

# YOUNG JESUS

*The Bird and the Whisper*



EKO

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# **CHAPTER 1:**

# **THE WEEPING**

# **WOOD**

The sawdust made Jesus sneeze three times in a row, each one louder than the last.

"Bless you, little storm," Joseph said without looking up from his plane. The curl of cedar peeling away from the wood looked like a tiny scroll, and Jesus tried to catch it before it hit the ground. Missed.

"Why does wood smell sad?" Jesus asked, pressing his nose against the fresh-cut board.

Joseph's hands paused for just a breath. "Wood doesn't smell sad, son. It smells like cedar. Like trees. Like good hard work."

"But this one—" Jesus ran his small finger along the grain, and something cold touched the inside of his chest. Like drinking water too fast. "This one remembers something bad."

"Trees don't remember." Joseph's voice stayed patient, but Jesus heard the careful sound underneath. The same sound Mother used when he asked about the dreams where light sang his name. "Come, help me measure. Remember what we say?"

"Measure twice, cut once." Jesus took the measuring rope, but his hand stayed on the cedar board a moment longer. The cold feeling spread up

his arm. Fire, his body whispered. This tree knew fire.

"SHESUS!"

Ruth's voice exploded through the doorway, followed immediately by Ruth herself—three years old and covered in what looked like flour. Or dust. Or possibly both.

"Ruth! You're supposed to be napping." Jesus dropped the rope and caught her as she barreled into his legs.

"No nap. Play." She grabbed his hand with sticky fingers. "Come see! I maked you something!"

"Made," Joseph corrected automatically. "And Jesus is helping me work."

"Pleeeeeease?" Ruth turned her enormous eyes on Joseph. She'd learned that look from watching the neighbor's cat beg for scraps. It worked about as well. "I maked—made—him a present!"

Jesus glanced at the cedar board. The cold feeling was fading, leaving only the memory of something he couldn't quite name. "Can I go, Father? Just for a moment?"

Joseph sighed, but his eyes crinkled. "A moment. Then back to work. And Ruth—no more flour."

"Wasn't flour," Ruth said, pulling Jesus toward the door. "Was dust from the special jar."

"What special jar?" But Ruth was already dragging him into the courtyard, where indeed, Mother's grinding stone was covered in... something.

"Ruth, is this—"

"LOOK!" She pointed proudly at the ground where she'd used the grinding flour to draw wobbly circles. "It's you!"

Jesus tilted his head. The circles looked more like sick sheep than anything human, but Ruth's face glowed with pride.

"It's..." He knelt beside her creation. "Why is my head so big?"

"'Cause you think lots." She poked his forehead with a floury finger. "Mother says your head is full of questions. So I made it bigger for all the questions to fit."

Something warm replaced the cold in his chest. Different from the cedar feeling. This warmth felt like sunrise, like bread just out of the oven, like—

"RUTH BAT MARY!"



Mother appeared in the doorway, and the warmth in Jesus's chest immediately mixed with the very familiar feeling of uh-oh.

"Was accident?" Ruth tried, hiding behind Jesus.

Mary surveyed the destruction—grinding flour everywhere, her good stone dusted white, handprints on the walls where Ruth had steadied herself. Her jaw worked the way it did when she was counting to ten in her head. Maybe to twenty.

"Jesus, take your sister to wash. Ruth, you will help me clean every grain of this later."

"But I maked—"

"Made. And yes, I see you made... something. We'll discuss it after you wash."

Jesus took Ruth's sticky hand and led her to the water basin. Behind them, he heard Mother muttering something about "forty years in the wilderness sounding better each day."

At the basin, Ruth splashed more water on herself than in it. "Shesus?"

"Mmm?"

"Why you make that face when you touch the wood?"

Jesus paused, water dripping from his hands.

"What face?"

"The hurting face. Like when I falled off the big rock but tried not to cry."

"I don't make a face."

"Do too. Your eyebrows go like this—" She scrunched her tiny face into an exaggerated frown. "And your mouth goes like this—" She turned her lips down dramatically.

"I do not look like that."

"Do too. Ask Thomas. He says you look at things like they're talking to you in secret words."

Jesus dried her face with the edge of his tunic, maybe rubbing a little harder than necessary. "Thomas talks too much."

"He likes you though. Says you're weird but nice-weird." She grabbed his face between her wet palms, forcing him to look at her. "I think you're nice-weird too."

The warm feeling came back, stronger. Ruth's hands smelled like flour and childhood and

something else—like she'd been picking the wild  
jasmine behind the house again even though  
Mother told her not to.

"Ruth," he said carefully, "Do you ever... feel  
things? When you touch stuff?"

She tilted her head, considering. "I feelled squishy  
when I touched the mud yesterday."

"No, I mean... inside. In your chest."

"Oh!" Her face lit up. "Like when baby Micah  
smiled at me? Made my tummy feel like  
butterflies?"

"Maybe? But from things, not people."

Ruth's forehead wrinkled in concentration. Then  
she shrugged, already bored with the question.

"Dunno. But one time I touched the mezuzah and

my fingers felt tingly. Mother said it was 'cause I needed to wash my hands."

She wiggled free and ran back toward the house, calling over her shoulder, "Come on! Before Mother counts to MORE numbers!"

Jesus followed slowly. As he passed the workshop doorway, he saw the cedar board leaning against the wall. Just for a moment, he let his fingers brush it again.

Fire. Definitely fire. But also... after the fire, rain. Years and years of rain. And new growth. And birds—

"Jesus!" Joseph's voice, gentle but firm. "The measuring rope?"

"Coming, Father."

He picked up the rope, but something made him glance back at the road beyond their courtyard wall. A man stood there, traveler-dusty, leaning on a walking stick. Nothing unusual—many passed through Nazareth.

But the man was looking directly at Jesus. Not at the workshop. Not at Joseph. At him.

Their eyes met for one heartbeat. Two. The man nodded once—small, like acknowledging something privately confirmed—then continued walking.

"Who was that?" Jesus asked.

Joseph looked up. "Who was who?"

But the road was empty. Only dust swirling where footsteps had been.

"Never mind." Jesus turned back to the workbench. "Where should I measure?"

As Joseph showed him where to place the rope, Jesus felt something new. Not cold like the cedar's fire-memory. Not warm like Ruth's flour-portrait. Something else.

Like a tiny hum, just behind his ears. So quiet he might have imagined it.

But that night, as he lay on his sleeping mat with Ruth curled against his side like a flour-scented puppy, the hum was still there.

Waiting.

*The dove carved itself in dreams he wouldn't remember. Not yet.*

## **CHAPTER 2:**

# **THE DONKEY GAME**

"You have to kick it HARDER!" Thomas shouted, dancing from foot to foot like he needed the toilet. "It's a Roman ball! Kick it like you're kicking Caesar!"

Jesus looked down at the leather ball—really just old rags wrapped tight and tied with string. It didn't look particularly Roman. Or kickable. It looked sad.

"I don't want to kick Caesar," Jesus said. "I don't even know Caesar."

"That's not the POINT." Thomas grabbed the ball and demonstrated with a wild kick that sent it



flying into Miriam's garden. A squawk of protest from the chickens confirmed its landing.

"Thomas bar Jacob!" Miriam's voice came sharp over the wall. "That's the third time this week!"

"Sorry!" Thomas called back, not sounding sorry at all. He turned to Jesus with a grin. "See? Perfect kick. Now you get it and try."

Jesus sighed and squeezed through the gap in Miriam's fence. The chickens scattered, except for the big red hen who stood her ground, fixing him with one beady eye.

"I'm not here to steal eggs," he told her.

The hen clucked skeptically.

The ball had rolled under the cucumber vines. As Jesus reached for it, something made him stop.

There, by the water trough, the old donkey everyone called Methusaleh stood with his head hanging low. Too low.

"Thomas," Jesus called. "Something's wrong with—"

"Just GET THE BALL! Before she comes out with the broom!"

But Jesus was already walking toward Methusaleh. The donkey's breathing sounded wrong—wet and rattled, like stones in a bucket. His left front leg trembled with each breath.

"Hey," Jesus said softly. "Hey, old man."

Methusaleh's ear twitched but he didn't lift his head. Up close, Jesus could see the problem. The leg was swollen from hoof to knee, hot to the touch even through the fur.

"JESUS!" Thomas's head appeared over the wall.

"What are you—oh."

The wet breathing got worse. Methusaleh made a sound that wasn't quite a bray, more like a sigh that had given up halfway through.

"We should get someone," Thomas said. "My father maybe, or—"

But Jesus wasn't listening. That feeling was back—the warm river in his chest, the one that had come when Ruth fell, when the bird couldn't fly. Only this time it felt different. Bigger. Like it had been feeding on all his held-back moments.

He placed both hands on the swollen leg.

"Jesus, don't. If he kicks—"

The warmth rushed down his arms so fast it made him gasp. Not like water this time—like lightning made of honey, bright and sweet and terrifying. The donkey's leg pulsed under his palms, and Jesus felt—

Pain. Days of it. A cut from a sharp stone that went bad. Infection spreading like ink in water. The donkey's simple confusion about why his body had turned against him.

"Stop," Jesus whispered, not sure if he was talking to the infection or the river or himself.

The warmth poured out anyway. He felt the poison drawing back, the swelling deflating like a punctured wineskin, the heat leaving—

"WHAT IN THE NAME OF ABRAHAM'S  
BEARD—"

Miriam stood in her doorway, broom in hand, mouth hanging open.

Jesus jerked his hands back, but it was too late. Methusaleh lifted his head, shook it like he was waking from a long nap, and took a solid step forward on his perfectly sound leg.

"I—he was—it's not—" Jesus backed away, his hands tingling like he'd been holding nettles.

Thomas had gone completely silent, still hanging over the wall with his eyes wide as plates.

Miriam looked from Jesus to the donkey to her broom, as if wondering which one to hit first.

Then Methusaleh complicated things by braying—loud and joyful and decidedly un-dying—and trotting to the water trough with the energy of a donkey half his age.

"You." Miriam pointed the broom at Jesus. "What did you do?"

"Nothing! I just—he looked sad and—"

"That donkey," she said slowly, "has been lame for a week. I was going to have Samuel look at him tomorrow. And you're telling me you did nothing?"

Jesus's mouth opened and closed like one of her chickens. The tingling in his hands was fading, but the memory of the donkey's pain still echoed in his bones.

"Maybe he was just... tired?" Thomas offered weakly from the wall.

Miriam's look could have curdled milk. "Tired. The donkey was tired. And now he's dancing like it's Purim."

As if to prove her point, Methusaleh kicked up his heels and pranced—actually pranced—around the garden.

"I should go," Jesus said, edging toward the fence.

"Oh no you don't." Miriam grabbed his shoulder. Not hard, but firm. "You're going to explain exactly what—"

"MIRIAM!" Her husband's voice boomed from inside. "THE BABY'S INTO THE GRAIN AGAIN!"

She closed her eyes, muttered something that might have been a prayer or might have been words mothers weren't supposed to know, and released Jesus.

"Go," she said. "But boy—"

Jesus was already squeezing through the fence.

"—BE CAREFUL!" she called after him. "GIFTS  
LIKE THAT DRAW ATTENTION!"

He ran. Thomas ran beside him, the ball forgotten  
in Miriam's garden. They didn't stop until they  
reached the old olive tree at the village edge, both  
panting.

"That," Thomas wheezed, "was the most amazing  
thing I've ever seen."

"You can't tell anyone."

"Are you JOKING? You just healed a donkey by  
TOUCHING it! Do you know what this means?"

"Thomas—"

"You could heal EVERYTHING! My  
grandmother's bad hip! The baker's curved spine!



Oh! And Rebecca's baby who won't stop crying—maybe something's wrong with her that you could—"

"THOMAS!" Jesus grabbed his friend's shoulders. "You can't. Tell. Anyone."

Thomas's excitement dimmed slightly. "But... why? You could help everyone. You could—"

"I don't even understand it!" The words came out harsher than Jesus intended. "I touch things and they... change. Or heal. Or I feel what they feel. And I don't know why or how or when it will happen next!"

"But that's incredible! You're like... like Moses! Or Elijah!"

"Moses was eighty when God talked to him. Elijah was old. I'm six. And I just want to play ball without accidentally performing miracles!"

Thomas was quiet for a moment. Then: "That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard."

"What?"

"If I could heal donkeys with my hands, I'd never play ball again. I'd heal everything. I'd be the most famous person in all Galilee! Maybe all Judea!"

"I don't want to be famous."

"Then you're stupid." But Thomas said it gently, the way friends can call each other stupid and mean I don't understand you but I still like you.

They sat under the olive tree as the sun started its downward slide. In the distance, they could hear

the other boys still playing. Judas's voice rose above the rest, organizing teams, making rules.

"He's going to find out," Thomas said quietly.

"Judas. He notices everything."

Jesus picked at the bark. "I know."

"He already doesn't like you."

"I know."

"Because his father compares you two all the time."

"I KNOW, Thomas."

They sat in silence again. Then Thomas punched Jesus's shoulder, not hard.

"Well, I think it's amazing. Even if you are stupid about it."

Jesus almost smiled. "Thanks."

"Want to go back? Get the ball?"

"Miriam will kill us."

"Nah. She's got baby troubles. We could probably steal all her cucumbers and she wouldn't notice."

"We're not stealing cucumbers."

"You're no fun for someone who can do miracles."

They walked back toward the village, arguing about whether healing counted as a miracle or just a "really weird thing" (Thomas's position). Behind them, the olive tree's shadow grew long, reaching toward the village like fingers.

And from another shadow, someone watched. Not the traveler from yesterday—someone smaller, younger. Someone whose father owned the big house with the red door.

Judas stepped out from behind the wall where he'd been listening. His face wore an expression too old for his nine years—part triumph, part fear, part something harder to name.

"Miracles," he whispered to himself. Then louder, practicing: "The carpenter's son performs miracles."

He thought of his father's morning lecture about proper Torah memorization. Of the way the rabbi praised Jesus's questions while frowning at Judas's stuttered responses. Of his mother's sigh when she found him struggling over the simplest prayers.

A donkey. The strange boy had healed a donkey with a touch.

Judas looked at his own hands—soft, uncalledoused, good for holding scrolls he couldn't properly read.

What would his father say if Judas could heal?  
Would he finally look at his son with something  
other than disappointment?

But no. That gift belonged to the carpenter's boy.  
The one who didn't even want it.

"Stupid," Judas muttered, echoing Thomas. But  
when he said it, the word had teeth.

He turned toward home, his mind already  
working. His father had friends. Important  
friends. Friends who worried about false prophets  
and wild claims and the delicate balance Rome  
allowed them to maintain.

They should know about this. They needed to  
know.

After all, Judas reasoned as he walked, wasn't it his  
duty to protect the community from deception?

From danger? From boys who might upset  
everything with powers they couldn't control?

He was doing the right thing. He had to be.

But his stomach hurt as he walked, and his hands  
shook slightly, and somewhere deep in his chest,  
something small and hurt whispered: *Why him?*  
*Why not me?*

By the time he reached the red door, Judas had  
buried that whisper so deep even he couldn't hear  
it anymore.

All that remained was the story he would tell.

And the watching he would do.

And the waiting for his moment to matter.

*That night, Methusaleh slept standing for the first  
time in a week. In his simple donkey dreams, a boy*

Young Jesus

*made of sunlight touched him and said, "Better now." And it was.*



# **CHAPTER 3:**

## **THE BIRD AND THE WHISPER**

The dead sparrow lay by the well like a dropped prayer.

Jesus found it during the quiet hour when most of Nazareth napped. He'd come to draw water for Mother, but the tiny body stopped him mid-reach for the rope. Brown feathers ruffled by wind. One wing stretched wide like it was still trying to fly.

He knelt in the dust. The sparrow weighed nothing in his palm—less than nothing, as if death had stolen even its small substance. Its eye, half-open, reflected the noon sky.

The warm river stirred in his chest.

*No*, he told it. *Not here. Not in the open.*

But the river didn't care about careful. It rose like flood season, pressing against his ribs, flooding down his arms toward his cupped hands. The sparrow's stillness pulled at him the way Ruth's broken body had, the way Methusaleh's pain had. Death was just another kind of wrong his hands wanted to make right.

"Please," he whispered, not sure if he was asking the river to stop or the bird to live.

The tingling started. His palms grew hot.

Then—footsteps. Multiple sets. Coming fast.

Jesus closed his hands around the sparrow and stood, the river crashing back into his chest so hard

it made him dizzy. Benjamin and his brothers rounded the corner, their voices carrying complaints about the heat.

"Jesus!" Benjamin called. "What are you doing here? Everyone's sleeping."

"Water." His voice came out strangled. The sparrow's body was so light between his palms. So wrong. "Getting water."

"Us too. Mother says we drink like camels."

Benjamin's younger brother, David, peered at Jesus's closed hands. "What've you got?"

"Nothing."

"Doesn't look like nothing." David stepped closer.

"Is it a lizard? I caught a huge one yesterday. Want to see?"

"No, I—"

"Let me see!" David grabbed for Jesus's hands.

Jesus stumbled backward, clutching the sparrow tighter. Too tight. He felt tiny bones shift under his fingers and wanted to cry out.

"Leave him alone," Benjamin said, but he was curious too. "Though seriously, Jesus, what—"

"It's dead!" The words burst out. "It's a dead bird and I found it and I was going to bury it because that's what you do with dead things, you bury them so they can rest, but you came and—"

He was crying. When had he started crying? Fat tears rolling down his dusty cheeks while three boys stared at him like he'd grown a second head.

"It's just a bird," David said slowly. "They die all the time."

"I know that."

"So why are you crying?"

Jesus didn't have words for it. How could he explain that he felt the sparrow's interrupted flight in his bones? That his hands knew exactly how to restart its tiny heart, realign its neck, call back whatever spark had fled? That holding this small death while denying his gift felt like drowning in reverse?

"Because," he said finally. "Because it was flying and then it wasn't."

The brothers exchanged looks. The kind that said *the carpenter's son is being weird again.*

"Well," Benjamin said awkwardly, "we could help bury it. If you want."

"No." Jesus wiped his face with his shoulder, hands still cupped around the bird. "I'll do it."

They filled their jars in uncomfortable silence. As they left, David whispered something that made his brothers snicker. Jesus didn't catch the words, but he heard the tone. The same tone the village boys used when talking about Crazy Ezra who lived in the caves and claimed angels spoke to him.

When they were gone, Jesus opened his hands.

The sparrow lay twisted now, truly broken. His desperate grip had finished what the fall had started. A fresh wave of tears came—not for the bird's first death, but for this second one. The one he'd caused by trying too hard to hide.

"I'm sorry," he whispered. "I'm so sorry."

He found a spot behind the well where the earth was soft. Dug with his hands until he had a hole deep enough. As he placed the sparrow in its tiny grave, the whisper started.

Not the warm river. Something else. A sound just behind his ears, like wind through spaces that didn't exist. Like someone calling from very far away or very deep inside.

Jesus froze, hands full of dirt. The whisper grew—not louder, but clearer. Still no words, just... presence. Recognition. Like being known by something that had always known him.

"Who are you?" he asked the empty air.

The whisper swirled, almost amused. As if to say:  
*You know. You've always known.*

"I don't understand any of this." He covered the sparrow with earth, patting it down gently. "The healing. The feeling. Now voices that aren't voices. Why is this happening to me?"

The whisper softened. If it had words, they might have been: *Not to. Through. For.*

"For what? For who?"

But the presence was already fading, leaving only ordinary afternoon silence and a small mound of fresh earth.

Jesus sat back on his heels. His hands were dirty. His face was streaked with tears and dust. He'd failed to save the sparrow, scared the village boys, and now he was hearing whispers that spoke in riddles.



"I'm not very good at this," he told the tiny grave.

"Whatever I'm supposed to be. I'm not good at it."

A shadow fell across him. Jesus looked up to find Ruth standing there, her favorite doll tucked under one arm.

"Mama says come home," she announced. Then, tilting her head: "Why you talking to dirt?"

"I buried a bird."

"Oh." She plopped down beside him, arranging her doll's hair. "Was it the brown one?"

"How did you—"

"Saw it when I came earlier. Tried to make it fly but it wouldn't." She gave him a matter-of-fact look.

"Things die, Shesus. Mama says it's 'cause the world is broken."

"But what if you could fix them? The dead things?"

Ruth considered this seriously. "Then they'd just die again later. Maybe sadder."

"Sadder?"

"Cause they'd know what dying felt like twice."

Jesus stared at his little sister. Sometimes she said things that seemed to come from somewhere else, somewhere older than her three years.

"Ruth? Do you ever hear... whispers? When you're alone?"

"You mean the light people?"

His breath caught. "What?"

"The light people. They talk but not with mouths." She demonstrated by opening and

closing her mouth silently. "Like that. But you hear them anyway."

"You hear them too?"

"Sometimes. Mostly in dreams." She went back to playing with her doll's hair. "They say you're not ready. But I think that's silly. You're six WHOLE years old."

"Ready for what?"

She shrugged. "Dunno. They talk in puzzles. Like that story about the king who had to guess the name." She stood, dusting off her bottom. "Come on. Mama made bread and if we don't hurry James will eat it all."

Jesus followed her, mind spinning. Ruth heard whispers too. Called them light people. Said they thought he wasn't ready.

Ready for what?

As they walked, Ruth slipped her small hand into his. "Don't be sad about the bird," she said. "Last night I dreamed it was flying again. But different. Brighter."

"That's just a dream, Ruth."

She gave him a look that was pure Mary—patient and knowing and slightly exasperated. "Shesus. Sometimes dreams are more real than real."

They walked home hand in hand, leaving the sparrow in its grave. But that night, Jesus dreamed too. Of a bird made of light, flying through spaces between stars. It turned to him with eyes like tiny suns and said in a voice like wind chimes:

*Not yet. But soon. Be patient with becoming.*

When he woke, the whisper was there. Stronger.  
Waiting.

And somewhere in the darkness, Ruth sat up on  
her mat, eyes wide.

"The light people say the bird says thank you," she  
announced to the sleeping house. Then she lay  
back down and was snoring within seconds.

Jesus stared at the ceiling until dawn, wondering if  
everyone heard voices they couldn't explain, or if  
madness ran in families, or if—just  
maybe—something larger than understanding was  
trying to speak to those small enough to hear.

The whisper hummed agreement.

Or maybe that was just the wind.

Young Jesus

*But wind doesn't know your name the way this  
whisper did.*

## **CHAPTER 4:**

# **THE SCROLL WITH NO ENDING**

The synagogue smelled like old prayers and new sweat. Jesus sat between Joseph and Uncle Cleopas, trying not to fidget as Rabbi Ezra unrolled the Torah portion for the week. The afternoon heat made everyone drowsy, and baby James had already fallen asleep in Mary's arms, drooling on her shoulder.

"Today," Rabbi Ezra intoned, "we read of Moses and the burning bush."

Jesus perked up. He liked the Moses stories—ordinary people suddenly talking to fires that knew their names. It felt... familiar, somehow.

The rabbi began to chant, his voice rising and falling like waves. Jesus followed along, lips moving silently with words he was only beginning to understand. Then Rabbi Ezra stopped mid-sentence.

"Ah." He peered closer at the scroll. "It seems we have some damage here. Water stains, perhaps. Or age." He cleared his throat. "We'll continue from where the text resumes."

"But what does the missing part say?" The question escaped before Jesus could stop it.

Every head in the synagogue turned. Speaking during the reading was like... well, like talking to God while He was talking to you. Just not done.



Rabbi Ezra's eyebrows climbed toward his hairline. "Young Jesus. The text is damaged. We cannot read what isn't there."

"But it was there once. Someone wrote it. God said it. Moses heard it." Jesus felt Joseph's warning hand on his shoulder but couldn't stop. "Doesn't it matter what's missing?"

"What matters," Rabbi Ezra said carefully, "is what we can read. What has been preserved."

"But—"

"Jesus." Joseph's voice carried that final tone. The one that meant *we'll discuss this at home*.

Jesus subsided, but his mind wouldn't quiet. All through the rest of the service, he stared at the gap in the text. The rabbi read around it like stepping over a hole in the road, but Jesus could feel the

missing words pulling at him. What had God said in that erased space? What instruction or promise or warning had water or time stolen?

After the service, the men gathered to discuss business while the women collected children. Jesus slipped closer to the Torah scroll while Rabbi Ezra was distracted by an argument about goat prices.

The damaged section wasn't large—maybe three lines worth. The parchment showed ghost letters, shadows where ink had been. If he squinted, if he angled his head just right, he could almost—

"Finding hidden treasures?"

Jesus jumped. The stranger from the other day stood behind him—the one who'd watched from the road. Up close, his eyes were the color of deep water.

"I'm not supposed to touch it," Jesus said.

"I didn't suggest you should." The man moved closer, smelling of road dust and something else. Incense, maybe. Or just distance. "But you're right to wonder about the gaps."

"Rabbi Ezra says what matters is what we can read."

"Rabbi Ezra is a good man who fears dangerous questions." The stranger's voice was mild, but something sharp hid underneath. "Tell me—what do you think was written there?"

Jesus looked at the damaged portion again. That feeling came—the same one that let him feel the cedar's memories, the donkey's pain. But this was different. Older. Like trying to remember a dream from before you were born.

"Something about..." He closed his eyes, let the almost-knowing wash over him. "Something about the space between speaking and hearing. About how God's voice changes depending on who listens."

The stranger went very still. "And how would a carpenter's son know such things?"

Jesus opened his eyes to find the man studying him with an expression he couldn't read. "I don't know. I just... felt it. Like the words left an echo."

"Echoes." The stranger smiled, but it didn't reach those deep-water eyes. "Yes. Everything leaves echoes, for those who can hear them." He pulled something from his robes—a small scroll, tied with red thread. "For your father. A commission. Tell him Nathanael of Sepphoris has need of his skills."

Jesus took the scroll, which felt heavier than it looked. "Are you a teacher?"

"Of sorts. I look for things. Lost things. Hidden things. Things that wait to be found." He glanced at the Torah scroll with its missing words.

"Sometimes I find them. Sometimes they find me."

"Which am I?"

The question surprised them both. The stranger—Nathanael—laughed, short and startled.

"I don't know yet," he admitted. "But I think we'll both find out soon enough."

He turned to go, then paused. "That gap in the text? You're right. It does matter. The silence between words often says more than the words themselves." He smiled that not-quite smile again. "But perhaps you already know that."

Then he was gone, leaving Jesus holding the small scroll and a head full of questions.

"Jesus!" Mary's voice carried across the courtyard.

"We're leaving!"

He tucked the scroll into his belt and ran to join his family. But as they walked home, he kept thinking about gaps. Missing words. Silences that spoke.

"You were very bold today," Joseph said as they walked. Not angry, just observing.

"I'm sorry. I just wondered—"

"I know. You wonder about everything." Joseph's hand found his shoulder. "It's not a fault. But Jesus, not everyone appreciates questions that dig too deep."

"Why?"

"Because some people build their whole lives on not looking too closely. When someone comes along asking about gaps and echoes..." He shrugged. "It makes them uncomfortable."

"But don't we need to know what's missing?"

Joseph was quiet for a moment. Then: "Sometimes what's missing is missing for a reason. Sometimes the gap is the message."

"I don't understand."

"No. But you will." Joseph squeezed his shoulder.

"Oh, a man gave me this. Said his name was Nathanael."

Jesus handed over the scroll. Joseph frowned as he examined it.

"I don't know any Nathanael from Sepphoris."

"He said he was a teacher. Sort of. He looks for lost things."

Joseph's frown deepened, but he tucked the scroll away. "We'll see what he wants. But Jesus—be careful around strangers who speak in riddles. Not all teachers teach what's worth learning."

That night, as Jesus lay on his mat, he thought about the damaged Torah portion. In his mind, he could almost see the missing words, floating just out of reach like dust motes in sunlight. The whisper was back, humming at the edge of his awareness.

*What was written there?* he asked it.

The whisper swirled, amused. If it had words, they might have been: *What needs to be.*



*That's not an answer.*

*Isn't it?*

Ruth stirred on her mat. "Shesus? You talking to the light people again?"

"Maybe. Go back to sleep."

"They say the missing words aren't missing. They're just waiting."

"Waiting for what?"

But Ruth was already asleep again, snoring softly.

Jesus stared at the ceiling, thinking about gaps that were messages and words that waited and strangers who looked for lost things. Somewhere in the space between what was written and what was missing, truth lived.

Young Jesus

He just had to learn how to read the silence.

*And in a house across Nazareth, Judas lay awake too, remembering the carpenter's son who asked dangerous questions and heard impossible things. Tomorrow, he decided. Tomorrow he would tell his father about the donkey. About the miracles. About the boy who saw what wasn't there.*

*The gap between decision and action yawned like an open mouth.*

*Sometimes what's missing matters most of all.*

## CHAPTER 5:

### JUDAS'S DARE

The olive trees made good hiding spots, but terrible shade. Jesus pressed against the rough bark, watching the other boys through the leaves. They'd been playing King of the Hill on the big rock for an hour, and he'd been not-playing for just as long.

"He's scared," Judas's voice carried clearly. "The carpenter's boy is scared to play with us."

"Maybe he's just tired," Thomas offered, but even he sounded doubtful.

"Tired? Or too special for regular games?" Judas picked up a stick, drew something in the dust. "My father says his family thinks they're chosen. Says his mother tells stories about angels."

Jesus's hands clenched. He could step out. Could join them. Could prove he wasn't scared or special or whatever Judas was implying. But something held him back. The same something that whispered *careful* when the river wanted to flow.

"I heard he healed Miriam's donkey," one of the younger boys piped up.

"Stories," Judas said, but his eyes gleamed. "Unless he wants to prove it?"

That's when Thomas spotted him. "Jesus! Come on! We need another player!"

Trapped. Jesus emerged from behind the olive tree, brushing bark from his tunic.

"Finally," Judas said. His smile showed too many teeth. "We were starting to think you'd turned into a tree."

"I was just—"

"Hiding. We know." Judas stepped closer. He was three years older, a head taller, and he used every inch of that height. "But now you're here. Want to play?"

"What game?"

"A new one. I made it up." Judas pulled out his small knife—the one his father had given him for his bar mitzvah preparation. "It's called Truth or Miracle."

The other boys shifted nervously. Even Thomas looked uncertain.

"I don't know that game," Jesus said carefully.

"It's easy. Someone asks you for a truth. If you won't tell it, you have to perform a miracle

instead." Judas flipped the knife, caught it. "Since you can't do miracles, you'll have to tell the truth."

"That's a stupid game," Thomas said. "Nobody can do miracles."

"Exactly." Judas's eyes never left Jesus. "So it's really just a truth game. Unless..." He dragged the knife across his palm. Not deep, but enough. Blood welled up, bright in the afternoon sun. "Unless someone here thinks they can fix this."

The boys gasped. Benjamin stepped back. "Judas, that's—"

"What? Crazy?" Judas held out his bleeding hand toward Jesus. "Go on. Touch it. Make it better. Like you did with the donkey."

Jesus stared at the blood. The river in his chest surged, wanting. Such a small cut. Such an easy fix.

His hands tingled with the need to help, to heal, to make whole.

"I can't," he said.

"Can't? Or won't?" Judas stepped closer. Blood dripped onto the dust between them. "Come on, miracle boy. Here's your chance. Prove the stories true."

"You're being mean," a small voice said. Ruth had appeared from nowhere, clutching her doll. "And stupid. Mama says playing with knives is stupid."

"Go away, baby," Judas snapped. "This is for big boys."

"You're not big. You're just tall." Ruth moved to stand beside Jesus. "And you're bleeding on purpose, which is the most stupid."

"Ruth, go home," Jesus said quietly.

"No." She grabbed his hand with her free one. "You come too. Mama made honey cakes."

"In a minute."

"Now." She tugged harder. "The mean boy can play with his blood by himself."

Judas's face went red. "I'm not—"

"Yes you are." Ruth fixed him with a stare that was pure Mary. "You're mean and sad and you want Shesus to be special so you can hate him for it. But he's not special. He's just my brother who tells good stories and lets me put flowers in his hair and—"

"Ruth." Jesus squeezed her hand. "Enough."



She huffed but stopped talking. The silence stretched tight as a drum skin.

Finally, Judas closed his fist around his cut. "This isn't over."

"Yes it is," Thomas said suddenly. "This is stupid, Judas. You're bleeding everywhere and scaring the little ones and for what? Because Jesus's better at Torah than you?"

"He's not better! He's just—" Judas stopped, swallowed whatever he was going to say. "Forget it. All of you. Just forget it."

He stalked away, leaving spots of blood in the dust like a trail of accusations.

The other boys scattered quickly, mumbling about chores and mothers and dinnertime. Soon only Thomas remained.

"You could have," he said quietly. "Healed him. I know you could have."

Jesus watched Ruth drawing patterns in the dust with her toe. "Maybe."

"So why didn't you?"

"Because he didn't want healing. He wanted a show." Jesus met his friend's eyes. "And because some people need their wounds. Take them away too soon and they'll just make new ones."

Thomas stared at him. "When did you get so wise?"

"I'm not wise. I just..." Jesus struggled for words. "I can feel what people really want. And Judas doesn't want to be healed. He wants to be right."

"About what?"

"About me being dangerous."

They walked back toward the village, Ruth between them still holding Jesus's hand. As they passed the synagogue, she piped up:

"The light people say Judas is important."

Both boys stopped. "What?" Jesus asked.

"They say he's important. For later. For the big story." She scrunched up her face. "But they won't say why. I asked and asked but they just got all swirly."

"Ruth, you can't just—" Jesus started.

"Oh! And they said to tell you the answer is yes."

"The answer to what?"

"Dunno." She spotted a butterfly and released his hand to chase it. "They just said tell you yes! Yes! Yes!"

Thomas watched her go, then turned to Jesus.  
"Your sister is very strange."

"I know."

"Does she really talk to... light people?"

"I don't know. Maybe. Or maybe she just dreams vivid dreams."

"Do you? Talk to them?"

Jesus thought of the whisper, constant now like a second heartbeat. "Something talks. I'm not sure what."

"And it told you the answer is yes?"

"Apparently."

They stood there, two boys on the edge of something neither could name. Finally Thomas punched Jesus's shoulder.

"Well, whatever the question was, at least you know the answer."

"That's the problem," Jesus said. "Yes to what? Yes to healing? Yes to hiding? Yes to becoming whatever everyone's so afraid I'll become?"

"Maybe just... yes. To all of it."

Ruth came running back, butterfly forgotten.

"Mama says come NOW or the honey cakes will be all gone!"

They ran, leaving the bloodstained dust behind. But Jesus could feel it—the weight of Judas's dare,

his cut, his need to prove Jesus dangerous. It sat in his stomach like a stone.

That night, he asked the whisper: *Was that the question? Should I have healed him?*

The whisper swirled, and for once, formed something almost like words: *He will cut himself again. And again. Until he learns that some wounds are doors.*

*Doors to what?*

But the whisper had gone back to its wordless humming.

Ruth padded over in the dark, dragging her sleeping mat. "Shesus? The light people want me to tell you something else."

"What now?"

"They said..." She yawned enormously. "They said the mean boy is part of the pattern too. The dark parts are just as important as the light parts."

"I don't understand."

"Me neither." She curled up against his side. "But they seemed really sure about it."

Within minutes she was asleep, but Jesus lay awake thinking about wounds that were doors and boys who needed their pain and patterns that required darkness to be complete.

Somewhere across the village, Judas pressed cloth to his self-inflicted cut and planned his next move.

The game wasn't over.

It had barely begun.

*And the answer, whatever the question, was still yes.*

## Young Jesus



## **CHAPTER 6:**

### **RUTH SEES FIRE**

The morning started like any other—Ruth stealing bread from Jesus's plate while he pretended not to notice, James babbling in Mary's lap, Joseph already in the workshop before the sun fully rose. Normal. Safe. Predictable.

Then Ruth started drawing.

"What's that supposed to be?" Jesus asked, watching her scratch in the dirt with a stick.

"You," she said matter-of-factly.

Jesus tilted his head. The figure looked more like a scarecrow that had lost a fight with a windstorm.

"Why is my head on fire?"

"Not on fire. Made of fire." Ruth added more flames, her tongue poking out in concentration.

"See? Fire crown. Fire hands. Fire heart."

"I'm not made of fire."

"Not yet." She sat back to admire her work. "But you will be. The light people showed me."

Jesus felt the familiar chill that came when Ruth said things like this. "When did they show you?"

"Last night. And the night before. And..." She counted on her fingers, gave up, shrugged. "Lots of nights. They really want me to remember this part."

"What part?"

She added more details to the drawing—tiny figures around the fire-Jesus, some kneeling, some

running away. "The part where you choose. They say I have to help you remember to choose right."

"Choose what?"

"Dunno." She started a new drawing next to the first. "They talk in pictures, not words. Look, this one's you too."

The second drawing showed a figure surrounded by darkness, alone.

"That's sad," Jesus said.

"No, that's thinking. See?" She pointed to small dots around the dark figure's head. "Those are the questions. You go dark to hear them better."

Mary appeared in the doorway. "Ruth, what are you—" She stopped, seeing the drawings. Her face

did that thing where too many emotions tried to happen at once.

"Mama, look! I drew Shesus when he's older!"

Mary knelt beside them, studying the pictures. Her hand found Jesus's shoulder and squeezed. "Ruth, honey, why don't you go help Father? I think he dropped something."

"But I'm not done—"

"Now, please."

Ruth huffed but obeyed, stick still in hand. Mary waited until she was gone, then quickly scuffed out the drawings with her foot.

"Mother?"

"Not now." She erased every line, then erased the erasure, smoothing the dirt until no trace

remained. "Some pictures are too true to leave lying around."

"But what did she mean? Fire crown? Choosing?"

Mary sat back on her heels, looking older than her years. "Your sister sees things. Maybe dreams, maybe... something more. But Jesus, you must understand—not everyone who sees the future should speak it."

"Why?"

"Because speaking makes it real. And some real things need time to grow in darkness before they face the light." She touched his cheek. "Like seeds. Like babies. Like you."

"I don't understand any of this. The healing, the whispers, now Ruth's pictures—"

"Shh." Mary pulled him close. He breathed in her familiar smell—bread and wool and something uniquely Mother. "You don't have to understand. Not yet. Just... be six. Be my boy. The fire will come when it comes."

"What if I don't want to be on fire?"

She laughed, but it was a wet sound. "Oh, my love. I don't think anyone wants to be on fire. But some people are made of kindling, and the world is full of sparks."

"That doesn't make me feel better."

"No. I suppose it wouldn't." She released him, stood. "Come. Let's see what your father supposedly dropped."

They found Joseph teaching Ruth to hold a chisel properly. She wielded it like a tiny spear, jabbing at the air.

"I'm carving!" she announced. "Like Shesus!"

"Carefully," Joseph warned. "Tools aren't toys."

"I know. I'm making something important." She bent over a piece of scrap wood, tongue out again.

"For later."

Jesus helped Joseph with the morning work, but his mind kept drifting to Ruth's drawings. Fire crown. Fire hands. Fire heart. What kind of choosing led to burning?

Around midday, Ruth presented her carving. It was supposed to be a dove—at least, that's what she claimed. It looked more like a lumpy potato with wings.

"It's beautiful," Jesus said, because that's what big brothers said.

"It's not done." She held it up to the light. "Needs something. Oh!" She grabbed Jesus's hand. "Put your hand on it."

"Why?"

"Just do it. Please?"

Jesus glanced at Joseph, who shrugged. He placed his palm over the wooden lump.

The river stirred—not flowing, just... noticing.  
The wood under his hand felt warm, almost alive.  
Like it remembered being a tree, remembered birds  
nesting in its branches, remembered—

"There!" Ruth snatched it back. "Now it's ready."

"Ready for what?"



"For when you need to remember you're not alone." She tucked it into her belt. "The light people said so."

"Ruth," Joseph said carefully, "these light people. What do they look like?"

She scrunched her face. "Like... like if stars were people? Or if people were made of morning? They're hard to look at straight." She brightened. "But they smile a lot. Especially when they talk about Shesus."

"And they talk about me often?"

"All the time. They think you're—" She paused, searching for words. "They think you're the answer to a very old question. But also a new question. But also not a question at all but a door." She shrugged. "They're very confusing."

That evening, after Ruth had been put to bed (clutching her lumpy dove), Jesus found her drawings recreated in the dust behind the house. She must have snuck out while Mary was preparing dinner.

But these were different. More detailed. The fire-crowned figure stood between earth and sky, hands stretched both ways. The dark figure sat in a garden, drops of something—tears? blood?—falling from his face. And a third drawing he hadn't seen before: the same figure, arms spread wide on... something. The lines were unclear.

"You weren't supposed to find those."

Jesus spun. Ruth stood in her nightclothes, looking unusually serious.

"You should be asleep."

"Can't. The light people are being very loud tonight." She came to stand beside him. "They really want you to see this. But Mama's right too. Seeing changes things."

"Ruth, I need you to tell me. In the last picture, what am I—"

"Choosing." She said it quickly, like ripping off a bandage. "You're choosing love even when love hurts. That's what makes the fire worth it."

"I don't want to hurt."

"Nobody does." She slipped her hand into his. "But the light people say... they say the hurt isn't the point. It's what you do with the hurt. You take it and turn it into... into..."

"Into what?"

"Into doors. For other people to walk through."

She yawned suddenly, enormously. "I'm tired now.  
Carry me?"

Jesus picked her up, her small weight familiar in his arms. As he carried her back to bed, she mumbled against his shoulder:

"The fire doesn't burn you, Shesus. You become the fire. And then everyone can see in the dark."

She was asleep before he laid her down. Jesus smoothed her hair, thinking about fires and choices and doors made of hurt transformed. Outside, wind scattered the dust drawings, but their truth had already been spoken.

Written in dirt, carried on wind, drawn by a child who saw too much—the future waited.

And somewhere in that waiting, fire gathered itself  
to crown a carpenter's son who just wanted to be  
six.

But six was already ending.

Seven was coming.

And with it, the first sparks of the burning Ruth  
had seen.

*The lumpy wooden dove sat on the windowsill,  
guarding their sleep. If you looked at it just right, in  
just the right light, it almost seemed to glow.*

*But that was probably just imagination.*

*Probably.*

## CHAPTER 7:

# JOSEPH'S COUGH

The cough started small—just a tickle in Joseph's throat during morning prayers. By midday, it had grown teeth.

Jesus heard it from across the workshop, a wet sound like tearing cloth. He looked up from the bench leg he was sanding to see Joseph bent double, one hand braced against the wall.

"Father?"

Joseph waved him off, but when he straightened, there was red on his lips. Just a speck. But in the slanted afternoon light, it looked like all the blood in the world.

"It's nothing," Joseph said, wiping his mouth.

"Sawdust. Makes everyone cough."

But sawdust didn't make blood. And the careful way Joseph avoided Jesus's eyes said he knew it too.

That night, the cough kept the whole house awake. Mary made honey tea. She rubbed Joseph's back with oil. She whispered prayers that sounded more like arguments with God.

Jesus lay on his mat, the river in his chest raging like flood season. He could feel Joseph's lungs from across the room—wet and heavy, like soaked wool. Could feel the tiny tears where blood seeped through. Could feel exactly how to fix it.

All he had to do was touch him. Let the river flow. Seal those tears like he'd sealed Ruth's broken skull.

He sat up.

"Where are you going?" Ruth whispered from her mat.

"To help Father."

"No." She grabbed his arm. "Not yet."

"Ruth, he's sick—"

"I know. But the light people say..." Her voice got that faraway quality. "They say some things have to break before they can become what they're meant to be. Like seeds."

"Father's not a seed!"

"Shh!" She glanced toward their parents. "I don't understand it either. But they're very sure. If you heal him now, something important doesn't happen."



"What could be more important than—" Another cough cut through the night, longer, wetter. Jesus felt it in his own chest like sympathetic lightning. "I can't just let him suffer."

"You think letting him cough is harder than fixing it?" Ruth's eyes were too wise for three years old.

"The light people say the hardest power is the power not used."

Jesus pulled free of her grip but didn't move toward Joseph. The river crashed against his ribs, wanting out, wanting to help, wanting to heal.

*Please*, he begged the whisper. *Tell me what to do.*

The whisper swirled, and for once, offered something like words: *Love holds. Love also lets go. Both cost everything.*

"I hate riddles," Jesus muttered.

The next morning, Joseph tried to work but had to stop every few minutes to catch his breath. His skin looked like old parchment, and his hands shook on the tools.

"I'll finish the table," Jesus offered.

"You're six. You can barely reach the—" Joseph started coughing again. This time, the blood wasn't a speck. It was a splash.

Mary appeared in the doorway, took one look, and made a decision. "Bed. Now."

"The order is due—"

"The order can wait. Bed."

Joseph was too tired to argue. As Mary led him away, he looked back at Jesus. "Take care of things?"

"Yes, Father."

The workshop felt enormous without Joseph in it. Jesus picked up the plane, tried to remember everything his father had taught him. Measure twice. Follow the grain. Listen to the wood.

But all he could hear was coughing from the house.

Thomas found him there an hour later, still holding the plane, staring at nothing.

"My mother sent soup," Thomas said, setting down a covered pot. "She heard your father is..." He trailed off. "Is he dying?"

"No." The word came out fierce. "He's just sick. People get sick."

"My grandfather got sick. He coughed blood too. He died."

"My father's not dying!"

"Okay, okay." Thomas held up his hands. "I'm just saying... if he does... my father says he'll help. With the workshop and things."

Jesus set down the plane carefully, so he wouldn't throw it. "He's. Not. Dying."

But that night, Joseph's breathing sounded like wind through a broken door. Mary didn't even pretend to sleep, just sat beside him, cooling his fever with wet cloths.

Jesus snuck out to the workshop. In the darkness, he found the piece of cedar that had started everything—the one that remembered fire. He pressed his palms against it.

"Please," he whispered. "If you remember burning, remember healing too. Tell me what to do."

The wood was silent. But the whisper in his bones grew louder, almost urgent: *Not yours to fix. Not yet. Wait. Trust. Let the breaking teach what wholeness cannot.*

"I don't understand!" The words came out as a sob. "He's my father! I can help him! Why won't you let me help him?"

*Because,* the whisper seemed to say, *some help helps. And some help steals the very thing someone needs to become.*

"Become what?"

But the whisper had no answer. Or maybe the answer was in Joseph's cough, in Mary's prayers, in the way suffering carved spaces in people that nothing else could carve.

Jesus went back inside, climbed onto his mat.

Ruth immediately curled against him.

"The light people say you're being very brave," she whispered.

"I'm not brave. I'm scared."

"That's what brave is. Scared but choosing right anyway." She patted his cheek with a sticky hand.

"Father will be okay. Different okay, but okay."

"How do you know?"

"Because the light people already showed me you both older. He's teaching you something important. Something about wood and waiting and..." She yawned. "Something about how love works when love can't fix things."

Jesus held her close and listened to Joseph struggle for breath. The river in his chest had calmed to a steady flow, still there, still ready, but no longer raging to escape.

Maybe this was the lesson. Not how to heal, but when not to. Not how to fix, but how to be present with what was broken.

But it was the hardest lesson yet.

And the night was long.

And Joseph's cough echoed like questions in the darkness: What is love when love must watch? What is power when power must wait? What is faith when faith sees suffering and still says "not yet"?

Jesus didn't have answers.

But he stayed awake, adding his breath to the rhythm of his father's labored breathing, as if he could breathe for them both.

As if presence was its own kind of healing.

As if sometimes, the greatest miracle was not using miracles at all.

*Dawn came slowly, and with it, Joseph's fever broke. He would live. He would heal. But the cough would never fully leave, and in years to come, it would teach Jesus things about limitation that unlimited power never could.*

*But that was still to come.*

*For now, there was just a boy, awake in the darkness, learning the hardest prayer of all:*

*Not my will. Not yet. Not unless.*



Young Jesus

*Just... here. With you. Through this. Amen.*

## **CHAPTER 8:**

# **THE STRANGER'S BLESSING**

The workshop felt different with Joseph resting inside. Quieter, but also expectant, like the wood itself was waiting to see what Jesus would do alone.

He was attempting to fix a chair leg—the joint had come loose, and normally Joseph would handle it in minutes. But Jesus's hands felt clumsy, too small for the work. He'd been trying for an hour, and the leg still wobbled.

"Need help?"

Jesus looked up. A man stood in the doorway, travel-worn but clean, leaning on a walking staff carved with symbols Jesus couldn't read.

"We're closed," Jesus said. "My father is... resting."

"I know." The stranger stepped inside, and Jesus noticed his sandals were worn nearly through. "I'm not here for carpentry. May I sit?"

Jesus gestured to the bench. The man sat carefully, as if his bones hurt, and pulled out a water skin.

"Thirsty?"

Jesus realized he was. He'd been so focused on the chair he'd forgotten morning was becoming afternoon. "Thank you."

The water was cool, with a hint of mint. As Jesus drank, he studied the stranger. Not old, but aged

by sun and road. His eyes held depths like still water.

"You're trying to do your father's work," the man observed.

"Someone has to."

"Do they?" The stranger accepted the water skin back. "Perhaps the work is trying to do you."

Jesus frowned. "That doesn't make sense."

"Doesn't it?" The man picked up the loose chair leg, examined it. "This joint—what's wrong with it?"

"It won't hold. I've tried everything Father taught me."

"Everything he taught. But what about what you know?" The stranger handed him the piece. "Feel

it. Not with your hands. With that gift you're trying so hard to hide."

Jesus went still. "I don't know what you mean."

"The same gift that wanted to heal your father last night but didn't. The same gift that makes you see more than most." The stranger's voice was gentle. "I'm not here to expose you, child. I'm here to tell you something important."

"Who are you?"

"A watcher. A wanderer. A friend, perhaps." He smiled. "My name is Simeon. And you are Jesus bar Joseph, who is also something else entirely."

The whisper in Jesus's bones hummed recognition. This man belonged to the same mystery as Nathanael, as the carved symbol, as the knowing that came without learning.

"What do you want?"

"To give you a blessing. If you'll accept it."

Jesus set down the chair leg. "Why?"

"Because you're carrying weight too heavy for six-year-old shoulders. Because you're trying to be what others need instead of what you are.

Because..." Simeon paused. "Because I've been walking for three months to find you, and my feet are very tired."

"Three months?"

"I go where I'm sent. Sometimes I know why. Sometimes I only understand after." He leaned forward. "Will you let an old wanderer bless you?"

Jesus thought of Joseph's warnings about strangers. Of Mary's fear of exposure. But the

whisper in his bones sang *yes yes yes*, and Ruth's words echoed: *The answer is yes.*

"Okay."

Simeon placed weathered hands on Jesus's head. They smelled of road dust and cedar oil. When he spoke, his voice carried weight like thunder carries rain:

"You who see what others cannot, may you learn when to close your eyes. You who heal what others cannot, may you learn when to let things break. You who know what others cannot, may you learn the wisdom of unknowing. You who carry the weight of heaven, may you remember the gift of earth."

The words sank into Jesus like water into dry ground. The river in his chest responded, not with

its usual surge but with something like...

recognition. Like coming home.

"But most of all," Simeon continued, softer now, "may you remember this: You are loved not for what you can do, but for who you are. And who you are is enough. Even when it feels like too much. Even when it feels like not enough. You are loved."

He lifted his hands. Jesus's eyes were wet, though he couldn't say why.

"I don't understand," Jesus whispered.

"You don't need to. Not yet. But when the weight gets too heavy, when the gift feels like a curse, when everyone wants you to be what they need instead of who you are—remember an old man



blessed you. Remember you are loved. Remember you chose to say yes."

Simeon stood, joints creaking. "Now, about that chair."

He picked up the leg, ran his fingers along the joint. "See here? It's not broken. It's just forgotten how to fit. Like people sometimes. Like gifts sometimes." He showed Jesus where the wood had swollen slightly. "Don't force it. Ease it. Remind it what it was made to do."

Jesus took the piece, felt along the grain with new understanding. There—just there—where the wood had lost its way. Not broken. Just confused. He eased it gently, the way Joseph eased difficult boards, and felt it remember its shape.

The joint slipped together perfectly.

"See?" Simeon smiled. "Your father taught you to fix. But you know how to heal. There's a difference."

"Will you stay? There's food, and—"

"No. My feet have rested enough. Other roads call."  
He moved to the door, then paused. "Your father will recover. Different than before, but stronger in some ways. The cough will remind him—and you—that even good men have limits. That's not weakness. That's truth."

"Wait—how do you know about—"

But Simeon was already in the street, walking with the steady pace of someone who has far to go. At the corner, he turned back once.

"The chair," he called. "Check the other legs too. Once one forgets its place, the others sometimes follow."

Then he was gone, leaving only the scent of cedar oil and the echo of blessing.

Jesus checked the other chair legs. Two more were starting to loosen. He fixed them carefully, not forcing but reminding, and thought about gifts that felt like burdens and love that didn't depend on doing.

When Joseph emerged that evening, shaky but upright, he found all the chairs repaired and Jesus sweeping sawdust with unusual focus.

"You've been busy," Joseph said, voice rough from coughing.

"A man helped. Simeon. He knew about wood."

Joseph tested one of the chairs, eyebrows rising.

"This is fine work. Better than..." He looked at Jesus sharply. "Did you do this?"

"He showed me. But I did the work."

"And this Simeon—what did he want?"

Jesus considered. "To bless me. And to tell me I'm loved."

Joseph's face went through several expressions. "Nothing else?"

"He said the cough will remind us that even good men have limits."

Joseph was quiet for a long moment. Then he pulled Jesus close, and Jesus breathed in the familiar scent of sawdust and safety, now mixed with the sharper smell of sickness survived.

"He's right," Joseph said finally. "About the limits. About the love. About all of it, I think."

That night, Jesus told Ruth about the blessing. She listened with her serious face on.

"The light people know him," she said when he finished. "They say he walks between. Like you will. But different."

"Between what?"

"Between what is and what could be. Between broken and whole." She yawned. "Between knowing and unknowing. They say that's the hardest place to walk."

As Jesus lay down to sleep, he felt the blessing settling into his bones like the whisper had—part of him now, changing nothing and everything.

Young Jesus

*You are loved not for what you can do, but for who you are.*

For the first time since his gifts had awakened, the river in his chest felt less like a burden and more like a companion.

Less like too much and more like just enough.

Less like a curse and more like what it had always been:

A blessing, waiting to bless.

*In dreams that night, he fixed broken things by reminding them what they were made to be. And somewhere, on a road leading away from Nazareth, an old wanderer smiled and blessed the dust his feet had touched, knowing it would remember.*

## **CHAPTER 9:**

# **THE BREAD AND THE BEGGAR**

The market smelled wrong.

Jesus noticed it first—beneath the usual scents of fresh bread and overripe fruit, something sharper. Hunger. Not the ordinary kind that came before meals, but the kind that hollowed people out from inside.

"Stay close," Mary said, adjusting James on her hip.  
"And don't wander."

But Jesus was already watching the edges, where shadows gathered despite the morning sun. That's where the hungry ones stayed, close enough to

smell food, far enough to avoid the merchants' sticks.

"Mama, I need bread for lunch," he said.

"We have bread at home."

"Please? The kind with seeds?"

Mary sighed but handed him two small coins.

"Quick then. We need to get back."

The baker's stall was three rows over. Jesus walked slowly, the coins warm in his palm. At the corner where nobody liked to set up—too narrow, too dark—he found what he was looking for.

A boy, maybe his age, maybe younger. Hard to tell under the dirt. He sat with his back against the wall, knees drawn up, watching everyone and no one.



Jesus stopped. The boy's eyes tracked him—dark, careful, like a wounded animal's.

"I'm getting bread," Jesus said.

The boy said nothing.

"The seed kind. It's good."

Still nothing. But the boy's throat moved when he swallowed.

Jesus continued to the baker, bought a single loaf with both coins. It was still warm, the seeds crackling on the crust. His stomach growled, reminding him he'd given his breakfast to Ruth when she'd dropped hers.

He walked back the slow way. The boy was still there, still watching.

Jesus sat down beside him. Not too close. The boy tensed but didn't run.

"I'm Jesus."

Silence.

"That's okay. You don't have to talk."

Jesus broke the bread carefully, making sure the halves were even. He held one out.

The boy stared at it like it might disappear. Or like it might be a trick.

"It's just bread," Jesus said. "Well, bread with seeds. But still."

The boy's hand moved so fast Jesus almost missed it. One moment the bread was in Jesus's hand, the next it was gone, the boy eating in quick, desperate bites like someone might take it away.

"Slow down," Jesus said. "You'll make yourself sick."

The boy did slow, marginally. His eyes never left Jesus's face.

They sat in shared silence, eating. The bread was good—nutty from the seeds, soft inside. Jesus tried not to think about how his half would have to last until dinner now.

"Why?" The word was rusty, like it hadn't been used in a while.

Jesus considered. Why? Because the boy was hungry. Because he had bread. Because the whisper in his bones hummed satisfaction when he shared. Because...

"Because you saw me," Jesus said finally. "Yesterday.  
When my father coughed blood in the street.  
Everyone looked away. But you saw."

The boy's eyes widened slightly. He had been  
there, Jesus realized. Hidden in a different shadow,  
but there.

"People don't like seeing," the boy said. More  
words now, like the bread had loosened them.  
"Sick makes them think of dying. Hungry makes  
them think of losing."

"What's your name?"

"Don't have one. Not anymore."

"Everyone has a name."

"Not beggars. We're just boy or you or get away."

He licked crumbs from his fingers. "Mostly get away."

Jesus felt the river stir in his chest. Not to heal—the boy wasn't sick. But to... know. To understand. To see past the dirt to whatever made someone think they'd lost their name.

"I could call you friend," Jesus offered.

The boy made a sound that might have been a laugh. "You don't know me."

"I know you're hungry. I know you see things others miss. I know you're careful but not mean." Jesus shrugged. "That's enough to start."

"You're strange."

"My sister says that too."

This time the laugh was real. "You have a sister?"

"Two. And a brother. Ruth is three and thinks she talks to light people. Sarah is still crawling and puts everything in her mouth. James just learned to walk and falls down a lot."

"Sounds... loud."

"Very loud. Sometimes I come here just for quiet."

Jesus paused. "Do you have family?"

The boy's face closed like a door. "Had."

Jesus knew not to push. Some doors opened when they were ready, not before.

"Jesus!" Mary's voice carried over the market noise.

"Time to go!"

Jesus stood, brushed crumbs from his tunic. The boy watched him rise, something shifting in his expression.

"Tomorrow?" the boy asked, so quiet Jesus almost missed it.

"Tomorrow," Jesus agreed. "Same place?"

A nod.

"And think about a name. Everyone needs something to be called."

"Why do you care?"

Jesus thought about it. "Because names matter. Because being seen matters. Because..." The whisper surged, offering words he didn't fully understand. "Because the kingdom is built one shared meal at a time."

"What kingdom?"

"I don't know yet. But I think it's the kind where everyone has a name."

He left before the boy could respond, jogging to catch up with Mary. She took one look at his empty hands and crumbless face and sighed.

"You gave it away."

"I shared it."

"With who?"

"A friend."

Mary's expression softened. "A hungry friend?"

"Not anymore. Well, less hungry."

She touched his cheek. "My generous boy. But you'll be hungry later."



"That's okay. Hungry I understand. He was..."

Jesus searched for words. "He was empty. That's worse than hungry."

"Yes," Mary said softly. "It is."

That night at dinner, Jesus's portion was smaller—Mary couldn't make food appear from nothing. But Ruth noticed and quietly pushed part of her bread to his side of the table when she thought no one was looking.

"For the boy who shares," she whispered.

"How did you—"

"Light people told me. They say the bread boy is important. They say you fed more than his stomach today."

"What else did I feed?"

"Hope," Ruth said simply. "They say hope is very hungry. Takes lots of feeding."

Later, as Jesus lay on his mat with his stomach not quite full, he thought about the boy with no name. About bread broken and shared. About kingdoms built one meal at a time.

The whisper hummed approval, and for once, offered something clear: *What you did today matters more than any miracle.*

*Why?*

*Because miracles amaze. But kindness saves.*

Jesus fell asleep thinking about that. About salvation that looked like shared bread and remembered names and seeing the ones everyone else called "get away."

Tomorrow he would go back. Tomorrow he would share again.

And maybe, eventually, the boy would remember his name.

Or choose a new one.

Either way, he wouldn't be invisible anymore.

And neither would the kingdom that was building itself, one broken piece of bread at a time.

*In the narrow corner where nobody liked to set up, a boy who'd forgotten his name touched the place where bread had been placed in his hands. He'd forgotten that too—the feeling of being given something without having to beg or steal or pay.*

*Tomorrow, he decided. Tomorrow he would remember how to say "thank you."*

Young Jesus

*It was a start.*

## CHAPTER 10:

# THE CARVED DOVE

The wood spoke before Jesus touched it.

He'd found the piece behind the workshop—olive wood, cast aside for some flaw Joseph saw but Jesus couldn't find. It hummed against his palms like a caught bird, warm with possibility.

"What do you want to be?" he whispered.

The answer came not in words but in knowing. His hands moved without his mind's permission, the small knife Joseph had finally trusted him with finding the shape hidden in the grain.

A dove. Of course. It had always been a dove, waiting.

"Shesus?" Ruth appeared at his elbow, quiet as shadow. "Whatcha making?"

"I'm not sure. My hands seem to know better than I do."

She plopped down beside him, bringing her mysterious lumpy carving from weeks ago. "Mine's better."

Jesus examined her creation—still more potato than bird, but carried with such pride it had developed its own dignity. "Yes. Yours has character."

"No. Yours has pretty. Mine has *important*." She held it up to the light. "See? The light people been whispering to it."

"What do they whisper?"

"Secrets. About later. About the choosing time."

Her face scrunched. "They say yours and mine gotta be together when... when something happens. But they won't say what."

Jesus's knife paused. The dove was nearly free now—wings spread, head tilted as if listening to heaven. One more cut and—

"MIRACLE BOY!"

The blade slipped. Not badly, but enough to nick his thumb. Blood welled, dropped onto the dove's breast, sank into the grain like the wood was thirsty.

Judas stood in the workshop doorway, flanked by his father and two other men Jesus recognized as synagogue elders. Their faces wore the expression of people who'd come to settle something.

"Can I help you?" Jesus asked, wrapping his thumb in his tunic.

"My son tells stories," Judas's father said. His voice was smooth as oil, dangerous as hidden rocks.

"About you. About things you can do. Impossible things."

"I tell truth!" Judas stepped forward. "The donkey. The bird. And yesterday—" His eyes glittered.

"Yesterday you fed a beggar boy with bread that appeared from nowhere!"

"I bought bread. With money. From the baker." Jesus kept his voice level. "And shared it. Is sharing a crime now?"

"Don't play games, boy." One of the elders moved closer. "We've been watching. Strange things follow



you. Your mother speaks of angels. Your sister draws pictures of fire. And you—"

"Leave my family out of this." The river in Jesus's chest stirred, not warm but cold. Protective.

"Or what?" Judas sneered. "You'll heal us? Curse us? What exactly are you?"

"I'm six." Jesus stood, the bloodied dove still in his hand. "I'm six years old and learning carpentry and trying to help my sick father and I don't understand why you hate me for it."

"We don't hate—" Judas's father began.

"Yes you do." The words poured out now, unstoppable. "You hate that I learn faster than Judas. You hate that I ask questions you can't answer. You hate that something in me reminds you of something you've forgotten. And most of

all—" He looked directly at Judas. "You hate that I won't perform for you. Won't prove I'm special so you can feel special for exposing me."

Silence fell like a stone into water.

Ruth tugged on Jesus's tunic. "The light people say be careful. This is a choosing place."

"Choosing what?" Jesus asked without looking away from the men.

"Choosing how the story goes. Whether it goes dark or bright first."

Judas's father recovered first. "Listen, boy—"

"No." Joseph's voice came from behind them, rough with sickness but steady with purpose. "You listen."

He stood in the house doorway, one hand braced against the frame. Mary beside him, James on her hip, face carved from protective stone.

"You come to my home," Joseph continued, each word careful as his finest work, "to interrogate my son. Based on what? Stories? Jealousy? Fear of a child who shows kindness?"

"He performs miracles—" Judas started.

"Does he?" Joseph stepped forward, and Jesus saw what effort it cost him. "Or does he simply see need and respond? Feed the hungry? Comfort the grieving? Show mercy?" His voice grew stronger. "If that's miraculous, then perhaps the problem isn't with my son."

The elders shifted, uncomfortable. But Judas's father stood firm. "There are laws. Traditions. Order to maintain—"

"Whose order?" Mary spoke now, quiet but fierce. "Rome's? Herod's? Or just yours—the order that keeps some up and others down, some fed and others hungry, some named and others forgotten?"

"You speak of things you don't understand, woman."

"I understand plenty." She shifted James higher. "I understand you fear what you can't control. What doesn't fit your careful categories. What suggests God might work outside your approval."

"Blasphemy—"

"Is it?" Joseph touched Jesus's shoulder. "My son feeds beggars. Asks questions. Shows unusual

compassion. If that threatens you, perhaps you should examine why."

The standoff stretched taut as a bow string. Jesus felt the moment balanced on a knife's edge. One wrong word and—

"It's just a dove."

Everyone turned. Ruth had stepped forward, holding Jesus's carving. The blood had spread through the grain, creating patterns like feathers, like flame.

"See?" She held it up to the men. "Just wood and trying and a little blood from accident. Not magic. Not miracle. Just..." She smiled her gap-toothed smile. "Just love making something beautiful."

Something in the room shifted. The elder on the left cleared his throat. "Perhaps we've been... hasty."

But Judas wasn't finished. "A week! Give me a week and I'll prove—"

"Enough." His father's hand fell heavy on his shoulder. "We're leaving."

"But Father—"

"Now."

They filed out, Judas shooting one last look of mingled hatred and desperation. At the gate, his father turned back.

"Keep your boy close, Joseph. Not everyone will be so... understanding."

When they were gone, Joseph sagged against Jesus. Together they made it to the bench, Joseph breathing hard but smiling.

"Proud of you," he whispered. "Both of you. All of you."

Mary knelt beside them, and suddenly they were all there—parents and children tangled in a knot of relief and love and fierce protection.

"The dove," Ruth said after a moment. "We should hang it somewhere. For remembering."

"Remembering what?" Jesus asked.

"Today. When we all chose each other instead of being afraid."

Joseph took the carving, examined it with craftsman's eyes. "The blood makes it more beautiful. Like it was meant to be there."

"Maybe it was," Jesus said softly.

They hung it above the door that evening, where it could catch both sunrise and sunset. Ruth insisted on hanging her lumpy creation beside it.

"Perfect," she announced. "Now everyone who comes here will know."

"Know what?"

"That this is a house where different is okay. Where questions are good. Where love is bigger than scared."

That night, as Jesus lay listening to his family's sleeping breaths, the whisper in his bones spoke clearly:

*Today you chose. Not the easy path of hiding or the dangerous path of display. The third path. The narrow path.*



*Which path?*

*The one where power serves love instead of fear.*

*Where strength looks like restraint. Where winning  
looks like everyone walking away whole.*

*Did we win?*

*You're all here. You're all together. The dove watches  
over your door. Yes, you won.*

But even as warmth filled his chest, Jesus knew this  
was only the beginning. Judas would keep  
watching. The elders would keep fearing. The gifts  
would keep growing.

And someday, the choosing would be harder. The  
stakes higher. The cost greater.

But not today.

Today, a wooden dove blessed with accidental blood guarded their door. Today, his family had stood together. Today, love had been bigger than fear.

It was enough.

It was everything.

*And in the darkness beyond the walls, forces stirred.  
Some in anger. Some in hope. Some simply marking  
time until a carpenter's boy became what he was  
always meant to become.*

*The dove kept watch, blood-marked and beautiful.*

*Waiting, like everything else, for morning.*

## EPILOGUE:

### MARY'S SCROLL

*Three months after the confrontation*

The house slept. Even the wind had stilled, as if all creation held its breath while Mary wrote words she might never speak aloud.

Her son was seven now. Still small for his age, still eager to help, still asking questions that made grown men stumble. But something had changed since that day with the dove. He moved more carefully, watched more closely, chose his words like a merchant counting precious coins.

He knew now. Not everything—God help them, not everything—but enough. Enough to understand that being different carried a price.

Enough to see the fear in neighbors' eyes. Enough to feel the weight of gifts that grew heavier with each passing season.

Mary wrote in the hour before dawn, by the light of a single lamp, on parchment she'd saved for years. Joseph didn't know. The children didn't know. Perhaps they never would. But someone had to witness. Someone had to remember the boy he was before the world began its slow work of turning him into what he must become.

That day he'd healed another bird. Mary had watched from the window as he found it in the courtyard, wing bent at that terrible angle. He'd looked around first—checking for witnesses, a habit now—then cupped it in those small hands that knew too much.

She'd seen him heal before. Ruth's skull knitting beneath his palms. The donkey's lameness melting away. But this time was different. This time, he'd hesitated. This time, tears rolled down his cheeks as the warmth flowed through him.

"Why are you crying?" Ruth had asked. (She saw everything, that one. The light people had marked her as surely as they'd marked him.)

"Because it hurts," he'd said.

"The bird?"

"No. The healing. It takes something from me now. Not much, but... something."

Mary had wanted to run to him. To tell him to stop, to hide, to be ordinary. But she'd stayed at the window, bearing witness to this terrible truth: the gifts of heaven extracted their price in the currency

of earth. What cost God nothing cost them everything.

He was still just a boy. He still laughed when Ruth put flowers in his hair. Still lost himself in the rhythm of sanding wood. Still crawled into their bed when nightmares came—though the nightmares now were of crowns made of thorns and trees shaped like crosses and voices crying his name in languages not yet invented.

"Mama," he'd asked her yesterday, "why did God make me this way if it makes everyone afraid?"

What could she say? That fear was the first face love wore when it met something larger than itself? That prophets were never welcome in their own homes? That the light he carried illuminated things people preferred to keep in darkness?

Instead, she'd held him. Her miracle boy. Her burden. Her blessing. Her son who was hers and not hers, human and more than human, seven years old and ancient as sorrow.

"Because," she'd told him finally, "someone has to show them there's nothing to fear. Someone has to go first into the light."

"What if I don't want to go first?"

"Then you go second. Or third. Or last. But you go, my love. Because that's who you are."

The dove still hung above their door, the blood-stains darkened to the color of wine. Visitors asked about it sometimes. They told them the truth—their son carved it, cut himself, the blood made it beautiful. People nodded and changed the

subject, uncomfortable with metaphors they couldn't quite grasp.

But Mary grasped it. Every mother knew blood made things beautiful. Every mother knew love required wounds.

Joseph's cough had settled into his chest like a permanent lodger. He worked slower now, rested more often, but his hands were still sure on the wood. He was teaching Jesus joints and joins Mary had never seen before—complex things that required patience, precision, faith that disparate pieces could become one whole.

"For later," he'd tell her when she asked why such advanced techniques for a seven-year-old. "He'll need to know how broken things fit together."



They didn't speak of which broken things. They didn't need to.

Judas still watched. Mary saw him sometimes, lurking at the edges of their life like a shadow waiting to gain substance. His father had forbidden direct contact, but hatred that deep didn't obey fathers. It bided. It planned. It grew.

Jesus saw him too. "He's hurt," he'd told Mary once. "Something inside him is bleeding and he doesn't know how to make it stop."

"Stay away from him."

"What if I could help?"

"Not every wound wants healing, my son. Some people build their whole lives around their pain. Take it away and they have nothing left."

He'd nodded, but she'd seen the look in his eyes.  
The same look he had before he healed the bird.  
Before he fed the beggar. Before he chose mercy  
over safety every single time.

This was who he was. This was who he'd always  
been. The one who saw hurt and could not help  
but reach for it, even when reaching cost him  
everything.

The first light touched the eastern sky. Soon the  
house would wake. Ruth would demand stories.  
James would need feeding. Jesus would disappear  
into the workshop where wood waited to teach  
him about transformation.

But for now, in this quiet hour, Mary wrote the  
truth:

## Young Jesus

Her son was the promise Israel had waited for. He was also a little boy who hated olives and laughed at his sister's jokes and sometimes forgot to wash behind his ears. He was divinity wrapped in dust, eternity measuring itself against mortal hours, infinite love learning the terrible arithmetic of human hearts.

He was seven years old.

He had already begun to save the world.

The world had already begun to break him.

And she, his mother, could only watch. And love.

And remember.

And write these words she'd hide where only light could find them, for the day when someone would need to know:

## Young Jesus

He was real. He was theirs. He was exactly what  
God looked like when God decided to be small.

And they were never the same.

Mary rolled the parchment carefully, sealed it with  
wax and tears, and placed it in a jar she would bury  
beneath the workshop floor. Above, the carved  
dove caught the first light of dawn, blood-stains  
glowing like prophecy, like warning, like hope.

\* \* \*

## ***Why This Book Might Feel Familiar***

### *A Note for Parents*

Dear Friend,

You've just finished reading about a boy who heals birds and feels too much and doesn't quite fit the world around him. A boy whose gifts set him apart. Whose questions have no easy answers. Whose very presence unsettles the comfortable.

Sound familiar?

This isn't only a book about Jesus.

It's a story about every child who carries the ache of *more*.

Every child who sees what others miss. Who weeps at suffering. Who asks why the world is broken—and wonders if they're meant to help mend it.

Maybe that's your child.

The one who gives away their lunch. Who finds God in puddles and poetry in pigeons.

The one you watch with pride and a lump in your throat, wondering how someone so soft will survive in a world that rewards the hard.

Or maybe it's you.

Maybe you were that child once.

## Young Jesus

Maybe you still are, beneath the armor adulthood  
taught you to wear.

Maybe you still hear whispers you can't explain, still  
carry the ache of *too much*, still wonder if your  
strangeness was a burden or a beginning.

Here's what Mary learns in these pages:  
Different isn't broken.  
Tender isn't weak.  
And the ache that isolates you may be the bridge God  
uses to reach others.

Your child's tears over broken things?  
That's not something to fix.  
That's holy ground.

Their impossible questions?  
Not problems to solve.  
But invitations to wonder.

Their urge to help, to heal, to make whole?  
Not naivety.  
Kingdom.

Jesus was once seven. Learning that power serves love.  
That strength looks like restraint. That being different  
is its own calling. Every child learning the same walks a  
path he walked first.

So read this story with them.

## Young Jesus

Let them see that even God began small.

Let them know that *feeling too much* may simply mean  
*feeling just enough in a world gone numb*.

And maybe, when the house is quiet, read it again—for  
the child you were.

For the miracles you learned to hide.

For the moments you chose kindness, even when it cost  
you.

The light people Ruth speaks of?

They're still whispering.

Still calling to the parts of us that remember where we  
came from.

You only need to be still enough—

young enough—

brave enough—

to listen.

With love and remembrance,

# <3EKO

P.S. Whatever your question is, the answer might be  
yes. Ask Ruth.

# Thank you for reading.

This is the first story in the Young Jesus series—a sacred imagining of the child who became the Way.

Each book traces a quiet moment from his early life, refracted through wonder, questions, and small acts of love.

If this story moved you, there is more.

## **Coming soon:**

*Book 2: The Carpenter's Apprentice*

*Book 3: Questions in the Temple*

*Book 4: The Firstborn*

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And if you believe stories like this should exist in the world, please share it with someone you love.