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Iscariot

A NOVEL of JUDAS

## *Iscariot: The Hidden Chapter*

This segment was originally Chapter 22, but during the editing process it seemed to break the flow of the story enough that it was cut. However, the chapter was an important enough event in the story of Jesus and Judas that I wanted to make it available to my loyal readers.

Thank you for joining me on this journey. I love and appreciate you all.

—Tosca Lee

## Chapter Twenty-Two

One day late that winter, Jesus nearly collapsed from exhaustion.

“Master, you are but one man,” Matthew said. “This crowd is too many for you. You must stay back, and hold court from the house as the great teachers do.”

I knew Jesus would never consent to this.

“Let us go for you,” Simon said. “We cannot heal, but we can tell your stories and speak your words.” The old lines had disappeared, these last few days, from his forehead.

“I will give you all authority,” Jesus said, sitting heavily back against the wall of the front room in Zebedee’s house.

I didn’t understand then what he meant. I was too busy contemplating the practicality of this idea. I was also contemplating the danger of it. The eye of Herod was on us. Even now, his spies might be

among us. To multiply our ranks by going out into the country meant we must be willing to move quickly afterward. Herod would never abide even the hint of a growing army. And I had no delusions—that was what we would be.

“You understand that I am sending you like sheep among wolves. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household be called the same?”

I knew by his answer that the matter was settled. But as he gave us his instructions, I felt fear rise up within me. Across the way, Peter visibly blanched.

We were to take nothing with us, to go without coin or food in our pockets or even a staff to protect ourselves in the same manner that pilgrims were to enter the Temple. But these roadways and villages were not the Temple!

And yet, I had seen this man still a storm. I had seen him send a legion into the sea, and had known it for a prophetic act. I would believe anything, do anything, for this man.

I left a day later with Nathanel, glancing back once at Simon and Peter, going the other way. I reveled in the way people flocked to us. For

the first time I felt like the respected Pharisee and teacher of the law I had always meant to be, and yet the life of a Pharisee paled to me now beside this mission.

Though he did not say it, I knew I served the Messiah.

We told his stories. We preached his words.

The second day in the first town we came to, they brought us a boy on a pallet. He was feverish and pale and I did not need to look to know that he had a festering wound.

Because I could smell it.

I stepped back, glanced at Nathanel. His eyes were as round as coins.

“I’m sorry, but—”

“Please,” the man, his father, cried. He was knotted and thin as a cord, with only two good teeth showing in the front of his mouth. “I’ll give you anything you want. I’ll pay you all I have!”

“Why did you not send him to my master before? Or the priest at least?” I said, my voice rising, sounding too much like anger when it was actually panic.

They would throw us out, call us frauds—already we were drawing a crowd. I looked around for an escape.

“Judas,” Nathanel said. “Judas!” he said again.

I glanced up.

He was studying the boy’s leg intently.

“He said all authority.”

I stared at him. Surely he didn’t mean...

“Please,” the young man’s father said. He was crying now, moving the tunic aside so we could see.

The wound had swollen the boy’s entire leg. Already it blackened most of the flesh around it. I had seen such wounds before and knew it was too late—even if they cut it off he would die.

I spun away, if only to keep from vomiting on him.

“Why didn’t you cut off his leg?”

“How could I? He’s my only son!” he cried.

“At least then he might have had a chance to live!”

I tore at my hair.

The boy on the pallet moaned.

I had heard such a moan once, from my own brother the year he had the summer fever. It had frightened me because I knew he lay on the brink

of death. And though he didn't die, I never forgot the sound of it, otherworldly as an echo from Sheol.

I covered my face. I did not want to see this thing, this boy before me. I did not want to hear the pitiful cries of his father, or the boy's wasting response to them.

I understood. I now knew why my master denied no one. Why his expression twisted so often in sadness and yes, even agony, so often throughout the day.

I lurched away, pushed my way through several onlookers, the cries of the man and the weaker groan of his son too loud in my ear. Like the face of the leper, crying out as his head lolled to the side, etched in me forever.

I saw a vision of my master laying out his hands even as he swayed from exhaustion on his own feet.

And then I was spinning back, pushing my way into the crowd.

They would kill me. They would kill us both. And if they did not, I would contract the wasting disease from sheer contact with it, myself.

But in that moment, it didn't matter.

I fell down beside the pallet, where Nathanel was still standing, his chest heaving, lost.

I laid my hands on the boy's leg, over the crusted flesh, the oozing wound beneath my fingers.

My heart was breaking because I could not bear the cries of his father or the certain agony of my teacher, had he been here.

*I'm so sorry*, I thought. But the words that came from my mouth were, "Be well!"

*Be well!*

I did not cry it to the boy. Neither was it command. Only a plea to the only One I knew with the power to weep for them both and to answer.

I fell down over him, ready for the mob. Waiting for the angry cries, the shouts of "Deceiver!" and the stones.

But the cries, when they came, were exultant. Someone shouted. The father lifted his hands and then nearly knocked Nathanel off his feet, both of them falling over me.

Beneath me, the young man stirred. In a frenzy I pushed Nathanel and the boy's father away. He was calling on the name of God, praying with his hands lifted to the sky.

I took away my hands, turned them over. There was no pus.

I jerked back from the pallet...



From a whole and well-formed leg. From a boy stirring as though waking from sleep.

They were pulling him up by the time I fell back into the crowd, those who had rushed forward to see and touch and shout. Neighbors, having known about the grievous wound, the pending death of the boy now laughing and clasping his father by the neck.

As they helped him to stand, several others went rushing away to tell their friends. “You will eat with us tonight, teachers! You great men of God!” someone cried out, clapping me on the shoulder.

But all I could think, as I stared after the boy now comforting his sobbing father, was: *I am not worthy. I am not worthy. All that I knew, I do not know.*

When he had disappeared from sight, I turned away from the others, going off by myself as though to relieve myself behind some bush. There, I wept like a woman, covering my face with the hand that had touched the boy’s festering sore only moments earlier.

I had been a proud man, once. I had wanted to add my mark to the name that is Judas, that is the name of Judea, where the Holy City dwells. But now I only wanted to return to my teacher and tell him what had

happened, to fall down at his feet. To return to his side, to the jostling and the bruises of the masses, if only to snatch at those rare quiet moments alone when I might see his profile against the stars.

We went on from there to another town, east to Jotapata and again to Cana, where we were welcomed in the name of our master. We told his stories and healed again, and again. Nathanel was in a fever, tireless with it. I watched him, stepping back and giving him room to heal as many as he would or wanted, knowing I would never be less amazed the next time than I had been the first, that I would not find myself broken and lifted up at once.

Knowing with each act that it brought me closer to my return, to the side of my master and friend.

By spring, I was bone-weary, the heels of my feet feeling as though they had worn so thin that I walked on bone.

We spent our last days in Endor before turning our faces north, to Capernaum.

At last.

I had never seen a more beautiful sight than my master rising up from the courtyard of Zebedee's house to greet us.

"Judas," he said, rushing to embrace me. "My friend!"

"Hail, Teacher," I said, emotion choking me.

As I kissed him, I did it knowing I had traveled all those miles and weeks and months for this very moment. A Judean returning to Galilee. A man following a teacher with no place to call his own.

And yet I felt that I had come home.

I closed my eyes and basked in his presence.

Two days later, everything began to unravel.

TOSCA LEE

*Havah*  
*the story of Eve*

THE  
DELETED SCENES

## LAMECH

**T**his strange great-grandson of Irad—I will not speak his name, I have sworn it will not come from my lips lest it give him the notoriety that he so longed for—took two wives. One to adorn himself in public as a man puts on his finery, for I heard she was young and very beautiful, and one to adorn himself in his chamber, for she was seldom seen and remained in her sister-wife's shadow. And this man—he will be unknown to me, I shall not know him or ever say I have and will revoke my knowing of him if I should meet him by coincidence—killed a young man. He was unapologetic, and the feud-song came as far as our settlement and likely traveled farther, saying that he would not hesitate to have done it anyway, no matter that the man was young. And so if Kayin was avenged for any hurt done to him seven times, surely he would be avenged seventy times seven, because he had cause to do it.

Where had the sense gone in people?

It is said that his one son was the first to live in tents with livestock, though that braggart family would claim to be the first to defecate on the ground if they thought it was something

to brag about. His other son was the first to play the lyre and the pipe, though I knew better. I hoped he was put out of the city or, barring that, that his great, great-grandmother Renana chastised him well; no doubt that she still had a sharp tongue. (Let the braggart see what defense he had against that.) But I never heard that he was put out and so it seemed he fooled everyone with his claim of self defense.

I wondered, if indeed there was a day that one stands before the One, if he would keep his claim to the face of God.

At least the sister in the shadows, the second wife of the braggart, seemed to bear a son with some claim to something: many years later, traders came from Hanokh to our area bringing copper wares the like I had not seen before. And they were the work, it was said, of this son, who became renowned for this very craft for many generations to come.

Some time around evening, when everyone was in the streets—I never understood the ability of so many to loiter in such a place—a boisterous and rotund man came into the room, huffing with each step. He wore the finest wool and new sandals. Behind him walked a woman of such striking beauty that I actually gasped. But now I saw that she was not so very young. No, not young at all. Surely she had grandchildren of her own by now.

“Ah, my great grandson, Lamekh.” Renana sounded less than ecstatic. I gave him a slight, blank smile.

“Mother,” he said, coming to kneel, with great difficulty, before me. The woman with him did likewise. Now I could

smell the scent of jasmine upon her. She was like a dish that one lays out that is too lovely to eat, but too delicious not to.

“Lamekh, you say?” I did not offer him my hand.

“Yes, mother, and Adah, my first wife. I have two of them.”

I almost cringed at the sound of that name, but if ever there was a woman fitting to carry it, it was this beauty.

“How strange,” I said. Renana said nothing and I realized that there was no love lost between them. Or perhaps the conflict lay between her and the beautiful Adah. “How should I know you—a great-grandson, you say?”

He recited the lineage of Hanokh to Methusalel. “Some know me only by the event that happened now some long while ago. I defended myself and by the hand of the One, was triumphant. How sad for that boy’s family, and for me as well. It is not an easy thing to bear the favor of God.”

“No,” I said lightly, “I have heard nothing of you.”

## THE GREAT MOTHER

One day a man comes to me. I recognize him; he is the master potter. “I have brought this gift,” he says, bowing low. I want to tell him I am weary of gifts—what do I need with all of these things? But every child wants to be blessed and so I thank him as I admire it—until I see the sign of the serpent upon it.

“Tell me,” I say, “What is this symbol?” I want to hear what he will say, though I know what it is.

Again, the serpent returns to me. Test me, Deceiver. You will not win again.

“It is a myth, I am told, of a creature that brought knowledge to man.”

How can they know this?

“That is not a myth,” I tell him, but do not satisfy the question in his eyes.

Hanokh has founded another city, I hear. And Irad has a city named for him in the delta to the south, where they build reed houses and live on fish. I hear they have made a shrine and



fortified it with bricks. One day a ship sails upriver—we stare at it in amazement. It brings news and goods: fine metals and fish oils and reed mats and beads. The merchant offers me one for each of my children—56 in all. There was a time I would have accepted gifts for my grandchildren as well, though today I cannot even summon their full number.

“You see this one, that it is the color of the river of paradise?”

“What river is that?” I squint.

“The waters of everlasting life that flow from a mountain spring.”

“That is foolish talk.” I hand the beads back.

“Forgive a merchant his stories. Please keep them, Lady of the Rib.”

I have not been called that in a very long while. It sounds strange on his tongue; he has an accent. Perhaps he comes from one of those settlements where the words of the people are strange and can no longer be easily understood.

## IN OLD AGE

There are a few things that happened during those years, though now I cannot remember exactly when. It is the bane of age, forgetfulness, but the privilege of the old woman, to tell things out of order. Yes, I am the hen, pecking at her seeds hither and yon, and so be it.

I can remember to this day with absolute accuracy and a remaining pang the first time one of my children lied to me. I had gone out after Hevel, who had toddled out of the house to who knows where—he was always going somewhere, even in his napkins. I had left near the hearth a skin full of gruel on a hot rock. As I went out, I called back to Kayin, “I will be back—do not touch the fire or the food.”

Well, Hevel not only escaped his brother, but got himself most of the way to the river, whereupon he became lost and it was only through Reut’s help that I found him, crying and sucking on his fingers, his other hand tugging at his wet and soiled napkin. When I brought him back, Kayin was missing. I left Hevel there, with the same command, sitting in his soiled clothes as panic seized my chest. It was like that for me with

any child that went missing in those early days, but especially so for Kayin.

“Kayin?” I called, “Where are you?” I called him again, and then again. He told me many years later, remembering the incident perhaps with as much pain as I, that it was the near-hysteria in my voice that brought him out of hiding. His fingers were in his mouth, and I knew right away that he had burned them, but it was the look on his face that seized my heart. His shoulders had fallen forward, and his chin quivered as he came back to the house, not embracing his wayward brother who put out his hands toward him, or to inquire, as he always did, about every little thing Hevel had done or where I had found him or what we were going to do next.

“I told you not to touch that food!” I said with a mixture of exasperation, shock, and compassion. But just as I was examining his hands, I stopped.

*Where are you?*

*I was afraid, and so I hid.*

*Did you eat of the tree that I commanded you not to eat?*

But of course the One had known. As I had known. Now, looking at my miserable son, I saw the way he suffered now because of it.

And how I suffered as well.

That night when all of my children and the adam, too, slept, I walked out of the house to stand beneath the stars. It was the first time I realized fully that in the absence of choice, there is no true obedience.

That night, I wept up to the sky. And later, I dreamed of the

valley, and of the gate between the mountains, and of the pillars of fire, and the terrible faces of the beings within it that I have believed ever since to stand at the gates of that place, ready to confront us should we return before the fullness of time.

Not long after that, Kayin asked me for the first time about the beginning. Adam was in the garden and I was pinching a new mud pot. Hevel and Lila were playing outside in the sun, but as ever, Kayin was wherever I was, near to hand, willing to take my labor from my hands even then if it gave me rest—or a chance to talk to him unhindered. He was quietly jealous for my time, though he never made demands, and gave it up with only silent reluctance.

I was startled, not having expected this question. This life was what he knew. Why should he wonder about what was before? I had never wondered at any such thing.

But then, I had known the answers from the first days of my life.

I thought back to my dreams, so remote now as to be stories I told myself before sleeping, the vision of them like something dried in the sun, leaving only its residue where once it had been.

I smashed the clay flat—it wasn't turning out properly anyway—and formed it into a rough ball. "When the One that Is began to create, there was earth, and there was nothing in it, and it was much as this clay here, without form. And the One made light," I said.

"How did he do that?" Kayin asked.

"What makes you think the One is a he?" I said, glancing at him sidelong, my eyebrow raised.

“Father calls the One a ‘he.’”

*Does he?* I thought, wryly. Now I realized that I had heard him say the same thing, and had done it myself, too. But in truth I had not thought of it this way ever. The One, I knew, was all things. Was the beginning and the end. Was greater than man or woman. But eventually, I, too, began to refer to the One as ‘he’ as well.

Forgive me for that, daughters, if you can.

During the time of Kayin’s first questions, I know now that he took note of the wistfulness in my face when I told him about my communion that day among the grape shrubs on the terraces. He asked me then if the One still came to me now as then, and I was abstract in my response, and even then, as a child, I wonder if he did not see through it. But it was my hope that he would experience the One as he was meant to, in whatever way the One would come to him.

I did not tell him how greatly different things were then and now, and I did not tell him why. He did not know that our existence was a shadow of that former life. Or that we had not been made to die or to suffer or to hunger or fear or live in anything other than accord with the animals that we now hunted for their skins or that we sacrificed on the altar to send the aromas up to heaven. Kayin knew none of these things—only that the burden of some great responsibility rested on his shoulders.

I wonder if telling him would have made a difference.

Now here is something else: by the time my first children were old enough to be counted among the adults, when I had

by then the children of my oldest children—as well as my own youngest—to hold in my lap, and Adam labored in the fields with the other men, something began to shift between us. I did not see it then, it was so gradual, like the changing of a river's course. But in retrospect I see it well; the men unbound by the duties of nursing children that kept a woman doing those things that could be put down and taken up easily, that kept infants out of the hot sun or inclement weather, the men, making their deals together, expanding and sharing fields, clearing for one another, offering service in return for yields and yearlings. Though the women were in the fields often, it was among the men that these bargains were struck. And so I tell you: that power rests in the hand that folds the swaddling, but it is recognized in the pacts made by men. If we were not near when a decision was being made, it was done as readily as a man releases his bladder—that is to say, whenever and anywhere he will do it. I had to remind Adam to consult me in these matters and, when that failed me, to demand it.

I noticed after a time that my daughters began to sway men's thinking in other ways. They had become more clever than I, who continued to reason with my husband, knowing he would do whatever he pleased when he was gone anyway. And so they learned to ply the wills of men with the pleasures of food and wine and warmth in the night, perhaps more adroitly than I.

I was first amused and then disgusted by this. But how could I fault them—especially when it worked.

It was not until many years later, when I held the children of my grand-children, that I realized indeed, that it had come to

pass, the very thing the One had said: that the man had power over me, and yet my desire was still—was ever—for him.