

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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Isca<sup>r</sup>riot

A NOVEL of JUDAS

## *Isca*riot: The Hidden Chapter

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

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

—Tosca Lee

## Chapter Twenty-Two

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

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

I knew Jesus would never consent to this.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We told his stories. We preached his words.

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

Because I could smell it.

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

“I’m sorry, but—”

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

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

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

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

I glanced up.

He was studying the boy’s leg intently.

“He said all authority.”

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

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

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

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

“Why didn’t you cut off his leg?”

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

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

I tore at my hair.

The boy on the pallet moaned.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But in that moment, it didn't matter.

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

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

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

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

*Be well!*

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

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

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

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

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

I jerked back from the pallet...



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

At last.

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

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

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

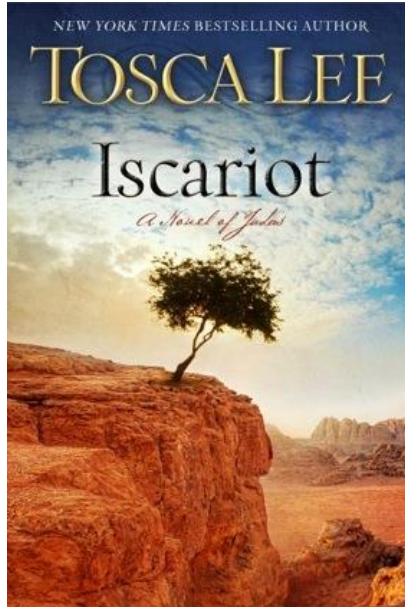
As I kissed him, I did it knowing I had traveled all those miles and weeks and months for this very moment. A Judean returning to Galilee. A man following a teacher with no place to call his own.

And yet I felt that I had come home.

I closed my eyes and basked in his presence.

Two days later, everything began to unravel.

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