

Georgios:

Hidden Heritage

by A. K. Frailey

*A. K. Frailey Books
Fillmore, Illinois*

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Genealogy from ARAM to Georgios

Aram
Gizah + Ammee

*Sons begot sons for generations.
Beyond count of man.
But not God.
And a Covenant was made
Between God and Man
He chose a People for His very own from which He would arise
A Man among men
A King among kings
And many would come to know Him
And many would know of Him
And some would choose Him
For their own
And there came upon the land a man named Alexios.
Whose wife bore him a son
Named
Georgios*

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Chosen Exile

The Island of Patmos

Circa Anno Domini 100

His father called him Georgios, but his grandparents just called him Georgi. He wasn't sure he liked either name, but he did know that one drew him home like a bee to honey while the other sent shivers down his spine. His home was a great, white, stone house surrounded by a white stone wall with green moss growing in thick tufts. It was perched on top of a mighty cliff on the island of Patmos in the middle of the Aegean Sea. His grandfather, Myron, had inherited the land from his father, and they ruled over their large portion with autocratic supremacy, even though for many the island was a land of exile, far from the glory of the Roman Empire. Georgios could remember no other home, and his mother's parents, Myron and Roxanna, treasured him beyond words. His life was both comfortable and pleasing, except for those times when his father, Alexios, returned from his long months of travel as a legionnaire for the Roman army. Then old yearnings haunted the boy's days and filled his dreams.

"Georgios! Come here, son!"

Georgios trotted up to his father and dutifully knelt on the sunbaked earth and bowed his head. He did not speak first; he knew that was not an option.

Alexios controlled the smile which would have liked to play on his lips. As a member of the Roman Army he was trained to control his emotions, yet his heart smiled at the sight of his only

son. The youth would be thirteen soon, and this would be his year of testing. Alexios sighed, for though he wanted his son to know discipline and strength, he knew all too well the price a boy had to pay to become a man. In a generation of men, only a few would be called great; only the truly great were worthy of notice.

“Rise and come walk with me a while, Georgios. I have something to tell you and I would speak of it now before it is too late.” Alexios stood waiting, the sun beating mercilessly down on his short black hair.

Georgios’ heart leapt to his throat, for though he was intimidated by his father, he also felt much safer when his father was home. He knew his world was changing rapidly and things were happening all over the countryside, in the towns and across the empire, which caused many men to rise and pace the floors during black, sleepless nights. He took a large step to fall into alignment with his father, trying to keep up without appearing to work at it. Still he did not speak. Alexios looked out of the corner of his eye at his son. How small the boy was! He was so thin and awkward. How would he fare during the coming years? The only thing they had in common was their thick, wavy hair. *Was I ever this frail?* Alexios wondered anxiously. Taking another deep breath, Alexios walked forward trying not to take too large a step at each pace.

“Son, I am being called away, far from here, and it is my duty to respond quickly and obediently.” He stopped and put his large hand on his son’s head. “As I hope you would do in my situation.”

Georgios didn’t look up, for now he realized his father was going to leave him behind again. A deep depression began to settle over him. He felt his father’s hand move from his head to his shoulder and squeeze, asking for reassurance that his confidence was not in vain. Georgios nodded, fearing that if he spoke now

his voice might betray his desolation, but this was not enough for the staunch Roman.

“Georgios, I know this is hard for you. Your mother has been gone for over a year now, but you must overcome any fear that you are being tested beyond your endurance. You are from strong stock, made for greatness,” Alexios looked up into the bright blue sky, a faraway expression crossing his features. Then, looking down, he patted his son’s shoulder again. “Besides, you are almost a man now.” He shook Georgios’ shoulder playfully. “And, you have your grandmother and grandfather and all your various relations and friends. You are hardly alone in this world.”

The boy nodded again. He knew what his father was saying was true, but he also felt abandoned. He never felt comfortable with boys his own age, and girls were absolutely impossible to deal with. His grandparents were gentle and kind, but they could hardly help him find his strength. All they ever did was pamper him, and he most certainly did not want to be pampered. He had endured it for almost thirteen years now, and he had hoped that his father would allow him to train for some important post or, at very least, allow him to travel with him. Georgios clenched his fists in frustration and disappointment, but he dared not show any further displeasure than this. But it was enough. Alexios knelt down on the hard path and pulled his son to himself. There was unusual emotion straining his voice when he spoke. His words were as gentle as a man bred to be a warrior could possibly make them.

“I wish I did not have to leave, or that I could take you with me, but I am not a free man. I belong to the empire, and there are many demands upon me that I must account for. I cannot risk your suffering some tragic fate because of my weakness. The safest place for you is here, under the protection of those who

are most desirous of watching over you.” Alexios pushed his son a distance from him and, tilting his face up into the light, he looked Georgios in the eyes. “You do understand, don’t you?”

Georgios swallowed hard and nodded his head slowly. His dark brown eyes squinted in the harsh light. His father stood up, an impatient frown crowding out the look of compassion he had worn just a few moments before.

“That is not good enough, Georgios. I want you to speak to me. Do not just nod your head like a dumb animal. Speak! Say what you think. I can accept discord as long as it is explained and defended. I cannot accept limp acquiescence.”

Georgios took a deep breath and in a swift motion flung himself against his father, hugging him around the waist. It was an impulsive, rash move and he did not know what madness made him act like this, but for some reason he believed that he would never see his father again, and he wanted so much to save him from some unnamed terror. He was afraid to look up and see his father’s disappointed, reproachful expression, but instead he felt the gentle caress of his father’s firm hand as it smoothed his linen tunic down his back. Finally, Georgios lifted his head and looked up at his father, who was blinking rapidly with no attempt at speech.

“I will miss you, Father.”

Alexios nodded gravely. His dark, penetrating eyes were thoughtful, even sorrowful. “I am grateful for that.” He shrugged and seemed about to say something, but then he stopped himself. He put his hand on his son’s head again and spoke with forced cheerfulness. “I am glad someone will miss me. Since your mother died I have not been a favorite son.”

Georgios rubbed his eyes with the back of his hand. His brows knit together in a semblance of a frown. “What do you mean? Surely everyone reveres you?”

Alexios laughed mirthlessly and began to turn back towards the boy's home again. "Yes, I suppose that is true. But you will learn, Georgios, that reverence is not the same as love. In fact, I would say that few really revere me but most fear me, or rather they fear what they imagine about me."

Georgios felt his spirits climb. It was not often that his father spoke so honestly to him, and he felt the trust and intimacy that this conversation was engendering. "I do not understand. You are a great man, everyone thinks—"

"Georgi! Georgi? Where are you?" It was the high strained voice of his grandfather calling for him. The old man was shielding his eyes from the glare of the sun as he stood just outside the doorway of his house. He saw the boy with his father and his face suddenly clouded over. Georgios noticed the change, and as he looked up he saw the same irritation wash over his father's face. What was this mysterious conflict about? He had never noticed it before. But then, his father was not often at his grandfather's home. In the past, Georgios had usually been called to visit his father in another town, but this time his father's visit had been so short that Alexios had decided to stay with his wife's parents. It was becoming clear, however, that this was not a comfortable situation for anyone. He looked up to his father again and saw him put on his "Roman face," as Georgios liked to call it. A sigh erupted from deep inside; he would never be able to comprehend the irrationality of adults. But then as his shoulders slumped, he realized he was not a reasonable person either, for he both adored and feared his father and loved and scorned his grandparents. The boy quickened his pace even as his father slackened his own.

"Yes, grandfather! I am here. I am just saying goodbye to father."

The old man put his hand down and nodded his head in sol-

emn agreement. He turned and went back inside the glaring, sunbaked villa. Alexios stood on the dusty road that led up to the main house, staring off into the distance. Georgios bit his lip in frustration. He wanted his father to stay, but clearly that was impossible. There were rules to be followed. In fact, Georgios had heard it whispered that as a member of the Roman Army, Alexios should not have married...perhaps there was more to this situation than he realized. Georgios shook his head to brush away all shadows of doubt. If only he could go with him. His voice was small and uncertain when he finally spoke his wish out loud.

“Father, could I go with you, perhaps, some day?”

Alexios seemed to come out of a dream as he looked down at his son. Slowly, his eyes focused as he rubbed his jaw.

“It’s a possibility. I have thought about it, of course, but you were always too young. Soon, Georgios, you will become a man, and it is the duty of every father to see to the training of his son.” Georgios’ heart rose and he held his breath in anticipation, his eyes wide with daring hope. His father spoke musingly, his eyes darting to the home of his dead wife’s father. “Yes, it would be right and just. Let us say this; in one year when I finish my tour, I will be back. When I come here again, it will be to pick you up and bring you with me wherever I go. We will be warriors together, and we will conquer the world!”

Georgios’ heart beat so fast that he wondered how it stayed in his chest. If he could only go with his father, he would do everything that was asked of him; he would be a perfect son. He took the necessary steps to reach his father, then clasped Alexios’ hand and knelt once more in the dust. This time, however, he felt not the subjugation of a dutiful Roman boy but the loyalty of an honored son.

“I will be here waiting for you, Father, and I will do every-

thing while you are gone, with the sole intention of pleasing you.”

His father smiled as he put his hand upon his son's black hair once more and looked into the distance. Georgios' grandfather peered at the filial scene with an angry scowl bearing heavily down upon his brow.

Georgios knew that his life had changed in this instant, and he was no longer bound to the chains of his childhood. He was not merely an idle youth anymore, but a young man with only one year to prepare himself. Prepare he would in every way possible to become a great son to his noble, distant father.

A Revelation

After seeing his father off down the winding, dusty road, Georgios spent some time leaning against the stone wall, watching the ships on the sparkling sea, marveling at their beauty and silent charm and wishing very much that he could be on one. He knew his father's ship was ready and would set sail very soon, so he watched until a ship broke free from the coast and slipped over the blue stillness, becoming smaller and smaller until it was nothing more than a memory in his mind. When he returned home, Georgios expected to be received with the same gentle love and compassion that he had always received from his mother's parents, but this was a day of surprises.

His grandfather, Myron, was a tall, slight man, while his grandmother, Roxana, was more solidly built. Often Georgios had watched the two and been surprised that they had ever become husband and wife, for his grandfather was commanding, though his voice was thin and high, while his grandmother, a round buxom woman with long black hair and flashing black eyes, moved through the world like a gentle breeze, perfumed persuasion in every word and gesture. As he entered his home, he noticed a strange and heavy silence, the two lined up near the doorway awaiting his return. His grandfather spoke first.

"Georgi! We have been waiting for you to come back. What took you so long? Our dinner has long been ready and we have been very worried." Myron stood hunch shouldered, as if bowed down by a weight too great to withstand, while Roxana bustled

to her grandson's side and ushered him into the dining room. The servants moved out of the way, virtually invisible. Georgios' grandparents belonged to an old, wealthy Greek line, supported by an inheritance from Roxanna's father and what monetary supplements Alexios could send their way for the care of his son. Myron had inherited their beautiful home but not much else, so he had become a man of business and had done well on the mainland until his daughter, Helena, married Alexios and they moved back to this distant island. From then on it seemed that nothing went well. Myron often blamed Alexios for the demise of his mercantile business, though it was really due more to his own misunderstanding of what was popular than anything to do with his daughter's husband. Still, he disliked and distrusted the burly Roman and blamed his daughter's death on him. Helena's illness was common enough, and her recovery had seemed certain until Alexios' sudden appearance after a long absence sent Helena into a flutter of excitement from which she never recovered. Myron peered at his grandson as they began to eat their midday meal. "I am worried that your father may have upset you, Georgi; you've hardly said a word since you came home. Normally, you are such a magpie."

Georgi looked at his grandparents, who were both staring at him expectantly. He smiled guiltily. "Oh, yes, you are right. I am sorry. I've been thinking. I didn't mean to be so late." The boy looked at the food set before him. "It smells wonderful and I am very hungry." The youth began to eat with all the pleasure of a child who wants to grow big and strong as fast as he can. He ate in silence for a while, but slowly realized that his grandparents were not enjoying their meal. He put his gravy-soaked bread down and looked to his grandmother for explanation.

"Has something happened?"

Roxana's long eyelashes fluttered innocently. "We were just wondering the same thing. Your father was so quiet and distant

when he arrived, and then you two had such a long and earnest conversation before he left; well, we just wondered if he had some news we should know about.”

Georgi felt a sudden blush creep up his cheeks and his breath come a little faster. Why were they forever worrying about him and imagining the worst? Georgi squared his shoulders and took a deep breath. He knew this conversation had to happen, though he dreaded their reaction.

“My father told me that he must be on tour for the next year, but after that he would come and get me and I would begin my training.” Georgi felt the tension in the room rise as two sets of eyes grew wide and round. Both his grandparents leaned in. Their expressions spoke more than words could say. Georgi felt a wave of resentment rising in him, and he knew that he would have to face this or he would never be able to grow up free, able to learn the ways of men.

“Why are you looking so shocked? He is my father, after all, and it is perfectly right that he should want to train his own son. You know perfectly well that I am going to be of age in a few months; it is about time I had the chance to learn the ways of real men.” The two continued to stare at him; Myron laid down a crushed olive.

“*Real men? Your father?!* What was he thinking when he made such an offer?!” Myron’s voice rose to a sharp squeak. “You have no business going off with him! He will do nothing but bring you to a bad end among savages who drink strong wine, eat rich food, and brutalize their enemies. Warriors are little better than beasts, hired to kill when the need arises.” Myron waved his thin hand in the air. “No! I will not have it. No grandson of mine will accept such a fate! You are destined for greater things.” He looked to his wife and pointed his finger at her accusingly. “I told you what would happen when you al-

lowed Helena to marry that man! I told you then that the child of such a match would be doomed to a hideous fate, and what did you say? You bustled about and flung your arms around your daughter and said that she *loved* Alexios, as if that made everything better. And when we knew the full truth, still you did nothing to stop it!”

At this, Roxana rose from the table, her hands flailing about in a frenzy of impotent rage.

“Me? Do not blame me! I am the one who told you that I suspected he was not one of us. I told you to speak to Helena and order her to give up the match, but you said it was too late. You said he was too powerful a man to anger. And now, look what he is doing! He killed our daughter, and he will kill our only beloved grandson!” Tears began to flow as she started to leave the room, but Georgi had risen to his feet, too astonished to speak coherently.

“What do you mean he *killed* my mother? Mother died of an illness. My father loved her and he did everything he could... he called for the best physicians. They were all at a loss. No one could have saved her.” The boy’s eyes narrowed sharply. “You always hint that my father is no good...why? He is a Roman citizen, after all!”

Roxanna stopped and turned to stare at her grandson, then in a mad rush of maternal protectiveness she embraced Georgios, hugging his head to her chest and covering his ears with her hands. She looked at her husband and spat out her words in a venomous whisper. “He shall never be burdened with the truth.”

Myron ran over to them and, even as Georgios tried to break free of the smothering embrace, wrenched him aside. “He will be a man soon and his father will have the right to take him! Unless we do something now, we will relive the agony of seeing our child bound to an unworthy—”

Georgi broke free from both his grandparents and ran to the doorway where several well-dressed servants clustered about curious, yet afraid of all the shouting. Georgios stood ready to make his escape, for though he had to know the full truth, he also sensed that he was about to learn something that would change his life. “What do you mean by *unworthy*? How could so noble and so just a man be...”

“He is a *Jew*!” Myron’s shriek no sooner left his mouth than he watched his grandson’s face drain of all color. Georgi’s eyes grew round with absolute astonishment. His father, his strong, noble father, was from that despised and defeated race? It could not be true! The boy took a step forward, and then a thought occurred to him and he took a step backwards. Then he, Alexios’ son, was carrying that same disgrace in himself? How could it be? How could he have lived so long and known so little about his own father, about his own self? He stared at his grandparents, never for a moment noticing the embarrassed stares of the servants. He knew that although his grandparents were often conniving, they did not often lie—certainly not to him. Yet, despite his incredulity he saw that they looked truthful. Roxanna began to flutter towards him, obviously wanting to embrace him and wipe away the news, as one dries tears off a face, but Georgi knew he could never be embraced in the same way again. If they despised his father for his blood, then they could not be so inconsistent as to love him unreservedly.

“Then I am...” His words failed him.

Roxanna bustled over. She had dug a small white cloth from within her silky sleeve when she realized the danger of tears was upon her and she now waved this banner at Georgios. “No, no, of course you are not! You carry our daughter’s blood. You carry *our* blood. You look nothing like them! No one would ever guess. You are not like them at all.”

Georgi stood transfixed. If he had been pierced by a sword he could not be more amazed. “But I *am* one of them!” Georgi was struggling to hold his own tears in check as he took another step nearer the doorway. “I am my father’s son and I will be no other.”

He turned to flee and then stopped, tears beginning to stream down his face. “My father wants me and my mother loved me so I will not deny that they are mine.” He looked scornfully at his grandparents. “If I were to deny anyone at this moment, it would be you two!” With those last words echoing off the blazing white walls, Georgi turned and fled past the murmuring, speculating crowd of servants. He had no idea where he was going or what he was going to do, but he knew that he would not soon return to the home of his childhood to be embraced by anyone.

An Unfair Fight

Ships left port almost every day, and though it was not customary to sign on to one at the last moment, a merchant vessel that had stopped for a few repairs needed to move out to sea immediately, and they could use another hand. Georgios had to talk fast and confidently to convince the captain he was worth taking onboard, for his slight frame and peaked face spoke of a youth too weak and inexperienced to do any serious traveling, much less manage the hard labor assigned to the members of a ship's crew. But as it happened, Georgios was not destined to do much labor, for almost immediately upon sailing out into deep waters the captain's misgivings proved prophetic. Georgios took ill, and there was little anyone could do but hope he did not die. The captain had dearly wished for more work from the youth, but being a kind man, he saw no reason to let the boy die, so he let Georgios sleep in the aft of the ship and did not ask anything more of him than to keep his moaning to himself.

Georgios could never, in later years, recall any details concerning that terrible voyage other than the awful undulations that seemed to never cease and the stink that made him want to take his nose off and throw it into the sea. But he was vaguely aware when they approached land and he was rowed to shore and roughly carried to a sparse wooden hut out of the sun. He was not alone at first, for a few others had debarked, but they were soon on their way to unnamed destinations and never spoke or looked at him. Georgios remembered his grandparents' anguished yells when he had rushed

out of their home—his home—the only home he had ever known. They had called for him for hours, even as the sun sank behind the purpling mountains and the dark night descended. There were not many places he could go on that first long night, but he made his way to shore by a circuitous route, and found the merchant ship he had joined. Now he wished he had not been so lucky.

It was cold and damp that night, and the strain of the shocks he had endured was more than he was used to. He put his hand to his burning forehead and wondered at his own sanity. By daybreak, he realized he was ravenously hungry, for he had not eaten for quite a while, but he was a bit more greedy than wise when he spied a nearby tree loaded with fruit. The result was disastrous, for good as they were in small amounts, too much was clearly too much and he was soon feeling the effects of his unwise choice. But even after everything, in this strange hut on the shore of he knew not what land, as he alternately clutched his aching stomach and throbbing head, he remembered his resolution to follow after his father. Unfortunately, there were moments when he could easily imagine crawling back into his grandmother's welcoming arms and being stroked by her firm, loving hands. He could not hide from the realization that perhaps he had been stupid to run away as he did. What kind of a man would his father think him if he saw him now? He could no longer debate his choice, however; he must move on. As he put his hand to his head and rocked back and forth in renewed misery, he wondered if there wasn't a better way to learn the truth.

Georgios imagined his father's strong marble-like face and he felt comforted. If it was true that he was a Jew, a Roman-Jew, then his father must have known even greater trials in his life than being stranded, ill, on a strange shore.

Georgios set his chin. Perhaps it would be best to simply return to his grandparents' home to await his father as had

been originally planned, rather than pushing forward into the unknown. There might be a chance he could undo this mistake and get out of this situation before it got any worse. He sat and watched the gentle waves rolling onto shore and promised himself he would never to act so rashly again.

With his resolve firmly set, Georgios realized that he was beginning to feel a little bit better. His greatest discomforts were his burning thirst and his aching head. He tried to stand up, but the earth under his feet seemed to sway, so he grasped a beam of wood that supported one end of the structure in which he was now standing. He took one slow step and then another until he reached the doorway, and he looked out over the rocks and sand to the sea which was still, unerringly, running upon the shore in meditative intervals. Georgios looked over the cresting waves and spoke aloud.

“It wasn’t that long a voyage, wretched as it was, so I can’t be that far from home. If I look about I’m sure I’ll find someone going my way and I can ask for passage – I’m sure my grandparents will pay any cost.” Georgios heard a low snort behind him and he whirled around, almost falling down in his attempt to see who was hidden in the dark interior. He peered intently, but after staring at the bright day, looking into the hut was like staring into blackness and he could see nothing. Then suddenly, he saw someone moving toward him. It was a young man, not much older than himself, though twice the strength if his muscles could be believed. Georgios took a step backwards, wary and frightened, for he could not tell this young man’s intent or why he had stayed so silent while he had been moaning and talking to himself.

“Who are you?”

The young man stepped up to Georgios and poked him in the shoulder, as if to make sure he was real. Then he spoke with

slow, deliberate words. "I could ask you the same thing."

Georgios took another step backwards, now well out of the hut. He had never been in a fight before, though he had seen some of the boys at home wrestle. He had always disdained those youthful contests, for he considered himself too well brought up to get into any physical contact with the servants and sons of lesser men, for his family was considered superior to everyone else on the island. Here, however, was a moment when a battle for supremacy would not be decided by class or wealth, and he might not be able to avoid a confrontation. Georgios cringed at the thought of actually touching this dirty, ragged-looking boy. He cleared his throat and tried to make his voice as deep as possible, speaking with slow, precise words. "I am a Roman citizen, the son of Alexios..." he never got the rest of his words out, for the boy jumped on him and began to pummel him with both fists. At first, Georgios was too surprised to even put up his hands in defense, but then the searing pain of a jab to his cheek and a blow to his middle made him realize with distinct shock that if he did not act soon he might be beaten to death, so scrambling back to his feet, he used what little skills he had and began slapping and clawing at his enemy. What he lacked in strength and skill he made up for in sheer determination and spirit. He would not be beaten; he would not lie down and die for anyone! He wanted to scream but he had no extra breath. Every ounce of his strength was used to keep his aggressor off him. When exhaustion began to overwhelm him and he realized he was too weak to win, he saw out of the corner of his eye a wooden staff leaning against the interior wall. Georgios scampered under the larger boy's arm, ran inside the dwelling, grabbed the staff, and in one swift motion turned and swung with all his might at the lunging youth, who had not seen the staff or realized his opponent had a weapon. Georgios felt the impact of the heavy ce-

dar stick against the skull of his challenger resound with a loud crack. In slow motion, the young man crumpled to the ground in a helpless heap. Georgios stood, sweating and panting, unable to comprehend all that happened in the last few moments. He felt himself fall to the ground, completely exhausted, aware once again of his own throbbing head, his sour stomach, and now his many aching bruises and burning scratches.

Georgios put his hand to his head and shuffled backwards to lean against a wall, staring every now and again at the fallen youth, wondering what in the world he should do now. As the slanted rays of the sun reached inside the rough dwelling, he could clearly see the young man's dirty face. Though he still feared him, he also feared he had killed the stranger. It was not in his nature to kill another human being, even though he knew he would eventually be trained as a soldier to kill, quickly and skillfully, as needed. Still, he could not relish this kill. He felt his face contorting as this new concern blotted out all the others. What had he just done? In his first mad rush from home, he had sent himself on a horrific voyage which ended in him doing the unthinkable: killing another person, someone he did not even know. Georgios rubbed his hands across his face, tears of outrage and fury building. He knew full well that he had had no other choice but to defend himself, yet he regretted the consequences of his choice. Oh, if only he could relive the last few days and think his actions through more slowly. If only the past were not beyond recall.

The sun seemed to cross the sky very slowly as Georgios tried to decide what to do next. Finally, as he attempted to shake himself free of his aches and pains, he decided that it was no use dying here along with his mistake, and he rose up to leave. He stepped around the fallen youth and walked outside, looking around. He realized that he was not very far away from a vil-

lage of some sort. He could see the smoke of various fires and the shapes of buildings in the distance. His attention was called further up the shore, and he saw that the ship's men had simply dropped him off in an out-of-the-way spot; the port was less than a league away. He scrunched his eyes together, realizing that they had probably thought he would quickly die and it would not be good for business to put a dead boy on shore along with all their goods.

Georgios measured the distance carefully with his eyes and concluded that though he could not walk quickly, he could certainly manage to reach the town before the sun fell. He had just started to make his sojourn when he heard a low moan from inside the structure. Georgios froze. He thought of how the boy had attacked him without cause, and imagined the further fury he would undoubtedly feel at his bruised and broken head. Yet even with this knowledge, Georgios closed his eyes and sighed with deep relief, for he was immensely glad that the youth was not dead. He had not killed anyone. He could leave this dreadful scene with a clear conscience. He took one exultant step forward and heard another moan. He wavered in his resolution, for if he left the youth here he might die; he might be too injured to make it through another night. Georgios swallowed back his painful thirst and remembered his own desolation at finding himself alone in the dark with no one to aid him. He now had the courage to go on, but what would he do about his injured enemy? Georgios pictured his father's face once again, and his grip upon his shoulder. He could hear his father's firm voice speaking, "It is my duty to respond quickly and obediently...as I hope you would do, my son." Georgios knew that his father had had to face many hardships, and undoubtedly terrors, in his life, and if he was part Jew, then he had overcome much more than Georgios had ever realized. Georgios

put his hand up to his head again as the ache throbbed even more fiercely. He stood still in the silence of the hot day and knew that he could not run from this situation. This young man inside the hut was a relation to someone. He would eventually be found, dead or alive, and Georgios might be discovered and blamed for the outcome. He could not escape the consequences of his actions. He had only one real choice and that was to go back and face what had happened. He turned on his heel and walked the few paces back to look in on his tormentor. The young man was sitting up, holding his head in his hands. A trickle of blood had seeped down the side of his head where a spreading purple bruise marked Georgios' hit.

Georgios picked up the fallen staff before he went in and stepped determinedly over to his prostrate oppressor. "Are you alright?"

The youth attempted to lift up his head but a sudden yowl of pain escaped his lips as he swung his arm out in a thrashing attempt to hit Georgios.

"Do I look alright to you?! What, are you stupid? You nearly killed me; perhaps I shall die tonight, I don't know."

Georgios shuffled his feet in conflict. He really wanted to move on and get away from this horrible youth, but he knew where his duty lay and he knew that he had to stay and do something helpful. He remembered a time when he had fallen and his grandmother had bound his head with onions and pungent leaves. He took a step forward and put out his hand.

"I will help you stand up. There is a town not far from here and there we can get you the assistance you need. Does your family live nearby?"

The youth spat out a curse as he attempted to get to his feet. "My family?! My family? I would like to see them again! Can you bring the dead back to life, you...you murdering Roman?!"

Chapter 3

Georgios stepped back in surprise. "I am only trying to help you, though world is a mystery after the way you attacked me." Georgios watched the youth squeeze his eyes in obvious agony and he tried to change the subject. "So, where do you want to go?"

The youth gave a deeper groan, almost a growl. "I'll go to the devil and take him with me if I have anything to say about it!" Again there was a moan unlike any Georgios had ever heard before, and soon the moan became a stifled sob as the youth buried his hands to his head and rocked in pain.

Amazed and confused compassion, Georgios moved a step nearer and put his hand on the youth's shoulder lightly. "I am not your enemy—at least I do not wish to be. Tell me, what can I do to help you?"

Slowly the youth raised his red-rimmed, haunted eyes and stared at Georgios for a moment before he spoke in a deadened whisper.

"You, a Roman, want to help me? How very un-Roman of you! Would you help the son of a crucified man, a man of a tormented and defeated race?"

Georgios stifled a shocked intake of breath, remembering all too vividly the horror of seeing the remains of a crucified man, and then he reached out once more and he shuffled awkwardly closer. "Yes, actually, I would. I would like to help you."