

T H E
Bronze } Bow

Elizabeth George Speare

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A BOY STOOD on the path of the mountain overlooking the sea. He was a tall boy, with little trace of youth in his lean, hard body. At eighteen Daniel bar Jamin was unmistakably a Galilean, with the bold features of his countrymen, the sun-browned skin, and the brilliant dark eyes that could light with fierce patriotism and blacken with swift anger. A proud race, the Galileans, violent and restless, unreconciled that Palestine was a conquered nation, refusing to acknowledge as their lord the Emperor Tiberius in far-off Rome.

Looking down into the valley, the boy could see the silver-gray terraces of olive trees splashed with burgeoning thickets of oleander. He remembered that in the brown, mud-roofed town every clump of earth, every cranny in a stone wall, would have burst into springtime flower. Remembering, he scowled up against the hot noonday sun.

He was waiting for two figures to reappear among the boulders that tumbled on either side of the path just above him. He was puzzled and uneasy, at odds with himself. Who were these two who had been so foolhardy as to climb the mountain? He was resentful that they had reminded him of the village, fearful that they might look back and discover him, yet unwilling to let them out of his sight. Why was he so bent on following them, when

all he had wanted for five years was to forget that other world in the valley?

He glimpsed the boy again, some distance up, then the girl. Some memory nagged at him. Brother and sister, that was evident. They moved alike, with a sort of free, swinging ease. They had the same high cheekbones and dark ruddy complexions. Their voices were sharp in the clean air. Daniel could see the girl clearly. She had stopped to snatch a cluster of pink flax blossoms and she stood now, poised on a rock, her face lifted, her yellow head covering slipped back off her dark hair.

"Look, Joel!" she cried, her voice coming down to him distinctly. "How blue the lake is! You can see the tetrarch's palace in Tiberias."

Daniel's black brows drew together fiercely. Now he recognized the boy. He was Joel bar Hezron, the red-cheeked boy who used to come to the synagogue school, the scribe's son, the one the rabbi held up for an example, the one they used to tease because his twin sister always waited outside to walk home with him. She had an odd name—Malthace. Five years ago that was, and Daniel could still feel the hurt of seeing her waiting there outside the school, while his own sister—

"We're almost there!" the boy's voice rang out. The girl sprang down from the rock. The two flicked out of sight, sending a quick hail of pebbles bounding down the path. Daniel moved forward with the caution of an animal stalking its prey.

He reached the top just as the girl, flushed and out of breath, flung herself down on the patch of grass where Joel waited. She snatched the head covering clear off, letting the wind pull at her hair. Daniel could see them pointing out to each other the landmarks below.

From where he crouched he could not see the valley, but he knew the sight of it well enough. How many times had he sat where those two sat now, looking down on the village of Ketzah that had been his home? Not so often these last years, but at first, before he had got used to life in the cave. Sometimes he had climbed up and sat here till dark, straining his eyes to catch the specks of light, picturing Leah and his grandmother at their evening meal, wondering if he would ever see them again. He never had, and he had stopped remembering and wondering—until today.

Now that Joel and his sister were no longer shouting, the wind hid their voices. He stared at them, disappointed and baffled. He had to hear them. More than that, he was fighting back a longing to speak to them. His own people—after five years! He looked down at his bare caloused feet, at the goatskin tunic bound with a thong around his waist. What would they think of him, those two in their clean robes and leather sandals? Suppose he should risk his freedom for nothing? But he could not help himself. Like an animal lured out of hiding, he edged slowly from behind the rock.

Instantly the boy was on his feet, the girl swiftly up beside him. He might have known they would be off at the sight of him. To his astonishment, they stood still. He saw Joel's hands clench; the boy was no coward. Daniel stood on the trail, his heart pounding. If they ran from him now he could not bear it. He fumbled for the remembered greeting.

"Peace be with you," he said.

Joel did not relax his guard. "Peace," he said shortly; then, "What do you want?"

"No harm, Joel bar Hezron," said Daniel.

"How do you know me?"

"I heard your sister call you. I am Daniel bar Jamin."

Joel stared, remembrance suddenly livening his face. "The apprentice who ran away from the blacksmith?"

Daniel scowled.

"No one blamed you," said Joel quickly. "Everyone knows how Amalek treats his boys."

"I care nothing for Amalek," Daniel said. "Can you tell me about my grandmother and my sister?"

Joel frowned and shook his head. "I'm afraid I can't. Do you know them, Thace?"

The girl had been frightened, and her breath was still uneven, but she spoke with a frankness like Joel's.

"There is an old woman who comes to the well in the morning," she said. "She lives in a house behind the Street of the Cheesemakers."

"Yes," Daniel said hungrily.

The girl hesitated. "They say she has a little girl who never goes out of the house."

Still? He had thought perhaps in all this time—"That is my sister Leah," he said. He wished he had not asked. It had been better not knowing.

"No one has ever seen her," the girl went on. "But I know that she's there. I'm sorry. I wish I could tell you more."

Daniel hesitated, embarrassed, but unwilling to give up.

"There was a boy named Simon," he said. "Six or seven years older. He was bound to Amalek too."

"You must mean Simon the Zealot," said Joel.

"You know him?"

"I've heard of him. He has his own shop now. They say he gets more business than Amalek."

"He used to help me," said Daniel.

"He has a reputation for being a good man—and a good patriot."

"Would you give him a message for me? Would you tell him I'm up here? I'd like him to know."

Joel looked surprised. "You mean you live up here?"

"Yes."

"Alone? Is it safe? I mean—they say the mountain is full of robbers."

Daniel said nothing.

"Aren't you lonely?"

"I don't live alone," said Daniel.

"Oh." Joel was baffled. "Don't you ever come back to the village?"

"I'd just get dragged back to Amalek's shop."

"I suppose so. Yes, I'll tell Simon, of course. How long since you ran away?"

"Five years, about. Simon will remember me, though."

The girl spoke, in a straightforward voice that matched the look in her eyes. "Five years! Do you mean your grandmother hasn't known where you were in all this time?"

Daniel looked at the ground, his lips tightening.

"Tomorrow, when she comes to the well, can I tell her I've seen you?"

Daniel looked back at her with resentment. He had long since managed to quiet his conscience, and he did not like having it stirred up again. "If you like," he said. He felt angry at himself now, and disappointed. Why had he given himself away after all these years? What had he expected? There was nothing more to stay for.

"You'd better go back," he said, turning away. "You shouldn't have come up here."

"Why not?" asked Joel, looking not at all alarmed.

"I'm warning you. After this, stay in the village." He walked away from them.

"Wait," called Joel. He looked at his sister with a swift question, and she nodded. "We—we brought our lunch. Will you eat it with us?"

The blood rushed up into Daniel's face. He had not asked for their charity.

"It's not much," Joel said. "But we'd like to talk to you some more."

Was it possible this boy had made the offer in friendship? Slowly, like a wary animal, Daniel took a few steps back and let himself down on the grass. From the pocket of the wide striped girdle that bound her waist, the girl pulled a neatly wrapped bundle. Joel produced a small flask which he handed to his sister, then sat down and solemnly held out his hands. With astonishment Daniel watched the girl pour a little stream of water over her brother's hands. Hand-washing before a meal—he hadn't given a thought to it for five years. He wouldn't have imagined that even a scribe's son would carry water all the way up the mountain just to observe the law. Then the girl turned toward him. He saw the question in her eyes and the slight shrinking, and a stubborn pride stiffened him. He was a Jew, wasn't he? He held out his hands, and watched the drops trickle over his blackened knuckles, embarrassed, thinking how the men in the cave would hoot if they could see him.

The girl unwrapped the bundle and made three small piles, equal piles, he noticed, not skimping herself the way his mother used to do. Then Joel spoke a blessing and they handed Daniel his share, a few olives, a flat little loaf of wheat bread, and a small honey cake whose taste his tongue suddenly remembered from childhood. For the