

Abigail was still reeling from the dramatic events of the last moments when a panting Jacob tugged at her shawl. He could scarcely voice his question. "Are they hidden?"

Abigail clutched his shoulders with both hands. "Did Nedra—?"

"We made it," he puffed. "I don't think Enos knew she'd ever left."

"Thank God," breathed Abigail.

"Where's Alban?"

"Gone. They—"

"Gone? What do you mean? Where?"

"They've left. We can only pray that their escape will be successful."

"But ... but how could he leave without me? I was to go. He promised he'd never leave me."

Abigail looked at her brother's stricken face and realized what he was trying to say. "He couldn't wait, Jacob. Alban and Leah were in danger. You know that."

Even as she spoke, they heard the sound of horses' hooves—many of them—clattering upon the paving stones coming up to the courtyard. The hunters had arrived.

"Quick!" Abigail pushed at Jacob. "We must hide before they enter." When he resisted she pulled him forward. "Run, Jacob!"

He half turned to look at her. "Run where?"

"Behind the wash tubs. Out back. There's an alley that leads to the back streets."

They hurried across the courtyard just as prancing mounts snorted and stomped their way into the enclosure. Leah heard the crude shouts of soldiers, the clanging of steel blades. She pressed Jacob into the shadows behind her, afraid that any movement would get unwanted attention.

"The man Alban. Where is he?" came an angry shout from the obvious leader of the soldiers.

"He is not here." It was Peter's voice that met the demand.

"We were informed he is in this compound. You deny this?" The voice was harsh.

"I do not deny that he *was* here. It is his wedding day. We celebrated the claiming of his bride, and—"

"I am not interested in your celebrations. Where has he gone?"

"He did not say."

The soldier released a volley of curses. "We'll see if you know how to tell the truth. Men, dismount. Search every corner of this foul place from top to bottom. If this uncouth man here is lying, he'll soon mount a cross. Along with the rest of his followers."

Abigail pulled in a deep breath and pressed more firmly against Jacob. Amid the noise and confusion in the courtyard, they would not likely be noticed. "This way," she hissed over her shoulder. As they ducked into a passageway toward the back of the compound, she prayed. *Please, Father God, help us ... help us all. Lord Jesus, direct our steps. Holy Spirit, be with us....*

Jacob, who knew the warren of back streets and alleyways of Jerusalem like his own hand, soon took the lead in their headlong rush to safety.

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Later that evening, in the back of a shed attached to the shop of a fishmonger who belonged to the followers' community, Jacob again plied Abigail with questions. Where were Alban and Leah headed? What were their plans? How soon would they send for him?

Over and over her answers were the same. "I do not know."

His patience quickly came to an end. "Then what are we to do?"

"Wait," responded Abigail.

"Wait!" Jacob attempted to scoff but was near tears. "It was not to be this way. I need Alban now. I did not even get to say farewell. To receive instructions of what I am to do. How can you say wait? For what? For whom? What if they don't make it? How will we know?" His words tumbled over each other, a litany of his frustration and grief.

"If they do not make it, Herod will be boasting of it from here to Rome," Abigail finally said, trying to rein in her impatience. "Even if they do make it, he might claim they did not just to save face. There is nothing that we can do, Jacob, but wait. They will send word when they can. They will send for us when the time is right."

But Jacob failed to be convinced. Abigail could feel him withdraw from her in the blackness of the night. It hurt deeply. Had she found Jacob, merely hours ago, only to lose him in his sorrow over Alban? She prayed not. But for the moment her heart felt even colder than the night's chilly arms encircling them.

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