those of the Eleven who had returned.

“We find this hard to believe, Clopas - why would the Master run after you two in particular.”

There was a profound silence, until Mary said softly.

“Perhaps, because he loves them!”

Simon-Peter was uneasy, this was yet another report which had been brought to him throughout this remarkable day. Earlier, Joanna had visited the house of Joseph of Arimathea, where Rebecca had quietly announced that the Master had appeared first to a slave, and then to her lover, both of whom had been healed of their afflictions - the slave, of dumbness - and the lover of a sickness which threatened death. She had been adamant that the Master had appeared in a radiant form, and that the now talkative slave could testify of what had happened. There being no other credible explanation, Simon was inclined to believe the story.

The two youngsters had been sent out during the day - they being less likely to attract attention. When they returned, it was with news that a story was being circulated by priests from the Temple that Jesus of Nazareth had been stolen by his disciples from

the grave into which he had been interred. The same disciples could be expected to try to tell the people that he had risen from the dead on the third day, as he had promised. The priests were also saying that if the disciples could be found, there was a likelihood of finding the disturbed corpse, or at the very least, they could be made to tell what they had done with the body.

It was at this point that Simon firmly directed that no one else was to leave the house until the furore died down. The outer gates were locked - as was even the upstairs room into which the Eleven had retreated. Another problem was that it wasn't quite the Eleven - they were only Ten. Thomas had still not put in an appearance, and this was a matter for real concern. Thomas was a man of inspired gloom - a pessimist who could be guaranteed to place the most depressing clothing on the course of events. There was no knowing where he might have hidden himself. No one seemed to know where he had lodged when he had visited the city in the past. He was a man who never thought to mention such details, rather than one who was secretive. Thomas was the ultimate pessimist, although he was brave and cool enough on occasions - especially when - in former times - there had been a crisis on the lake during sudden storms, then he would suddenly emerge out of his despondency and show real leadership. He had been much more outgoing during his time with Jesus, but this looked threatened by the turn of events.

Their supper was brought to them by the nervous serving maid, Rhoda. Simon had tried to reassure her, and had retreated abruptly when she had burst into tears. Sobbing, she had set down the food and had run from the room, Andrew laughed softly.

"You're losing your touch with the ladies, brother!"

There was a general murmur of subdued laughter from the others, which didn't subside when Simon growled.

"You take care of your ladies and I'll take care of mine!"

It was already late that evening, and they had settled down on the mattresses provided

by their hostess, and were talking quietly among themselves on their next course of action, when the room gradually emerged from darkness into light. Simon and the others sat up abruptly, hardly daring to breath. From the direction of the locked door a shape appeared and coalesced into the recognisable figure of the Master, who said softly:

“Peace be with you!”

Simon asked tremulously.

“Is it really you, Lord - or is it a ghost?”

Jesus smiled at them and silently extended his hands. Simon eyed the nail wounds. Then Jesus bared his side and revealed the wound caused by the lance. He extended his hand to Simon again, and after a slight hesitation, Simon took it. The flesh was warm - alive - and the pull which drew him to his feet, was strong. The others of the Ten scrambled to their feet and crowded around them, reaching out and touching their resurrected Master. Jesus nodded smiling broadly. He repeated:

“Peace be with you!”

When they had quietened down, he said to them.

“As my Father sent me, so I send you.”

He drew breath and expelled it over them, saying.

“Receive the Holy Spirit! If you forgive any man’s sins, they stand forgiven; if you pronounce them unforgiven, unforgiven they will remain!”

Gradually, the light started to fade, and the disciples drew back, and quite suddenly, he was gone. Simon heard someone trying to strike the flint in the ensuing darkness. By the sound of it, they were botching the attempt. Eventually, a flicker of light appeared which grew enough to show their faces.

Simon of Cana apologised.

“Sorry, my hands were shaking!”

Simon nodded - and then turned a beaming face to the others.

“The Master HAS risen - and we’ve just seen the proof of it - forget all your plans, brothers - He’ll show us what we must do from now on!”

It was, perhaps, an hour later that Thomas appeared at the locked outer door, having decided to make his move to join the others under the cover of darkness. It took some time for him to gain entry and he was considerably annoyed when he was shown the upper chamber. He exploded angrily.

“The girl must be a half-wit! She left me standing in the street with all the temple priests hunting me! I expected to be arrested at any minute!”

Andrew responded soothingly.

“Not ALL the temple priests were after you, Thomas - some were after us too! - That’s why Simon ordered the door barred.”

Thomas glowered at Simon.

“It’s dangerous out there - leaving a man on the street!”

He received little sympathy.

“A pity you weren’t here earlier - the Master came to us!”

Thomas eyed Simon with suspicion. Thaddaeus exclaimed.

“We’ve seen the Lord! - he was here!”

James Alphaeus reinforced the point.

“There’ve been reports all day - he’s appeared to others - Clopas and Nebet on the road out of the city - to Rebecca - you remember Rebecca? - he healed a slave and her lover as well.”

Thomas glowered suspiciously.

“Lover?”

James corrected himself.

“What else do you call him - the man she wants to marry.”

Thomas drew himself upright.

“My guess is, you’ve had too much to drink! - and so have Clopas and Nebet! I tell you

this - unless I see the marks of the nails on his hands - and unless I put my finger into the place where the nails were, and my hand into the wound in his side - I won't believe it!"

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The meeting between Joseph and Caiaphas was coldly polite. For his part, the Prince of Arimathea had been expecting the interview, the only question was whether it would be before the membership of the Sanhedrin, or whether it would be face to face. When the messenger came, with a polite request that Joseph should attend the High Priest at the earliest convenient opportunity, Joseph surmised that Caiaphas preferred to minimise the exposure to the fewest possible people. There could be no doubt as to the subject, although the reason for the proposed meeting was not contained in the request.

Joseph thanked the messenger and gave him a return answer - he would be pleased to attend the High Priest as soon as was practicable. Joseph then made sure that he had plenty of other matters to delay his arrival at the palace. It was already late afternoon on the day after the remarkable recovery of Lucian, which had followed the apparent rising from the dead of the man they had called the Master, when Joseph was ushered into Caiaphas' presence. The greetings were formal and polite, and there was a mutual appraisal.

Caiaphas met the cool, unruffled stare of a man who was sure of himself. A man who controlled wealth and power, and a man who was not prepared to be overawed or brow-beaten. Joseph eyed the man he now looked upon as an adversary. The High Priest was his usual, smooth, diplomatic self, very conscious of the power and prestige of his office. A man used to exercising his will and having it accepted by lesser men.

"So good of you to find time in your busy routine to respond to my invitation."

It hadn't been an invitation - Caiaphas didn't make invitations - he made demands!

“Regrettably, I was unable to comply earlier.”

He didn't add the customary recognition of rank.

Caiaphas eyed him for a moment.

“My brother priests and I were somewhat surprised that you made your own tomb available for the interment of a criminal, Joseph.”

Joseph smiled a little. Caiaphas was annoyed enough to dispense with the usual sparring and mount a frontal attack.

“Call it an act of charity on a day when it was otherwise sadly absent, Caiaphas.”

The High Priest nodded slowly, never taking his eyes away.

“An act of charity - how commendable.”

Joseph remained silent. Caiaphas continued.

“An act of charity which, it would seem, has been abused. You are perhaps unaware that the body of this criminal has been removed from your tomb by the followers of this man - no doubt, with the intention of putting abroad the ridiculous claim that he has risen from the dead - as I understand he declared he would so do?”

Joseph stared at him steadily - so that was his game!

“I wasn't aware that his body had been removed - surely, that's a matter for the Procurator - especially if you suspect his followers to be involved.”

Caiaphas moved restlessly.

“The matter is somewhat delicate - At my request, Pilate provided two soldiers from the garrison to guard the tomb - it appears that they neglected their duty and allowed the body to be disturbed.”

Joseph responded dryly.

“How reprehensible - tell me, how does this concern me?”

The question was sudden, Caiaphas' eyes widened a little .

“In so much that I seek your assurance that it was done without your knowledge or approval. If I am to approach Pilate on the matter, I must be sure that you have not

authorised such an action.”

Joseph took his time to reply.

“Why would you suppose that I would be a party to such a procedure?”

Caiaphas laughed softly, contriving to sound a little embarrassed.

“Forgive me, but it is common knowledge that your sister, Rebecca, has spent some considerable time following this man around the countryside - and it has been reported that you, yourself, spent several days at his camp in Peraea.”

Joseph nodded.

“True on both counts - but that doesn’t make me a body snatcher!”

“Of course! Could there be any doubt on the point?”

Joseph rose.

“Having put your mind at rest, I shall take my leave.”

“So soon? But if you must.”

Joseph paused.

“There is one thing I must add - I view with concern and distaste, the way in which this matter was handled by yourself and those of the Council who were in agreement with you. You ensured that people such as myself were not present to ensure a fair hearing. In view of the corrupt practices, which you encourage, I will no longer respond to any invitation to sit with you and my brothers on the Sanhedrin. I will thereby hold myself aloof from any similar occasions, which will bring you all into disrepute!”

Caiaphas had also risen, his face was chalk-white, but the high spots of colour on his cheek-bones were slowly increasing. He controlled his response to a diplomatic level.

“It will be a matter of regret if we no longer have your contribution to our discussions and conclusions. There have always been voices on the Council which have questioned the inclusion of those members who, because of their youth, were inclined to rash and ill-considered statements or actions. It is a suggestion I have always repudiated, considering that the opinions of the younger men, especially when they hold positions

of undoubted power and authority as rulers of the nation, are to be valued and considered. However, your approach in this matter has been a trial for those who are acting in the best interests of the people. It would, perhaps, be expedient for you to gain the wisdom of years before you again sit with us!”

Joseph bowed and turned on his heel - Caiaphas subsided into his chair. He hadn't expected such a direct confrontation, the young man was powerful, and could become a threat to the authority of the Sanhedrin unless steps were taken to neutralise him. He knew he could do nothing to him physically, that would be courting disaster - but he could be discredited - especially if he formed some connection with the followers of the Galilean - even if it was through his own, impetuous sister, Rebecca!

Joseph collected Saul and Eli, who had been waiting for him in the Outer Court. One look at his grim face was enough to tell them that the interview had not gone well, they maintained a diplomatic silence as they mounted and rode away from the Temple precincts. Joseph took a route which would not bring him directly home. His two retainers followed behind him, as he urged his horse forward through the crowd at the gate which led out of the city to the Mount of Olives. They clattered over the bridge across the Kedron ravine and headed in the general direction of Bethany. Joseph diverted again towards the garden which contained his newly purchased tomb, into which Jesus of Nazareth had been laid to rest a few days earlier. They dismounted and hobbled the horses outside the enclosed garden, and Joseph stalked through the gate. Saul and Eli followed him to the tomb, which stood gaping open. Joseph spoke for the first time.

“I am informed that the body which we laid to rest here, has been removed - the Lord Caiaphas is somewhat interested - he even thinks I had something to do with it!”
He turned suddenly and eyed them critically.

“I sent the two of you after Rebecca - you were some time under this man's influence - I suppose it isn't possible that you were moved to help his followers to steal the body!?”

His two servants didn't drop their eyes. Saul, as usual, was the spokesman.

"No, Lord Joseph - If the body was moved, we had no part of it!"

Joseph didn't drop his eyes.

"I'm glad to hear it - if it were otherwise, I wouldn't spare you my reward!"

He looked at the open tomb again.

"What did you make of him?"

His tone had changed completely, he turned to them again. Saul cleared his throat and answered cautiously.

"As you said, Lord Joseph - a man with a great attraction. I saw wonderful things which can't be easily explained - and they happened every day. He spoke powerful words which penetrated deeply into my soul. I think I came to believe in him!"

Joseph held his eyes.

"So, he became your Master?"

"Only in the terms of who he was and what he promised, Lord Joseph - you are our Master otherwise."

Joseph nodded.

"I thank you for your frankness - I understand your attraction - I was touched with it myself, I went to him as you know - and I heard an answer I couldn't follow!"

An edge of frustrated bitterness had crept into his voice. His tone changed abruptly.

"What do you make of the recovery of Lucian - and the fact that his slave, Balthus, swears that he was made to speak by an apparition?"

It was Eli who opened his mouth this time.

"It was the Master, Lord Joseph - he's risen from the grave and he's come to our house and healed both of them! The Lady Rebecca wanted it - she prayed for it, and when she heard he was dead, she thought it could never happen - but the Master came and he answered her prayer for help - and they both are healed!"

For Eli, who was not given to long speeches, it was an oration. Joseph responded

softly.

“I see that you’re totally convinced, Eli - but couldn’t there be another explanation?

Perhaps they were both touched by an angel!”

“With respect, Lord Joseph - the Lady Rebecca asked for the Master - and the Master came!”

Joseph gestured for them to enter the tomb. The linen wrappings were still laying on the slab upon which he had placed the body - to one side, the face napkin - which he himself had placed over the dead eyes - was folded neatly. There was no odour of corruption, which one might have expected, even after only a few hours.

“I wonder what happened here.”

His voice was muted, as if they stood on a hallowed place.

Saul rumbled softly.

“Perhaps we shall never know, Lord Joseph.”

Their master signalled them to vacate the tomb..

“From this time on, you are to be particularly vigilant. I have come from a meeting with the High Priest, as you know, and from what was said between us, I think we can expect trouble for our house. Saul, I want you to recruit reliable men from Arimathea and drill them to become a defence force to be reckoned with! Eli, you will help him - but in particular, you will redouble your personal protection for the Lady Rebecca, and as far as possible, for the guests under our roof. As soon as possible, I intend to leave Jerusalem for Caesarea - there we’ll be away from conspiring priests and doctors!”

They left the garden and rode back to the city. Just before the gates Joseph halted once more.

“We will delay our return home - a visit to the Lord Nicodemus is indicated!”

The sudden and unannounced arrival of the Prince of Arimathea, precipitated a flurry of near panic at the house of the learned doctor. As was usual at that time of the day, he was attended by his students - for the most part, young and earnest men who aspired to

become temple priests, and over whom he often shook his head in private despair.

There were one or two who showed considerable promise, but the others were for the most part dullards whose families had sought desperately for some occupation which would keep them out of harm's way - and provide a lucrative income - if they could summon the wits to be unscrupulous. It was one of those who showed promise, who met Joseph and his retainers at the door, after the startled man-servant had fled into the house to obtain help. Joseph recognised him, he was one of those who had attended Nicodemus at the tomb. They locked gazes.

"You are Timon - I am Joseph. I must speak with master Nicodemus urgently - I think you will understand on what subject!"

Timon looked slightly startled at being remembered. He bowed acknowledgement.

"The master rests and meditates at this hour, but I will approach him."

Joseph eyed the retreating back of the dark-haired, slightly built young man. He approved - he was young, but he had a certain dignity. It was a matter of minutes before Nicodemus came to the door himself, he sounded a little out of breath, but that wasn't unusual.

"Please enter, Lord Joseph! Had I been aware - had I been informed - you would never have been kept waiting in the street!"

"It's a small matter, Nicodemus - we have a greater one to discuss!"

The old man shot him a shrewd look, and stepped aside for his guest to enter, and then led the way into a dark, inner room, which was crowded by numerous scrolls scattered over every available surface. Timon was silently clearing a space for them to sit facing each other. He bowed to them both and withdrew out of earshot. Nicodemus followed him with his eyes.

"A treasure, my Lord Joseph - a treasure among dross!"

"It's a pleasure to find a good man, Nicodemus."

Nicodemus half rose.

“Refreshments! I must offer you refreshments!”

Joseph restrained him.

“Please! Let us forego refreshments! I’ve just come from a summons to Caiaphas - I think you should know what transpired.”

The old man slowly resumed his seat.

“I should tell you that I have also received an invitation to attend the High Priest as soon as possible.”

Joseph nodded.

“I’m not surprised - I’m only surprised that Caiaphas has given me the opportunity to consult with you first.”

Nicodemus gave him a searching look.

“I can tell that the interview was not pleasing.”

“It was not! I listened to what he had to say - I then told him that I have no intention of sitting with him and his clique on a corrupt Council - and he, in turn, suggested that it would be better if I did not return until I was older and wiser!”

Nicodemus stroked his thin, white beard. He murmured.

“Dear me! Was that altogether wise, Lord Joseph - to abdicate your tempering position on the Council?”

Joseph exclaimed angrily.

“I had no other option! The man as good as accused me of engineering the removal of the body of the Galilean from my tomb in a conspiracy with his disciples! You ARE aware that the body has disappeared?”

Nicodemus was genuinely shocked.

“I was not aware!”

Joseph stared at him. Nicodemus continued hurriedly.

“I have found no reason to leave my house - and the subject hasn’t been raised by my students.”

Joseph nodded.

“Perhaps Caiaphas wants to accuse you of a similar complicity. He’s putting about a story that the body was stolen in the night by the Galilean’s friends. If he can implicate either or both of us, it will give it greater credence.”

Nicodemus sat silently for a moment, then:

“What has happened to the body?”

Joseph hesitated.

“There have been some remarkable reports - talk of the dead walking the streets and returning to their homes - even in my own house, two remarkable events have taken place. You will remember the young Roman, Lucian, who took a wound which wouldn’t heal? - He was near death, but now, his wound is healed and he’s restored to health. He has a slave - a dumb Nubian. This morning, he was able to speak - although clearly terrified - he tells of an apparition who touched his throat and his tongue - and who went on to the bedside of his master, and touched him on the breast and the brow. My sister, Rebecca, insists that her Master came to them both - and that he has risen from the dead - as he promised!”

Nicodemus stared at him white faced and rose slowly to his feet.

“And you, my Lord Joseph - what do you believe?”

Joseph rose too and stared at him.

“I believe the evidence of my own eyes - but I also believe the inclinations of my heart! I was told to sacrifice everything and give to the poor - which I was not, and I am still not able to do - but I am ready to believe that this man can do anything!”

Nicodemus whispered.

“Even to rise from the dead?”

Joseph nodded after a moment’s hesitation.

“Even that, Nicodemus! Let us not forget that he has been witnessed as bringing at least two others back from the grave - the latest being his friend, Lazarus of Bethany,

who had been dead for four days. If he can raise others - then, he can raise himself!

There have been too many remarkable events surrounding his death - and subsequently. I am ready to believe that he is the Messiah!"

Nicodemus sank back in his chair, he looked almost piteous.

"What am I to do, Lord Joseph."

Joseph suddenly felt well - confident - as if he had crossed a personal barrier.

"I can only advise you to look into your heart, my friend - weigh your feelings and your convictions - and if you come to the same conclusion, defend your convictions!"

He resumed his seat and faced the old man. Nicodemus was deep in thought. He suddenly said:

"You will remember our previous conversation, Joseph - when I told you that I had set my students the task of investigating the credentials of Jesus of Nazareth?"

"I remember."

"It has been a painstaking task - and one with considerable difficulty, but they have undertaken it to their credit. Their investigation came to fruition only days before the terrible event in which we shared, and I put the matter out of my mind - as far as was possible, since it concerned the same man."

Joseph stirred restlessly, Nicodemus was becoming garrulous in his old age.

"They found something of interest?"

Nicodemus nodded, hugging the secret to himself for as long as possible.

"Timon and the others have discovered that Jesus was not a true Galilean! Certainly, his parents, Joseph, a carpenter - and his mother, Mary, were residents of Nazareth - but the census conducted by Quirinus required every family to be numbered in the district of the father's family. Joseph, it appears, was of the house of David, and therefore, was obligated to return to his ancestor's district. The census records him, together with his wife and child, as being in Bethlehem. You will, of course, understand the implications!"

Joseph's mouth was dry, he nodded slowly.

"He fulfils the requirement of prophecy that the Messiah shall be born of the house of David the king - and even in his city!"

Nicodemus' eyes sparkled with academic excitement.

"Quite so, Joseph, quite so!"