

The Search for the Sword of Goliath

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A Kent Family Adventure

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~ CHAPTER ONE ~

Mom's upstairs taking a nap, so Julia and I are shamelessly trying to eavesdrop on Dad and Uncle Ken.

Normally we would be doing our home-schooling right now but Mom says she's feeling a bit run down and we can spend the day reading. Of course, with Julia being 13 and me being 15, we really don't need Mom the way we used to. At our age we can do a lot of reading and learning on our own. But neither of us can help the fact that Dad and Uncle Ken are clearly planning another Kent family adventure and we want to be the first to know about it. My name is Ginny, by the way.

Dad's an archaeologist who specializes in Biblical artifacts. A lot of people know Dr. Anderson Kent for his involvement with the Tadmor scroll, something we found last summer when we were digging at Palmyra, Syria. We recently got back from the Czech Republic where we did some exploring of a cave that had pictures of men and dinosaurs living at the same time – another proof that evolution doesn't have the answers because evolutionists believe that dinosaurs lived and died millions of years before man. Dad likes to work on any project that upholds the authority of the Bible.

"Obviously the find is priceless," Uncle Ken, Dad's brother and partner is saying. Uncle Ken teaches at the University of Toronto so he doesn't come along on our adventures but he always helps Dad plan things out and he and Dad stay in touch via e-mail when we're out in the field.

"Well, I can imagine why they'd want to keep the whole thing secret," says Dad. "If I found something like that and then lost it I wouldn't want anyone to know either. A three thousand year old artifact with that kind of significance..."

"Well, they'll do anything to get it back and that's where you guys come in."

Dad laughs.

"Well, I don't usually play the detective..."

Now it's Uncle Ken's turn to laugh.

"At least not on purpose," concedes Dad.

"Well, this will be right up your alley, a bit of archaeology, a bit of detective work, some espionage and intrigue thrown in for fun. And a bit of acting."

Julia and I look at each other and raise our eyebrows. We're in the hallway that leads to the kitchen, trying to stay quiet.

"Well at least I'm pretending to be myself," says Dad. "I'd hate to have to pretend to be some black market antiquities dealer."

We can hear a chair scrapping against the floor.

"Well, I'm going upstairs to check on Helena and to tell her the news. We'll have to start packing right away."

Julia and I scurry back into the living room and each grab a book by the time Dad pokes his head into the living room.

He chuckles when he sees us.

“*Near Eastern Artifacts During the Solomonic Reign*, Ginny?”

I’ve accidentally grabbed one of his archaeology books.

“OK guys, ‘fess up. I thought I heard some scuffling outside the kitchen door.”

Our faces reveal our guilt.

“OK,” he says, sitting down on the arm of one of our couches. “Here’s the story. Keep it to yourselves though because it is top secret.” Dad takes a deep breath and sounds as if he can’t believe what he’s saying. “One of the digs in Israel this summer uncovered what they believe to have been the sword of Goliath.”

We gasp.

David killing the giant Goliath is a famous story. After killing the giant with his slingshot, David ran over to Goliath and chopped off his head with the huge sword which he then kept as a souvenir of his victory. Later the sword was given to Ahimelech, the priest at Nob, perhaps as some sort of offering to God. David asked for it back when jealous King Saul was trying to kill him because of his popularity with the people.

“Where did they find it, Dad?” I ask, leaning forward. “Jerusalem?”

My dad shakes his head.

“At a little site north of Jerusalem. Who knows how it got there, whether it was David or one of his sons. I mean, anything could have happened to the sword after the death of David. He had a number of sons. Any one of them could have grabbed it up and hidden it. But anyway, the dig was just a small site that would have been happy with a bit of pottery. They didn’t have the security for a big find.

“They tried to keep the sword a secret until someone from the Antiquities Department could show up, but in the couple of hours that it took for the guy to get out there, the sword disappeared.”

“It sounds like an inside job to me!” I say excitedly.

Dad nods.

“Most likely. We’re going over there posing as an archaeologist and his family...” Dad pauses to chuckle. “Actually, we’re going over there as ourselves. There’s a month left of digging at the site...”

“They kept the site going?” I ask.

“Yes,” nods Dad. “They want to keep everything as normal as possible. They’re terrified that this will get out to the media and that every black market antiquities dealer is going to come out of the woodwork. If that happens, we’ll never see the sword again. It’ll be in some private collection for the next hundred years, or so.”

“So, when do we leave?” asks Julia.

“Tomorrow,” says Dad, standing up.

“*Tomorrow?!?*” we both gasp.

“We’re working for the Israeli government,” says Dad, on his way out the room. “They’ve got us on an *El Al* flight out of Toronto tomorrow night. Better start packing.”

Mom’s sipping ginger ale to calm her queasy stomach. She wasn’t as excited as we were at the prospect of another trip. She thinks she’s fighting the flu but Dad says she can spend the whole dig sleeping in our room if she wants.

We should be trying to sleep on the plane but Julia and I are too hyper to take a snooze. For one thing, we’ve never been to Israel before. Dad and Mom met on a dig in Israel in their twenties and spent many summers there before we were born so they’re a bit calmer than us.

“What about terrorists?” Julia whispers to Dad across the aisle. “Isn’t it going to be dangerous?”

“I think you’ll find you feel pretty safe in Israel,” replies Dad quietly. “Most of the citizens have had army training and there are so many soldiers in the streets that there’s very little crime. Many of the off-duty soldiers carry their weapons around with them as well. Suicide bombers are always a possibility, but we’re just going to have to pray daily for God’s protection. Believe me, between your Uncle Ken and Aunt Gwen and your Mom and I, a lot of praying has already been done on behalf of this trip.”

Dad and Mom sleep while Julia and I watch an in-flight movie. An advantage to staying up is that you don’t miss the late night snack that comes around for anyone who’s awake.

Dad has told us that we’ll be digging at Bet Horon, a small suburban community about 17 kilometres, or 10 miles, north of Jerusalem. It’s mentioned a couple of times in the Bible. In the days of Joshua, the Israelites made a peace treaty with the people of Gibeon. When the kings of the Amorite people heard about this, they got nervous about this new power shift and decided to go attack Gibeon. The people of Gibeon made an appeal to Joshua who, with God’s blessing, came out to their defense. The kings of the Amorites were sent running down the road from Bet Horon to Azekah with the Israelites chasing them and God hurling hailstones at them.

Bet Horon is also mentioned as a place King Solomon built up, making Upper Bet Horon and Lower Bet Horon fortified cities with walls and with gates and bars. This may be how the sword of Goliath ended up there since Solomon was the son of David.

Although we’ve been told that there are a lot of English-speaking immigrants living in Bet Horon, I still want to learn some conversational Hebrew from a book I borrowed from Dad. It would take me months, maybe years, to learn how to read the Hebrew alphabet, so I’m just learning how to say it, not read it. *Ken* is yes. *Lo* is no. *Bevakasha* is please. *Toda* is thank you. *Boker tov* is good morning. *Layla tov* is good night.

This is all modern Hebrew, Dad says. It’s a bit different from the Biblical Hebrew. Dad told us that until the Zionist movement where Jews started to plan for a Jewish state, Hebrew was only used in religious services like the Seder and by scholars studying the Bible. It became an official language of Jewish Palestine in 1922 and by the time Israel became a nation in 1948 it was already a modern language. Dad says if we have time we’ll visit Ben-Yehuda street in Jerusalem, named after Eliezer Ben-Yehuda who was most responsible for reviving the language and turning it into something spoken every day.

Of course, sightseeing is going to be a low priority on this trip with the daunting task of having to find Goliath’s sword.

At first, we’re going undercover. The director of the dig is going to greet us as if we were expected all along. So, we’ll start off digging and we’re all on assignment to talk to people and to try to subtly gather as much information as possible. Of course, we have to pretend to know nothing about the sword of Goliath.

We’re landing at the Ben Gurion airport in Tel Aviv. Somebody from the dig will be there to meet us even though Dad said we’d have no problem making our own way to the site. Dad is familiar with the country and fluent in Hebrew.

After the plane lands and we’re past the bustle of trying to find our luggage, I have a chance to look around while we wait in the main lobby for our drive. Although there are a lot of people in Western clothes, what makes Israel a little more exotic is that there are a large number of Orthodox Jews and plenty of Arabs in traditional Arab clothing.

“There he is,” says Dad, pointing to a man carrying a sign that says “Kent Family”.

“Boker tov! Boker tov!” says the middle-aged man smiling when we go up to him. He is short, deeply-tanned, with curly-hair and a beard and mustache. He looks about my parent’s age and he’s wearing a faded t-shirt, cut-off jean shorts and a pair of sturdy leather sandals. “Shemi Schlomo. Ma

shelomkha?” *My name is Schlomo. How are you?*

“Ani beseder, toda,” Dad replies. *I’m fine thank you.* “Naim meod lehakir otkha.” *I am very glad to meet you.*

“Ata medaber anglit?” asks Schlomo, as he grabs one of our suitcases and begins heading for a door. *Do you speak English?*

“Yes,” says Dad. “Ken.”

“I speak a bit,” says Schlomo. The van is parked right outside the airport despite the numerous signs that seem to be saying “no parking”. Schlomo tosses the “Kent Family” sign into the back, along with all of our luggage and then we climb in, Julia, Mom and I in the back, Dad and Schlomo in the front.

Tel Aviv is a bustling city on the Mediterranean coast. Though it mostly looks Western, all the signs are in Hebrew and there’s plenty of architecture that shows an Arabic influence.

“You come to Tel Aviv to play, nu?” says Schlomo as he maneuvers through the crowded streets.

“I like Jerusalem better,” says Dad smiling.

“Ah,” says Schlomo smiling. “You come to pray, nu?”

“I’m feeling queasy again,” moans Mom quietly to me.

“It’s no wonder,” I say looking out the window. “There’s so much to see and we’re seeing it all at about 100 kilometers an hour.”

Mom pulls a peppermint out of her purse and puts it in her mouth.

Once we’re out of Tel Aviv, the road quiets down. It’s awesome to think that we’re looking at the same scenery that Jesus looked at as a human – rolling green hills, Bedouin shepherds with their sheep, the occasional small town looking ancient and run-down. The occasional modern looking factory or housing development looks out of place.

“What’s that?” gasps Julia. “Did we just miss a terrorist attack?”

We’ve zipped by the carcass of a jeep that looks blackened by an explosion.

“Where are the people?” Julia demands, twisting her head to look out the back window.

Dad and Schlomo chuckle.

“Actually, that’s a leftover from one of the wars,” says Dad. “It’s the Israeli way of remembering. You’ll see a few of those type of monuments while we’re here.”

“So,” says Schlomo conversationally. “You like Bet Horon? You study Yeshua or Schlomo?”

Dad laughs.

“Both. The Joshua story is, of course, more exciting. But any artifact from the reign of Solomon would be of immense value.”

Dad is talking casually, but I can tell he’s also probing. How much does Schlomo know about the sword of Goliath?

“Ken, ken,” nods Schlomo. “Yitzak feels the same, I think.” Yitzak Ben Eli is the dig director. “There was some find that everybody was excited about that had something to do with Solomon or David, I heard.”

“Oh?” says Dad conversationally.

“Not sure about much,” Schlomo shrugs. “It got hidden away.”

“Who saw it?”

“Oh, the top guys, you know...” Schlomo is vague. But it gives us the idea that not everybody at the site is even aware that the sword was found. That could eliminate a lot of suspects since who could steal a sword that they didn’t know existed?

“I drop you off at the kibbutz,” says Schlomo. “It’s too late to go dig.”

Even though it’s only 11:00, days at an archaeological dig usually start before sunrise and

knock off around lunchtime to avoid working in the midday heat. The afternoons are spent washing pottery and analyzing the data of the day. Usually the workers have free time if they want to take a nap or explore the area.

Israel is a small country so it isn't long before we are pulling into a cluster of buildings that Schlomo says is Bet Horon. Although the drive here was fairly rural, we have now entered the residential zone that surrounds Jerusalem and there are little communities in every direction.

Bet Horon is clean and bright. The first thing I notice is a large playground with children swinging and climbing and sliding while their mothers watch. Some mothers wear head scarves and long skirts, suggesting that they are religious. Others look like they could be standing in North America with their jeans and t-shirts. But everyone looks as if they get along.

We are staying in a kibbutz just on the outskirts of Bet Horon. A kibbutz is a place where people pool their resources – their money and their time – in order to make the community work.

“What does this kibbutz do?” Dad asks Schlomo as we head for some large white buildings.

“They run a youth hotel?” says Schlomo.

“Hostel?” asks Dad.

“Yes, that is it. That is where we stay. They grow berries in there too.” Schlomo waves to a series of greenhouses that are bustling with activity.

Schlomo has parked in front of one of the larger white buildings. There is Hebrew writing over the main entrance which consists of two glass doors. Right now things are quiet.

With Schlomo's help, we get our luggage out of the back of the van and lug it into the lobby of the hostel. Inside it is bright because the walls are a sunny yellow and the few pieces of furniture are a light wood. Behind a small counter sits a young woman, clearly the receptionist.

“Boker tov,” she says, smiling.

“Dr. Anderson Kent and his family,” explains Schlomo, dropping one of our large suitcases in front of her desk. “For the dig.”

To us he says, “There. That is it, I think. Now I go back to dig. They need the van.”

“Thank you so much for picking us up,” says Dad, shaking his hand, startling Schlomo. I don't think people shake hands much here.

“Lunch is as soon as everyone comes in,” says Schlomo, pointing to a set of double-doors that lead to a dining room. “Around one o'clock. Eat first, shower later, ken?”

“Yes,” agrees Dad to this time-honoured tradition at dig sites.

The young woman behind the counter has been quietly working and hands us two sets of keys when Schlomo leaves. There is writing in both Hebrew and English.

“Toda. 24 and 25,” reads Dad. “Well folks, let's go.”

We head for a small flight of stairs in one of the corners.

The hallways are narrow but clean and well-lit.

Although our rooms are side-by-side, they are not adjoining. Each room contains two single beds and a wooden chair. Dad and Mom laugh about the two single beds and immediately push theirs together.

Since there isn't even a drawer, we don't bother to unpack, although Dad warns us to keep our luggage zipped up since this part of the world has things like scorpions and we don't want to find any nasty critters amongst our clothing.

Mom is still feeling kind of queasy from all the travel and opts for a nap. With an hour before lunch, Dad, Julia and I decide to walk around Bet Horon.

It doesn't take us long to circle around the residential area and after about half an hour, we end up at the playground that we passed coming in. It is still a hub of activity with kids all over the jungle gym and moms sitting and chatting on benches. There's one bench left and we sit down.

“No shade,” moans Julia. “Back home there would be nice big trees giving lots of shade.”

“It is a bright day,” agrees Dad. He has long since put on his sunglasses. “You’ve got to keep in mind, a lot of this used to be desert, Julia. The Israelis have put a lot of work into turning this into a green country.” He’s casually glancing around. There are a few green bushes along one side of the playground although with them being only about two feet tall, they don’t provide any shade.

“What’s that?!” Dad leaps to his feet, startled. “I think there’s a man in the bushes!”

~ CHAPTER TWO ~

Julia and I look at each other. It doesn't hit us at first what this means.

"Run!" bellows Dad for the benefit of all the mothers. He grabs mine and Julia's arms and starts dragging us away from the playground. "Terrorist!"

Pandemonium breaks out. Mothers are screaming as they run to grab their kids. Sure enough, a man dressed in black wearing a ski mask despite the heat, stands up in the bushes and hurls something in the direction of the playground.

There is an explosion, knocking us off of our feet.

Dad begins to chase the man in black, but the terrorist hops a low fence and leaps into a car. A driver is waiting and they zoom off. Dad whips out a notebook and scribbles down the license plate number.

Julia and I are just stunned.

We stand staring as mothers continue to scream. Children are crying. Some kids are bleeding but no one seems to be dead. The explosion has rearranged a lot of sand and gravel and demolished a slide.

I don't realize it at first, but I'm crying. By this time, Dad is back at our side and leading us to a bench to sit down.

"The police will be here soon and we'll want to tell them everything we can remember."

We nod, numb.

Before the police can arrive, a bus drives by slowly, its occupants staring out their windows in horror at the aftermath of the explosion. From their clothing and their dusty faces, we can tell that they are our fellow workers from the dig site.

The police arrive within minutes. Dad quickly gives them the license plate number and one of the men begins rapidly talking Hebrew into his radio, no doubt to alert the army to stop the car. Since our description of the man isn't very helpful, we are allowed to go back to the hotel. Before we go, some ambulances have arrived and are taking the injured to the nearest hospital.

The lobby of the hostel is bustling with dig workers heading for lunch. When they see Dad and us and realize that we're part of the dig and will be eating with them, there is a buzz of excitement at the thought of a first-hand account of the story of the explosion.

Yitzak Ben-Eli rescues us.

"Dr. Kent." He quickly whisks us to a quiet table in the corner. "A most unpleasant start to your visit in Israel." He isn't probing for information, just stating a fact. "And how is your wife?"

"Upstairs sleeping. She must have been quite exhausted to sleep through all the noise."

Yitzak nods.

"Traveling wears me out too. I must always have a nap when I travel outside the country."

The soup arrives and despite the din around us, we eat quietly.

Yitzak Ben-Eli is a slim, dark-haired man in his late thirties. He's handsome enough that Julia

will probably have a crush on him before the meal is over.

After the soup comes a delicious eggplant parmigiana with some tossed salad. I look around the dining room. Everybody is eating with gusto. Archaeological digs are not for the delicate and refined. It's for people who want to relive their childhood – dig in the ground all day, eat covered in dirt, don't worry about your manners.

"There was such an attack on the day the sword disappeared." Yitzak speaks so quietly there is no danger of being overheard and I can barely hear him. But Dad picks up on it right away.

"Really? Do you suspect a diversion?"

Yitzak nods.

"Although it would be difficult to do, not impossible. The whole thing took place on the outskirts of Bet Horon, on the side where our dig is going on. There was much noise along with it, screeching of tires, yelling, then an explosion. Needless to say everyone on the dig site was staring in the direction of the noise, myself included."

"That's interesting," says Dad, pausing his eating. "Today I noticed that the order of noise was an explosion, yelling and screaming, then screeching of tires."

Yitzak nods.

"You're absolutely right. On the day the sword was taken, the so-called terrorists arrived screeching their tires, they did most of the yelling, and the explosion was just an incidental aftermath to give them a legitimate reason for being there in the first place. Since most people on the dig site are not from Israel, they did not know that this is not how a terror attack works. The terrorist usually doesn't announce his arrival."

Dad nods.

"Was anyone hurt?"

"No, thank God. But that is another thing that makes me suspicious. Usually the attack is on a group of people, not an empty backyard. The explosive landed in a sandbox."

Dad laughs.

"Either that or it was the dumbest terror attack in the history of Israel."

Yitzak smiles.

"I would say the same except that when all the excitement had died down and I returned to the shed where we had locked up the sword, it was gone."

"You had found it that day?"

"In the morning. While it was still dark. That's why most of the people don't even know what we found. I phoned Antiquities right away, but, of course, they don't start work until 9:00. That's roughly when the attack took place. Antiquities showed up at 9:30."

"Someone must have had friends..."

"Of course," nods Yitzak. "And someone must have alerted those friends who then quickly came up with this plan. In this day of cell phones it is easy enough to do, just go to the outhouse and make the call."

A waitress comes around with a fruit bowl and we all help ourselves to some of the fresh Israeli oranges. Dad grabs a few extra for Mom.

"Well, we'll keep that in mind and keep our ears open as we work," says Dad.

"You'll all be working in the section where the sword was discovered."

"Now, who knows exactly what you found that day?"

"Elinor Parkinson was actually the lady who was working in the square. All she knows is that she found something gold. She saw a tiny portion of it and doesn't even realize what she found. It was Monday afternoon, just about time to head back to the hostel. So I left one of our Bedouins there to guard it. I deliberately didn't want to generate any excitement so I asked her to say nothing about it at

the time. To the best of my knowledge, she didn't."

Dad glances around the room.

Yitzak senses his question.

"She is the one over by the window wearing a red sweat-shirt."

We discreetly check out the older lady with white hair who is laughing with a table full of older ladies.

"I believe she and her friends are what you call, Baptists, from somewhere in the United States."

Dad nods.

"So, tell me about the day you actually dug out the sword."

Yitzak grins ruefully.

"I am afraid I broke all the rules of archaeology. With the help of my assistant, Amos, we got that thing out of there in about an hour. We did take some measurements and Amos did the photos, but it did not take me long to realize that what I had was priceless. Something worth killing for, in fact. It scared me. I am content to find some pottery and evidence of human habitation. I was not expecting this."

"How big was it?"

"We measured it at 5 foot five inches. A sword fit for a giant. It was enormously heavy. Amos and I wrapped it in some tarp lying around and hauled it to the tool shed."

"Wasn't this seen by the whole dig site?"

Yitzak nodded.

"Amos was clever enough to tell anyone who would listen that what was in the tarp was a new kind of metal detector for finding coins. Now everyone thinks they will find a coin and that that is what we're after. Even Mrs. Parkinson thinks that the gold she found was a coin because she came up to me later and asked me if her coin verifies the Bible in any way. I assured her that her find did and she seemed pleased."

"Why did you think it belonged to Goliath? There were possibly many giants..."

Yitzak nodded.

"Of course. The size of it alone obviously wouldn't be enough to link it with Goliath. But there was an inscription on the hilt." Yitzak is already speaking quietly but he leans even closer to Dad. "As you probably know, Canaanite was the language of the Philistines but the inscription was in Hebrew. It simply said 'sword of Exile.'"

Dad's eyes widen and Yitzak nods.

"I see you know that exile is the Hebrew word for Goliath. I believe the inscription was added perhaps at the request of David or one of his sons."

Dad nods his agreement and continues asking his questions.

"Who's working in the square now?"

"Mrs. Parkinson continues to. Your girls will be beside her and you will be that particular area's supervisor until the end of the dig."

"And my wife?"

Yitzak grins.

"I hope she does not mind, but she'll be assisting Shushana with the food preparation. All the workers help with food preparation on a, how do you say it, rotation?"

Dad nods.

"Helena will get a chance to meet everyone that way."

"Exactly."

"Speaking of Helena, I want to go up and see how she's doing."

Yitzak nods as Dad stands up and we follow.

“I’ve told you everything that is relevant. Enjoy the rest of the day and we will see you on the bus at 5:00 tomorrow.”

Mom is awake and thanks Dad for the oranges, although she groans when she hears about her assignment in the kitchen.

“Food doesn’t appeal to me at the moment,” she says.

She is horrified to hear about our encounter with the terrorist.

“Thank God you were protected! Any news on the poor people taken to the hospital?”

“We’ll check an English paper tomorrow,” says Dad.

We’re all so wiped out that Julia and I just go back to our room and collapse on our beds.

I don’t wake up until 4:30 a.m. when Dad is pounding on our door and telling us to get ready to come downstairs for a quick snack before getting on the bus.

Mom gingerly sips on some tea while Julia and I wolf down some bread and jam and a large mug of hot chocolate.

While lunch was a lively meal, this gathering is far more subdued. There are a few morning people who feel it is their duty to be cheerful but they only succeed in irritating the ones who are still groggy.

We board the bus and since the whole ride is in the dark it’s impossible to take in the scenery. The ride is short and when we get off the bus, Julia and I just allow ourselves to be swept along by the crowd to the sheds where all the equipment is kept. One of student supervisors is in charge of opening everything up and he also hands everyone what they need. We take our trowels and buckets and then go over to Dad to find out where we’re supposed to go. Everybody else just heads for their square and picks up where they left off.

Mom’s sitting on the bench of a picnic table in the eating area, while Dad is a few feet away talking to Yitzak. I shiver in the cool morning air. It’s hard to believe that by noon this place will be broiling.

We take a seat by Mom.

“How are you, Mom?” I say.

She smiles bravely.

“Feeling a bit better, Ginny. Really, I don’t know what this is. It reminds me of…”

“Ginny! Julia!” Dad call out to us. “You’ll be working over here.” He starts heading for the dig site and we jump up and follow.

Things are usually pretty quiet first thing in the morning at a dig site. Everybody just settles down into their square and begins to dig with their trowels. The sun is starting to come up so we have enough light.

About an hour and a half into the day, someone comes around with some Turkish-style coffee and everybody pauses for a break. You have to be a fan of stuff that tastes like espresso to drink this strong beverage, so Julia and I pass.

Mrs. Parkinson takes a small cup, however.

“Hello, girls,” she says smiling at us. “You’re new here.”

It’s a statement but it’s a conversation-opener.

“Yes, I’m Ginny, this is Julia” I say. “We’re with our Dad.” I point to Dad.

“Dr. Kent, right?”

We nod.

“I’ve heard a lot about your Dad and how he always stands up for the authority of the Bible. I read an article about him in *Christianity Today* and I’ve seen him on that archaeology show on TBN…”

I nod.

“Dad’s been on a lot of TV shows. Mostly Christian stuff.”

“Well, of course,” says Mrs. Parkinson, sipping her coffee. “The world doesn’t want to hear that the Bible is true.”

Mrs. Parkinson has a friendly manner. Very open. She makes me think of how Jesus said to Nathaniel, “behold an Israelite in whom there is no guile.” I know we can rule her out as a suspect but hopefully she can still give some information about other people.

“Yitzak says you found something gold,” I say casually.

“Yes, it was a coin,” says Mrs. Parkinson putting down her small cup and putting her gloves back on. “Does he expect that we’ll find some more?”

“I dunno,” I say, picking up my trowel. “I guess we’ll just have to keep our eyes open.”

She gives me a smile as she gets back to work.

Julia and I are lucky to be sharing a square because we can pass the time playing guessing games. One of our favourites is “Who Am I?” where you have to give the other person hints until she guesses who it is. It’s always someone in the Bible. When we were younger it would go something like this:

I was a preacher.

I dunno, Julia would say. Give me another clue.

God asked me to do a certain job.

Julia might guess Jonah.

I’d say no and carry on.

God asked me to build something.

Now usually at this point, Julia would guess Noah and she’d be right but some other clues I could have given would have been:

I had three kids.

Or the real clincher:

I had to take care of a whole bunch of animals.

Now, of course, we make them a lot harder.

Julia goes first.

“I was more honourable than my brothers.”

“Joseph?”

“Nope. My mother gave birth to me in great pain.”

“Benjamin?”

“Nope. I prayed that God would enlarge my territory.”

“Um, Jacob?”

“Nope. Give up?”

“No, never.”

I notice that Mrs. Parkinson is listening and grinning.

“When he prayed, God gave him all he asked for.”

“Oh!” I say. “Jabez!”

“That’s what I thought,” says Mrs. Parkinson, mostly to herself.

Now it’s my turn.

I have to think a bit first. You can do one of two things to make it hard. You can pick an obscure person, like Julia did. Or you can pick a well-known person and just use a lot of obscure facts for the clues. This is what I decide to do.

“I had a wife named Ahinoam.”

Mrs. Parkinson smiles with recognition. She must really know her Bible.

"I dunno. Keep going," says Julia.

"I stole a king's water jug and spear."

"That sounds familiar," says Julia. "It's definitely Old Testament."

I nod.

"I nearly killed a guy named Nabal."

Julia grins.

"Davd."

Mrs. Parkinson nods.

"Why don't you try to stump us!" I call out to Mrs. Parkinson.

"I think that might be hard," she replies, looking up. "You guys really know your Bible. But I'll try." She thinks for a bit.

"I had a lot of money."

"Zaccheus?" I guess.

She shakes her head and continues.

"I was a prophet and an apostle."

Julia and I look at each other. This one is hard.

"I sold a field and gave the money to Peter to give to the poor."

"Ananias?" I guess hesitantly.

She shakes her head, obviously enjoying herself.

"For awhile I traveled with Paul."

"Silas?"

"When I was with Paul I was mistaken for the god, Jupiter."

Julia and I just look at each other.

"OK. Here's another one. I had an argument with Paul and we separated."

"Barnabas!" I practically yell. "That was a good one, Mrs. Parkinson."

"Thank you," she replies. "You know girls, you must keep your eyes open." We're all sitting in the dirt and she's looking down as she speaks. "I figure we may find some more coins. After all, who goes around with just one coin in his pocket?"

"It would be exciting to find something," I say, neutrally. I don't want to give it away that it was not a coin she found.

"I like espionage," says Julia, dramatically. I look at her, surprised. "I always think that maybe there're people who come to a dig to steal what's found and smuggle it out of the country."

Mrs. Parkinson laughs.

"I like your imagination, dear."

"Do you think there's anyone here who might be an international black market antiques dealer?" asks Julia, hopefully.

I'm proud of her boldness.

"Well," says Mrs. Parkinson, pausing in her work. "I guess I'm like you. I like a good spy story and I can't help but noticing that there are some people on this dig who seem kind of... suspicious. I mean, if something went missing, they'd be the first people I'd investigate."

"Oh, like who?" says Julia.

"Well, you've only been here a day, but if you look around the next few days I think you'll see who I mean."

"Mrs. Parkinson!" groans Julia. "Tell us!"

Mrs. Parkinson laughs merrily.

"I don't want to spoil your fun."

"Oh come on!" begs Julia. "Give us a hint! I bet you anything someone's after your coin!"

“You kids of archaeologists must do this to make life interesting,” says Mrs. Parkinson grinning. But then the expression on her face goes serious. “Although, it is funny you should say that about my coin. I had quite a few people talk to me that day that don’t normally even look at me. It was strange how many people wanted to hear about it.”

“That’s pretty typical on a dig site,” I assure her. “The person who finds something is the centre of attention for a day or two.”

Mrs. Parkinson nods.

“I would expect that. Quite a few people just wanted to know more about the coin. They were normal enough in their interest. But a few people asked me questions that were a little more leading...”

“Really?” says Julia.

Since we are working so close together, we can speak fairly quietly. All around us people are laughing and talking and there’s a lot of yelling as people pass info onto each other. The two young men on the other side of us have headphones for their MP3 players. We’re in no danger of being overheard.

“Well, girls, I know I can trust you with us all being believers. And maybe this info is something that would be useful to your Dad in case anything *does* happen and something goes missing...”

We nod. It’s hard to keep working. I just want to stop and focus all my attention on what she has to say. As it is, I’m just poking around in the dirt, barely making any progress.

“Well,” she continues, pausing. “There were three people who acted strangely. I found something gold near the end of the day. I called my supervisor over and he took over from that point. When we got back to the hostel for lunch, a woman I don’t normally talk to, very boldly made a seat for herself right beside me. In fact, she displaced one of my friends who was just about to drop her, ahem” Mrs. Parkinson coughs delicately, “*posterior* into the seat beside me. The young lady introduced herself as Clarice and spent the entire lunch drilling me about my find. And drilling is the word. It wasn’t just a casual interest. She wanted to know if I had actually seen the object. Was there any kind of picture or inscription on it? How old did it look? *Well, how should I know?* was what I felt like telling her. I’m not an archaeologist. But I minded my manners and answered her as nicely as I could. Truth is, I said, I didn’t know what I’d found. It wasn’t until the next day when my supervisor, Amos, and Yitzak were digging around and removed the coin and Amos told everybody that they had some kind of metal detector for finding coins that I put two and two together and realized that was what it was.”

“That does sound strange,” I agree.

“Furthermore,” continues Mrs. Parkinson. “She was back the next day, right beside me at lunch, with even more questions. Had I actually seen the coin? Again, any picture or inscription on it? I had to explain to her that no, I hadn’t seen anything because Amos and Yitzak had sent me and a few other people in this area over to that section...” Mrs. Parkinson waves her hand towards the other side of the dig. “...to help them with moving a big pile of rocks that was keeping them from being able to move any further. Apparently, after the construction of that housing development over there, the children of Bet Horon took all the stones that had been excavated and had made a giant rock-pile for themselves to climb on.”

We nod.

“I guess they didn’t want us just standing around watching them. Time is money and all that.”

We nod. The truth is, one of the rewards of working on a dig site is being able to stand around and see what you’ve dug up. But Amos and Yitzak were counting on these first-timers not to know that.

“So that’s suspicious person number one,” concludes Mrs. Parkinson. “She’s over there wearing a blue bandanna and a black t-shirt.”

Discreetly, Julia and I scan the site and spot who Clarice is. She’s about ten loci away.

“Now the second strange character is that man way over there wearing the red t-shirt and the blue baseball cap.”

He’s in one of the loci right beside the housing development.

“First I have to tell you, he’s right beside the backyard where we had our terrorist attack.”

Our eyes widen.

“Not as bad as the one you were in,” Mrs. Parkinson continues. “The morning I was moving rocks around, some terrorists threw a bomb into that backyard. Praise the Lord, no one was hurt. But it was quite a fright nonetheless.”

“For sure,” I agree. “We were terrified.”

“I’m sure you were,” says Mrs. Parkinson. “But thank God we’re under His protection.”

We nod.

“Anyway, that young man came up to me after lunch on the day I found my coin and actually asked me out on a date that night!”

She looks at us, expecting us to be shocked.

“He’s young enough to be my son!” she explains.

“He looks old enough to be my dad,” says Julia, looking at him.

“When you get to be my age dear, any man under forty is a young man.”

“So, did you go out with him?” Julia asks mischievously.

Mrs. Parkinson laughs merrily.

“I asked him if he was a believer and when he looked at me blankly I told him that I only date men who share my faith. He said he just wanted to go out for a drink. I said I didn’t think there was anything wrong with a drink. In fact, the Lord said that he made wine to gladden a man’s heart. Not to mention, of course, our Lord turning water to wine and all that. But I said to him, amongst my circle of friends are some who believe that drinking is wrong and that the wine mentioned in the Bible is unfermented, so in order not to offend them, I would have to decline his invitation.”

Our eyes widen at this unique declination.

“Well, girls, he told me that I wouldn’t have to tell my friends that I was going out for a drink and I told him that I am not in the habit of keeping information from my friends. And he just stared at me. And I stared at him. And we were at somewhat of an impasse until the third strange encounter of that day happened. An older man, one far more suited to ask me out if someone were to get such an idea into his head, came right up to me at that moment and asked if I could tell him a bit about my find because he was doing an article for his church magazine back home about his archaeological experiences. Well that sounded a lot more reasonable, so I said good-bye to the young man, who’s name is Mark, by the way, and joined Cliff for a walk through the housing development.”

“Did Cliff bring any kind of notepad or digital recorder along...?”

“No, Ginny, he didn’t. And that was my first inclination that he was a suspicious character. He claimed to be writing an article and yet he took no notes despite that he asked about as many questions as Clarice. So I decided to test him... Rather like you girls and your game. I threw out some obvious Bible references. Asked him whether he thought Saul’s son Solomon had ever actually visited Bet Horon. He didn’t correct me and say, don’t you mean David’s son Solomon? I asked him whether he thought we’d find anything pertaining to the apostle Paul who was born in Bet Horon. He didn’t correct me and tell me that Paul was from Tarsus. Anyway, even if I wanted to be able to give him any info, I couldn’t and he seemed disappointed after our short walk. Neither of those three people have talked to me since.”

“Wow,” I say. “That is weird, Mrs. Parkinson. I don’t blame you at all for being suspicious.”

“So which one’s Cliff?” asks Julia.

“He’s gone. The next day, the day I was moving rocks, he started having chest pains. An ambulance came and took him away. I expect it was the shock of the terrorist attack. It can be very terrifying to have a near death experience, particularly when you’re not ready to meet your Maker. Anyway, Amos told me that he was discharged from the hospital after a few hours and that he decided to fly home rather than come back here.”

“So,” says Julia. “Are they the suspicious people you were talking about?”

Mrs. Parkinson laughs with delight.

“No my dears! Those are *my* suspicious people. But there are a lot of strange characters here. What you ought to do is find something spectacular and then see what kind of interesting encounters *you* have!”

Julia nods and we continue on with our work.

But my mind is whirling.

Finding something spectacular is a really good idea!

It would probably smoke out the most suspicious people...But where would we find something spectacular enough to plant in the dirt and pretend to find...?

I can’t wait to talk all of this over with Dad but now is not the time. He’s too busy running around and taking measurements and comparing notes with the student supervisors.

Mom joins us at the meal and nibbles on some cucumbers and pita bread while we wolf down hummus, tomatoes, pita bread, oranges, lots of water, plus some delicious date squares. Dad is sitting with Yitzak and some of the student leaders. Even a meal is used to talk archaeology and trade ideas.

She asks us how it’s going, but in a casual way. We’re seated at a picnic table with an older Israeli couple so it’s not a place to really talk about why we’re here. Even though the older couple don’t seem like they want to talk, Mom goes out of her way to ask them questions about their life in Haifa and by the end of the meal they seem a little friendlier.

Even though meeting people and getting to know them is part of our job here, Mom would probably work hard to be friendly anyhow.

After the breakfast meal, we’re back in our locus and Mrs. Parkinson has a companion in hers. One of the student leaders has joined her. Mrs. Parkinson introduces her to us. She’s a Jewish student from Jerusalem named Hadassah.

“Hadassah is Messianic,” Mrs. Parkinson whispers to us.

Hadassah laughs.

“It is not a secret, Mrs. Parkinson.”

“I know, but I don’t want you to be unnecessarily persecuted...”

Hadassah sighs as she works.

“It is true that most Jews dislike anyone who believes Yeshua is the Messiah, but I have been blessed to find many Jews who do believe.”

I’ve never met a Messianic Jew before so this is really neat.

“How did you become a believer in Yeshua?” I ask. Yeshua is the Hebrew way of saying Jesus. In English we would say it Joshua. But we call him Jesus because the New Covenant was written in Greek and then later translated into Latin. In Greek his name is something like Iesous. And in Latin, that became Jesus. But Dad says Yeshua is probably what Jesus’s family and disciples called him.

“Through a friend at school,” says Hadassah smiling at me. “She persuaded me through Scripture much the same way Rabbi Shaul persuaded people in the first century.”

“Who’s Rabbi Shaul?” asks Julia.

“We call him the apostle Paul,” explains Mrs. Parkinson. “A rabbi was what they called their

teachers back then. Even Jesus was called a rabbi.”

Hadassah nods.

“It is nice to meet a Christian who understands the Jewish roots of our faith.”

Mrs. Parkinson smiles modestly.

“You are very blessed to have Dr. Kent as a father,” Hadassah says. “I have read all of his writings that I can. He is a man who understands much about Judaism.”

Now it’s our turn to smile modestly.

The rest of the day at the dig site passes by quietly and quickly.

The unofficial rules of a dig say that you go straight from the bus to the lunch room when you get back from the site. No one wants to wait to eat while everyone has a shower so we all just eat in our grubbies with our dirt-stained arms, legs, and faces.

After that, it’s time to clean any pottery that was found that day so we all sit outside with our buckets of water. It’s amazing how many broken shards of pottery are found in a day. Usually they are incomplete, but the archaeologists spend a lot of the afternoon examining the pieces, trying to piece together any pieces that look similar, speculating what they might have been – a pot, a water jug, whatever.

So I can’t tell Dad about our conversation with Mrs. Parkinson until he gets back to our rooms. Mom has skipped lunch and is still taking a nap so Dad joins us in our room.

He is very interested to hear about Mrs. Parkinson’s suspicious people and when I tell him about the idea to “find” something supposedly valuable in our locus, he looks thoughtful.

“That might actually work,” he says. “I’ll talk to Yitzak about it. Obviously, we’d plant something of little value but pretend that it’s some ancient Biblical piece. Perhaps a piece of Bedouin pottery. I dunno. Maybe Yitzak will have a better idea.”

He heads off to the showers, but says that we will go see Yitzak as soon as he’s cleaned up.

Since Dad left the door to their room unlocked, we peak in on Mom while we’re waiting for Dad.

“Hi, girls,” she waves sleepily at us standing in the doorway.

“Mom, are you OK?” I ask, concerned. “You usually don’t get so tired.”

“I’m fine,” she grins. “I thought I had the flu, but now that I know what it is I feel great. As it turns out...”

Suddenly there’s a commotion in the hallway. That is to say, we hear people shouting but we don’t actually see anyone. The walls of our rooms are thin and the shouting is coming from one of the rooms, but we can’t tell which one.

“You idiot!” a woman screams. “How could you mess it up?”

“Shut up!” a male voice yells. And then there is silence. Complete silence. The silence is more disturbing than the yelling.

At once, Mom is at our side.

“Get inside!” she says as she grabs our arms and pulls us in.

Just as our door shuts, we hear another door in the hallway open. Mom is looking through our peephole.

“I can’t tell what room it is,” she whispers. She keeps looking out. “No one has walked by.”

The significance of that remark is that our room is by the stairs and the only way out.

“Did they go to the bathroom?”

“We’ll ask Dad. If it was a man he’ll have seen him.”

But when Dad gets back he says he was the only one in the bathroom. With the water running, he missed all the shouting. He praises Mom for her quick thinking in getting us into the room.

“I don’t want anyone getting hurt,” he says. “My theory is, you may have overheard something

to do with the sword and then the man looked out the door to see if anyone might have heard them in the hallway.”

Since Dad has gotten dressed in the bathroom, all four of us head out to talk to Yitzak.

~ CHAPTER THREE ~

Yitzak loves the idea.

“But it will not be pottery we plant!” he says, pacing around his room, stroking his chin in thought. “We will plant gold! These are people who are after things they can sell to collectors. A water jug will not attract them. But an object of great value will.”

“But where are we going to get something...”

Yitzak laughs.

“That you will leave to me.”

Yitzak sits down on the chair in his room. His room is only slightly bigger than ours. It has a chair and a small table with a laptop computer on it. He waves for us to use his bed as a couch.

We sit quietly while Yitzak thinks.

“Gold paint,” he says after a few minutes. “Naturally we don’t want to risk losing something of great value. What do you think Anderson? A little wooden statue of a cow, from the souk, covered in gold paint? A miniature of what they may have worshiped while Moshe was on Mt. Sinai?”

When Moses was getting the Ten Commandments and the rest of the law from God, the Israelites made a golden calf and had a big party in its honour.

Dad nods.

“An idol. There are collectors who would pay a lot for something like that.”

“Then it is done,” said Yitzak, standing up. “Come, let us go to the souk and select our statue. For the gold paint we’ll probably have to visit the New City.

I’m excited that Yitzak is inviting us along.

Yitzak glances at his watch.

“We will miss dinner. But I know a wonderful place in the Old City...”

Yitzak leads us all down to the mini-van that belongs to the dig for the summer, the same one Shlomo picked us up in. We head for a paint supply store first.

Jerusalem is a beautiful city. Even the modern buildings are built with a white stone front that makes them blend in with the older buildings. The streets are bustling with Israelis in modern clothes, Orthodox Jews in black clothes and hats and Arabs in traditional robes and keffiyahs.

We pull into a small outdoor mall and join Yitzak as he goes into a paint and wallpaper store. They have a small can of gold paint, probably for accents and trim.

Then it’s off to the Old City. We park the van in a parking lot outside of the high stone walls and head in through one of the arching gates.

It’s late afternoon, but the streets are still busy with native shoppers and tourists.

Since Yitzak has a destination in mind, we don’t browse, but follow him through the stone streets.

We pass through the lively Christian Arab quarter to a quieter street in the Jewish quarter. Yitzak greets one of the street vendors who has a display of wooden carvings.

“Beautiful,” says Mom, picking up a camel.

“Olive wood,” says Yitzak. “All hand-carved.”

“You will want a commission next,” says the owner smiling. He is an older man, dressed in a faded white shirt and khaki pants. He has a kippot on his head.

“Aaron, I’d like you to meet the Kent family.”

Aaron nods at us.

“This is perfect,” says Yitzak, picking up a small wooden cow.

Aaron laughs.

“You are a constant surprise, Yitzak,” he says. “A cow is perfect?”

“I will tell you all about it sometime,” promises Yitzak. “But for now, I want to get these people to Yanni’s.”

Aaron nods knowledgeably.

“Perhaps I will see you at synagogue, Shabbat?”

Yitzak laughs.

“You would not be yourself if you ever failed to remind me of my laxness in that area...”

Aaron shrugs.

“One of these days...”

Yitzak purchases the cow and Mom buys two camels. If we were in the Arab section, we’d have to haggle over the price, but here in the Jewish quarter there is a set price.

Yanni’s is a large, wood-paneled restaurant in the Jewish quarter and it is full when we arrive. Somehow, a table for five is located in a back corner and we are seated. Yitzak waves away the menus.

“There is only one thing to have here,” he says. “The mixed grill with pita bread and salad. And a cold beer.” He smiles at us. “Beer or lemonade, girls?”

Mom, Julia and I take the lemonade, but the men go for the beer.

The mixed grill is delicious. Roasted lamb, chicken, beef, garlic and onions in a seasoned sauce. The salad is similar to a coleslaw but with lettuce thrown in.

For dessert we have a flaky pastry with an orange sauce and Turkish coffee for Yitzak, peppermint tea for the rest of us.

“Well, I’m impressed,” says Dad, leaning back in his chair.

The restaurant has only seemed to get busier.

Yitzak insists on paying the bill and after that we stroll out into the Jerusalem night air. It is balmy, still comfortable in short sleeves.

We’re heading for the gate where we parked the mini-van, when all of a sudden Mom grabs Dad’s arm and whispers for us all to hear.

“Look!”

~ CHAPTER FOUR ~

It's Mark and Clarice.

They've just turned into a small shop. They didn't see us.

"This confirms it!" says Dad, excitedly. "They know each other! They must be working together!"

Yitzak looks puzzled.

"Tell Yitzak about your conversation with Mrs. Parkinson, Ginny," says Dad.

Since we're standing in a dark street with the possibility of Mark and Clarice appearing at any minute, as rapidly as possible, I tell about Mrs. Parkinson's encounters after finding the gold object.

Yitzak nods.

"Then it is important they don't see us. They must not know that we know they are comrades. Come!"

He grabs mine and Julia's arms and whirls us around in the direction we came. Dad and Mom are right behind us as we hurry through the now quiet streets. With Yitzak in the lead, we take a different route back to the van.

"Did anyone see what store they went into?" asked my mother when we were driving away.

"That is a good question," says Yitzak. "Easy enough to find out. Next time I am in the Old City, I will visit that particular store and see what I can find out..." He glances at us. "OK, maybe we can all go..."

Julia and I look pleased.

"I guess you are the ones to do detective work since you can pose as innocent tourists. Like a detective novel, yes? That is the reason we asked you to come help us."

The hostel is quiet when we return.

A few people are playing cards in the common room, with the TV in the corner tuned to a news program. But we head to our rooms. Early mornings are awful unless you've had a good night sleep.

Mrs. Parkinson is talkative at the dig site.

I thought she might comment on us not being at dinner, but she has her own story to tell.

"My friends and I decided to do something different and go out for falafels. Hadassah was kind enough to recommend a local restaurant that we could walk to."

Hadassah smiles at the acknowledgment.

"When we worked it all out, we all dined for 80 cents each. \$1.50 if you include the ginger ale. I think falafels are the only things here that are extremely economical. When we first arrived in Israel, we ate at a Burger King and it cost us \$8 dollars each. It's been my experience that it is best to avoid the Western foods which are ridiculously expensive, and just stick with the local fare."

We nod. Dad and Mom have said the same thing.

"Tomorrow is Shabbat," says Hadassah. "If you want to try some authentic local cuisine you

should come with me to my house church. You and your friends,” she nods to Mrs. Parkinson. “And you and your family,” she nods to us.

“We would love that!” I say.

I know Dad and Mom will be thrilled to spend the Sabbath with believers.

“I would be honoured,” says Mrs. Parkinson, pausing in her work. “And I’m pretty sure my friends will want to come along too.”

“Buses don’t run on Shabbat,” says Hadassah, “But one of the believers has a small truck we should all be able to fit into. We meet in an Orthodox neighbourhood, so for your own comfort, you would be better off wearing a long skirt and a head scarf. Even the believers are very conservative in their dress.”

We nod. We’ve traveled through the Middle East before and always try to have clothes that won’t be offensive.

“A head scarf, hmmm,” says Mrs. Parkinson, thinking out loud. “I have a large sun hat. Quite pretty, a big sunflower on the front. Do you think that would be OK?”

Hadassah laughs.

“I guess that will do.”

Julia and I play our guessing games, while Mrs. Parkinson and Hadassah discuss the Jewish nature of the first century church and the day goes by quickly. Particularly since we head back to the hostel a few hours early so that those Israelis who want to go home can catch a bus and be back in time for the Sabbath which starts Friday at sunset.

Back at the hostel, Yitzak discreetly lets us know that the golden statue will be ready for Sunday and asks that we meet him on Saturday night to discuss how it will all play out.

I let Dad and Mom know about our Sabbath invitation and they agree that it’s a great opportunity.

Lunch was the usual full meal, but Friday night dinner is light - bread, tomatoes, cucumbers, hummus, and some pastries - because most of the staff wants to be with their family for the Sabbath. If we were with a Jewish family this night, we would probably be having the best meal of the week, perhaps chicken, challah bread, wine, not to mention the candles and the prayers.

Even Yitzak has gone somewhere for the Sabbath, so our family joins Mrs. Parkinson and her gang and our parents finally get to talk with her. Her friends’ names are Marg and Pepper. Pepper is named Pepper because she says she has had salt’n’pepper hair since she was twenty-five. Mrs. Parkinson introduces herself as Elinor Parkinson. She seems thrilled to have my dad across from her and spends the meal asking him questions about archaeology and how it confirms the Bible.

“It’s nice not to face a hostile audience,” Dad smiles as we stand up to go to our rooms. “You wouldn’t believe the number of people who are unresponsive to the idea that the Bible is actually true.”

Hadassah has asked that we meet her at 10:30 the next morning. We all have a sleep-in, which is wonderful. Thankfully, Dad went downstairs at eight o’clock to grab us some pastries and juice from the dining hall where a light breakfast was laid out. After eating, we dress in long patterned skirts, white blouses, and simple head scarves.

Marg, Pepper, and Mrs. Parkinson are waiting for us down by the front door. They have bright-coloured dresses on and none of them are wearing scarves on their heads. Instead they all have extravagant straw hats with large flowers all over them. Something tells me no one will be mistaking us for Orthodox Jews on our way to synagogue.

Hadassah comes down the stairs and half smiles, half sighs, when she sees Mrs. Parkinson and her gang. But there is barely any time to greet us because a dark green truck has pulled up and an enthusiastic man in his twenties has jumped out of the driver’s seat to greet Hadassah.

He barely looks at us, even when Hadassah introduces him as Michael.

We are escorted to the back of the truck and Michael absent-mindedly signals for us to climb in. There is nothing to sit on but some crates. The truck is clearly used for the delivery of fruits and vegetables because on the floor are old lettuce leaves, the odd tomato and cucumber, not to mention a number of oranges. Michael hurries to the front to help Hadassah into the seat beside him.

Mother's eyes are wide with alarm.

"Andy," she hisses. "There are no seat belts! There are no seats! This can't be legal, never mind safe!"

My father looks deep in thought. He hasn't climbed in yet, despite that Mrs. Parkinson and her friends, after the initial shock of the situation, have climbed in and are making themselves comfortable on some of the crates.

Dad seems to be weighing something in his mind.

"No," he finally says, out loud. "We're not going. I can't risk it."

Michael is peering out his window to see if we're all aboard.

"No thanks, Michael," Dad calls out casually. "I think we're going to pass. But we do appreciate the kind invitation."

Hadassah leans out of the window, looking concerned. But Michael has just shrugged and hopped into the driver's seat. Dad barely has time to shut the back door for Mrs. Parkinson, Marg, and Pepper before the engine roars to life and Michael's taken off, leaving us in a cloud of fumes.

Mom coughs and quickly jumps back.

"Dear God," says Dad staring at the back of the van. "Protect those people and bring them safely back to us."

"Amen," we all agree.

"Well," says Dad, turning to us. "We're in our Shabbat best. Shall we go for a walk?"

We're all game.

We're walking down the residential street that will take us past the children's playground.

Unlike the day we arrived, the playground is quiet and there is no sign that it was ever the target of a terrorist attack.

We keep walking until we come to the main road. The sun is blazing so I'm grateful for our headscarves, but I think Mrs. Parkinson's straw hat would have been more effective for keeping the sun out of our eyes.

There's nothing along the main road for us to walk to. It's just a long stretch of road and we're about to turn back when we hear someone calling, "Kent family!"

It's Yitzak in the mini-van.

He pulls over to the side of the road and calls out, "hop in!"

"There's no place to go on this road," he calls out over his shoulder, "and all the buses don't start running until after Shabbat. Would you like to be tourists and go to the Old City?"

"Won't everything be closed?" asks Mom, who has been given the exalted passenger's seat in the front.

"The Jewish places, yes. But the Muslim's holy day is Friday and the Christian's is Sunday, so I think you will still find activity. Plus, there will be all the tourists."

"Don't you keep Shabbat, Yitzak?" asks Dad.

Yitzak laughs.

"I go to visit my mother Friday nights. But as Aaron is constantly pointing out to me, I don't go to synagogue on Saturday. I know you are a firm believer in our writings and probably think me an apostate."

Now Dad laughs.

"I don't judge another man's faith, Yitzak. I wasn't planning on taking my family to church

every Sunday while we're here. Going to church isn't what Christianity is about and I suspect that you feel the same about Judaism."

Dad is sitting beside me in the bench seat. Julia is riding in the back. Yitzak twists his head to glance back at Dad.

"You are right," he says, sounding surprised. "I do not like ritual for the sake of ritual and I do not go to synagogue for the sake of going to synagogue. It does not make me a better Jew. What makes me a better Jew is to read the Holy writings and actually put them into practice in my life. You agree?"

"I agree," says Dad.

There is silence for awhile and Yitzak switches the radio on. It is playing what sounds like folk music.

When we arrive at the Old City, Yitzak parks in the same parking lot that we were in the last time.

"I thought, for fun," he says with his eyes smiling mischievously, "we could just walk by that shop that Mark and Clarice visited."

Julia and I grin. We love playing detective. Dad and Mom don't look upset. Riding in vegetable trucks without seats and seatbelts might upset them, but we all love to solve a mystery.

The Jewish Quarter is quiet, although, there are signs of life. A synagogue is bustling, sounds of talking and laughter, some people are out walking.

The shop that Mark and Clarice went into sells brassware. It is all barred up so we don't spend too much time there but Yitzak declares that we will come back in the future.

Yitzak takes us to the Western Wall. It is the outer wall of what used to be Herod's Temple, destroyed in 70 A.D. by the Romans when they took Jerusalem. It's the holiest place for Jews now.

The area is wide open with many tourist groups standing around snapping pictures. As we get closer, the atmosphere becomes more somber. There are many Jews praying by the wall. The men are on one side, the women on another, with a partition in between. Yitzak asks us if we want to pray. Dad shakes his head.

"I can pray anywhere."

Yitzak nods, not offended.

Julia and I take it all in – the tourists from all over the world, the Orthodox Jews, the more casually-dressed Israelis, the Arabs heading for the Temple Mount itself where the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa mosque are.

"Look!" Julia shakes my arm. "That's Mark and Clarice over there!"

"It is!" I whisper excitedly, not that they could hear us we're so far away. They're close to the wall, having a conversation with a man with curly dark hair, wearing shorts and a t-shirt and looking under-dressed compared to most of the people around us. I glance at our parents and Yitzak. They're chatting quietly. Quickly I point Mark and Clarice out to them.

"We will follow them!" declares Yitzak. "And if we get caught, we will play it cool and pretend we weren't."

We can't help but laugh at Yitzak's plan but we all agree.

Mark, Clarice and the man don't seem to be in any hurry but eventually they start heading away from the wall and down one of the streets that will take us back to the heart of the Jewish Quarter. They don't look back so we have no problem following them, although when the streets are quiet, Yitzak suggests we duck into a few doorways or turn our back to them and examine a storefront until they are well ahead of us. I think he's enjoying this spy game.

"Well, I'll be," whispers Dad when we turn down a familiar street. "We're heading right back to that brassware shop!"

“Let’s watch from here,” suggests Yitzak, quietly, pointing to a little alleyway where we can see the front of the brassware shop without being conspicuous.

Sure enough, Mark, Clarice, and the man stop in front of the brassware shop. Of course, with it being Shabbat, it is closed, but the man they’re with has a key, the door opens and they enter.

“What now?” asks Dad when they have disappeared.

“Well,” says Yitzak, thoughtfully. “I do not think we should barge in, or anything. Perhaps I should just talk to our contact at the Department of Antiquities. If there is anything suspicious about that shop, maybe they have some information...”

“Good idea,” says Dad, firmly. “I don’t believe in putting ourselves in danger if we can get information through a safe channel.”

We turn around and head back through the Jewish Quarter.

“As a Jew I am not allowed on the Temple Mount, so if you want to see the Dome of the Rock, you’ll have to do it without me.”

“Some other time,” says Dad. “My wife and I have seen it and the Al-Aqsa mosque on past trips but we’ll make sure the girls see it before we go home.”

Instead, Yitzak takes us on a tour, showing us some of the high points of the city, pointing out places dating back to the time of King Hezekiah in the Bible all the way up to places where the Jews fought in 1967 when they captured all of Jerusalem. Of course, he and Dad have some long convoluted discussions about the age of certain walls and the historical significance of certain architectural styles, archaeologist-to-archaeologist. After awhile, we non-archaeologists kind of tune out and just enjoy the scenery.

I notice that we don’t go to any of the sites that have anything to do with Jesus. And in Jerusalem there are a lot. Before this trip we read about all of the places that cater to people on pilgrimages – churches built on important sites, the Garden of Gethsemane, the Via Dolorosa that follows Jesus’ route as he carried his cross, the Garden tomb.

Yitzak suggests we head back to the hostel where there will be a light dinner prepared so we make our way to the mini-van.

Mrs. Parkinson and her friends are waiting for us. Apart from a cabbage leaf in Mrs. Parkinson’s hair and unidentified green stains on the back of Pepper’s skirt, they seem to have survived. Someone from the Messianic congregation would have had them over for dinner except that Michael was in a hurry to get them all back to the hostel because he wanted to spend the evening with Hadassah.

“I don’t blame him,” says Mrs. Parkinson as she joins us for a dinner of pita bread and cold chicken. “She’s a lovely girl. But there’s something about him that I don’t care for. I’m not sure he’s always walking in the Spirit.”

“A young man in love doesn’t always seem to be walking in the Spirit,” commented Marg.

“You’re probably right,” agreed Mrs. Parkinson.

After supper Yitzak invites us back to his room. He wants to show us the wooden cow, now painted gold.

“I will go early,” he says. “It will be in your locus.” He nods to me and Julia. The top right corner as you’re facing north.”

Julia and I look blank.

“Towards the picnic area,” says Dad helpfully.

We nod.

“Don’t find it right away. It’s too dark and everyone isn’t completely awake. How about after the morning coffee?”

We nod. Although I think I’ll be too excited to wait. But the important thing is to just act

normal.

“We will make a big to-do about this,” continues Yitzak. “That is to say, we won’t hide anything and it goes without saying that word will rapidly spread throughout the site.”

“And then?” says Dad. “We’ll have to call the Department of Antiquities...?”

Yitzak nods.

“As I said, I have a friend there. Tonight I will call him and explain everything. It is not necessary for him to come and pick it up right away since I want to give the thief ample time, but I don’t want word to get back to the Department that we are hiding a big find.”

Dad nods and after a few more minutes of chatting we head to our rooms.

We all agree to go to bed early, although, once I get into bed I think I’m never going to sleep.

“I can’t sleep,” says Julia as we lie in the darkness.

“Me too.”

“I’m going to read.” She switches on the light and digs through one of her bags for a mystery novel.

I pull out my book of crossword puzzles. It’s amazing how quickly my eyes get tired and I start to feel drowsy. An hour later, we agree to turn off the lights and we both drop off to sleep.

~ CHAPTER FIVE ~

We force ourselves to sip some hot chocolate in the morning, but Julia and I are so excited we can't eat any of the bread or jam.

The Kent family isn't talking. We don't want to give anything away so we're all being quiet. Mrs. Parkinson and her friends sit down beside us and their chatting amongst themselves makes up for our lack of it.

When we get to the site and start digging around in our locus it's hard for us not to start moving too quickly through the dirt. Everything goes slowly on an archaeological dig and we can't mess things up by starting to go too fast.

"You're quiet today, duckies," says Mrs. Parkinson to us. Hadassah isn't in the locus this morning.

I realize we aren't being very natural so I laugh.

"I stayed up too late doing crosswords," I say. "I'm a bit tired."

"Oh, I love crosswords," says Mrs. Parkinson enthusiastically. "Especially now that they've banned knitting on airplanes. I always have a book of them in my purse. You must be quite good at them."

I shrug.

"Good at the Bible ones. And I usually get the history questions. Sometimes the science stuff. We don't have a TV and we don't watch a lot of movies so anything about entertainment I just have to leave til the end."

Mrs. Parkinson nods vigorously.

"It's all garbage on TV, dear," she says. "I'm ashamed to watch it and I think you've pricked my conscience. I really should get rid of it too. It's much better to read. Though, there's a lot of garbage in the world of books too. I think we Christians have to be so careful to watch our minds and what goes in them."

We nod. Dad and Mom have said the same thing, many times.

"Where's Hadassah?" asks Mrs. Parkinson after a few minutes of quiet digging.

I'm surprised.

"I just assumed she was talking to the other student leaders," I say.

Mrs. Parkinson shakes her head.

"All the student leaders are digging. It's only your Dad and Yitzak who aren't."

I look around and she's right. Only Dad and Yitzak have some surveying equipment and are taking measurements.

The morning coffee seems to be taking forever.

I don't want to ask Mrs. Parkinson what time it is because it would be out of character. But it is getting lighter out as the sun rises and more people are starting to chat as they wake-up.

Finally, one of the student leaders comes around with the coffee and some small paper cups. He's in his early twenties, with curly dark hair and I think his name is Amos.

"Hello," says Mrs. Parkinson, friendly, as she accepts her cup. "We were wondering where Hadassah is this morning?"

Amos shrugs.

"Haven't seen her." He moves on to the locus behind us.

"I hope she isn't sick," says Mrs. Parkinson. "I haven't seen her since church yesterday..."

I'm so eager to get back to digging that I can barely listen to Mrs. Parkinson.

As soon as the coffee break is over, Julia and I begin to dig in earnest. At this point, we're allowed to find our object.

Of course, all part of being natural, we can't both be digging in the same corner. Since Julia has always worked on the side closest to the picnic area, she'll be the one to actually find the object. I'm tempted to ask her if she wants some help, but that would be absurdly abnormal since all we're doing is digging in the dirt.

"Hey look!" Julia calls out, after about half an hour. "I think I found something!"

Of course, Dad and Yitzak have been waiting for this and they are by her in a flash.

Immediately, I drop my shovel. So does Mrs. Parkinson.

"What is it, dear?" she calls out to Julia.

"Gold," says Julia loudly, cheerfully.

"Another coin!" gasps Mrs. Parkinson. "I told you we could find another!" She's leaning so far into our locus I'm afraid she might tumble head-first into the dirt.

Meanwhile, Dad and Yitzak are calmly concentrating on the gold object, acting natural, calling for a student leader to bring some brushes to gently remove the object from the dirt. Another student leader comes over to measure the depth at which the object was found and to take some photos.

Word is spreading through the dig site and people are pausing in their work to try to see what's going on. Since Julia said "gold" loud enough for all the surrounding loci to hear, there's a buzz of excitement throughout the site.

"I believe it is intact," says Yitzak, sounding excited. He is saying this for the benefit of the student leaders who are crowded around, looking down. "And it does appear to be gold, perhaps..."

The student leaders are glancing at each other, faces animated.

It dawns on me that I should be watching people, getting their reactions to this. After all, this object is supposed to be an enticement to someone here. I glance over at Mark and Clarice and I catch them looking at each other, while everyone else is looking in our direction. Mark is raising his eyebrows as Clarice nods quickly. Then they turn my way so I quickly look back at Dad and Yitzak.

Trying to be as discreet as possible, I climb out of the locus and join Mom at the picnic tables. We smile and I sit down beside her. Now I can face the whole site without looking suspicious.

All the student leaders are surrounding the locus. Since our locus is right on the edge of the dig site, right beside the picnic area, and everyone else is facing our locus, Mom and I are the only ones to see Mark slip away. His locus is right beside the housing development so no one notices, they're so intent on trying to see what's going on with this gold object.

As he rounds the corner of a house, I think I see him pull a cell phone out of his pocket. I don't dare look at Mom to see if she's noticed since Clarice is still looking in our direction, so I pretend to be intent on Dad and Yitzak. Something tells me our plan is working so it doesn't surprise me what happens that afternoon.

~ CHAPTER SIX ~

Digging an object out of the ground is a slow process because of the measurements that have to be taken and the care that has to be taken not to damage the object. Dad and Yitzak have to put on a good show that this is for real.

They skip lunch to keep brushing away and slowly getting the object out while Amos photographs their progress. Unfortunately there's no way I can let Dad know about Mark's phone call.

Everybody is talking about the object. Most people can see that it's not just a coin and they are excited. The word is out that it's golden and since the average Israelite didn't have gold knick-knacks hanging around, people are speculating that it may have belonged to a king, or a rich merchant, and that it's probably an idol.

Mrs. Parkinson and her friends talk to Mom, Julia and I all through lunch about the sin of idolatry in Israel, but I'm too distracted to notice. Mark and Clarice are sitting together at a crowded picnic table. He's sitting on the end and I can see that he's drumming his fingers on his leg as if he's antsy and can barely sit still.

Everybody returns to some half-hearted work after lunch. Dad puts Julia and I with Mrs. Parkinson and we each pick a corner and do some light dirt shifting while keeping our eye on the square next door.

We've only been going for half an hour when there is a commotion by the picnic area which is by the road where the bus is parked. A car has pulled up behind the bus and two men with ski masks charge out with automatic rifles, heading right for Dad and Yitzak...and us.

A lot of women scream. A few shouts from the men.

But Dad and Yitzak are calm.

There's no doubt what the men want. They rush to the locus and wave their rifles around calling out in Hebrew.

Yitzak sighs heavily and looks very reluctant, but he does pull the golden cow out of the dirt and toss it to the one man who is holding out his hand. The other man continues to wave his weapon at us as they run back to their car and drive away with screeching tires. Yitzak runs after them and returns triumphant. He has a license plate number.

"Ski masks in Israel?" muses Dad. "I wonder what their source is?"

Yitzak is too busy calling someone on his cell phone.

I discreetly keep my eye on Clarice and Mark.

At one point they glance at each other and smile, but it is too quick for anyone to notice.

Everyone else is hysterical. Some women are crying and there is a loud hum throughout the site. A couple of people have cell phones out and are calling people.

Mom was sitting at a picnic table looking pale throughout the encounter. Now she rushes forward to us and she and Dad hold onto each other for a bit.

I turn to Mrs. Parkinson.

“Prayer,” she says grimly and a tad bit shakily. “Prayer. I was in prayer throughout that. No evil will befall you. Psalm 91.”

Julia and I nod.

“Prayer is good,” says Julia. She grabs my hand and we hold onto each other for a few seconds. It was scary to be so close to those weapons, but it’s funny how the fear hits us after it’s over. During it I was too stunned, which is weird because I was kind of expecting something to happen after I saw Mark make that phone call.

Within half an hour, a reporter from The Jerusalem Post is at the site to interview Yitzak.

Yitzak, having anticipated this and not wanting to lie about a spectacular find, has left to go talk to his friend in the Department of Antiquities, leaving Dad in charge.

At first, Dad pretends not to understand Hebrew because he doesn’t want to lie either. But the reporter, a young man wearing a white cotton shirt and khaki pants, switches to English, and furthermore, he wants to talk to Julia and I.

God must have a sense of humour because, before we can even say a word, Mrs. Parkinson is there, right beside us, loudly talking about gold coins and gold statues and the authority of the Bible. She is declaring that the find today verifies the Bible because it was some sort of a golden idol and the Israelites were known idolaters, so all this find does is prove, once again, that the Bible is true and that anyone who says it isn’t is wrong.

“Let God be true and every man a liar,” she concludes, triumphantly, her eyes shining. Then she notices us and looks chagrined.

“Oh dear, doctor, I should let you handle all this...”

Dad laughs.

“You did fine. In fact, I officially make you our press liaison. Mrs. Parkinson will answer all your questions,” he says to the journalist before turning and joining Mom at the picnic area.

Mrs. Parkinson glows at this great honour. The reporter gets an earful while the rest of us pack up the stuff in the shed beside the picnic area.

“I’m looking forward to reading that article tomorrow,” Dad whispers to us as the reporter gets in his car and drives away.

Back at the hostel, Yitzak hasn’t returned yet so we join everybody in the dining room for lunch. Because the golden calf was stolen before Dad and Yitzak had a chance to really examine it, the student leaders don’t crowd around Dad to discuss it the way they would if it had been a normal find. But we give the people plenty to talk about when halfway through our meal, Yitzak signals to us from the doorway to join him in the foyer.

There is a buzz in the dining hall as we exit and join Yitzak who has two men with him. They are dressed casually in white shirts and khaki pants, but they turn out to be government officials with the investigative branch of the Department of Antiquity.

Because Yitzak’s room is too small for us to all meet in, Yitzak asks the girl at the front counter if there is a place we can talk. She directs us to a large room with rows and rows of chairs and says it is the kibbutz member’s meeting room. Yitzak thanks her and we arrange some of the chairs in a circle so that we can all face each other.

“Of course I have told them of our little plan to try to smoke out the thief of the sword,” says Yitzak, leaning forward.

“Evidently it worked,” says one of the men. “Except we don’t know who contacted the two men who robbed you.”

“I think I might,” I say boldly and I tell them about seeing Mark leave to make a phone call and about the look he and Clarice exchanged while everyone else was terrified.

“Good Ginny!” beams Yitzak, looking so directly at me I blush.

Dad pats me on the back.

“I’m glad someone thought to look around,” he says. “I confess, I completely forgot to.”

“Well, that makes our job considerably easier,” says the other man. “Particularly when we combine it with what Yitzak told us about them going into that brassware shop. We’ve been keeping our eye on the owner of the shop for awhile. I’m afraid I cannot say more than that but the pieces of the puzzle are starting to fit together, yes?”

The two government agents nod and then stand up. Yitzak also stands up and shakes their hand before they turn and leave the room.

“Well, that was quick,” says Mom. “I was expecting it to go on for longer.”

“I think the case is solved,” says Yitzak, looking cheerful. “It is almost certain that the sword of Goliath is in the hands of this brassware dealer and that it will be back with the Israeli government by this time tomorrow. If he has already sold it, it may take a little longer, but all in all, it is finished I think. Once again Kent family, a successful case for you, yes?”

We all laugh.

But the next day we find out that it was not a successful case for us.

~ CHAPTER SEVEN ~

Yitzak is dejected.

“The brassware man does not have the sword,” he says to us after lunch in his room. “They phoned me today. The man candidly admitted that Mark and Clarice had come to him at the beginning of the season with the hope of selling anything of value that was found, but someone stole the sword from them before they could bring it in. At first he told the authorities that he was appalled that they would consider him a black-market dealer in antiquities. He claimed he was just pretending that he had gone along with Mark and Clarice’s scheme in order to return any artifact to the Israeli government.” Yitzak smiles ruefully. “It was pointed out to him that he should have phoned the Department of Antiquities right away regardless of whether a sale went through or not because Mark and Clarice are criminals under international law. When they searched his backroom and found our golden calf that was pretty much the end of him. He will be in prison for awhile.”

“What about Mark and Clarice?” asks Mom.

“Arrested late last night in their rooms. I’m surprised they were able to do it so quietly. Mrs. Parkinson phoned me and complained that there was immorality going on in the room beside her but when I investigated, it turned out to be them arresting Clarice. I was relieved. Had it been immorality, I don’t know what I would have done. But Mrs. Parkinson insisted to me on the phone that it must stop.”

We can’t help but laugh at Mrs. Parkinson’s complaint.

“Turns out Clarice’s father was also in on it. His name was...”

“Cliff!” I suddenly burst out.

“That’s right,” says Yitzak looking surprised. “But he left before you came. He didn’t want to be involved in illegal activities and ended up having a stress reaction to it all. He ended up going home. How did you know about him?”

“Mrs. Parkinson,” I explain.

“Ah, the ubiquitous Mrs. Parkinson,” says Yitzak shaking his head. “Always she seems to be around. Are you sure she did not steal the sword?”

I think he’s half-serious but we all burst into laughter at the thought of Mrs. Parkinson being a dealer in black market antiquities.

“Mrs. Parkinson can’t keep a secret,” Dad assures Yitzak. “She wouldn’t keep the sword hidden. She’d shout from the roof-tops that once again archaeology confirms the Bible.”

“You are right,” agrees Yitzak.

“You said that someone stole it from them...” says Dad.

“Yes,” says Yitzak. “No doubt the same men who stole our golden calf were working for Mark and Clarice. Except that only minutes after they had stolen it and were just outside the subdivision, a truck forced them off the road and took the sword from them. Mark and Clarice’s men had guns, but the driver of the truck threw a tear gas grenade into their car and grabbed it from them. The driver was

wearing a gas mask, of course.”

“So, Mark and Clarice weren’t the only ones to make a call on their cell phone,” says Dad thoughtfully.

“But that doesn’t make sense!” I burst out. “Mrs. Parkinson said that they talked to her about her find that day. Asking her all sorts of questions about it. Why would they do that if they knew they had stolen the sword?”

“But they didn’t know!” says Yitzak, his eyes widening, as a light bulb goes off in his head. “They were willing to steal anything! They were trying to figure out what they had stolen! They didn’t even have a chance to look at it because it was stolen from them so quickly!”

“Did the person who stole it from them know that he was stealing the sword of Goliath?” asks Dad.

“Probably not,” says Yitzak thoughtfully. “Though I imagine they know they have something valuable. Even if it’s not the sword of Goliath, it’s a magnificent find.”

“If Mark and Clarice weren’t the only one to make a phone call that day, that means there’s still a thief working on this dig,” says Julia excitedly.

“Or someone who is in close contact with a thief,” agrees Yitzak.

“So we still have a case to solve,” says Dad grimly.

“Find the person who made a call that day,” says Mom. “And they’ll lead us to the sword!”

Our plan is to find out who has cell phones and more importantly, who brings them to the dig site.

By the end of the day we have an idea of who might have been able to make a phone call to the thieves.

There are a few people who are obvious about it because people tend to dress lightly on a dig. Two men have phones in the back pockets of their shorts and a woman wears one strapped to her waist. One woman brings a purse to the site and another man brings a knapsack, so they’re possibilities. Everyone else doesn’t seem to bring anything with them.

With Yitzak’s help we draw up a profile of our suspects.

Moshe, 56, Israeli. Usually wears white t-shirts and jean shorts, of which the cell phone is in the back pocket. Moves the phone to his side pocket when he sits down on the ground. Yitzak thinks he’s a janitor at a school.

Avram, 35, Jewish from America. Wears a lot of khaki and brown. Has a cell phone in his back pocket and unlike Moshe, crouches down or works on his knees rather than sitting down in the dirt. Yitzak thinks he’s a student.

Sarah, 42, Israeli. Single mother of a university student who is also at the dig site. Her son’s name is David and he’s 18. They don’t work together in the same locus but it is clear they have a friendly relationship and often eat together.

The woman with the purse is Ruth, 62, Christian from England. She is white-haired and carries a large purse. Often we see her knitting during the meal. She hangs out with a crowd of older Christians from England.

The man with the knapsack is one of the student leaders, Joshua, 25, Israeli. He takes a lot of photos with his personal camera and takes notes in a thick-looking notebook, which presumably are both in his knapsack when he’s not using them. Yitzak says that he asked for permission to record the goings-on of the dig site for a university project he’s working on.

“It’s a book about standard dig procedures,” explains Yitzak. “I contacted his Archaeology professor when he first asked me and he’s legitimate. We have an agreement that I approve of all the photos before it’s published.”

“Will he include the robberies?” asks Julia.

Yitzak laughs.

“It is a manual about the boring routine of a summer dig. I doubt he will include armed robberies as part of his standard operating procedure for a dig.”

Dad is staring at the list we’ve written up. We’re in Yitzak’s small room and the list is sitting on his table.

“I think we can rule out Ruth,” he says thoughtfully. “She carries a purse because she wants to have her knitting with her. Joshua could have a cell phone in his knapsack but he has a legitimate reason for carrying it around with him without it having to involve a cell phone. He has an expensive digital camera that he doesn’t want to lose.”

Mom looks down at the list.

“I agree about Ruth.”

“Whose phone rang today?” asks Dad. “Did anyone actually use their phone?”

“Moshe made a phone call during breakfast,” I say. “He talked the whole time.”

“Sarah had a call while we were digging,” volunteers Julia. “She only talked for a minute.”

Mom is still looking down at the list.

“I can understand Israelis who are used to carrying their phones around bringing them on a dig, but one thing I have to wonder, why would Avram from America bring a cell phone? The long distance would be exorbitant. I mean, unless he’s got a local phone for his stay here, but would he have a lot of people he has to stay in contact with here in Israel? I mean, he’s just a visitor...”

“That’s a good point!” says Yitzak looking pleased. “Why *does* he have a phone?”

“I think that would make him our best suspect,” agrees Dad.

Without outright staring at him, we all keep an eye on Avram. We can’t help it. But if he is a thief, he would probably only make a call if something valuable was found. Yitzak is considering planting another find to smoke him out, although he says it would stretch everybody’s credulity that one site could have so many valuable finds in one season.

But events are going to play out over the next few days that will surprise us all.

For now, Mrs. Parkinson is talking, telling us all about how she and her friends visited the Messianic congregation for their weekly Bible study.

“I’m sure you girls know all about it, growing up under the teachings of your father,” says Mrs. Parkinson enthusiastically. “But they are in the middle of a fascinating study on how all of the Old Covenant laws are shadows of Jesus Christ.”

“Dad told us that they had to practice all sorts of ritual purity before approaching God,” I say. “But now we have Jesus to make us pure and righteous.”

Mrs. Parkinson nods vigorously.

“Yes, and last night they were talking about the Feast of Tabernacles, or Feast of Booths as it is sometime called. These people feel that Jesus was born at the beginning of this Feast. You see, all the Israelites would go up to Jerusalem to keep the Feast and they would build temporary booths to live in for the eight days, just like Jesus put on a temporary body to tabernacle among men. You see girls, Jesus wasn’t really born on December 25th...”

“Yes,” Julia nods. “Dad says the date was picked to coincide with a popular pagan celebration, sort of to compete with it.”

“Yes!” says Mrs. Parkinson enthusiastically, stopping her digging for a moment. “You know all about it! It really makes me think! There’s so much I don’t know about God’s precious Word! Pepper and I are thinking of going to Bible College when we get back home.”

We can’t help smiling.

I'm keeping an eye on Avram who's about six loci away from us. He's just digging. The phone is in his back pocket.

"Now you girls have an in with the top guys around here," Mrs. Parkinson says to us and I turn back to her. "Can you tell me what happened to Hadassah? She's such a sweet girl. She was here working solid before you guys came and now I haven't seen her since we went to church with her that day."

"A lot of people come for part of a dig," I say. "They only want to take a couple of weeks off work or else they want to take part of the summer to travel around and see the sites if they've come from far away."

"That could be," agrees Mrs. Parkinson. "But she didn't mention anything about leaving."

I just nod. I don't want to tell Mrs. Parkinson that friendships made on digs can be very casual and usually no one follows up on them after the dig is over, particularly if they live halfway across the world. But I understand how Mrs. Parkinson feels. Since there's so much time spent doing mindless work everyone talks to people and feels like they're becoming close.

"Well, dears," she says, brushing some dirt off of the front of her pants. "I haven't seen Mark or Clarice lately either. I suppose they went home. So much for my suspicious people, eh?"

Julia and I just smile. I feel bad keeping things from her but we're not allowed to talk about the things we know.

"How about you guys?" she asks. "Any suspicious people on this dig, not including armed gunmen, of course?"

I laugh.

"Tons," I say. I lower my voice, conspiratorially. "What do you think of Avram, over there? He's American, I think."

"American, my foot!" says Mrs. Parkinson, sniffing. "I heard him make a joke about America not worrying, Israel was behind them all the way. I happen to know that the American government spends millions, or maybe it's billions, of dollars supporting Israel."

Julia and I look at each other.

"You don't think he's American?" I ask.

Mrs. Parkinson shakes her head vigorously.

"No, dearie. I met him during our orientation meeting. Yitzak broke us all up into small groups so we could get to know each other better. He was in our group. He said he was going to school in Chicago and he certainly tried to sound American. Said his favourite food was a hamburger and French fries and that he liked baseball. But he talked a little too formally, if you ask me. We say 'burger and fries', not 'hamburger and French fries'. Then after that, I overheard him making that comment to another American when they were talking about America and the war in Iraq. He said, 'don't worry America! Israel is behind you!' That's just not something an American would think of saying."

I nod, thinking about this. Dad will be interested.

"Why, dears? Is he suspicious?"

"Kind of," I say. "I mean, I don't exactly suspect the knitting lady of being in cahoots with armed gunmen."

Mrs. Parkinson nods, knowing who I mean.

"But if it were an Agatha Christie, Ruth should be our prime suspect. But I believe she's above reproach."

Any further talk is stopped by the call to breakfast.

Mrs. Parkinson winks at us.

"C'mon girls! Follow me!"

This is unusual but we do.

She stops to consult with her friends who are sitting at their usual table and then, boldly, she heads for the picnic table where Avram is sitting with another man.

“Hello, Avram!” she says cheerfully as she sits down beside him. Rather shyly, we sit across from her. Avram looks startled. “I remember you saying you lived in Chicago. Ginny and Julia want to hear all about Chicago.”

I don’t recall ever saying I wanted to hear all about Chicago, but I guess if Rahab could lie when she hid the Israelite spies, Mrs. Parkinson can lie in order to solve our case.

“Uh, I see,” says Avram, slowly. I don’t think he even remembers Mrs. Parkinson’s name. “Ah, yes. Chicago.” He smiles at me and Julia. “Yes, I live in Chicago and I go to school there.”

“What are you studying?” asks Julia, politely.

“Political Science,” he says.

“Is Chicago a nice place to live?” asks Julia. She’s a lot more social than me.

“Yes, I think so. Where do you live?”

“Toronto.”

“Ah, Toronto. There are many Jews in Toronto, yes?”

“Yes,” agrees Julia. “How about Chicago?”

Avram shrugs.

“Yes, some.”

There is a silence. Everybody decides at this point that we should just start eating and we all start helping ourselves to the tomatoes, cucumbers, boiled eggs, bread, and jam. Avram gets up to help himself to coffee in a big urn at one of the other tables. Interestingly, he gets into a conversation with one of the female student leaders also getting coffee and he never comes back to our table.

That forces Mrs. Parkinson to talk to the man across from her and beside us whose name turns out to be Pete. He’s a Jewish mechanic from Brooklyn.

“Is Avram an American?” Mrs. Parkinson lowers her voice slightly.

Pete snorts.

“Yeah, and I’m an Eskimo.”

“I told you!” says Mrs. Parkinson to us, triumphantly.

I think Pete decides we’re all a bit crazy because he just concentrates on his food after that. But Mrs. Parkinson has made her point.

When we’re back at the hostel, in Yitzak’s room after lunch, Julia and I tell about our investigation of Avram.

“Well,” says Yitzak, “to be quite honest, I just assumed he was American because that’s where his application came from. He filled in his nationality as American, but we don’t check up on people or ask to see their passports.”

“Is it enough to go on though?” asks Dad, musing out loud.

Yitzak shakes his head.

“No, but it raises the idea that he is not what he pretends to be.”

It is agreed that we will all keep our eye on Avram.

~ CHAPTER EIGHT ~

Julia and I are so tempted to plant something ourselves, a piece of pottery from the souk, just to smoke out Avram. Except that it would be hard to get our parents to agree to another fake find and impossible to actually sneak out by ourselves to get something to plant.

Mrs. Parkinson inadvertently does what Julia and I should have thought of.

Right after breakfast, all of a sudden, Mrs. Parkinson lets out a shriek.

“I’ve found something!” she bellows out to all who might be interested. “Another coin! I’m sure of it!”

Like everybody there, my eyes are on Mrs. Parkinson until I realize, my eyes should be on Avram.

He’s making a phone call on a cell phone!

I’m so excited I pinch Julia, who’s also watching him. We exchange delighted grins.

After his call, Avram puts away his phone and focuses his attention on Mrs. Parkinson. Dad and Yitzak have already rushed over. They are waving the student leaders to bring over the brushes as they hop into her locus.

For about 15 seconds Yitzak and Dad just stare at Mrs. Parkinson’s find. Then Yitzak lets out a belly laugh.

“What is it?” demands Mrs. Parkinson. “Another coin! I’m sure of it! It’s silver. Do you think it was from the days of Caesar, Dr. Kent?” Mrs. Parkinson turns her attention to our Dad. “Do you think it’s another confirmation of the Bible? Perhaps one of the types of coins that Jesus referred to when he said, render to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s ...”

Mrs. Parkinson is speaking majestically, almost pouring out a sermon.

“It’s part of a candy bar wrapper,” says Yitzak. “But thank you Mrs. Parkinson, for your diligence.” He looks up and surveys the site. “Now which one of you rascals dropped a candy bar wrapper in Mrs. Parkinson’s locus...?!”

He turns and walks away.

Julia nudges me. Avram is making another phone call!

“But of course,” I murmur to her. “He has to let them know it was nothing.”

We return to our digging.

Right after lunch, when we are in Yitzak’s room, we let Dad and Yitzak know about what we saw.

“Well,” says Dad, thoughtfully, “that may very well wrap up our case. It’s quite possible then that he made the other phone calls too...”

“If this will get us our sword back, I will be most grateful,” says Yitzak, starting to look excited. “I will phone my friend in Antiquities right away...”

It is our cue to leave. In fact, Yitzak has his phone out and is already talking in rapid Hebrew as we close the door to his room.

“I think when this is all done,” says Dad, speaking quietly so as not to be overheard. “Mrs. Parkinson is going to have to get a medal for her part in it.”

We laugh. He’s right. At this point, we don’t realize what a big part she will play in really wrapping up this case.

~ CHAPTER NINE ~

The next day, Avram is not at the dig site. He was at dinner the night before so after dinner something must have happened.

Taken in for questioning by the Israeli authorities, Dad tells us later that day in our rooms.

“Will they torture him?” asks Julia excitedly. “To find out where the sword is?”

Mom grimaces.

“Well, Julia,” says Dad slowly. “I don’t know how they go about extracting information...”

“Can I ask Yitzak?” asks Julia.

“No,” says Mom.

“I feel like we can finally relax,” says Dad, taking a deep breath. “I think this case is wrapping up and maybe we can just start to enjoy being in the Holy Land.”

“How about dinner in the Old City?” says Mom.

“Good idea,” says Dad. “This time I think we should try out something Arab.” He is still speaking quietly.

At the front desk of the hostel, Dad asks the young woman for the number of a taxi company, but she offers to make the phone call for him and ten minutes later a cab pulls up at the front entrance.

Dad says something in Hebrew to the driver and we barely have time to put on our seat-belts before we take off.

“The Old City is divided up into four quarters,” says Dad. He has his lecture tone of voice. “The Jewish Quarter which we’ve already visited, the Muslim Quarter, the Christian Quarter which is where we’ll go today, and the Armenian Quarter.”

“What’s an Armenian?” asks Julia staring out the window.

“An ethnic group of people, who in this case have occupied a portion of Jerusalem since the first century when a battalion of Armenians fought under the Roman general Titus when he took Jerusalem in 70 A.D. They converted to Christianity later on and most of the Armenian Quarter, which is small to begin with, is taken up by a monastery.”

Julia nods, her eyes slightly glazed.

“What about the Via Dolorosa?” I ask. “Will we follow it?”

“Good question,” nods Dad. “We will probably walk along some of it because a lot of it is in the Christian Quarter. The Via Dolorosa, or Way of Suffering, is a pilgrimage a lot of Christians take to follow the road where Christ supposedly carried his cross. But unfortunately, most of it is probably apocryphal. There is simply no way of knowing at what point Jesus couldn’t carry his cross anymore, or at what point a woman might have rushed forward to wash his face. But even if we don’t follow the Via Dolorosa, keep in mind that although these might not be the exact stones that Jesus walked on, the whole ambiance of Jerusalem can give one a very good idea of what it must have been like in the first century.”

Dad says something to the driver in Hebrew and very shortly we are pulling up to a parking lot

with tour buses and cars just outside one of the stone gates of the Old City.

After paying the cab driver, Dad gets out and says, “This is the Jaffa Gate. It’s named that because the road leading out of it will go to Jaffa, or Joppa...”

This is just the beginning of the lecture.

As we wander around the Christian Quarter, Dad shows us the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, built on the site where some people believe Jesus was crucified, buried and resurrected. He points out the Tower of Antonia, as well as the Pool of Bethesda where Jesus healed the crippled man who had no one to help him into the waters that were supposed to heal people every time an angel stirred it up.

Then, because it’s getting late, we find a restaurant that looks good.

Dad and Mom prefer the restaurants that are small and run by a family because they like situations that are personal, where they can get to know people.

The restaurant that Dad picks is run by a couple from Syria and their two daughters. Before long, the owner has sat down with us and is telling us all about how he left Syria because he wanted to live close to where Jesus lived. He is excited to hear all about our summer in Syria and says that he had heard of all the activity in Tadmor and what it did to confirm the authority of the Bible.

The wife makes us a delicious traditional Syrian meal of pita bread and hummus, followed by kibbe kros which are beef and bulghur patties filled with pine nuts, and a delicious dessert of batlawa which is pastry with walnuts and honey covered in a sweet syrup.

Since the restaurant is not overly busy, Dad and Mom talk with the couple over cups of tea until it’s closing-time.

We head back through the dark, though not deserted, streets of the Old City to the Jaffa Gate where some taxis wait.

When we get back, we can’t believe what we’ve missed.

Yitzak is frantic.

He’s been trying to find us all afternoon and evening.

“Thank God you are safe!” he cries when we come through the front doors of the hostel.

The foyer is full of uniformed men and milling dig workers.

“We thought they had gotten you too!” he exclaims.

“Gotten us too?! Who?!” says our Mom, clutching at her stomach.

“We don’t know yet,” says Yitzak, collapsing onto a wooden chair up against one of the walls.

“What’s going on?” says Dad, calmly, as he pulls up a chair beside Yitzak.

“Mrs. Parkinson,” says Yitzak, staring into the distance in a daze. “Always Mrs. Parkinson...”

“What about Mrs. Parkinson?” demands Julia.

“And her friends, of course,” he says, listlessly, sounding defeated.

“What happened, Yitzak?” asks Dad.

“I passed them in the foyer this afternoon. They were heading out the door, laughing and talking...”

“Did they say where they were going?” asks Dad.

“Not directly. Mrs. Parkinson is under the impression that we persecute any Jew who thinks that your Jesus is the Messiah. They were talking loudly about how much fun it would be to go to a Messianic *pot-luck*, I think they called it, but as soon as they saw me their voices dropped, as if they had a great secret...”

“Did you see the vehicle they got into?” asks Dad.

Yitzak shakes his head.

“I kept going to my room. But half an hour later I got a call on my cell-phone that if Avram wasn’t released, Mrs. Parkinson and her friends would be killed.”

Mom gasps. Julia and I look at each other, horrified.

“I suppose the only bright spot is that he didn’t ask for the sword.”

“The sword?” says Dad. “But you don’t have the sword...”

“That is something you also missed,” says Yitzak. “My friend in Antiquities told me that Avram did make a phone call that day to someone who did steal the sword. Avram told the authorities who he had passed it onto. Some antiquities dealer who still had it. The authorities confiscated it.”

“Will they release Avram in order to save Mrs. Parkinson and Marg and Pepper?” asks Dad.

Yitzak shakes his head.

“Israel won’t negotiate with terrorists. I know that technically these aren’t terrorists, but the policy is to not negotiate in cases like this. The government has the sword. It is clearly worth a fortune. They will not hand over the man who helped to steal it.”

“I don’t blame them,” sighs Dad. “Policies like that have to be maintained or else kidnappings would be rampant in Israel, but dear God! Those poor women!”

“Now, last time they went to a Messianic activity, it was because of Hadassah. But I haven’t seen Hadassah around lately,” says Mom.

Yitzak nods.

“Yes, Hadassah phoned to say that she was sick and didn’t know when she would be back. She is at home.”

“That’s too bad,” says Mom. “Nothing serious, I hope!”

Yitzak shrugs.

“She did not say.”

“But I see what you mean,” says Dad slowly. “Who invited them to this Messianic activity...?”

Yitzak shrugs again.

“Probably someone they met at the last event they went to...” One of the investigators has gotten Yitzak’s attention and is signaling him. “Excuse me,” concludes Yitzak.

The Kent family looks at each other.

“I think we should do a little investigating on our own,” says Dad.

“I think so too!” I say eagerly.

“Hadassah may be able to help us,” says Mom, thoughtfully.

“I agree,” says Dad. “I want to talk to her to see if she has any idea who might have invited Mrs. Parkinson’s gang to another get-together.”

“We don’t have her phone number,” says Mom.

“Yitzak does,” says Dad, heading off in his direction.

Dad waits patiently while one of the investigators talks to Yitzak. Yitzak is in a daze. When Dad asks him something, he absent-mindedly pulls a small pocket computer out of a pocket and hands it to Dad, along with his cell phone, before wandering off to talk to one of the other investigators.

Dad comes back.

“The names and profiles of all the dig workers are on here,” he explains. We follow him to his and Mom’s room where the phone call can be made in private.

Hadassah’s last name turns out to be Haufmann.

Dad calls the number and begins talking in Hebrew when someone answers.

After a short phone call, he hangs up, a shocked look on his face.

“That was Hadassah’s mother. When I identified myself as a leader at the dig site where Hadassah used to be, she sounded surprised. She said, what do you mean, used to be, she’s still there, isn’t she? I had to say, no, that she had called the director of the dig to say she was sick and hadn’t been here for quite awhile. Her mom is coming over right away. She sounded very upset. I think Yitzak’s troubles are only beginning.

~ CHAPTER TEN ~

“Where’s my baby?!”

It’s twenty minutes later and the already noisy foyer is suddenly silenced by this piercing shriek. A plump, middle-aged woman in a print dress has appeared at the doorway. Now she is the centre of attention.

“Where is this man who calls himself Dr. Anderson Kent?” The woman sounds as if she very much doubts my father’s identity.

“You must be Hadassah’s mother,” says Dad, quickly moving forward with an outstretched hand that Mrs. Haufmann ignores.

“Where’s my baby?” she demands again. “Where’s my Hadassah?”

By this time, Yitzak is starting to realize that this might affect him. He and one of the investigators move in to join Dad and together they take Mrs. Haufmann into the dining room for a more private discussion.

“Well,” says Mother, looking around. “I must confess, I feel a bit tired...”

“Go rest, Mother,” I say. “We’ll stay here.”

“I think I’d rather you go to your rooms too...”

“And miss the excitement?” groans Julia.

“Dad’s in the dining hall,” I say quickly. “You wouldn’t be leaving us alone. Besides, they might want to talk to us.”

“Well...” says Mom, pondering this. “I guess you can stay. But do not leave this foyer! There are obviously some very desperate people willing to do anything to get what they want!”

“We’ll stay right here!” I say eagerly. “We won’t move!”

Reluctantly, Mom heads for the stairs.

Now, at this point you’re expecting that once Mom is out of sight that we’ll turn into Nancy Drew and rush out the front door to track down Mrs. Parkinson and her friends.

Except that, first of all, Mom’s right about dangerous and desperate people. I personally wouldn’t want to meet them alone. And second of all, our parents would never let us come along on another adventure again. So instead, we take a couple of seats outside the entrance to the dining hall and listen in to what’s going on.

Because the glass door to the dining room was never shut, we can hear Mrs. Haufmann’s loud voice.

“Yes, she is Messianic. So what of it? Is this a totalitarian state where you can’t believe what you want to believe?”

An unknown male voice assures her that Israel is and always has been a free state.

“I don’t believe it myself,” Mrs. Haufmann carries on. “But they are nice people. Not people looking for trouble. I went to one of her Bible studies once. Just going through the life of David. Nothing wrong with that!”

Mrs. Haufmann sounds defiant.

Yitzak's voice assures her that David is a fine thing to study.

"I don't think they are involved with any wrongdoing with this Mrs. Whoever-you-said and her friends. But what I want to know is, when are you going to find my daughter? Where is my daughter? Why would she phone you and say she was sick?"

The unknown male voice says, "Now that we know she is missing we will make it a top priority to find her. Please don't worry, Mrs. Haufmann. She will be found."

Five seconds later, the investigator comes charging through the dining room door and confers with several of his colleagues. There is much nodding and cell phones are pulled out.

"What am I to do?" demands Mrs. Haufmann. "What am I to do?!"

Yitzak clears his throat.

"I think, probably just go home, Mrs. Haufmann. They will phone you as soon as they know anything..."

"I can't just sit at home..."

"It's probably best you be at home," says Dad gently. "Hadassah might call you at home."

There is the sound of a chair scrapping on the floor.

"I hadn't thought of that. I will go right away."

"We will call you as soon as we hear anything," promises Dad. "I will call you as soon as we hear anything."

"Thank you, professor," says Mrs. Haufmann and soon she is passing by us and heading for the main entrance.

Yitzak and Dad linger.

"Bad business," mutters Yitzak. "Bad business, all this."

"It's a big find," Dad reminds him. "Stuff like this is bound to happen when you have something as valuable as this."

"Find something worth finding and next thing everybody wants it," sighs Yitzak.

"A rabbi once said, store up for yourselves treasures in heaven where moth and rust can't destroy and thieves can't break in and steal."

"Smart rabbi. Who was it?"

"Yeshua of Nazareth," says Dad grinning as he comes out the door. "Oh hi, girls."

"Yeshua of Nazareth," repeats Yitzak, exhaling. "OK, I'll give your Jesus credit for that one. It is certainly true." He wanders off.

Dad sits down with us.

"Your Mom go to bed?"

We nod.

"Oh, Dad!" says Julia eagerly. "Can we go out and investigate, please? Can we go to the scene of the crime and look for clues?"

Dad sighs and laughs at the same time.

"Julia, I don't even know what happened yet. You guys sit here *and stay here!*" he adds sternly, before hurrying after Yitzak.

He and Yitzak talk for a few minutes before he returns to us.

"Well, so far, this is all they know. A truck of some sort came and picked up Mrs. Parkinson and her friends. They climbed into the back..."

"Michael!" Julia and I both exclaim.

Dad nods.

"I think so too. Ah, I think we are about to be questioned..."

The investigator that was in with Mrs. Haufmann joins us. He pulls a chair out from against the

wall so as to be in front of us.

“Yitzak says you may know who the driver of the truck is?”

Dad nods.

“We were invited by Hadassah to go to a Messianic service, along with Mrs. Parkinson and her friends, Marg and Pepper. A young man named Michael was driving the truck. When I saw that we were going to have to sit in the back of the truck on crates, no seat-belts, I decided that my family wouldn’t go. So I’m afraid our encounter with Michael was brief.”

“But Mrs. Parkinson and her friends went?” confirms the inspector as he scribbles something in a notebook.

Dad nods.

“Do you know his last name?”

“Unfortunately no. He’s a man in his mid-twenties, tanned, brown hair cut short, medium height. He was wearing a white shirt and khaki pants.”

The inspector sighs.

“You just described half the men in Israel.” He stands up. “Thanks anyhow. It’s the best lead we’ve got so far.”

“Well, girls,” says Dad, looking at us. “There is absolutely nothing for us to do here. We are now going to our rooms!”

We groan. But we know he’s right. With all the investigators on the case we would only get in the way.

Dad escorts us to our room and makes sure we are locked in before going and joining Mom next door in their room.

“Ginny?” says Julia, after we’ve gotten into bed and are about to drift off to sleep. “I noticed something strange...”

“Uh-huh...” I say, sleepily.

“Mrs. Parkinson. You know how she was always talking like it was a big secret that Hadassah was a Christian?”

“Uh-huh,” I agree, trying to wake myself up a bit.

“Well, Hadassah’s mom was kind of the same way, wasn’t she? She acted like she had to defend her daughter because she was a Christian. What’s up with that?”

“Yeah,” I say, thinking about this. “That is kind of strange. But maybe it’s just because there’s some tension between Christians and Jews. Dad says that a lot of Jews blame Christians for things like the Holocaust because Christians didn’t do much to try to stop it.”

“That’s pretty sad,” says Julia.

“Yeah,” I agree.

And we both fall asleep feeling kind of down.

Since no one has said otherwise, we’re up early and in the dining hall for breakfast. Dad says he’s half expecting the day to be canceled.

But Yitzak is drinking a cup of coffee and tells us we might as well just carry on because what else is he going to do with a whole group of dig workers?

Most people know by now that something is going on. Some of them passed through the foyer yesterday and saw all the commotion. There are a lot of rumours going around. I overhear one woman saying that Mrs. Parkinson is an investigator for the Mossad. Somebody else thinks that the ark of the covenant was found at our site and that eventually we’ll all be taken hostage until it’s turned over to an international crime syndicate.

Yitzak tells us just to ignore it all and leave it up to the investigators to sort out.

The nice thing is that everyone can gossip while they dig because poking away in the dirt doesn't need any mental concentration. So I think Yitzak is right to just carry on. At least the site will continue to be excavated. I figure this is how it will go until the Israeli government sorts it all out. Boy am I wrong!

When we get back to the hostel, Yitzak asks Dad and us to meet him in his room after lunch and showers.

"Look," he says. He is pacing in his small room. "I know that everything is being done about Mrs. Parkinson and her gang and Hadassah, but I can barely sit still. I have the biggest find any archaeologist could hope for, the sword of Goliath, but it will be accursed to me for the rest of my life if we don't get those people safely back!"

Dad nods.

"I agree," he says. "It seems to me that the key in all of this is Michael..."

"The young man driving the truck?"

"Yes."

"But we don't even know his last name!"

"No, but the Messianic group that Hadassah goes to would."

"We don't know a single person in that group...ah!" Yitzak has a thought. "Are you thinking what I am thinking?"

"Hadassah's mother?" says Dad.

"Yes!" agrees Yitzak. "All she has to do is provide us with one person in that group and we will be able to find out more about Michael!"

Dad nods.

"I'm sure the investigators are working on this, but..."

"There is no harm in us also trying to get to the bottom of this..." Yitzak is already out the door and we are following him.

When we are in his van and heading out of the Bet Horon suburb, Yitzak says, "We could phone, but something tells me that Hadassah's mother would respond better to a personal visit. Not to mention, if Mrs. Haufmann does not know any of the names of Hadassah's group, she might be willing to let us go through Hadassah's papers to see if we can find a name or an address..."

Yitzak easily finds Hadassah's and Mrs. Haufmann's home. It is a small apartment over a grocery store. After spending fifteen minutes looking for a parking spot, we arrive at Mrs. Haufmann's door. She eagerly lets us in.

"Any news?" she demands.

"Well..." says Yitzak slowly. "We were thinking that if we could get in touch with someone from her Messianic group that would help us figure out who the man is who is probably behind all this..."

"Yes," says Mrs. Haufmann, closing the door. "Those men were here this morning, asking me the same thing. I don't know anybody's name. I never go to her meetings. Except once," she added.

"The study about David?" says Yitzak.

Mrs. Haufmann nods.

"I met many people, but no one who I remember."

"A man named Michael...?"

"Yes," interrupts Mrs. Haufmann. "I was asked all about this Michael. Who is he? Is he my daughter's boyfriend? But I've never heard of the fellow! Do you think my daughter would have a boyfriend and not tell me about it?" she demands indignantly.

"No, of course not," says our Mom, soothingly. We are still standing in Mrs. Haufmann's small entrance.

“Sit,” she says abruptly, waving towards the living room.

Most of the furniture is worn, but comfortable. Mrs. Haufmann offers us lemonade and we accept. Mom goes into the kitchen adjacent to the living room to help her.

“It would not be exaggerating to say that if we could locate Michael, we could probably locate Hadassah,” says Yitzak as he receives a glass of lemonade.

“He is not her boyfriend!” insists Mrs. Haufmann.

“I don’t mean that they are partners in crime,” says Yitzak. “No doubt, he is merely a drive to her. But he is behind this I’m sure and if we had his name or the name of anyone in the group, he would most probably be able to tell us where she is!”

Mrs. Haufmann sighs as she sits down in a beige armchair.

“I do not know anyone’s name,” she repeats. “And those investigators took apart my dear Hadassah’s room trying to look for a name. I do not know if they found anything, but they did not leave looking pleased.”

“Where might Hadassah scribble down a phone number if she didn’t have it memorized?” asks Mom, leaning forward.

“On that little pad of paper by the phone,” says Mrs. Haufmann, pointing to a small table beside the couch where Dad and Mom are sitting. “But those men took the paper where she had written some numbers down.”

Eagerly, Yitzak reaches for the notepad.

“Ah-ha!” he says, holding it up to the light. “I can still make out the numbers on the paper that was under it! Anderson, do you have something to write...?”

“Go ahead,” says Dad, who already has a pen poised over a notepad.

Yitzak recites some numbers.

“Please use my phone,” says Mrs. Haufmann, when Yitzak stands up as if about to go.

“OK,” says Yitzak, sounding surprised and sitting back down. He dials the first number in Dad’s notebook.

He is speaking in rapid Hebrew. Dad translates for us, speaking quietly so as not to disturb Yitzak.

“He’s identified himself and he’s asking them if they have any knowledge of the whereabouts of Hadassah. Now he’s just saying, uh-huh, uh-huh, uh-huh.”

Yitzak has to get off the phone to tell us the other side of the conversation.

“Well, that was a dance teacher. She doesn’t remember Hadassah, but she says a man already phoned her today asking about a Hadassah Haufmann. Was Hadassah interested in dance, Mrs. Haufmann?”

Mrs. Haufmann nods.

“She always enjoyed ballet. I think she mentioned wanting to take some dance lessons. Not ballet though. Maybe something modern. I think they have dance in their church services...”

Yitzak is nodding and dialing the second number.

More talking in rapid Hebrew. This time Yitzak says more than just “Uh-huh.” The conversation goes on for so long that Dad gives up translating and just waits for Yitzak to finish.

“Well,” says Yitzak, rubbing his hands together. “That was productive! It was a lady from Hadassah’s church. She and Hadassah both get a drive to their church service every week from a man named Michael!”

We all exchange glances.

“She is an older lady. She sounded very concerned about Hadassah and says she will be happy to help us in anyway.” Yitzak is standing up again. This time we all join him. “She said the investigators were there this morning but she would be glad to talk to us. Hadassah is very dear to her.”

Mrs. Haufmann is looking interested and when Yitzak tells her the address of Mrs. Esther Barak, Mrs. Haufmann is surprised.

“Why, that’s the apartment building beside this store!”

Mrs. Haufmann says she is too weary to join us so she sees us out. But she wants a full report if we find out anything.

We don’t bother taking the mini-van. We just walk and we’re there in five minutes.

Mrs. Barak is an old lady with white hair, wearing a floral dress and a small strand of pearls. She looks kind, though at the moment, is serious.

“Please, sit,” she says, showing us into her living room.

In the course of the preliminary talking, Yitzak comments on her English.

“Yes,” she says. “I am originally from England, but my husband was an Israeli. I met him when I was 18 and came to Israel for a holiday. I ended up staying for the rest of my life! But you don’t want to talk about me, when dear Hadassah is missing! I gather from the investigators, Michael is involved somehow...”

“Yes,” says Yitzak. “Can you tell me more about him?”

Mrs. Barak’s eyes twinkle.

“Now, Michael, he is not interested in an old lady like me, of course? But what can he do? Hadassah is a wonderful girl and insisted that I drive with them since I live so close to her. Michael wanted to be alone with her, but what could he say? So he has me up there squished between them in the front seat.”

Yitzak smiles.

“What is he like?” Dad leans forward. “Michael, I mean?”

“A snake,” says Mrs. Barak, sharply.

Our eyes widen.

“I’m sorry to be so blunt,” says Mrs. Barak. “But this is not a time to be subtle, I think.”

“Why do you say he’s a snake?” asks my Mom, gently.

“It is his whole demeanor,” answers Mrs. Barak, leaning back in her chair. “We have many kind people in our church because we all consider ourselves equal. We are all brothers and sisters. But Michael is not interested in such things. He is not friendly. In fact, the only person he seems to enjoy talking to is Hadassah. I fear the poor girl will give too much of herself because she feels sorry for him.”

“How did he end up part of the Messianic movement?” Dad asks.

“That I couldn’t tell you,” replies Mrs. Barak. “He just showed up one day. Word of mouth, perhaps.”

“Did you tell these things to the investigators?” asks Yitzak.

Mrs. Barak shakes her head.

“They didn’t ask. They mainly wanted to know if I knew where he lived. I’ve never been to his house, nor did I ever phone him. All my contact was with Hadassah. I gave them the phone number of my dear friend Sadie, who is our church secretary and is in charge of such things as addresses and phone numbers.”

There is a pause.

“I suppose you too would like Sadie’s phone number...”

Yitzak shakes his head.

“We won’t trouble her. If the police have already talked to her they may have Michael in custody already...”

“Now,” says Mrs. Barak, returning to her seat. “We are all Christians, yes?”

“I’m not,” says Yitzak. He almost sounds embarrassed.

“All in good time,” says Mrs. Barak, her eyes sparkling. “Now, as I said, we are Christians, yes?”

We nod.

“So we need to pray, yes? When two or three are gathered in His name, He will hear us!”
We take turns praying. Even Yitzak mutters a few words in Hebrew.

~ CHAPTER ELEVEN ~

After we pray, we have tea.

Mrs. Barak is very British, serving us cookies on fine china, and pouring our tea from a beautiful floral tea-pot.

“Mrs. Barak, what is Michael’s last name?” asks Dad.

Mrs. Barak takes a deep breath as she thinks.

“Shameel, I think...”

Dad asks if he can borrow a phone book and after Mrs. Barak points to a shelf he begins to flip through it.

“There are about 60 people with the last name Shameel!” he sighs.

“Shameel,” Yitzak muses to himself. “Why does that name sound so familiar...?”

“Perhaps we should just start at the top...” Dad suggests.

“I could call my friend Sadie...” Mrs. Barak is saying when suddenly Yitzak gasps. He is staring at the phone book.

“Shameel!” he says pointing. “Here it is!!”

We all look at him, but since he is the one holding the phone book, none of us know what he’s talking about.

“I knew it sounded familiar!” says Yitzak, giving the phone book a slap. “Look at the first name in this list!”

He shows Dad the phone book and now it is Dad’s turn to gasp.

“Avram!” he says. “Avram Shameel! But is he the Avram from our dig?”

“Yes!” nods Yitzak emphatically. “I am sure of it. The name was familiar to me.”

“So, he’s a resident of Jerusalem when he is not in Chicago?” Mom asks.

“It would appear so!” says Yitzak nodding. “I think he is the most obvious person to call first.”

Mrs. Barak is just staring at us. But I think she has a general idea that things are moving forward.

Yitzak is already dialing the phone. Soon he is speaking rapid Hebrew. When he hangs up he explains.

“I was honest,” he says. “I told the man who I was and that I was deeply sorry about what had happened to Avram. I said that I had some of Avram’s belongings and wondered if Michael would like to pick up his bag. The man said that he hadn’t seen his son, Michael, since Avram was put into prison and that the whole thing was breaking his heart and that I could rot as far as he was concerned.”

“Brothers!” says Dad thinking this through. “Avram and Michael are brothers. Good guess, Yitzak!”

Yitzak shrugs modestly.

“But it doesn’t help us because Michael is missing. I asked the man if he had been in touch with Hadassah but he just hung up on me.”

“Could Avram help us?” asks Mom.

Yitzak laughs.

“He probably could but I doubt he would. Nonetheless, I’m going to make a phone call and let one of the investigators know that Avram and Michael are brothers.”

He digs through his pockets for a scrap of paper and then gropes for his cell phone. After a quick call in Hebrew, he hangs up and ruefully grins at us.

“They already know. Seems they are ahead of us. They have been spending the last few hours questioning Avram about the whereabouts of his brother and Hadassah. But he was not going to tell me what they found out. So, I propose we continue to pursue this ourselves...”

Yitzak suggests that the main thing is to find Michael and asks how we might accomplish this.

“We could talk to people at church,” suggests Mrs. Barak. “There are several people who might have some ideas.”

“Excellent,” says Yitzak.

“I will call my dear friend, Sadie,” says Mrs. Barak, picking up the phone. “She will be able to give me the phone numbers of some of the younger people in the assembly who might have talked to Michael.”

Soon, she is talking in Hebrew and writing numbers down on the notepad by the phone.

“I have several numbers,” she says, at last. “If you will be patient, I will see what I can do.”

Mrs. Barak’s calls are in Hebrew and are quite lengthy. Yitzak is openly listening. Dad seems to be following it all, as well. But Mom, Julia and I are feeling kind of restless.

Mom picks up a book on the coffee-table that appears to be about aquatic animals.

Julia pulls a pack of cards out of her purse and we start up a game of rummy on the coffee-table. I hope we aren’t being insensitive.

At last, Mrs. Barak is finished all her calls.

“Well, I have a few leads, as you might call them,” she says, her eyes sparkling. “Sadie gave me the names and numbers of a few of the young people. Most of them I talked to said Michael is very quiet and doesn’t talk much or socialize with them. One man said that he had had a long conversation with Michael all about archaeology and that he was very knowledgeable about the subject. My dear friend, Sadie, who notices everything, and I say that in the nicest possible way, told me that there is a young lady by the name of Shir who has a crush on Michael and, no doubt, makes a past-time of knowing everything about him. So I called Shir and she has agreed to talk to us. She works in a restaurant, but she takes her dinner break in...” Mrs. Barak looks at her watch. “... in 45 minutes.”

“Then we must go!” cries Yitzak, leaping to his feet. “Is she in the Old City?”

Mrs. Barak shakes her head.

“Ben-Yehuda Street.”

Ben-Yehuda Street is part of modern Jerusalem.

I love it. It’s for pedestrians only and it’s bustling with activity. There are stores and restaurants with outdoor patios and places to sit and just watch people. One thing I see a lot of in Israel that I’ve never seen before are soldiers. Israeli soldiers are everywhere, wearing their uniforms and their guns, but not all of them look like they are on duty. Many people wearing civilian clothes also have automatic weapons strapped to their backs.

I can tell that Yitzak and Mrs. Barak enjoy this part of Jerusalem as well. They are talking and laughing as we hurry through the crowds toward our destination...which turns out to be a small restaurant packed with people spilling out onto the tables set up outside on the pavement.

Mrs. Barak goes inside the restaurant while we all sit nearby on a stone bench set in a square around a tree. A few minutes later Mrs. Barak comes out with a slim girl in her late teens with olive

skin and long dark brown hair.

She seems shy about meeting such a large group of people interested in what she has to say about Michael, but with Mrs. Barak graciously facilitating, soon she is animatedly discussing a topic that is very enjoyable to her.

“Yes, he is very interested in archaeology,” she agrees. “It is all he talks about really. I have sat beside him at all meals we have and that is what he talks about. I do not think he likes to dig. I asked him if he was going on any digs this summer and he said no, but he likes to talk about objects that have been found.”

“Does he know about the value of the objects?” asks Yitzak gently. “Does he have an idea of how much they would cost if sold?”

“Yes,” says Shira, nodding slowly. “It is this that he seems to know the most about.”

“Perhaps he wants to be an antiquities dealer,” suggests Mom. “Does he have a part-time job in that area?”

Shir nods her head.

“Something with his brother, but he never told me what. He said they were partners.”

The adults exchange glances.

“Do you have an idea of places he might go if he wasn’t at home?” asks Dad. “Favourite hang-outs, that sort of thing?”

“Well, he comes here quite often,” says Shir modestly. “He likes to come and talk and sometimes we hang out when I get off work. But I haven’t seen him lately...”

This seems to be the extent of Shir’s knowledge on that topic.

It is Mrs. Barak who delicately manages to work in the topic of Hadassah.

“Is he friends with any of the other people, apart from Hadassah, that is? I know he drives her to church.”

A look of gloom comes across Shir’s face.

“No, he doesn’t hang out with anybody much. He drives Hadassah to church. I think he just does it to be nice.”

The topic of Hadassah seems to put a damper on Shir’s mood and she says she has to get back inside or she won’t have time to eat.

When she returns to the restaurant, the adults begin talking.

“I don’t think we learned anything,” sighs Yitzak.

“I’m afraid we aren’t getting any closer to finding Hadassah,” agrees Mom.

It is Mrs. Barak who makes the bold suggestion that we should just go over to Michael’s house, explain to them that Hadassah is missing and that we think she might be with Michael and that her mom is worried sick.

The other adults look at each other.

“I guess it’s worth a shot,” says Dad.

So we all head back to the van. Yitzak has written down the address of Avram from the phone book so after he consults a map in his car, we are only a fifteen minute drive from the quiet street where Michael lives.

“I don’t suppose it will be a simple case of rescuing Hadassah from the basement, or something,” sighs Mom, as we pull up to a small white stone house that looks like all the other small white stone houses on the street.

“I do not think that we will be lucky enough to be permitted to search the basement,” says Yitzak starting to get out of the van.

“No!” says Mrs. Barak suddenly. “You stay here. In fact, park further down. I will go myself.”

Yitzak nods.

“That may be a better idea. If we all show up at the door, we will get the door shut in our face, if it even gets opened in the first place.”

We find a place to park about ten houses away from Avram and Michael’s and Mrs. Barak hops out, insisting that the walk will be no problem.

It is getting dark now, but the streets of Jerusalem do not seem dangerous as they might in a North American city. Maybe it’s something about all the citizens having army training that discourages criminal behaviour.

Yitzak switches on the radio but he and Dad and Mom talk so only Julia and I are listening idly to the Israeli folk songs playing in the background. Some are even in English and it helps to pass the time.

Before we know it, there’s a tap at the window. Mrs. Barak is back.

But we can’t believe our eyes.

Hadassah is with her!

~ CHAPTER TWELVE ~

Hadassah is dazed and shocked to hear that her mom has been worried about her.

“She thinks I’ve been at the dig!” she cries.

“Well, I’m afraid with the investigation she found out that you weren’t at the dig,” says Yitzak, looking chagrined. “You phoned to say you were sick...”

Hadassah nods.

“Yes, I left the dig because I wanted to live here for awhile...”

Hadassah looks miserable.

Mrs. Barak is looking shocked.

“My dear,” she says. “Please do not tell me that you have moved in with the young man, Michael!”

“It’s a long story,” Hadassah says, finally.

“Would you like to tell us?” asks Mom, kindly.

Hadassah nods.

“At this point, I have failed. So, yes, I will tell you everything.”

She climbs into the van and we all take a seat as she tells us her story.

“My brother and I signed up for this dig...”

“Your brother?” asks Yitzak.

“Avram Shameel,” explains Hadassah.

We all gasp.

“But that would mean that Michael is...”

“My brother,” nods Hadassah. “Yes. But you see, my brothers grew up with my father and I grew up with my mother. That’s how I came to have my mother’s maiden name rather than the family name of Shameel. It is only recently that I decided I wanted to get to know my family better. My mother doesn’t know about this. My brothers are actually half-brothers. When my parents got divorced, my mother wanted nothing more to do with them all and I never saw them after the age of five until recently.”

Hadassah stares into the night.

“But a young man recently started attending our Messianic group and as I got to know him better, it was a great shock to us both to find out that we were brother and sister! Needless to say, we feel very close to one another and Michael is very dear to me. But it became clear to me that even though my brother tries to follow Yeshua, he has a darker side to him. You see, as you know Yeshua said that we cannot serve God and money, but my brother would very much like to have a lot of money and Avram, our eldest brother, will do anything to make money. He has had a great influence on Michael.”

“I think a picture is beginning to form,” says Yitzak, slowly.

Hadassah nods.

"I've been trying to think of ways that I could spend time with my brothers without my mother finding out. With Michael we go to Messianic activities together. But since Avram and I have very little in common, I suggested this dig. I was surprised when he agreed. But it didn't take me long to realize what his plan was. If anything valuable was found, he would discreetly phone Michael and Michael was supposed to steal it. I don't know all the details. Quite frankly, I just wanted to stop it."

"Michael went to great lengths to steal those objects," says Yitzak.

"Yes," agrees Hadassah. "He is very interested in antiquities and knows how much a person can make dealing in stolen artifacts."

"Mrs. Parkinson and her friends...?" says Dad.

Hadassah looks puzzled.

"I don't understand..."

"They've gone missing," explains Yitzak. "We think Michael may have taken them. Someone phoned the police and said that if Avram wasn't released, they would be killed."

Hadassah gasps but speaks quickly.

"I do not think Michael would hurt anyone!"

"Where is Michael?" asks Dad.

Hadassah looks miserable.

"He disappeared a couple of days ago. My father is sick over it. I think it is good I am here now that he has lost both his sons. You see, I asked my father if I could live here for awhile because I said I wanted to get to know him better. He was agreeable. But I also wanted to be able to keep an eye on Michael. But then, he disappeared a couple of days ago..."

"If," says Dad, leaning forward. "And I only say if, he were to have Mrs. Parkinson and her friends with him, where would he have taken them? Any ideas?"

Hadassah shakes her head.

"This is his home. Apart from his job as an assistant to an antiquities dealer in the Old City and doing the produce delivery, this is his life."

"Was there a Messianic potluck the night Michael disappeared?"

"No," says Hadassah. "If there were, he and I would have gone."

Dad nods.

"So it was a set-up. That's how Mrs. Parkinson and her friends were lured out," he explains to Hadassah.

"I must get back," says Hadassah, climbing out of the van. "First of all, I must call my mother. I must let her know I'm OK. I think she will be very mad at me for what I am doing but that is better than her worrying."

"Don't forget to phone the police," Yitzak calls out. "They think you're a missing person."

Hadassah nods.

"Thank you for taking the time to find me," she says. "I'm sorry for all the worry I have caused."

"I think I owe you an apology, dear," says Mrs. Barak, sighing. "I have thoroughly misjudged your relationship with Michael."

"You're forgiven," says Hadassah, lightly.

"I just have one question," says Mom. "Your mother said that she had attended a Messianic study with you. How is it she didn't recognize Michael?"

"Michael was a young boy when my mother last saw him," replies Hadassah. "She didn't recognize him as her stepson now that he's all grown up."

Hadassah says goodnight to us all and heads back to her father's house.

"Well, that's that," says Yitzak, starting the engine. "One less thing to worry about, yes?"

We all agree.

But what about Mrs Parkinson, Marg and Pepper?

The dig carries on. Michael stays missing. So do Mrs. Parkinson, Marg and Pepper. Hadassah returns to dig but goes home early on Friday to be with her father for the Sabbath.

Mrs. Barak, according to Dad and Mom, is spending time with Mrs. Haufmann who is still recovering from Hadassah being missing but is now having fits that Hadassah is spending time with her father.

“It is very sad,” Mrs. Barak confides to Mom on the phone. “She is bitter towards her ex-husband and jealous that her daughter wants to be with him at this time.”

Sabbath is quiet around the hostel.

We go down to the dining room which seems so empty without Mrs. Parkinson and her friends, not to mention all the people who have gone home for the weekend.

Julia and I make ourselves some hot chocolate and grab some bread while Dad and Mom have tea and a bagel. Since Yitzak isn't around to talk to, Dad picks up an Israeli newspaper and carries it with him to the table.

Mom is spreading some jam on her bagel when all of a sudden Dad chokes on a mouthful of his bagel.

Mom looks at him horrified.

“Honey! Are you OK!”

Dad is nodding emphatically, but he's having a hard time speaking. He's stabbing at the newspaper.

“Look! Look!” he manages to say before swallowing a mouthful of tea which helps him get back to normal. “Look at this article!”

“Andy,” says Mom. “You know I can't read Hebrew...”

“Residents of Safed are complaining that they are being inundated by unwanted Messianic evangelism,” Dad reads. “The complaint follows reports all around the Galilee region that a dynamic team consisting of three older English-speaking women are engaged in aggressive street preaching, telling all who will listen that Yeshua of Nazareth is the Messiah of Israel...”

“Three older women...” says Mom.

“English-speaking...” says Julia.

“Let's go!” I say.

For once, my family actually listens to me.

We leap up, food unfinished and head for Yitzak's room. He doesn't answer to the knocking.

Dad calls him on his cell phone and tells him what he just read in the paper.

Yitzak says he'll be there in 20 minutes. Be ready to go.

“I'm sorry,” apologizes Dad as we climb into the mini-van. Yitzak doesn't even turn off the engine. “I hope we didn't ruin your Sabbath!”

“Ruin it!” grins Yitzak. “My mother was just about to force me to go to synagogue.”

The newspaper is a Friday morning edition but Yitzak says we'll head to Safed and take it from there.

It's a long drive to the northern part of Israel, but on the way, Yitzak makes it interesting by pointing out different Biblical sites – Ai where the Israelites took a city, Bethel where God spoke to Abraham and Jacob, the field where David was said to have killed Goliath, Shiloh which was Israel's capital before David took Jerusalem, Jacob's well at Sychar where Jesus talked to a Samaritan woman, Megiddo which is also known as Armageddon, Nazareth where Jesus grew up, the Sea of Galilee where Jesus walked on water, Magdala where Mary Magdalene was from, and Capernaum where Jesus taught

in the synagogue.

“I’m impressed,” says Dad. “You even know the Christian sites.”

Yitzak smiles and shrugs.

“We Israelis have to keep our tourists happy.”

We have a late lunch at a restaurant in Tiberius that overlooks the Sea of Galilee. Yitzak says that it is slightly out of our way, but he can’t resist showing us the beautiful hilly region of Galilee over a lunch of fresh fish.

“It’s a shame not to spend some time here,” says Yitzak as we head back to the van. “But we are so close to Safed that I really want to see what we can find out today.”

We pull into Safed in the middle of the afternoon.

“There is only one thing to do,” says Yitzak. “Get out, walk around, and try to find out more about these lady missionaries.”

Safed is a beautiful town with cobblestone streets and flowers hanging in baskets, It is a place with a rich spiritual heritage says Yitzak, and where many artists come to live.

We walk around the streets, Dad and Mom admiring the architecture, and Yitzak stopping people to ask them questions in Hebrew. Most people can’t help him, until a group of young Hasidic men nod and begin talking animatedly. They point in the direction we are heading.

Yitzak is excited.

“They say that the ladies we want are in front of one of the synagogues, handing out Messianic gospel tracts, and preaching a loud sermon. The young men say that a lot of people are getting angry at their desecration of the Sabbath and may do something to stop them.

“We’d better hurry,” says Mom, picking up her pace.

“I agree,” nods Yitzak and we head in the direction of the synagogue.

It is a great relief to round a corner and see Mrs. Parkinson, Marg and Pepper out in front of a beautiful synagogue. I hear Mom beside me whispering a prayer of thanks to God.

But our brief moment of rejoicing is marred by the sight of one person in the crowd hurling something at the ladies.

It turns out to be a soiled diaper. The crowd is mixed and there are many small children at their parent’s side or in strollers.

Thankfully the diaper misses all three women and before anything further can happen, Yitzak and Dad have rushed up to Mrs. Parkinson, Marg, and Pepper and grabbed their arms to hustle them away. From there we just sprint.

A few people pursue us, but most lose interest after a couple of blocks. At least, that’s what I thought happened. But Yitzak explains to us in the van that the seriously devout Jews can’t race through the streets of the town on the Sabbath because it would be considered work.

We are all grateful for these Sabbath rules.

All three women are huffing and puffing, so Yitzak and Dad don’t demand an explanation right away.

When the ladies can talk, they are pleased.

“Well praise the Lord, but if you didn’t all come at the right time!” says Mrs. Parkinson, beaming. “How on earth did you happen to show up at just the right time?”

“What interests me more,” says Yitzak dryly, “is to know why you left my dig in order to evangelize the whole of northern Israel.”

The ladies exchange looks.

“But don’t you know?” asks Pepper. “Dear Michael said that he would let you know where we were. We were on a missions trip sponsored by the Messianic group that Michael belongs to.”

Now it is Yitzak, Dad, and Mom’s turn to exchange glances.

“How on earth did *that* come about?” asks Dad.

“Well,” says Mrs. Parkinson. “We were on our way to a potluck and while we were driving, Michael told us he had a burning desire to see northern Israel saved and asked us if we would like to accompany him on a missions trip. He was so enthused that we agreed to leave right away. We didn’t even have our toothbrushes with us.”

Yitzak keeps his eyes on the road but my parents are just staring at her.

“Oh, but we each bought a toothbrush,” said Mrs. Parkinson, sounding eager to reassure us that they had not given up dental hygiene. “But Michael pointed out to us that when Jesus sent out his disciples he told them not to take an extra tunic or pair of sandals or a purse. Michael had a bit of money from his church, but mostly we’ve been living on faith. It’s very exciting how the Lord has provided...”

Yitzak interrupts her.

“Speaking of Michael, where is he?”

“I don’t know,” says Mrs. Parkinson, looking around as if expecting to see him in the van. “He was with us a few minutes before you all arrived.”

“He must have seen us and ran,” sighs Yitzak.

“Why would he run?” asks Marg.

“Because ladies,” says Yitzak, “and I’m sad to say this, but you’ve been duped. Michael has used you. His brother is in prison and he has informed the police that he has you and will harm you if his brother is not released.”

The three ladies gasp.

There is silence as they think this through. Mrs. Parkinson is the first to break it.

“Nonsense,” she says briskly. “Michael is a very nice boy and would never hurt us.”

“I agree,” says Yitzak, nodding. He is doing an excellent job of keeping his eyes on the road despite the animated conversation. “I don’t think he would have hurt you. He just wanted you out of the way until hopefully his brother had been released. He was desperate more than anything.”

“His personal problems don’t change the fact that we brought five people to a saving knowledge of Yeshua,” says Mrs. Parkinson in a voice that says that’s-that.

Since nobody has much to say after that, the drive back south is long and quiet. After sunset, we stop for a quick dinner at a small falafel restaurant and then, much later, sometime in the middle of the night, we are pulling into the front of the hostel. The ladies have promised Yitzak that they will not go anywhere without letting him know first. We all just head up to our rooms and drop into our beds.

Despite the late night, Dad and Yitzak have to be present at the dig the next morning. But Dad insists that Mom, me and Julia stay back and rest for the day.

Surprisingly, Mom agrees.

Dad tells us to spend the day with her and not to go off by ourselves. Julia quickly falls asleep in Dad’s spot on the bed and Mom says that she’s too tired to go down for any food. So I go down with Dad and make us up some bread and jam for when we do want to eat. Dad brings a chair from the lounge and walks me back up to their room before boarding the bus. He’s definitely concerned about safety. I think he’s worried that with Michael still on the loose and desperate to get his brother out of prison, he might get more forceful if necessary.

When I get back to Dad and Mom’s room, I snooze a bit in the comfortable chair that Dad brought up.

After a few more hours sleep, Mom calls up Mrs. Parkinson’s room to see if they too stayed back from the dig. There’s no answer.

“Well,” says Mom, tidying her hair and applying some lip balm. “We can’t stay cooped up here

til Dad gets back. Let's go down to the lounge."

In the lounge, we find Mrs. Parkinson, Marg, and Pepper. What is particularly amusing is that there is also a student leader there, Amos. Mrs. Parkinson tells us with great chagrin that it is his job to guard them.

Amos looks up briefly from his lap-top and smiles at us before returning to whatever it is he is doing.

"Is an archaeological dig director allowed to have this much power?" asks Pepper indignantly. Mom smiles as she sits down.

"I understand how you feel," she says, "but I think Yitzak just wants to keep you safe."

"I still don't know what's going on!" exclaims Mrs. Parkinson.

Amos glances up at Mom and shakes his head slightly.

"I'm afraid that it's all still under investigation. But we were worried about you. Nobody knew what had happened to you," Mom says.

"We were doing the work of the Lord," says Pepper stiffly.

"I have a feeling while we were doing the work of the Lord, someone else was doing the work of the flesh," sighs Mrs. Parkinson.

Mrs. Parkinson shares some of her crossword puzzles with me.

Julia switches on the TV and watches some kid's show with lots of puppets and people dancing inside a studio decorated with big colourful blocks.

Mom reads her Bible while Marg and Pepper talk about gardening. Pepper's even bold enough to ask Amos a few questions about some of the plants in Israel which he politely answers.

By the time the others get back we are all very hungry and I think we devour our lunch with even more enthusiasm than the people who worked all day. But after lunch, Dad and Yitzak are both so tired that they put the student leaders in charge of the pottery washing that goes on outside behind the building everyday and go up to their rooms for a nap.

This time, instead of the lounge, we linger over tea in the dining room. A student leader named Yocheved is now in charge of Mrs. Parkinson and her friends. She has a magazine to read, but she's sitting beside them while Amos has left to help out with the pottery-washing.

Since we are the only one's left in the dining room, I can hear Mrs. Parkinson striking up a conversation with Yocheved about her name and asking her if it's the same name as Moses's mother. While they discuss Israeli first names, Pepper is staring out the window. Suddenly I see her face change. But then she quickly looks away and scans the room to see if anyone was watching her or the window. I turn my eyes away just in time.

"Mom," I whisper. "I think we have to check out something! It may be important!"

Mom is hesitant.

"Pepper saw something!" I whisper trying to be as quiet as possible. "Out the window!"

"OK," says Mom slowly and quietly. "We'll check it out from the foyer. Try to look natural, like we're just heading back to our room."

We get up, casually, taking our dishes to the entrance of the kitchen where a tray rack holds all used trays and dishes.

As we head across the foyer towards the stairs, we very discreetly check out the front of the building.

"It's Michael's truck!" gasps Julie.

With extreme casualness, Mom heads over to the girl at the front desk.

"Please call the police," she says quietly and quickly. "That truck out there belongs to the man who abducted the women from the archaeological dig group."

The young woman at the front desk is wide-eyed as she dials the number and speaks rapidly,

and loudly, into the phone.

When she hangs up, Mom says, “I think we should just stay here and act like we’re asking you tourist questions.”

The young woman nods, still wide-eyed, but she does a good job of pulling out a large map of Jerusalem and pointing out all sorts of places of interest until all of a sudden...

“Oh no!” gasps the young woman. “He’s coming in here and he has a gun!”

~ CHAPTER THIRTEEN ~

It is at that moment that Mrs. Parkinson and her friends come charging out of the dining room with Yocheved chasing after them. It is clear that they have been watching us through the open doors of the dining hall and have seen Michael enter.

“Michael, dear boy!” cries out Pepper. “Please don’t do anything foolish!”

Michael just glances at her and continues pointing the gun at me, Mom and Julia.

“Michael!” says Mrs. Parkinson authoritatively. “I command you to put down the gun!” She begins to walk towards him.

He shoots in their direction and shatters a framed glass picture of a mosaic of Jerusalem.

Screams erupt.

Even with all the noise I can still hear Mrs. Parkinson mutter, “I should have commanded him in Jesus’s name...!”

Mom puts an arm around each of us and I know that she has begun to silently pray.

The shot has brought out people from the back who had finished their pottery washing as well as some of the kitchen staff, but still, Michael continues to point the gun at me, Mom, and Julia.

“I want my brother out of prison,” he says to Mom. “And your husband is going to get him out.”

“Where are the police?” cries the young woman behind the counter.

“Police?” says Michael startled. “You called the police already?” He looks flustered and it’s probably not a good thing to have a flustered man pointing a gun at you.

Suddenly, from the stairs to the rooms, appears Yitzak and then Dad.

“Michael, no!” cries my Dad, pushing Yitzak aside and rushing over to us, despite Yitzak yelling at him to stay back.

“I will kill your family!” says Michael, almost hysterical. “Unless my brother is freed and allowed to return to the U.S.”

From somewhere behind me I hear one of the dig workers say, “Like that’ll ever happen. They’re dead.”

But instead of feeling stressed, I feel calm. I know God is protecting us. I can’t see them, but I know there are angels all around us.

“I’m afraid that killing my family would not get your brother released,” says Dad calmly.

“Killing two teen-aged girls and a pregnant woman would not endear you to the authorities.”

Pregnant?!

Julia and I look at each other wide-eyed and then at Mom who has her eyes closed and is still praying. How did we miss *this*?

“I don’t care!” says Michael, now hysterical. “I don’t have a choice!”

Dad’s eyes don’t betray that two cars loaded with armed men have just pulled up to the front of the hostel. We can see them through the glass doors and they can immediately see the situation we are

in.

“Oh thank God!” cries the young woman behind the counter, staring openly at the men leaping out of the vehicles and positioning their guns.

Michael whirls around and in that moment Dad grabs mine and Julia’s arm and jerks us towards the stairs. Yitzak, who has been edging closer and closer to us, already has Mom’s arm and practically has her to the second floor before Michael turns back to us. I hear a gun go off and something explodes into the wall beside me.

I’m expecting another loud explosion, and there is, but it is nowhere near me. After that, there is silence.

Hoping that I’m not being like Lot’s wife, I turn around and look back.

I see Michael sitting on the ground, moaning and clutching his arm. The gun has fallen onto the floor. Before he can move, he is surrounded by armed men.

Within a matter of minutes, an ambulance has pulled up and Michael is being hustled out on a stretcher and the foyer which was dead silent for about five straight minutes is suddenly noisy and chaotic as all the people who were watching in the wings mill around talking about what they just saw.

A few investigators stay behind wanting to talk to Mrs. Parkinson and her friends and of course, us.

After we tell our story, all I want to do is go lie down. Mom and Julia feel the same.

But before I drift off to sleep I can’t help saying, “A baby sister! I can hardly wait!”

“No way! A brother!” is all I hear Julia insist before I drop off.

The story is in all the newspapers.

With the showdown in the foyer Yitzak can no longer keep the goings-on at this dig a secret.

The sword, Michael, Avram – all of Israel gets to read about it in their morning paper.

When we come down to breakfast the next day, the foyer is packed with reporters looking for follow-up stories. Mrs. Parkinson is in one corner with a gang of reporters listening to her recall all the details of their mission trip up north with Michael. Marg and Pepper have their own reporters to talk to. Yitzak is in another corner discussing the sword. But he is being less dramatic than Mrs. Parkinson and her gang, simply insisting that more study will have to be done before it can be determined whose sword it was.

The minute we arrive, we have our own group of reporters to talk to. They ask Mom and I and Julia what it was like to face Michael in the foyer.

“We thank God that we were spared from harm and that Michael is being taken care of,” says Mom calmly. “We feel no malice towards him. We understand that he was desperate to get his brother out of prison.”

Dad is asked his professional opinion about the sword.

Dad laughs.

“I haven’t even seen the artifact,” he says. “I arrived after it was found. I would be thrilled if they let me examine it.”

We push our way through the crowds to the dining hall which is relatively quiet thanks to Yitzak asking that two large men from the kibbutz stand outside the door and only let authorized people in so that people who don’t want to talk to reporters can have a pleasant meal.

But we are among the few people not interested in sharing our story because most of the other people on the dig are outside sharing their impressions of Avram and the dig.

Amos looks up from his laptop and smiles at us.

“Guess we won’t be digging today,” he says.

“Probably not,” agrees Dad.

“Just as well,” sighs Amos. “I have so much data to enter I could be here for a week.” He continues typing, sipping a coffee and munching on some toast.

“Mom...?” says Julia tentatively as we sit down with our food.

“Uh-huh?” says Mom.

“So, about this baby...?”

Mom laughs.

“At first I thought I had the flu. I was thrilled to find out that was not the case. We were going to tell you guys when I started to show a little bit more.”

“So, how long...” asks Julia.

“I’m around four months pregnant now,” says Mom. “Five months to go.”

I’m about to ask about names when Yitzak bursts into the dining hall.

“Anderson!” he says, beaming. “How would you like to come with me and see the sword of Exile!”

Only authorized people are allowed to examine the sword, so Mom, Julia and I spend the day wandering around the Israel Museum while Dad and Yitzak are in a room somewhere in the inner recesses of the museum.

We meet for a late lunch in a private member’s lounge.

Dad and Yitzak are clearly excited.

“We can’t say anything now,” says Dad, but his eyes are sparkling. “You understand.”

Mom nods.

“You don’t have to.”

But it’s pretty obvious that the find is significant.

Something tells me that when the Sword of Goliath tours North America, Dad will have a lot of speaking engagements to go along with it.

~ EPILOGUE ~

Five months later

“Absolutely not!” I cry.

Dad and Mom laugh.

“Don’t worry,” Mom assures me, looking down at the little blue bundle in her arms. “We would never name him Goliath.”

It is a winter afternoon in January and we are visiting Mom in the hospital. She had our baby brother early this morning.

“But we might just name him David,” says Dad, looking down fondly at his new son.

It’s a good thing Julia and I aren’t the jealous sort because I think our baby brother is going to be the centre of attention for awhile. As long as I get to hold him a lot I won’t complain. He’s a darling even if he’s bald and all he’s done so far is sleep.

“David it is,” I agree quickly.

“I have a gift for him,” says Julia suddenly.

She’s been all mysterious, bringing this large plastic bag that looks pretty full.

“What is it, sweetie?” says Mom, looking up and smiling at us.

Quickly Julia pulls out a set of trowels, several soft brushes and the best thing of all, a big sturdy child-sized plastic wheelbarrow.

Dad bursts out laughing.

“We’ll have a section of the backyard staked out for him so he can practice being an archaeologist.”

Julie grins.

“I just wanted him to be ready for the next Kent family adventure!”