

YOUNG JESUS

The Firstborn



EKO

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First Digital Edition, 2025

Printed in the United States of America

CHAPTER 1:

AFTER THE FATHER

Jesus sat alone at Joseph's workbench. Morning light caught the dust motes floating where his father used to stand. The tools lay exactly where Joseph had left them seven weeks ago, but they felt foreign now—too heavy, too sharp, too permanent.

The shop held its breath. Even the wood seemed to wait, stacked in the corners like mourners who didn't know when to leave.

Young Jesus

"Just pick up the plane," he told himself. "Make one smooth pass. Begin."

His hands knew the motion. Fourteen years of watching, learning, becoming. But when he gripped the handle, something was wrong. The tool that had sung under Joseph's touch stayed mute under his.

He pressed harder. The plane stuttered, caught, bit deep. His hand slipped.

The nail was old, bent, hidden in the wood's grain. It caught his palm and opened a gash

Young Jesus

from the base of his thumb to his wrist. Blood welled immediate and red.

Jesus watched it drip onto the sawdust below.

One drop. Two. Three. Each darker than the last.

He should get a cloth. Should clean the wound. Should do something other than sit here watching his blood fall onto wood shavings. But he couldn't move. Couldn't think past the simple fact that his father's tools had drawn his blood on the very first morning he'd tried to use them alone.

Young Jesus

By evening, only a thin line would remain. By tomorrow, nothing. His body always healed too quickly, another secret to keep hidden. But some wounds stayed to remind you.

"Jesus?"

Mary stood in the doorway, thinner than she'd been seven weeks ago. Grief had carved new lines around her eyes, turned her movements careful, like someone walking on ice that might crack.

"You're bleeding."

Young Jesus

"It's nothing." He wrapped his hand in a spare cloth, watched the red seep through. "Just learning the tools have their own opinions."

She stepped into the shop, and he saw her notice everything—the untouched orders, the dust gathering on half-finished pieces, the way the morning light fell on Joseph's empty place.

"The widow Miriam came by. Her door is broken. The winter rains warped the wood, and now it won't close properly."

Not a question. Not quite a command. Just a recognition of what was.

Young Jesus

"I'll look at it," Jesus said.

"She asked for the master carpenter." Mary's voice stayed steady, but her hands twisted in her shawl. "I told her he would come."

Master carpenter. The words sat heavy as the tools. Joseph had been the master. Jesus was just—what? The son who knew how wood wanted to fit together. The boy who could feel the grain's intention. But not the master. Not yet. Maybe not ever.

"I'll go this afternoon."

Young Jesus

Mary nodded, started to leave, then stopped.

Her eyes found something in the corner—a shape beneath a cloth, gathering dust with everything else.

"What's that?"

Jesus followed her gaze. He'd noticed it that first terrible morning after, when he'd forced himself to enter the shop and found everything exactly as Joseph had left it. The project in the corner, covered, waiting.

"I don't know. Something father was working on."

Young Jesus

"You haven't looked?"

"No."

She waited, but he offered nothing more. After a moment, she left, and Jesus was alone again with the tools that had betrayed him and the blood that was already slowing.

He stood, crossed to the corner, lifted the cloth.

The wood was beautiful—olive, aged until it held light in its grain. Joseph had been shaping something, but Jesus couldn't tell what. Not a

Young Jesus

box. Not furniture. The pieces seemed to reach toward a form that hadn't quite declared itself.

There were curves that might become anything, joints cut but not assembled, patterns carved that led nowhere yet.

An unfinished thing. Like everything else Joseph had left behind.

Jesus covered it again. Whatever his father had been building, it would have to wait. There were doors to fix, orders to fill, a family to feed. The luxury of mysterious projects belonged to masters, not to boys pretending to be men.

Young Jesus

He returned to the workbench, picked up the plane again. This time he checked for nails first. This time he let the tool move at its own pace instead of forcing. The shaving curled away clean and smooth.

Better. Not Joseph's effortless grace, but better.

The morning wore on. Jesus worked in silence, learning the tools' moods, their resistances, their small violences. His hand throbbed beneath the bandage, but the bleeding had stopped. By evening, only a line would remain.

Young Jesus

A scar to mark the first lesson the shop had
taught him without his father:

Even familiar things could wound you when
everything changed.

The sun climbed higher. Somewhere in the
village, the widow Miriam waited with her
broken door. Somewhere, Mary managed a
household with too many children and not
enough coin. Somewhere, the world continued
to turn, expecting Joseph's son to become
Joseph.

Young Jesus

But in the corner, beneath its cloth, the
unfinished project waited. Patient as grief.
Silent as God had become.

Jesus set down the plane and looked at his
bandaged hand. The blood had soaked through
in the pattern of a rough cross. He rewrapped
it, tighter this time.

Then he gathered his tools—his father's tools,
his tools now—and prepared to go fix what was
broken.

It was what carpenters did.

Young Jesus

It was all he knew how to do.

For now.

Young Jesus

CHAPTER 2:

THE WEIGHT

OF WOOD

The widow Miriam arrived at dawn, before the dew had dried. Jesus heard her shuffling steps, the careful tap of her walking stick against the courtyard stones. He set down the adze he'd been sharpening and met her at the workshop door.

Young Jesus

She stood bent nearly double, one weathered hand clutching her stick, the other closed tight around something. Her eyes, clouded with age, found his face with difficulty.

"Master Jesus," she said, and the title still felt like borrowed clothes. "I've come about payment."

"The door is fixed, widow Miriam. It swings true."

"Yes." She smiled, revealing the few teeth left to her. "First time in three winters I slept without wind through the cracks. But I need to pay."

Young Jesus

She opened her fisted hand. Two small coins
caught the morning light. Roman bronze,
worn smooth. Jesus knew without counting
that the door repair was worth ten such coins.
Maybe twelve.

"This is generous," he said carefully.

Her face crumpled. "It's all I have. I know it's
not enough. I know what Joseph would have
charged. But I thought... maybe... since you're
still learning..."

"It's enough," Jesus said.

Young Jesus

"Don't lie to an old woman." Her voice turned sharp. "I may be bent, but I'm not stupid. That door took you half a day. The wood, the labor—"

"The door is fixed. You've paid. We're settled."

She studied him with those clouded eyes that seemed to see more than they should. "Your father would have—"

"My father isn't here." The words came out harder than intended. Jesus softened his voice.

"The door swings true. That's what matters."

Young Jesus

Behind him, footsteps. James appeared in the workshop doorway, sixteen and all angles, carrying the family's ledger.

"Jesus, I need to—" He stopped, took in the widow, the coins, the way they stood. His face darkened. "Widow Miriam. About your payment—"

"Is settled," Jesus said firmly.

James's eyes flicked to the two coins in Jesus's palm. He knew the accounts, knew what they needed, knew what the repair was worth.

Young Jesus

"Perhaps we could arrange additional payment later," James suggested, his voice carefully polite. "When your son sends money from Jerusalem—"

"Her son died last winter," Jesus said quietly.

"The fever."

James had the grace to flush. But he pressed on.

"Then perhaps other arrangements—"

"James." Jesus turned to face his brother fully.

"The payment is settled."

Young Jesus

They locked eyes. In that moment, Jesus saw Joseph in James's face—the same worry lines, the same practical set to his jaw. Someone had to think about money. Someone had to count costs. With Joseph gone, that someone was James.

"We need bread," James said, low enough that the widow might not hear. "We need oil for lamps. We need—"

"We need neighbors who can sleep without wind through their doors," Jesus replied just as quietly.

Young Jesus

"Blessings don't buy bread."

"Father said the wood serves. So do we."

"Father is dead." James's voice cracked on the last word. "And his generosity died with him.

We can't afford—"

"Thank you, master Jesus." The widow's voice cut through their whispered argument. She pressed the two coins into his hand with surprising strength. "Your father raised a good son. A kind son."

Young Jesus

She shuffled away, her stick tapping a slow rhythm on the stones. Jesus watched her go, noting how she moved easier now, standing a little straighter. A door that closed properly against winter wind. Such a small thing. Such an enormous thing.

"You're a fool," James said when she was gone.

"Perhaps."

"We have eight mouths to feed. Mother is still weak. The taxes are due. And you're fixing doors for two coins?"

Young Jesus

"Yes."

James slammed the ledger on the workbench.

"Then you can explain to the little ones why there's no bread tonight. You can tell Mother why—"

Movement across the street caught Jesus's eye.

A boy sat in the shadow of the opposite wall, knees drawn to his chest. Maybe ten years old, maybe twelve—hard to tell with the dirt and the way he hunched into himself. He'd been there yesterday too. And the day before.

Always alone. Always watching.

Young Jesus

As Jesus observed, three older children walked by. Without breaking stride, one kicked dust toward the boy. Another tossed a pebble—not at him, but near him. Close enough to make him flinch. They laughed and continued on.

The boy didn't react. Just pulled his knees tighter and kept watching the workshop.

"Are you even listening?" James demanded.

"There will be bread," Jesus said, still watching the boy. "There always is."

Young Jesus

"Because Father always found a way. Because Father knew how to balance kindness with survival. Because Father—"

"Because Father trusted." Jesus turned back to his brother. "Can you?"

James's jaw worked. He was trying so hard to be the man of the house, to fill shoes that would never quite fit. "Trust doesn't fill bellies."

"No. But it fills something else. Something that stays empty no matter how much bread you eat."

Young Jesus

Jesus picked up a smoothing plane from the workbench. The tool was small, meant for detail work. Joseph had loved it for its precision. He walked to the workshop entrance, then set the plane on the ground, just outside the doorway. Not obviously placed. Just... there. Where someone watching might notice it.

"What are you doing?" James asked.

"Working," Jesus said, returning to the bench.

"The widow Rebecca needs a new table. I should start cutting the pieces."

Young Jesus

James gathered his ledger, shaking his head.

"When we're begging in the streets, remember this moment. Remember choosing strangers over family."

He left, and Jesus was alone again. He began measuring wood for the table, but his attention kept drifting to the doorway. The plane sat untouched. The boy remained in his shadow.

Then, so slowly Jesus almost missed it, the boy unfolded. He crept forward, eyes darting. His hand reached for the plane, pulled back, reached again.

Young Jesus

Finally, he picked it up.

Jesus kept working, not looking directly. But he could see from the corner of his eye as the boy examined the tool. Turned it over. Ran a dirty finger along the blade. Then, hesitantly, he mimicked the motion he'd seen Jesus make countless times. Push forward, smooth and steady. Pull back. Push forward.

No wood to plane. Just the motion. But his face—his face transformed. For just a moment, he wasn't the boy who sat alone. He was a

Young Jesus

craftsman. He was someone who shaped things.

"The weight of wood," Joseph had said once, "isn't in what it weighs. It's in what it carries. A table carries meals and conversations. A door carries safety. A cradle carries hope. We don't just work with wood. We work with what wood holds."

Jesus watched the quiet boy practice with the plane and understood something new.

Sometimes what wood carried was possibility.

Young Jesus

Sometimes a tool in the right hands could carry
a different future.

The boy set the plane down carefully, exactly
where he'd found it. Then he retreated to his
shadow. But he sat differently now. Less
hunched. More... expectant.

Jesus smiled and returned to his measurements.

James was right—they needed bread. They
needed oil. They needed coin.

But they also needed to be the kind of family
that fixed doors for two coins. That left tools
where lonely boys might find them. That

Young Jesus

trusted tomorrow to provide what today
couldn't see.

The sun climbed higher. Orders waited. But
first, Jesus took a scrap of wood—too small for
anything useful—and set it beside the plane.
Just in case someone wanted to try the tool on
something real.

By midday, both plane and wood scrap had
disappeared. The boy remained in his shadow,
but now his hands moved constantly.

Smoothing invisible wood. Practicing being
someone new.

Young Jesus

That night, there was bread. A merchant, passing through, needed emergency repair on his wagon wheel. He paid well, grateful to be moving again before dark.

"See?" James said at dinner, triumphant.

"That's how it should work. Fair price for fair work."

"Yes," Jesus agreed, breaking the bread. "Both have their place."

But his mind stayed on the quiet boy. On the plane that had disappeared. On the way

Young Jesus

possibility could weigh more than coin, even
when coin was desperately needed.

Tomorrow he would set out another tool.

Something that required both hands.

Something that couldn't be hidden easily.

Something that would demand the boy choose
between safety in shadows and risk in learning.

The weight of wood, Jesus was learning, wasn't
just what it carried.

It was what it asked you to carry in return.

Young Jesus

CHAPTER 3:

WHEN THE WHISPER

WENT SILENT

Jesus woke in the darkness before dawn,
listening.

Nothing.

He lay still on his mat, breathing shallow,
waiting for the familiar warmth to bloom
behind his thoughts. The whisper that had
been with him since before

Young Jesus

memory—sometimes words, sometimes just
knowing, always present like his own heartbeat.

Nothing.

He sat up carefully, not wanting to wake his
brothers. The workshop called to him, as it did
every morning now. But this morning felt
different. Heavier. As if the air itself had
thickened in the night.

In the workshop, he lit a lamp and tried again.
Closed his eyes. Reached inward to that place
where divine guidance had always waited.

Young Jesus

Silence. Not peaceful silence. Empty silence.

The kind that echoed.

"Where are You?" The words came out cracked,
desperate.

He picked up Joseph's chisel—one of the
special tools from the hidden compartment,
the ones that had always hummed with
possibility. Now it felt dead in his hands. Just
metal and wood. Just a tool.

"Please." He gripped the chisel tighter. "I don't
understand. First Father, now You. What did I
do wrong?"

Young Jesus

The lamp flickered. Shadows danced on the walls. But no answer came.

Ruth found him there as the first gray light seeped through the window. She entered on bare feet, silent as always since her return from death. Her eyes took in everything—the unused tools, his trembling hands, the way he sat hunched like someone had carved out his center.

"It's gone," he said without looking up. "The whisper. The knowing. It's gone."

Young Jesus

Ruth settled beside him on the bench. For a long moment, she said nothing. Then: "Show me."

He held out his hands. No warmth. No light. Just carpenter's hands with new calluses and yesterday's scar.

"Try harder," she said.

"I have tried. All night. Every way I know." His voice broke. "It left when Father died. Or maybe... maybe it was never real. Maybe I imagined—"

Young Jesus

"Stop." Ruth's child voice carried ancient authority. "You're like a lamp with the wick turned down. Still glowing, but barely."

"I don't feel like I'm glowing. I feel like I'm drowning."

"Good," she said, which made him look at her in surprise. "Now you know what everyone else feels. Swimming in dark water without a voice to guide them." She touched his hand. "Maybe that's why it went quiet. So you could learn to swim."

"I don't want to swim. I want to hear Him."

Young Jesus

"And a baby wants to be carried forever.

Doesn't mean it's best." She stood, moved to the window. "What will you do today?"

"Work, I suppose. What else is there?"

"Exactly." She smiled that knowing smile that made her seem older than mountains. "What else is there but to continue? To choose without knowing? To serve without certainty?"

Jesus wanted to argue, but exhaustion weighed his bones. He'd spent all night reaching for something that wouldn't reach back. "The

Young Jesus

Roman merchant needs his chair repaired. The legs wobble."

"Then fix them."

"That's all? Just... fix them? Without the whisper, without knowing if it matters?"

"Everything matters. Or nothing does. Either way, the chair needs fixing."

She left him there, and slowly, reluctantly, Jesus began the day's work. The Roman chair was overwrought, too ornate for its own stability.

Young Jesus

He studied the joints, found the weakness,
began cutting new supports.

His hands knew what to do. That was the
strange part. Even without the whisper, muscle
memory remained. The wood still spoke its
own language of grain and possibility. But it
was just wood now. Not prophecy. Not divine
intention. Just trees that had been cut and
shaped and needed reshaping.

By midday, he'd fixed the chair and started on a
new commission—shelving for the baker's
shop. He worked harder than necessary, faster,

Young Jesus

taking on more than he could reasonably finish. If he stopped, the silence might swallow him. If he paused, he might have to face what the absence meant.

"You'll exhaust yourself." Mary stood in the doorway with water and bread.

"I'm fine."

"You're not." She set the food beside him.

"You're working like a man running from wolves."

"Maybe I am."

Young Jesus

She touched his face, turned it toward her. "Tell me."

"The whisper," he said simply. "It's gone. Since Father died, I can't... I can't hear anything. Feel anything. It's just silence."

Mary's face didn't change, but something shifted in her eyes. "I wondered when this would come."

"You knew?"

"I suspected. It happened to me too, after the angel left. Years of silence. I thought I'd been

abandoned. Thought I'd imagined it all." She
sat beside him. "But silence isn't absence.
Sometimes it's preparation."

"For what?"

"For choosing without proof. For walking
without light. For becoming who you're meant
to be when no one—not even heaven—is
watching."

"What if I choose wrong?"

"Then you learn. And choose again. And
again." She squeezed his shoulder. "The silence

Young Jesus

isn't punishment, my son. It's formation. God teaching you to walk without being carried."

That evening, Jesus tried once more with Joseph's special tools. The plane that had shaped wonders. The saw that cut perfect angles. The chisel that could find the heart of any wood.

Dead. All of them dead in his hands.

He worked past sunset, past dinner, past the time when reasonable people sought their beds.

Order after order. Commission after commission. If he could just work hard

Young Jesus

enough, fast enough, perhaps the whisper
would return. Perhaps heaven would see his
dedication and relent.

"You're bleeding again."

Thomas stood in the doorway—Thomas,
who'd started as a frightened apprentice and
grown steady under Jesus's teaching. He
pointed to Jesus's hands, where splinters had
worked deep and blood seeped slow.

"It doesn't matter."

Young Jesus

"It does." Thomas entered, took the plane from Jesus's cramped fingers. "Master, you're pushing too hard. The wood knows. It resists when you force it."

"I'm not forcing—"

"You are. Listen."

Thomas ran the plane along a board. The sound was smooth, rhythmic. Then he handed it to Jesus, who tried the same motion. The plane stuttered, caught, complained.

Young Jesus

"See? You're not working with the wood.

You're working against it. Fighting it."

Thomas's young face held concern. "What are you really fighting?"

Jesus set down the plane. His hands shook—from exhaustion, from frustration, from the terrible possibility that Thomas was right.

"Myself, maybe. Or God. Or the absence of God." He laughed bitterly. "How do you serve someone who won't speak to you?"

Young Jesus

"The same way you serve someone who will?"

Thomas suggested. "By doing what needs doing. By fixing what's broken. By teaching apprentices even when you don't have answers."

"When did you become wise?"

"When my master taught me that wisdom isn't about knowing. It's about continuing."

Thomas gathered the tools, setting them in their proper places. "Rest. Tomorrow has its own work."

Young Jesus

Alone again, Jesus sat in the darkness. No whisper. No warmth. No divine certainty. Just a young man in a workshop, surrounded by patient wood and sleeping tools.

"Maybe You're teaching me to choose without knowing," he said to the silence. "Maybe this is what everyone else lives with—this terrible freedom, this weight of deciding without guarantees."

The darkness didn't answer. But somewhere in the village, a door swung smoothly on repaired

Young Jesus

hinges. A widow slept warm. A quiet boy
practiced with a borrowed plane.

Small things. Human things. Things that
mattered whether heaven spoke or not.

Jesus wrapped his bleeding hands and prepared
for bed. Tomorrow he would wake to silence
again. Would work without whispers. Would
choose without certainty.

Would learn what faith meant when even God
seemed to hold His breath.

Young Jesus

The lamp guttered and died. In the darkness,
Jesus thought he felt something—not the
whisper, but an echo of an echo. Like someone
watching from very far away. Like love that
chose distance as its kindest gift.

Or maybe it was just hope, stubborn as
sawdust, refusing to be swept away.

Either way, morning would come.

The work would continue.

And maybe that was answer enough.

CHAPTER 4:

BROTHERS AND

BURDENS

James found Jesus in the workshop before dawn, giving away their father's best hammer to the blacksmith's son.

"What are you doing?" James's voice cracked with exhaustion and fury. He'd been up all night with the ledgers, trying to make numbers multiply like loaves.

Young Jesus

Jesus finished wrapping the hammer in soft leather. "His father's tools were stolen. He can't work without—"

"Without our tools? Our inheritance?" James crossed the workshop in three strides, but Jesus had already placed the hammer in the boy's hands.

"Thank you, master Jesus," the boy stammered, clutching the tool like salvation. "I'll repay—"

"Go," Jesus said gently. "Your father needs help with the morning work."

Young Jesus

The boy fled, leaving the brothers facing each other in the gray light. James's hands clenched and unclenched. Sixteen years old and aged ten more in the seven weeks since Joseph died.

"That was Father's favorite hammer."

"Father would have given it gladly."

"Father is dead!" The words exploded out of James, raw and ragged. "Dead, while you play at being generous with what isn't yours to give!"

Young Jesus

"Everything is ours to give. That's what makes us human."

"Being human doesn't pay taxes. Doesn't buy bread. Doesn't—" James's voice broke. He pressed his palms against his eyes. "I was up all night. Counting. Recounting. We have enough for two weeks. Maybe three if we eat less. And you're giving away tools?"

"James—"

"No." James dropped his hands, and his eyes held something harder than anger. "You're not the only one who lost him. But you're the only

Young Jesus

one pretending grief makes you holy. The rest of us just hurt."

Jesus set down the awl he'd been holding. "I'm not pretending anything."

"Aren't you? Working yourself bloody, giving away what we need, acting like suffering in silence makes you special?" James laughed, bitter as spoiled wine. "At least when Father went quiet, he still provided. You just... bleed on everything and call it blessing."

The words hung between them like suspended blades. Jesus felt each one find its mark, precise

Young Jesus

as nails. Maybe because they held enough truth to hurt.

"I'm trying," Jesus said quietly.

"Try harder. Try smarter. Try thinking about us instead of—" James gestured wildly at the workshop, at the world beyond, at everything that seemed to matter more than family.

"Instead of everyone else."

"Everyone else is us. We're all family."

Young Jesus

"Stop." James's face twisted. "Stop with the mystical words and mysterious kindness. Stop acting like you're above it all. Just... stop."

For a moment, they stood frozen. Then James moved—not planned, not thought, just seven weeks of grief and fear and sleepless nights pouring out through his fist.

Jesus saw it coming. Could have dodged.

Could have blocked. Instead, he planted his feet and let his brother's knuckles find his jaw.

Young Jesus

The impact spun him half around. He tasted copper, felt his teeth cut the inside of his cheek. But he stayed standing.

James stared at his hand like it belonged to someone else. "I... I didn't mean..."

"Yes, you did." Jesus touched his jaw, already feeling it swell. By evening it would fade. By morning, no trace. But right now it throbbed with honest pain. "And you needed to."

"Don't." James's eyes filled. "Don't forgive me. Don't make this another lesson about mercy. Just... don't."

Young Jesus

But his gaze had caught on something
else—Jesus's palm, where he'd raised it to check
his jaw. The scar from the first day, still pink,
still present.

"What's that?"

"A reminder."

"Of what?"

Jesus looked at the line across his palm. Such a
small thing. Barely noticeable unless you knew
to look. But it hadn't faded like every other
wound.

Young Jesus

"Some things stay to remind you how close pain is to love."

James reached out, almost touched the scar, pulled back. "Father's tools did that?"

"The first morning. I was trying too hard. Forcing things." Jesus flexed his hand. "It should have healed completely. Always does. But this one... stayed."

"Why?"

"Maybe because I needed it to. Maybe because some wounds are meant to be remembered."

Young Jesus

He met James's eyes. "Maybe because love leaves marks, and that's how we know it was real."

Something broke in James's face. Not anger this time—something deeper, older, more afraid. "I can't do this. Can't be him. Can't hold us together like he did."

"No one's asking you to be Father."

"Everyone is! Mother looks at me and sees his shadow. The little ones need food, need clothes, need..." He gestured helplessly. "Need more than I have. And you're here giving away

Young Jesus

hammers and speaking in riddles and I just... I
can't."

"Then don't."

"What?"

"Don't be Father. Be James. Be angry. Be
frightened. Be human." Jesus sat on the
workbench, suddenly tired beyond his years.

"We're all trying to be what we're not. You
trying to be the provider. Me trying to be the
mystic. Mother trying to be strong. But
maybe... maybe we just need to be broken
together."

Young Jesus

James stood uncertain, fist still clenched, tears
still threatening. "I hit you."

"You hit your brother. Brothers do that
sometimes."

"Father never hit anyone."

"Father never had to carry what you're carrying
at sixteen." Jesus smiled, split lip stinging. "He
was allowed to grow into his burden. You had
it dropped on you like a millstone."

"So did you."

Young Jesus

"Yes. And I'm failing at it differently than you are. But still failing." He gestured at the workshop. "Giving away tools we need. Working myself bloody. Listening for a voice that won't speak. We're both drowning, James. Just in different waters."

For a long moment, neither moved. Then James unclenched his fist, looking at his knuckles with wonder. "It felt good. Hitting you. That's terrible, isn't it?"

"It's honest."

Young Jesus

"I wanted to hurt you. Wanted you to hurt like
I hurt."

"I do."

"No, you—" James stopped. Looked closer.
Saw past the calm expression to what lived
beneath. "You do."

"Every day. Every breath without him. Every
tool that remembers his hands better than
mine." Jesus touched the scar again. "But pain
shared weighs less than pain carried alone."

"More mystical words?"

Young Jesus

"More brother words. More human words."

Jesus slid off the bench. "Hit me again if you need to. Or help me with the morning work. Or both. But either way, stop trying to be Father. We already had one. Now we need James."

Something shifted in the space between them. Not healing—too soon for that. Not forgiveness—too complicated. Just recognition. Two boys pretending to be men, carrying loads too heavy, breaking in different directions.

Young Jesus

"The blacksmith's son really needed that hammer?" James asked finally.

"Desperately. His family depends on his work."

"And we don't depend on ours?"

"We depend on more than tools. We depend on being the kind of family that gives hammers to desperate boys." Jesus picked up a plane. "But you're right too. We need to eat. We need to survive. So maybe... maybe we find a way to do both."

"How?"

Young Jesus

"Together. You watching the numbers. Me working the wood. Mother holding us all. Each doing what we can, not what we think we should."

James was quiet for a moment. Then: "Your lip's bleeding."

"Yours would be too if I'd hit back."

"Why didn't you?"

"Because you weren't really hitting me. You were hitting loss. Hitting fear. Hitting the terrible weight of being responsible for people

Young Jesus

you love." Jesus dabbed at the blood. "I've wanted to hit the same things. Just haven't found anything solid enough to punch."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be. Be honest instead. When the weight gets too heavy, say so. When you need to hit something, warn me first. When the numbers make you want to scream, scream." Jesus smiled carefully around his swollen lip. "We're allowed to be human, James. Even—especially—when it hurts."

Young Jesus

The sun was rising now, painting the workshop gold. Soon the others would wake. The day's work would begin. But for now, two brothers stood in the space between dark and light, between boy and man, between breaking and broken.

"I'll try," James said finally. "To be myself instead of his shadow. But I'll probably fail."

"Good. Failure's where the learning lives." Jesus handed him a piece of sandpaper. "Help me smooth this table. The grain's fighting me."

Young Jesus

James took the sandpaper, ran his thumb across its rough surface. "Like we've been fighting?"

"Exactly like that. Sometimes things need to resist before they can surrender to their shape."

They worked in silence for a while, side by side, the repetitive motion slowly untangling what words had knotted. The workshop filled with the whisper of sand against wood, the most honest prayer either could manage.

"Jesus?" James said eventually.

"Mm?"

Young Jesus

"The scar. You said some things stay to remind us. But remind us of what, exactly?"

Jesus paused in his sanding, looked at his palm where the pink line caught the morning light.

"That we're allowed to bleed. That healing doesn't mean forgetting. That even divine hands can be marked by human work."

"You think you're divine?"

"I think I'm your brother. I think I'm Joseph's son. I think I'm..." He struggled for words. "I think I'm both more and less than what people see. And this scar reminds me that both parts

Young Jesus

can hurt. Both parts can heal. Both parts are real."

James nodded slowly, understanding more than the words said. "I'll need more than a scar to remind me. I'll need you to keep being human when I forget you are."

"And I'll need you to keep being angry when I float too far from earth."

"Deal." James set down the sandpaper. "But I'm still not happy about the hammer."

"I know."

Young Jesus

"And we still need to figure out the money."

"I know that too."

"And Mother can't find out I hit you."

Jesus touched his already-fading lip. "Find out what? I walked into a low beam. Clumsy in the dark."

For the first time in seven weeks, James almost smiled. "You're a terrible liar."

"Another thing that makes me human."

Ruth appeared in the doorway then, looking between them with those knowing eyes.

"Better?" she asked simply.

"Different," James answered. "Maybe that's enough for now."

"It's always enough," she said. "Different is how tomorrow arrives—one small change at a time."

The morning work called. Orders waited. The family would need breakfast soon. But something had shifted in the workshop—not dramatic, not complete, but real. Two brothers

Young Jesus

had found each other in the space between perfection and failure.

"Come on," Jesus said, tossing James a cloth.

"Let's clean up before Mother sees the blood.

Then you can help me figure out which commissions pay best. Maybe between your numbers and my hands, we can keep everyone fed."

"And maybe," James said, catching the cloth,

"between your mysticism and my practicality, we can build something that actually lasts."

Young Jesus

They cleaned the blood—his and Jesus's
mingled on the workbench, impossible to tell
apart. Brothers' blood. Fighters' blood. The
kind that flowed when love got too heavy to
carry gently.

As the sun climbed higher, they worked. Not as
Joseph's replacements but as
themselves—flawed, frightened, faithful in
their fumbling way. The scar on Jesus's palm
caught the light when he moved, a small pink
reminder:

Young Jesus

Some wounds were meant to stay. Some pain
was just love wearing work clothes. And
sometimes the best thing brothers could do was
break against each other until they found a
shape that fit.

The workshop filled with the sounds of
labor—sawing, sanding, and beneath it all, the
quiet rhythm of two hearts learning to beat in
time again. Not perfect. Not healed. But
together.

It was enough. It was beginning. It was human.

CHAPTER 5:

THE RUMORS BEGIN

The shop had become a confessional without walls, and Jesus hadn't noticed it happening.

It started with the carpenter's widow from the lower quarter. She came for shelving—simple work, nothing that should have taken long. But while Jesus measured and cut, she began to speak. Not to him, exactly. To the air. To the wood. To the space between words where grief lived.

Young Jesus

"My daughter," she said, watching his hands work. "Stillborn last winter. I haven't spoken of it. Haven't been able to. But here, watching you work..." Her voice trailed off. "The wood doesn't judge, does it?"

"No," Jesus said quietly, not looking up. "It just holds what we give it."

She left an hour later. The shelving wasn't finished, but something in her face had changed. Lighter, somehow. As if she'd set down a stone she'd forgotten she was carrying.

Young Jesus

The next day brought the grain merchant. A big man with scarred knuckles and eyes that never quite met anyone's. He needed a new counting table. While Jesus joined the corners, the merchant's words spilled out like water through a broken dam.

"I cheated my brother." The admission came sudden, raw. "Years ago. The inheritance. Took more than my share, claimed Father wanted it that way." He watched Jesus's hands, steady on the wood. "He knows. Never said anything.

Young Jesus

Just looks at me with those eyes that
remember."

Jesus kept working. The plane whispered
against the grain, taking away what wasn't
needed, revealing what was always there
underneath.

"Will you tell him?" the merchant asked. "My
brother comes here. Buys from your family."

"I build furniture," Jesus said simply. "Not
judgments."

Young Jesus

The merchant left with his table half-finished
but his conscience somehow fuller. He paid
twice what Jesus asked. "For the wood," he said.
"And for... the rest."

By the third week, it had become pattern. They
came with legitimate needs—tables, chairs,
repairs. But they left having spoken secrets
they'd swallowed for years. The young mother
who sometimes hated her baby's crying. The
elder who doubted God's existence every night
but proclaimed faith every morning. The
Roman soldier who wept in his sleep, dreaming

Young Jesus

of the children his sword had found in
Sepphoris.

Jesus never asked for these confessions. Never
offered absolution. Just worked, his hands
steady on wood while their words found shape
in sawdust-thick air. Sometimes he'd
hum—low, wordless melodies that seemed to
make the speaking easier. Sometimes he'd share
a proverb Joseph had taught him. Mostly he
just listened with his whole body, the way
wood listened to the plane.

Young Jesus

"It's strange," Thomas said one afternoon, after a particularly broken man had left. "They tell you things they'd never tell a priest."

"Priests judge. Wood doesn't."

"But you're not wood."

Jesus smiled, running his thumb along a board's edge. "Aren't I? Taking what comes. Being shaped by every hand that touches me. Holding stories in my grain."

That's when the rumors started.

Young Jesus

It began innocently enough. The carpenter's widow telling her sister how she'd finally spoken her daughter's name aloud. The grain merchant's business becoming mysteriously blessed, his measures always running over. The young mother finding her baby's cries had transformed from burden to music.

"They say you have healing hands," Sarah mentioned one evening, bringing water to the workers. She kept her voice neutral, but Jesus heard the question underneath.

Young Jesus

"All hands heal when they create instead of destroy."

"That's not what they mean." She set the water jug down carefully. "Miriam's fever broke after you delivered her table. She says you never touched her, but the wood was warm. Warm like sunlight."

"Wood holds heat. It's natural—"

"Jesus." Sarah's voice was gentle but firm. "I've touched wood you've worked. It does hold something. Not heat. Something else." She met his eyes. "The whole quarter whispers about it."

Young Jesus

The whispers grew. Like smoke from a cook fire, they rose and spread and took shapes no one intended. By the time they reached the market, they'd transformed entirely.

"They say he makes the wood sing." "I heard he blessed my grain without touching it." "My daughter's fever broke after he walked past our door." "He speaks to the tools, and they obey." "The sawdust from his shop heals wounds." "He knows your secrets before you speak them."

Young Jesus

Jesus heard them all, carried on the wind of commerce and gossip. Each telling added details that had never happened, subtracted the simple truth of presence and patience. He'd become a story told by people who needed magic more than they needed carpentry.

The quiet boy—still unnamed, still watching—had become his fiercest defender.

When other children embellished the tales, he'd step forward.

Young Jesus

"You're wrong," he'd say in his voice rusty from disuse. "He doesn't do magic. He just... sees you. Really sees you. That's all."

But "that's all" was everything to people used to being invisible.

More came now. Not just for furniture but for proximity. They'd commission simple items that required multiple visits. They'd linger after paying, hoping for... something. A word. A touch. A miracle they could carry home.

"This is becoming dangerous," Matthew observed from his corner where he kept the

books. The former tax collector had developed a sixth sense for official attention. "When stories grow this fast, authorities follow."

He was right. By week's end, Jesus noticed new faces in the crowd outside the shop. Men who watched but never entered. Who listened but never spoke. Who wore the particular stillness of those paid to remember.

"Temple spies," Ruth said quietly one evening.

"They're trying to understand what you are."

"What am I?"

Young Jesus

She tilted her head, considering. "A place where people can put down what they carry. A silence that lets them hear themselves. A carpenter who builds more than furniture." She smiled. "Dangerous things, to those who profit from burdens."

That night, Jesus worked late, alone in the shop. Or not quite alone—the quiet boy sat in his usual spot, just inside the doorway now, practicing joints with scraps Jesus left out.

"Why do you defend me?" Jesus asked suddenly. "When the others tell stories?"

Young Jesus

The boy looked up, startled at being addressed directly. His hands stilled on the wood. For a long moment, Jesus thought he wouldn't answer.

"Because," the boy said finally, "they make you sound like magic. But you're better than magic. You're..." He struggled for words. "You're real. Magic fixes things from outside. You show people they can fix themselves from inside."

"Is that what I do?"

The boy nodded firmly. "My father says I'm cursed. Born wrong. Never speaks to me, just

Young Jesus

around me." He held up the joint he'd been practicing—crude but improving. "But here, you leave tools. You let me watch. You see me without..." He touched his throat. "Without needing this to work right."

Jesus felt something shift in his chest. All these confessions, all these whispered secrets, and here was the deepest truth: sometimes being seen was the only miracle anyone really needed.

"What's your name?" Jesus asked, though he'd wait months more for the answer.

Young Jesus

The boy smiled and returned to his work.

Names could wait. Recognition had already happened.

As Jesus swept the day's sawdust, he thought about the rumors. How they'd grown from simple truth—a shop where burdens felt lighter—into elaborate fiction about mysterious powers. How people needed the fiction because the truth was too simple to believe:

That someone could just listen. Just see. Just stay present while they bled out their secrets.

Young Jesus

That holiness might live in sawdust and
patience, not thunder and prophecy.

That the greatest miracle was being known
without being judged.

The whispers would continue. The stories
would grow. The authorities would come
eventually, demanding explanations for power
he wasn't consciously wielding.

But tonight, in a shop that had become
sanctuary, a broken boy practiced being whole.
Sawdust settled like blessing. Tools waited for
tomorrow's confessions.

Young Jesus

And Jesus hummed while he worked, a tune
that might have been lullaby or prayer or just
the sound of someone learning that healing
happened in the spaces between words—where
silence held more than secrets, and listening
was its own kind of light.

The rumors were wrong about the details. But
maybe, just maybe, they were right about what
mattered. Something holy was happening here.
Something that had nothing to do with magic
and everything to do with being human.
Something worth all the whispers in the world.

Young Jesus

CHAPTER 6:

MARY'S DARK NIGHT

Mary's breaking came quiet as morning
frost—there, then gone, then there again.

It started at the well. The women gathered as
always, jars balanced, gossip flowing easier than
water. Mary kept to the edge, drawing what
they needed, speaking when spoken to. She'd
learned the rhythms of widowhood, the careful
dance of presence without intrusion.

Young Jesus

"Such a devoted son," Rebecca was saying. "My Hannah's fever, gone overnight. After your Jesus delivered the cradle."

"Carpentry," Mary said carefully. "Nothing more."

"Is it?" Old Miriam leaned on her stick, eyes sharp as flint. "My nephew swears the boy's hands glow when he works. Says light pools in the wood shavings."

"Children see what they wish to see."

Young Jesus

"And mothers?" Miriam's voice carried decades of knowing. "What do mothers see?"

Mary's hands tightened on the water jar. "I see a boy who works too hard. Who gives away too much. Who—"

"Who isn't quite right." The words came from Deborah, the baker's wife. Not cruel, exactly. Almost sympathetic. "We all know it, Mary. Have known it since he was small. The way he looks at people. Like he sees through to their bones."

Young Jesus

"He's different," someone agreed. "Not bad different. Just..."

"Touched." Deborah nodded. "In the head. Happens sometimes, with difficult births. No shame in it. But perhaps..." She hesitated.

"Perhaps you shouldn't encourage the carpentry. People talk. Say he takes their confessions. Say he knows things. It feeds the wrong ideas."

Mary felt something cold settle in her stomach.

"He builds furniture. He fixes doors. He—"

Young Jesus

"He gave away Joseph's best hammer," Miriam interrupted. "To the blacksmith's boy. Just handed over your inheritance." Her voice gentled. "Mary, dear. We're worried. About you. About the younger ones. If Jesus can't... if he isn't... capable of managing things properly..."

"My son is capable." The words came out harder than intended.

"Of course." Deborah's smile was kind and terrible. "But perhaps... help. From the synagogue. From family. No one expects you to

Young Jesus

manage alone with a son who's..." She gestured vaguely. "Special."

Mary lifted her full jar, back straight as iron.

"Thank you for your concern."

She walked home with measured steps, but inside, something was crumbling. Touched in the head. Not quite right. Was that what they saw when they looked at her firstborn? Not the child who'd spoken wisdom in the Temple, but a broken boy playing at normalcy?

At home, she found Jesus teaching Martha to read. Not with scrolls—they couldn't afford

Young Jesus

those. With wood shavings, each curl carefully selected to match a letter's shape.

"See?" He held up a delicate spiral. "Bet. Like a house with a foundation. Every word needs good foundation, just like buildings."

Martha's face glowed with concentration, her small fingers tracing the shaving's curve. "Bet," she repeated. "For bayit. For baruch. For—"

"For ben," Mary heard herself say. "Son."

They looked up, and Mary saw it—what the women at the well couldn't. The infinite

Young Jesus

patience in Jesus's eyes. The way he made

learning feel like discovery rather than labor.

The gentle genius of teaching letters through

the medium he knew best.

And still, the words echoed: Not quite right.

Touched.

"Mother?" Martha asked. "Will you watch?

Jesus is teaching me the whole aleph-bet!"

"Later, little one. I need..." Mary set down the

water jar, hands trembling. "I need a moment."

Young Jesus

She made it to the back room before the tears
came. Pressed her face into Joseph's old cloak,
still hanging where he'd left it, and let seven
weeks of held breath escape in silent sobs.

Where are the promises?

The thought came unbidden, sharp as betrayal.
But once started, she couldn't stop it.

Where's the angel now? Where's the "favored
one" blessing? Where's the throne of David, the
kingdom without end? Where's anything but a
strange son giving away tools and talking to

Young Jesus

wood while the village whispers about his
wounded mind?

"Mother?"

She hadn't heard him approach. Jesus stood in
the doorway, Martha's lesson abandoned,
sawdust still clinging to his hands.

"Go back to your sister. I'm—"

"You're not fine." He entered, sat beside her on
the floor. Not touching—just present. "The
women at the well. I know what they say."

"How could you know? You weren't—"

Young Jesus

"Thomas heard. At the market. Told me I
should know what stories follow me." His voice
stayed steady, but she heard the hurt
underneath. "Touched in the head. Special.
Not quite right."

"You are right," Mary said fiercely. "You're
exactly what God—"

"What God what?" Now his voice cracked.

"What God made me to be? Then why is He
silent? Why do Joseph's tools feel dead in my
hands? Why do I fix doors for widows while

Young Jesus

the kingdom You promised stays locked in
heaven?"

They sat in the gathering dusk, mother and
son, both carrying questions too heavy for
human shoulders.

"I'm tired," Mary whispered finally. "Tired of
being strong. Tired of trusting promises I can't
see. Tired of watching you..." She stopped.

"Watching me what?"

"Disappear." The word fell between them like a
stone. "Every day, you work yourself thinner.

Young Jesus

Give away more. Speak less. It's like you're
fading into the sawdust, becoming another
ghost in this house of ghosts."

"I'm trying to serve—"

"You're trying to vanish." She turned to face
him fully. "And I'm terrified that one morning
I'll come to the workshop and find only tools
and silence. That you'll have given away so
much there's nothing left."

"Mother—"

Young Jesus

"Where are the promises?" The words burst out, years of held fear flooding free. "Where's the light I was told would guide you? Where's the favor, the blessing, the anything besides this terrible ordinary that's eating you alive?"

She pressed her palms against her eyes, but the tears came anyway. Great, gulping sobs that shook her whole body. The kind of crying that only comes when you've held it back too long.

The words hung in the air like smoke from a snuffed candle. Mary's hands trembled as she lowered them from her face, and in the terrible

Young Jesus

honesty that comes with complete exhaustion,
she heard herself whisper:

"Maybe I imagined the angel."

The moment the words escaped, she wanted to
swallow them back. But they lived now,
breathing in the space between mother and
son. Her shame was immediate, hot as
forge-fire.

"Maybe I wanted it so badly I made it real.

Maybe grief and hope tangled in a young girl's
mind until..." Her voice broke entirely. "Maybe
you're just my son. Just human. Just..."

Young Jesus

She couldn't finish. Couldn't name the fear
that had lived wordless in her bones for
fourteen years—that she'd built their entire life
on a beautiful delusion.

Jesus didn't move. Didn't speak. Just sat with
her in the gathering dark while she broke
against the sharp edge of her own doubt.

Jesus didn't speak. Didn't offer comfort. Just
sat with her in the gathering dark while she
broke against the sharp edges of divine silence.

Young Jesus

When the storm passed, she found him crying
too. Silent tears that caught the last light
through the window.

"Maybe," he said finally, "this is the promise.
Maybe ordinary is holy. Maybe giving away
hammers and fixing doors and teaching sisters
to read—maybe that's what kingdom looks like
when it's young."

"I wanted more for you. Wanted easier."

"I know." He smiled through tears. "I wanted
easier too. Wanted the whisper to stay. Wanted
Father to live. Wanted to build furniture

Young Jesus

without bleeding." He showed her his scarred palm. "But maybe the bleeding is part of it. Maybe the ordinary is what makes the holy possible."

"I don't understand."

"Neither do I. But watch—"

He stood, went to the doorway. "Martha? Bring what you've learned."

Martha came running, hands full of wood shavings. "Look, Mother! I can spell my name!"

Young Jesus

She arranged the curls carefully on the floor.

"Mem-resh-tav-heh. Martha!"

"And this," Jesus added another shaving. "What letter?"

"Aleph! For Abba. For Adonai. For—"

Martha's face scrunched in concentration. "For ahava. Love."

"Yes." Jesus looked at Mary. "For love."

And suddenly Mary saw it. Not the grand promises or cosmic purpose, but this: her strange, generous son teaching her daughter

Young Jesus

that love could be spelled in wood shavings.

Building kingdom one letter at a time.

Disappearing into service so others could

appear into knowledge.

He hadn't vanished. He had deepened. Become

less visible and more present. Like Joseph had

been—quiet strength that held everything

without announcement.

"The women at the well," she said slowly. "They

see what they need to see. A touched boy makes

them feel better about their own struggles."

Young Jesus

"Let them see it. Truth doesn't need
defending."

"But you do. You need—"

"I need you to trust me. Even when I seem to
fade. Even when the promises feel like lies." He
knelt beside her. "Can you? Can you believe
that ordinary might be the most holy thing
we're offered?"

Mary touched his face—her firstborn, her
mystery, her burden and blessing tangled
beyond separation. "I can try."

"That's all any of us can do," Jesus said. "Try. Fail. Try again. Trust that the falling is part of the rising."

Martha had returned to arranging letters, humming one of Jesus's work songs. The melody filled the space between them—simple, repetitive, strangely comforting.

"She's learning so quickly," Mary observed.

"She has a good teacher," Jesus said, then caught himself. "I mean you. The foundation you gave all of us."

Young Jesus

"I meant you." Mary wiped her face with her sleeve. "You teach like Joseph did. Patient. Present. Seeing what could be, not just what is."

"He taught me that. In the shop. 'Ask the wood what it wants to become.'" Jesus smiled at the memory. "Maybe that's what the silence is teaching me. To ask. To listen. To wait for the answer that comes in its own time."

A knock at the door interrupted. Ruth entered without waiting for response—Ruth who always knew when she was needed.

"The baker left bread," she announced, setting a wrapped bundle on the table. "Payment for the shelves. Also, three more people came asking for Jesus. I told them tomorrow."

"What did they want?" Mary asked.

"To confess things to the wood while he works." Ruth's expression stayed neutral. "The shop has become something new. Something needful."

"Something dangerous," Mary countered. "The wrong attention—"

Young Jesus

"Is already coming. Will come regardless." Ruth settled beside them, completing their small circle. "But tonight isn't about tomorrow's troubles. Tonight is about a mother remembering her son is human. And a son remembering his mother is too."

They sat in the deepening dark, three hearts beating different rhythms of the same song. Outside, evening prayers began to rise from neighboring houses. Inside, Martha spelled new words with wood shavings, building tomorrow one letter at a time.

Young Jesus

"I'm sorry," Mary said finally. "For breaking. For doubting. For—"

"For being exactly who you need to be," Jesus finished. "The mother who questions is as necessary as the mother who believes. Maybe more."

"Joseph never doubted."

"Joseph doubted plenty. He just did it quietly, in the shop, where only the wood could hear."

Jesus stood, offering her his hand. "Come. Let's eat the baker's bread. Let's watch Martha read."

Young Jesus

Let's be a family that breaks and mends and
breaks again."

Mary took his hand—scarred palm against
work-worn fingers. Let him pull her to her feet.

In the main room, the other children had
gathered, drawn by the smell of fresh bread and
the sound of their sister's excitement.

"Look!" Martha announced. "I can write
'bread'! Jesus showed me!"

And she could. Lechem spelled out in careful
shavings. The word made visible through the
medium of their daily labor.

Young Jesus

Mary watched her strange, beautiful family gather around the low table. Watched Jesus break the bread with hands that the village called "touched" but that she knew were simply touching—everything, everyone, with presence that transformed.

He hadn't vanished. He had deepened. Become what they needed by releasing what they expected.

The promises were still there, she realized. Just wearing work clothes instead of royal robes.

Young Jesus

Hidden in sawdust and patience and the slow
transformation of proximity.

"Thank you," she whispered—to Jesus, to God,
to the silence that taught by absence.

Tomorrow would bring new challenges. The
whispers would grow. The attention would
sharpen. The weight would increase.

But tonight, her son was teaching her daughter
to read. Tonight, broken bread tasted like
abundance. Tonight, ordinary was holy
enough.

Young Jesus

The kingdom was coming. Letter by letter.

Shaving by shaving. One surrendered

expectation at a time.

CHAPTER 7:

THE RETURN

OF KNOWING

The cradle sat on his workbench like a question
made of wood.

Jesus ran his hands along the rails, checking
joints that were already perfect. The young
mother would come for it today—Rebecca,
whose joy shone through her skin like

Young Jesus

lamplight. First child. First hope. First
everything.

He'd built it with extra care. Olive wood for
strength, cedar for sweetness, every surface
sanded until it felt like water. The kind of
cradle that could hold generations of dreams.

His hands stilled.

The knowing came sudden as lightning, sharp
as the nail that had scarred him. Not the old
whisper—that gentle guidance he'd grown
with. This was different. Harder. Heavier.

Young Jesus

"You're back," he said to the empty workshop.

Then, quieter, with an edge that surprised him:

"You waited until I was tired to speak. Why?"

No answer. The knowing sat heavy in his mind, but the presence behind it remained distant. Watching but not warming. Present but not personal.

"All those months of silence. All those nights I begged for one word." His knuckles whitened on the cradle's edge. "And now you return with this? With knowing that breaks rather than builds?"

Young Jesus

The workshop held its breath. Even the tools
seemed to pause in their patient waiting.

A wind stirred through the window—not
comforting but observant. Like being studied
by something that loved you but wouldn't
spare you. Like being prepared for weights you
didn't choose.

The whisper, when it finally came, wasn't
words. Just a feeling: You're strong enough
now to carry what would have crushed you
then.

Young Jesus

"Am I?" Jesus asked the darkness. "Or did you just run out of time to be gentle?"

The baby would die before walking.

Jesus gripped the cradle's edge, knuckles white.

The knowledge sat in his mind like a coal,
burning everything it touched. He could see
it—not vision exactly, but certainty. The fever
that would come. The tiny coffin. Rebecca's joy
curdling into something that would never
quite heal.

"No." The word came out cracked. "I don't
want to know this."

Young Jesus

But the knowing didn't care what he wanted. It
poured through him, relentless as spring rain.

The baker's daughter—tumors growing where
no one could see. The Roman

merchant—three days before his heart stopped.

The quiet boy who watched from the corner—

"Stop." Jesus pressed his palms against his
temples. "Please. Stop."

The workshop door opened. Rebecca entered,
radiant with late pregnancy, her husband
behind her carrying payment.

Young Jesus

"Master Jesus! Is it ready? I've been dreaming about—" She stopped, seeing his face. "Are you well?"

He forced his hands to release the cradle.

Forced his expression to soften. "Yes. Just... admiring the grain. See how it flows? Like water finding its way."

She approached, ran her fingers along the wood. "It's beautiful. Perfect. Our son will sleep so peacefully."

Daughter, the knowing corrected. *And she won't sleep long.*

Young Jesus

Jesus bit his tongue hard enough to taste copper. "I'm glad it pleases you."

"Pleases? It's..." Rebecca's eyes filled. "It's everything we hoped. You've built love into the wood somehow. I can feel it."

Her husband counted out coins—generous payment, more than asked. "For the extra care," he said. "We know you put your heart into every piece."

Tell them, something in Jesus urged. Warn them. Prepare them.

Young Jesus

But what would he say? Your daughter will die young, so love her harder? The fever comes in winter, so bundle her warmer? Words that would poison every moment of joy they had left?

"Thank you," Jesus managed. "May it... may it hold all the love you pour into it."

They left carrying the cradle between them, Rebecca chattering about names, about dreams, about the thousand small plans parents make. Jesus watched until they turned the corner, then sank onto his bench.

Young Jesus

The knowing settled into him like water into sand. Not just about the baby now. The whole quarter spread before his inner sight, each life a thread he could follow to its end. Natural deaths and violent ones. Joys that would sour. Love that would last. The terrible arithmetic of mortal existence laid bare.

"You're back," he whispered to the presence he'd begged to return. "But not how I wanted."

Ruth found him there as shadows lengthened. She took one look and understood.

"It returned. The whisper."

Young Jesus

"Not whisper. Shout. Scream." He showed her his trembling hands. "I know things. Terrible things. Useless things."

"Like?"

"Like every death between here and harvest. Like which marriages will break. Like—" He stopped. "Like things that would break them to know."

Ruth sat beside him, small and steady. "So don't tell them."

Young Jesus

"Then what's the point? Why give me
knowledge I can't use?"

"Can't use to fix. Can use to love." She picked
up a wood shaving, let it curl around her finger.

"If you knew I would die tomorrow, would you
treat me differently today?"

"Of course."

"Then you understand. The knowing isn't for
them. It's for you. To teach you that every
moment is last moment. Every cradle is
precious because it won't hold forever."

Young Jesus

"That's horrible."

"That's human. Everyone lives with this knowledge somewhere deep. You just have to carry it conscious." She stood. "There's a sick girl three houses down. Fever since yesterday."

"I know." The words came bitter. "She'll live. But her hearing won't return fully. She'll always turn her head to catch sounds."

"Then go."

"What?"

Young Jesus

"Go sit with her. Take water. Tell her mother she'll survive." Ruth moved to the door. "Use what you know to comfort, not cure."

"But I can't—"

"Can't what? Can't be human? Can't offer presence without power?" Her child's face held ancient challenge. "The whisper returned different because you're different. It's teaching new lessons now."

That night, Jesus did go. Knocked softly at the door, offered water and company. The mother wept with relief when he said—carefully,

Young Jesus

truthfully—that the fever would break by
dawn.

"How do you know?" she asked.

"Sometimes we just know," he said, sitting
beside the thrashing child. "May I stay? Night
fevers can be lonely."

He sat through the long hours, humming work
songs, cooling the girl's forehead with damp
cloth. When she whimpered, he told her stories
of wood that remembered being trees. When
she thrashed, he held her hand—gently,
humanly, letting fever run its course.

Young Jesus

By dawn, as known, the fever broke. The girl's eyes opened, focused with effort.

"I can't hear right," she whispered, panic rising.

"Everything sounds far away."

"Shh," Jesus said, making sure she could see his face. "Your ears are tired from fighting. They'll rest for a while. But you're here. You're whole.

That's what matters."

The mother clutched his hands. "You knew.

You knew she'd survive."

Young Jesus

"I hoped," Jesus corrected gently. "We all hoped."

Walking home through empty streets, he felt the knowing settle deeper. Every person he passed trailed futures—bright and dark, tangled beyond sorting. The baker rising early would find his daughter collapsed. The Roman guard would receive word of his father's death. The children playing in dust would grow to be teachers, thieves, martyrs, mothers.

All of it pressed against his skull, demanding attention, demanding action.

Young Jesus

But Ruth was right. The knowing wasn't given
to fix—how could anyone fix mortality? It was
given to shape how he moved through each
moment. To make him treasure the temporary.
To help him love without reservation, knowing
how briefly all things lasted.

Back in the workshop, he found the quiet boy
already there, practicing joints in the corner.
Still unnamed. Still faithful. Still carrying
futures Jesus couldn't quite see
clearly—something about water, about
recognition, about a voice crying out.

Young Jesus

"You were gone all night," the boy observed.

"Sitting with a sick child."

"Did you heal her?"

Jesus considered the question. "I sat with her.

Healing happened. Whether I caused it..." He shrugged. "Does it matter?"

The boy thought about this. "My mother was sick once. No one sat with her. She lived but said the loneliness hurt worse than fever."

"Then next time, you sit. You don't need special power to be present."

Young Jesus

"But you have it. Special power. Everyone knows."

"What I have," Jesus said carefully, picking up a plane, "is the same thing you have. Hands that can hold. Voice that can comfort. Presence that says 'you're not alone.' Everything else is just..." He gestured at the workshop. "Just tools. What matters is how we use them."

The boy nodded slowly, then returned to his practice. But Jesus caught him glancing over, watching how Jesus moved, how he touched each tool with deliberate care.

Young Jesus

The knowing was teaching him to move differently. Each board he cut might build someone's last table. Each joint he fitted might hold a family's final meal together. Everything temporary. Everything precious.

"You're humming again," Thomas noted when he arrived. "But it sounds different. Sadder?"

"Not sadder. Just... aware." Jesus set down his work. "Thomas, if you knew you had one day left in this shop, what would you build?"

"Strange question."

Young Jesus

"Humor me."

Thomas considered. "Something beautiful.

Something that would outlast me. Something

that would make people remember..." He

paused. "Why? Are you sending me away?"

"No. But someday you'll go. Start your own

shop. Teach your own apprentices." Jesus felt

the knowing confirm it—Thomas in ten years,

master carpenter,

CHAPTER 8:

TEACHING

WITHOUT WORDS

The kingdom spread like oil on water—silent,
inevitable, changing everything it touched.

Jesus noticed it first in the small things. The tax
collector who started giving honest change.

Not because anyone asked. Not from fear of
judgment. Simply because he'd spent an
afternoon in the shop while Jesus repaired his

Young Jesus

counting table, and something in the silence
had shifted him.

"I can't explain it," the man told his wife. "He
never said anything about my work. Never
judged. Just... was there. And suddenly I could
see myself clearly. Could see what I'd become."

The violent drunk from the upper quarter
came next. Known for his rages, his heavy fists,
the way his family flinched when he moved. He
needed a new door—had broken the old one in
anger. While Jesus measured and cut, the man's
bluster slowly drained away. When Jesus rolled

Young Jesus

up his sleeves to work, revealing the scar across
his palm, the man stared.

Then wept.

Great, gulping sobs that seemed to surprise
him more than anyone. When he could speak,
he said, "My father marked me too. With worse
than scars. I swore I'd never..." He looked at his
own hands. "But I became him anyway."

Jesus said nothing. Just kept working. But
when the man left with his new door, he
walked differently. Smaller. Softer. Like

Young Jesus

someone learning to take up less violent space
in the world.

The children noticed everything. They began
copying Jesus's way of walking—deliberate,
unhurried, each step a choice rather than habit.

The way he held tools like they were friends.

The way he looked at people—really looked,
not through or past but into.

"Why do you walk funny?" one bold boy asked.

"Do I?"

"Like you're trying not to break the ground."

Young Jesus

Jesus smiled. "Maybe the ground is trying not to break me."

The boy didn't understand, but he started walking the same way. Soon half the quarter's children moved like they were partnering with the earth rather than conquering it.

The women hummed his work songs while kneading bread. Simple melodies, wordless mostly, but they carried something. The bread rose higher. The work felt lighter. Arguments that usually sparked over borrowed flour somehow resolved into laughter.

Young Jesus

"It's that tune," one grandmother noticed.

"Gets in your bones. Makes you remember
things are temporary. Hard to stay angry when
you're thinking about that."

But it was the quiet boy who showed Jesus
what was really happening.

Still nameless, still faithful, he'd grown bolder
in his defense of the shop. When other children
embellished stories—Jesus walking on roof
tiles, Jesus making dead wood bloom—the boy
would step forward.

Young Jesus

"You're wrong," he'd say firmly. "He doesn't do magic tricks."

"Then what does he do?" they'd taunt. "Why do people change? Why do the Romans come to learn? Why do the priests watch from corners?"

The boy would think, then say, "He makes space."

"Space?"

"Space to be different. Space to be quiet. Space to put things down." He'd struggle for words.

Young Jesus

"Like... like when you're carrying too many packages and someone opens a door. They don't take your bundles. They just make room for you to set them down yourself."

Jesus overheard this one afternoon while sharpening chisels. The boy sat just inside the door now, accepted as part of the shop's rhythm. No longer copying movements but finding his own way with the wood.

"Here," Jesus said, handing him a freshly sharpened chisel. "You're ready for finer work."

The boy took the tool like a holy relic. "I am?"

Young Jesus

"You've been ready for weeks. I was waiting for you to know it."

That afternoon, Jesus taught him to carve details—the tiny cuts that turned functional into beautiful. No words beyond the necessary. Just hands guiding hands, showing how gentleness could be more powerful than force.

"My father says I'm wasting time here," the boy said quietly as they worked. "Says mute boys don't become craftsmen."

"Yet here you are, crafting."

Young Jesus

"But I can't... I mean, customers need to talk.

To explain. To negotiate. I can't—"

"You can't speak with your mouth," Jesus

corrected. "But watch—" He gestured around

the shop where three other workers shaped

wood in companionable silence. "How much

of what matters really needs words?"

The boy's hands stilled on the wood.

Something shifted in his face—a recognition, a

possibility glimpsing itself.

Young Jesus

"Your name," Jesus said suddenly. "I'd like to know it. Not because I need it. Because you're ready to give it."

The boy set down the chisel. Looked at his hands. Looked at Jesus. When he spoke, his voice was rusty but determined: "Nathan. My name is Nathan."

"Nathan," Jesus repeated, letting the name settle into the shop's vocabulary. "It means 'gift.'"

"My mother said I was God's gift. My father said she was mocking."

Young Jesus

"Maybe she was prophesying."

They returned to work, but the air felt different. Nathan had claimed himself through naming. The shop had witnessed it. Tomorrow, others would use his name, and a boy who'd been invisible would become undeniably present.

As the day wore on, Jesus noticed Matthew in his corner, ledger closed, watching the shop's rhythm with unusual intensity. The former tax collector had developed his own transformation—less dramatic than others but

perhaps deeper. He'd learned to see beyond numbers to the stories they told.

"We're losing money," Matthew said during a break. "By every measure I know, this shop should be failing. Too many free repairs. Too many underpaid commissions. Too many hours spent teaching instead of producing."

"And yet?"

"And yet we have enough. Always exactly enough." He shook his head. "It breaks every principle I learned. It should collapse. Instead, it grows."

Young Jesus

"Maybe you learned the wrong principles."

"Or maybe," Matthew said slowly, "there are principles beyond the ones Rome taught me. Economies that run on different currencies."

That evening, as the workers cleaned tools and prepared to leave, something new happened.

Instead of scattering immediately to their homes, they lingered. Nathan—now named, now visible—showed his carving to Thomas.

The Roman boy, Marcus, compared techniques with the Jewish apprentice. Natural

Young Jesus

enemies becoming natural companions over shared sawdust.

"Look," Ruth said quietly to Jesus. "Do you see it?"

He did. The kingdom wasn't just spreading through individuals anymore. It was creating connections. Building bridges from soul to soul. What started as personal transformation was becoming communal.

"Next comes the dangerous part," Ruth added.

"When it gets too big to hide. Too connected to deny."

Young Jesus

As if summoned by her words, a familiar figure appeared in the doorway. Judas. Eighteen now, sharp as a Damascus blade, carrying his darkness like a cloak.

"Still playing with wood while Jerusalem burns?" His voice held its usual edge, but something else too. Curiosity, maybe. Or hunger.

"Still watching from doorways while life happens inside?" Jesus countered.

Young Jesus

They studied each other—the betrayer-to-be and the betrayed-who-knew. The shop held its breath.

Then Judas did something unexpected. He entered. Fully. Walked to the bench where Jesus stood and picked up a piece of half-carved wood.

"Olive," he identified. "From an old tree. Gethsemane, maybe. See the grain? Twisted from wind and waiting." He set it down carefully. "You always did see too much in simple things."

Young Jesus

"And you always saw too little."

"Or perhaps," Judas said quietly, "I see exactly enough. This—" He gestured at the integrated shop, the impossible community. "This threatens everything. You know that, don't you? Every boundary you dissolve makes the boundary-keepers more desperate."

"I know."

"And you continue anyway."

"What else is there to do? Stop building because someone might tear down? Stop

Young Jesus

teaching because someone might twist the lessons?" Jesus picked up the olive wood. "This tree grew despite wind. Became beautiful because of struggle, not despite it. Should it have chosen not to grow?"

Judas was quiet for a long moment. Then:

"Your tax collector says the books don't make sense. Says you're surviving on impossible math."

"Matthew says many things."

"He's right, though. This shouldn't work. But maybe..." Judas moved toward the door, then

Young Jesus

paused. "Maybe that's the point. To make the impossible undeniable. To force heaven's hand by making earth too beautiful to abandon."

He left without another word, but his presence lingered like incense. The shop gradually emptied, workers heading home, but differently than before. They carried something with them now—not just skills but belonging. Not just changed hearts but connected ones.

"One hundred seventeen," Nathan said suddenly.

Jesus turned. "What?"

Young Jesus

"Days I sat across the street. Before you left the plane." Nathan's voice was stronger now, finding its way. "One hundred seventeen days of watching. Of wanting. Of not believing I could ever..."

He gestured at the shop, at himself holding tools, at the impossible made daily.

"Why did you count?" Jesus asked.

"Because each day I thought would be the last.

The day you'd notice me and send me away.

Tell me watchers weren't welcome. That

broken boys had no place with whole ones."

Young Jesus

Nathan ran his thumb along the chisel's edge.

"But you just kept leaving tools. Kept making space. Until sitting outside hurt more than risking coming in."

"And now?"

"Now I count different things. Days I've held tools. Pieces I've helped complete. Times someone has used my name." His eyes met Jesus's. "Twenty-three. Twenty-three times today someone called me Nathan instead of 'boy' or 'you there' or nothing at all."

Young Jesus

Thomas, organizing tools nearby, overheard.

"Tomorrow will be twenty-four. Or more.

Names are like that—once they start being used, they multiply."

As the last light faded, Jesus stood alone in the shop. No, not alone. Never alone anymore.

The space itself held presence now—every beam soaked with story, every tool warm with purpose, every grain of sawdust a testament to transformation.

He thought about the kingdom spreading. Not through grand gestures or proclaimed

Young Jesus

authority, but through the patient
accumulation of changed moments. A tax
collector counting honestly. A violent man
choosing gentleness. Children walking like the
earth mattered. Women humming songs that
made bread rise higher.

And Nathan. Nathan counting days until
counting became gratitude instead of fear.

The whisper—no longer whisper but
knowledge, weight, burden—stirred in his
chest. He saw flashes of what would come. The
shop would grow. word would spread beyond

Young Jesus

the quarter, beyond Nazareth. Authorities would come with questions that were really threats. Choices would narrow until only one remained.

But tonight, none of that mattered. Tonight, a mute boy had claimed his name. Tonight, enemies had compared woodworking techniques. Tonight, the kingdom had roots in sawdust and would grow wherever the wind carried it.

Jesus picked up the olive wood Judas had touched. Twisted from wind and waiting, he'd

Young Jesus

said. Beautiful because of struggle, not despite it.

"Thank you," Jesus said to the silence, to the tools, to whatever listened in the gathering dark. "For teaching me that kingdom comes through staying, not striving. Through making space, not taking it. Through being present to what is while what could be takes shape."

He set the wood carefully on the bench.

Tomorrow he'd begin carving it. Not sure yet what it would become—bowl, cup, something else entirely. But he'd let the wood speak its

Young Jesus

intentions, let the grain guide his hands, let the process teach what the product would reveal.

For now, he swept the sawdust into careful piles. Sacred dust from sacred labor. Each mote a moment when someone chose to change, to risk, to enter instead of observe.

One hundred seventeen days Nathan had watched. Twenty-three times he'd been named. Countless lives shifting through proximity to something they couldn't name but couldn't resist.

Young Jesus

The kingdom grew quiet as sawdust, patient as wood, inevitable as morning.

And in the corner, Joseph's unfinished project waited under its cloth. Still mysterious. Still incomplete. Still perfect in its incompleteness—like everything else being built here one careful cut at a time.

But that night, Jesus couldn't sleep.

He returned to the workshop alone, moving through darkness by memory. His hands found Joseph's unfinished project, lifted the cloth. In the blackness, he could only feel the

Young Jesus

shapes—promise without form, intention
without completion.

"Why do I feel more human every day?" he
whispered to the waiting wood. "Shouldn't it
be the opposite? Shouldn't the divine grow
stronger, not... quieter?"

His fingers traced the grain, finding the single
cut he'd added. One mark on his father's
mystery. One human choice in an inhuman
calling.

Young Jesus

The scar on his palm throbbed—the only wound that stayed, the only proof that divine hands could bleed and keep bleeding.

"I thought You were preparing me for something," he said to the darkness, to the tools, to whatever presence haunted the edges of his knowing. "But what if You're just... leaving? What if growing up means growing alone?"

No answer came. Just workshop silence and the patient breathing of wood that had once been

Young Jesus

trees, that remembered reaching toward light
even when roots held them in darkness.

He covered the project again. Tomorrow he
would smile. Teach. Build. Choose the
kingdom with both hands.

But tonight, in the honest darkness, he let
himself feel the weight of becoming—how it
pressed down like atmosphere, how it carved
away everything excess until only what was
essential remained.

Human. Divine. Both. Neither.

Young Jesus

Alone with the question of himself.

CHAPTER 9:

RUTH'S VISION

OF LIGHT

Ruth arrived at the workshop carrying
parchment and charcoal, her movements
urgent with purpose.

"I need to draw something," she said without
greeting. "Now, before it fades."

Young Jesus

Jesus set down his plane. He'd seen her like this before—caught between worlds, straddling the seen and unseen. "What did you dream?"

"Not dream. Saw. Am seeing." She spread the parchment on his workbench, began sketching with quick, sure strokes. "It's you, but not just you. The shop, but more than shop. Light, but not the kind that blinds."

The drawing took shape beneath her hands. Jesus at the center, working at his bench. But around him, others—Thomas, Nathan, the tax collector, the Roman boy, faces he didn't

Young Jesus

recognize yet. And from each figure, light. Not dramatic halos or heavenly beams, but something subtler. Like heat shimmer on summer stones. Like the gentle glow of banked coals.

"It's wrong," Ruth muttered, erasing, redrawing. "Not bright enough. But also too bright. How do you draw light that builds rather than burns?"

"Tell me what you see," Jesus said quietly. "Use words first."

Young Jesus

She paused, charcoal suspended. "You. But not
healing light—not the kind people expect.
Making light. Building it into people
through..." She struggled. "Through proximity.
Through patience. Like you're teaching them
to glow from inside."

"Ruth—"

"Wait." She returned to drawing, adding details.
The tools in the image seemed to pulse with
their own subtle radiance. The wood shavings
caught and held light like tiny stars. Even the

Young Jesus

shadows glowed faintly, as if darkness itself
could learn luminescence.

"This is what's happening," she said finally,
stepping back. "Not miracles as people
understand them. Something slower. Deeper.
You're not pouring light into people—you're
showing them they already carry it. Teaching
them to tend their own flames."

Jesus studied the drawing. It was beautiful and
terrible and true.

He could see it now through her eyes—the
workshop as forge for souls, each person who

Young Jesus

entered learning to burn brighter simply by
being seen, being valued, being given space to
discover their own light.

"When?" he asked. "When does this vision take
place?"

"Now. Yesterday. Tomorrow. Always." Ruth set
down the charcoal. "Time moves strange
around you. I see all versions at once—the shop
as it is, as it will be, as it could be. But in every
version, the same truth: light spreads through
watching, not touching. Through choosing,
not calling."

Young Jesus

A sound from the corner made them turn.

Joseph's tools—the special ones that had stayed
dead in Jesus's hands for months—were
humming. Not audibly, but somehow. A
vibration felt in bones rather than heard.

"Oh," Ruth breathed. "They're waking up."

Jesus approached slowly. The tools lay where
he'd left them, apparently unchanged. But
when he reached for the smallest chisel,
warmth met his fingers. Not the burning
power of his adolescent surges, but something

Young Jesus

gentler. Like greeting an old friend after long absence.

He lifted the chisel, and it settled into his palm with perfect weight. The workshop seemed to inhale, recognizing something returning to its proper place.

"They're singing," Ruth said softly. "Can you hear it?"

He could. Not with his ears but with something deeper. The tools knew him now—not as Joseph's son trying to fill impossible sandals, but as himself. The months

Young Jesus

of patient work, of choosing service over
power, of building kingdom through presence
rather than proclamation, had changed him.
Made him worthy of what had always been
waiting.

"Try it," Ruth urged. "Make something."

Jesus selected a piece of cedar, grain straight
and true. The chisel met wood like water
meeting shore—natural, inevitable, right.
Where the blade passed, the wood seemed to
wake. Not magical transformation, but
something subtler. The cedar becoming more

Young Jesus

itself, its essential nature revealed and celebrated.

"The tools were waiting," Ruth said, watching.

"Not for power—you always had that. Not for skill—Joseph taught you well. They were waiting for..."

"Humility," Jesus finished. "For me to stop trying to be him and start being myself. To understand that strength serves best when it doesn't announce itself."

Ruth gathered her drawing materials, but paused at the door. "There's something else.

Young Jesus

Something I didn't draw because... I wasn't
sure you were ready to see it."

Jesus set down the singing chisel. "Show me."

She returned to the bench, took fresh
parchment. This time her strokes were hesitant,
almost reluctant. What emerged made Jesus
step back.

It was him, but older. Standing in water. And
around him, not the gentle glow of the
workshop, but crowds. Massive crowds.

Pressing. Reaching. Taking. The light pouring

Young Jesus

from him looked painful, like blood from a wound that wouldn't close.

"This is the other future," Ruth said quietly.

"When hiding ends. When the workshop can't contain what you're building. When everyone wants to touch the light instead of tend their own."

Jesus's hand moved unconsciously to his scar.

"When?"

"Three years. Maybe four. The knowing will tell you." She rolled up the drawing quickly, as

Young Jesus

if it hurt to look at. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have—"

"No." He steadied himself against the bench. "I need to see. Need to know what we're building toward. Even if it..." He couldn't finish.

"Even if it costs everything," Ruth finished.

"Yes. That's what I see. The light spreads, but the source..." She touched his hand gently.

"The source gets emptied."

They stood in silence, the weight of future pressing down like storm clouds.

Young Jesus

"Then we'd better build well now," Jesus said finally. "Make the workshop kingdom strong enough to survive without its carpenter."

He set down the chisel carefully, but his hand tingled with residual connection. All of Joseph's tools would answer now, he knew. Not because he'd grown in power but because he'd grown in purpose. The inheritance hadn't been about the tools themselves but about becoming someone who could use them properly—with patience, presence, and profound respect for both wood and soul.

Young Jesus

"Show me more of the vision," he said to Ruth.

"Who are these others you drew? The faces I
don't know?"

She pointed to figures at the drawing's edges.

"Future students. word will spread—not about
miracles but about method. About a way of
being that transforms through proximity.

They'll come to learn carpentry and discover
they're learning to see. To stay. To serve
without possessing."

"And the light?"

Young Jesus

"Spreads like dawn. Person to person. Heart to heart. Not dependent on you—that's the beautiful part. Once someone learns to tend their own flame, they can teach others. The workshop kingdom becomes portable, spreadable, unstoppable."

Nathan entered then, earlier than usual, carrying something wrapped in cloth. He'd grown confident in the weeks since claiming his name, his muteness transformed from disability to different ability. He signed a greeting, then unveiled his project.

Young Jesus

It was a small box, joints tight, surface smooth.

But the lid—the lid bore a carving that made

Jesus's breath catch. The same spiral pattern

he'd been absently whittling into scraps for

months. Nathan had been watching, learning,

making the unconscious conscious.

"It's for my mother," Nathan signed. "For her

treasures. But also..." He struggled with the

signs, then spoke aloud, voice still rough but

determined. "Also to show her. What I'm

becoming. What you're teaching me to be."

Young Jesus

"I haven't taught you this," Jesus said, running his finger along the perfect spiral. "This came from you."

"No." Nathan shook his head firmly. "You taught me to see what was already there. In the wood. In myself. Same thing, really."

Ruth and Jesus exchanged glances. The vision made manifest—light spreading not through grand gestures but through small recognitions, patient observations, the quiet accumulation of transformed moments.

Young Jesus

"The box is beautiful," Jesus said. "But more—it's true. You've captured something essential in that spiral. Growth that curves back on itself but always rises. The pattern hidden in everything if we learn to see."

Nathan flushed with pride, clutching the box. But then his expression shifted. "There's something else. Men came to our street yesterday. Asking questions. About you. About the shop. About who comes and goes."

"What kind of men?"

Young Jesus

"Clean robes. Soft hands. The kind who watch but don't work." He set the box carefully on the bench. "My father answered them. Told them about the Romans learning beside Jews. About women being taught to read. About..."

He gestured at himself. "About mute boys becoming craftsmen."

The workshop felt suddenly smaller. Jesus had known this was coming—the growing attention, the threatened authorities, the inevitable collision between kingdom-building and empire-maintaining.

Young Jesus

"What did they say?" Ruth asked.

"That disorder spreads like disease. That boundaries exist for reasons. That someone should remind you of your place before you forget it entirely." Nathan's jaw set. "My father agreed with them. But I saw their fear. They're not afraid of disorder. They're afraid of the order you're building. The kind that makes their divisions look silly."

Jesus picked up the spiral-carved box, feeling its weight—not just wood but possibility, defiance, hope carved into form. "Let them

Young Jesus

come. We'll keep building. Keep teaching. Keep showing that light spreads best through open hands, not clenched fists."

"And when they try to stop you?" Nathan asked.

"Then we'll learn what the light does in darkness. How it behaves when pressed.

Whether it can survive being scattered." He handed the box back to Nathan. "But that's tomorrow's lesson. Today, you've built something beautiful. Your mother will treasure it."

Young Jesus

"She'll see the spiral first," Nathan said. "Then the joints. Then the smooth places where I learned patience. But mostly..." His voice caught. "Mostly she'll see her son making things. Being things she was told were impossible."

As the morning progressed and other workers arrived, Jesus found himself watching with Ruth's vision. Seeing the subtle light each person carried, tended, shared. Thomas teaching a new apprentice with the same patience Jesus had shown him—light passing to

Young Jesus

light. The tax collector helping with
measurements, his reformed honesty glowing
quiet but steady. Even the Roman boy, moving
easier among the others now, his light tentative
but growing.

CHAPTER 10:

ONE YEAR LATER

The morning of the anniversary, Jesus woke before dawn and knew everything had changed.

He dressed in darkness, moving quiet past sleeping siblings, and walked to Joseph's grave as the first light touched the hills. The stone marker was simple—a carpenter's grave, nothing more. But Jesus knelt and placed his

Young Jesus

palm flat against it, feeling the cold that had nothing to do with morning.

"Thank you," he whispered. "For teaching me that strength serves. That power kneels. That the greatest buildings rise from the deepest foundations."

A year of silence. A year of learning to walk without the hand that had guided him. A year of discovering that absence could be its own kind of presence.

"I understand now," Jesus continued, speaking to stone and memory and maybe something

Young Jesus

beyond both. "You weren't just teaching me carpentry. You were teaching me to decrease so others could increase. To build kingdoms in quiet corners. To trust that small things done with great love outlast empires."

Footsteps behind him. His family had come—Mary and James, Ruth and the others, even baby Joseph walking now on unsteady legs. They arranged themselves around the grave, a constellation of grief and growth.

"He would be proud," Mary said simply. "Of what you've become. Of what you've built."

Young Jesus

"We've built," Jesus corrected. "All of us. Even him, still. Especially him."

They prayed together, remembered together, then walked back to a workshop that had become something beyond Joseph's imagining.

The shop was already alive with movement. Forty-three people now called it home in some way—learning, working, discovering. The space had trebled, spreading into borrowed courtyards and converted stables. But at its heart remained the original bench where Joseph had taught his son that wood had

Young Jesus

memory, that tools were partners, that the kingdom of heaven might look like sawdust and sweat.

Nathan was already there, no longer the quiet boy but a young craftsman in his own right. He'd arranged tools on the bench—not for work but for ceremony. Each one cleaned, oiled, placed with intention.

"For remembering," he signed, then spoke aloud—his voice stronger now, used daily.

"Your father's tools. But also yours. Also mine. Also ours."

Young Jesus

Throughout the morning, people came. Not just workers but those who'd been changed by proximity to the workshop kingdom. The tax collector, bringing his ledgers to show honest accounts. The violent man, carrying toys he'd carved for children—hands that once broke things now building them. The Roman boy Marcus, walking straighter, speaking of dreams where enemies shared tables.

Each brought something. A piece of wood. A tool. A story of transformation. They laid them

Young Jesus

in the workshop like offerings, until the space overflowed with evidence of quiet revolution.

"Look what you've done," Thomas marveled, surveying the accumulated testimonies.

"Look what we've done," Jesus corrected again.

"What continues to be done. I'm just one pair of hands among many."

"But you started it."

"Did I? Or did I just make space for what was already waiting to happen?" Jesus picked up a plane—one of Joseph's, now his, someday

Young Jesus

someone else's. "Every person here carried their own light. I just... reminded them. Gave them permission to let it shine."

Sarah arrived at midday with food for the workers. Their betrothal had stretched to two years now, but she moved through the workshop with the easy authority of someone who belonged. She paused beside Jesus at the bench.

"Still patient?" he asked quietly.

"Still choosing," she replied. "Every day.

Choosing to wait for the fullness of time rather

than rushing toward convenient answers." She smiled. "Besides, I'm learning too. How to be partner to someone building tomorrow. It takes practice."

"Two more years," Jesus said suddenly, surprising himself with the certainty. "When I'm eighteen. When the workshop can stand without me. When what we've built has roots deep enough to survive transplanting."

Sarah's eyes widened slightly—the first concrete timeline he'd offered. "You're sure?"

Young Jesus

"As sure as wood grain. As certain as morning."

He took her hand briefly, publicly, breaking protocol but not caring. "You've waited with such grace. Two more years, and we'll build a different kind of kingdom together."

She squeezed his fingers once, then returned to serving food. But her smile carried sunrise.

As afternoon deepened, Jesus found himself in the corner where Joseph's unfinished project waited. All day he'd avoided it, this last mystery, this incomplete inheritance. Now, with the

Young Jesus

workshop humming around him, he lifted the cloth.

The pieces lay as Joseph had left them.

Beautiful olive wood, grain like frozen water.

Joints cut but not assembled. Purpose

suggested but not declared. Jesus had studied it

dozens of times over the year, but

understanding eluded him.

"It's not meant to be understood."

Ruth stood beside him, eyes seeing past and

present simultaneously.

Young Jesus

"What do you mean?"

"Some things are perfect in their incompleteness.

Like questions that teach more than answers.

Like searches that matter more than findings."

She touched one of the pieces gently. "Absorb

it. Add to it. But don't complete it. Let it

remain what it is—an invitation to keep

building, keep wondering, keep becoming."

Jesus lifted the largest piece, feeling its weight,

its possibility. Then, deliberately, he took his

own tools—Joseph's tools that now sang in his

hands—and added a single cut. One curve that

Young Jesus

suggested without defining. One mark that honored Joseph's vision while adding his own.

Then he covered it again.

"Some things are perfect in their incompleteness," he repeated, understanding flooding through him. The project would never be finished because it represented something that couldn't be completed—the ongoing work of becoming, of building, of creating space for others to discover their own light.

Young Jesus

As evening approached, the workshop gradually quieted. But instead of dispersing, people lingered. Someone began humming—one of Jesus's work songs that had spread through the quarter like seeds on wind. Others joined, harmonies weaving, until the shop itself seemed to vibrate with shared sound.

"This is what you've built," Matthew said, appearing at Jesus's elbow. "Not just furniture. Not even just transformed lives. But

Young Jesus

connection. Community. Kingdom hidden in plain sight."

"For now," Jesus said. "Until it grows too large to hide. Until the authorities decide we're too dangerous to ignore. Until—"

"Until is tomorrow's concern," James interrupted, joining them. "Tonight is for gratitude. For recognizing that father's death birthed something he couldn't have imagined. Something that honors him by surpassing him."

Young Jesus

Jesus looked at his brother—still practical, still worried about accounts, but transformed too by the year of shared burden. They'd learned to be brothers rather than competing shadows of their father.

"Nathan," Jesus called. "Would you close the shop?"

The young man straightened, surprised. This was master's work, owner's privilege. But Jesus gestured him forward, and Nathan understood. Carefully, reverently, he began the

Young Jesus

evening ritual. Banking the forge. Covering the wood. Setting tools in their places.

But when he reached for the lamp, Jesus stopped him.

"Let it burn tonight. Let light leak through the cracks. Let anyone passing know that something here stays awake, stays warm, stays welcome."

Nathan nodded and stepped back. The assembled workers began to disperse, but differently than a year ago. They carried connection now, invisible threads linking heart

Young Jesus

to heart, light to light. The workshop kingdom
had become portable, spreading through lives
that touched other lives.

"One year," Jesus said to the thinning crowd.

"One year since everything changed. Since I
learned that power serves best from its knees.

That kingdom builds one board at a time. That
the greatest teacher might be absence, the
greatest gift might be space, the greatest
strength might be admitting you need others to
stand."

Young Jesus

He looked at each face—Nathan confident
now, Thomas teaching others, Ruth seeing
futures in present moments, James balancing
books and brotherhood, Mary stronger for
having broken, Sarah patient as planted seeds.

"Thank you," he said simply. "For trusting a
boy pretending to be a man. For building when
you could have just observed. For becoming the
kingdom rather than waiting for it."

"Thank you," Nathan responded, speaking for
all of them, "for showing us we already were.
We just needed someone to see it first."

Young Jesus

As the last workers left, Jesus stood alone in the lamp-lit shop. No, not alone. Never alone anymore. The space itself held presence—every tool remembering every hand, every board soaked with story, every grain of sawdust a testament to transformation.

He moved to the bench where it had all started. Where he'd cut his palm and learned that some wounds were meant to stay. Where he'd discovered that Joseph's tools were waiting not for power but for humility. Where dozens had found their light by watching his.

Young Jesus

One last ritual remained.

From beneath the bench, he pulled out a piece
of olive wood. Twisted grain, wind-shaped,
beautiful in its imperfection. He'd been saving
it for something worthy of its story.

Now he knew.

Taking up Joseph's finest carving knife—the
one that sang truest in his hands—he began to
work. Not planning, just following the wood's
suggestions. The grain guided his blade,
revealing what had always been waiting within.

Young Jesus

A cup emerged. Simple. Unadorned. The kind
any family might use for daily wine.

But in the lamp's flickering light, it seemed to
hold more than its shape suggested. The
twisted grain formed patterns like water, like
wind, like the spiral Nathan had learned to
carve. Like the movement of light from soul to
soul that Ruth had drawn.

"For the wedding," he said aloud to the empty
shop. "When Sarah and I... when the time
comes. We'll drink from this and remember.

Remember that the kingdom starts small. That

twisted things can hold holiness. That ordinary cups can carry extraordinary promises."

He set the cup on the bench, still rough, still needing sanding. Tomorrow Nathan would help him smooth it. Thomas would suggest improvements. Ruth would see visions in its grain. It would become, like everything here, a community creation.

A sound at the door made him turn. The quiet boy—no, Nathan, always Nathan now—stood there, but not alone. Behind him, barely visible in shadow, stood another child. Smaller.

Young Jesus

Younger. Clutching Nathan's hand with
desperate trust.

"This is Miriam," Nathan said simply. "She
doesn't speak. Her parents say she's cursed.
Sound familiar?" His smile held pain
transformed to purpose. "I told her about the
shop. About watching. About waiting. About
finding your voice even if it's not in words."

The little girl peered around Nathan's leg, eyes
wide with fear and hope mixed beyond sorting.

Jesus knelt, bringing himself to her level. He
didn't speak—words weren't what she needed.

Young Jesus

Instead, he picked up a small piece of soft pine and the gentlest carving knife. With careful strokes, he shaped something simple—a bird, wings spread, ready to fly.

He held it out.

Miriam looked at Nathan, who nodded encouragement. Slowly, she reached out and took the wooden bird. Her fingers explored its curves, its possibilities. Then, still silent, she smiled.

Young Jesus

"Can she..." Nathan started, then reconsidered.

"Will you teach her? Like you taught me? Not to speak, but to... be?"

"We'll teach her," Jesus corrected. "You know the watching. I know the waiting. Together we know the welcome." He stood, addressing the girl directly. "Tomorrow, if you want, there will be wood shavings here. And tools small enough for small hands. And space to learn that silence has its own language."

She nodded once, clutching the bird.

Young Jesus

"Take her home," Jesus told Nathan. "But leave the lamp burning. Let her see the light from her window. Let her know something here stays awake for those who need it."

Nathan led her away, but at the door, he paused. "Jesus? What you're building here... it's not going to stop, is it? Even when you... when the time comes for whatever comes next?"

"How can it stop?" Jesus gestured at the workshop—tools waiting for tomorrow's hands, wood patient for transformation, the lamp burning steady. "It's not mine anymore."

Young Jesus

Never really was. It belongs to everyone who's found their light here. Who's learned to see others' light. Who's discovered that building kingdom means building each other."

"But you started it."

"Did I? Or did I just say yes when it asked to begin?" Jesus smiled. "Go home, Nathan.

Tomorrow brings new work. New chances to decrease so others can increase. New opportunities to build the world we want to inhabit."

Young Jesus

Nathan left, and Jesus made his final round of
the shop. Checking the forge. Adjusting tools.
Running his hands along benches worn
smooth by community labor.

At Joseph's grave that morning, he'd thanked
his earthly father for teaching him that strength
serves. Now, in the workshop Joseph built but
never imagined could hold so much, Jesus
whispered thanks to his heavenly Father.

"For the silence that taught me to choose. For
the burden that taught me to share. For the
scar that taught me some wounds are meant to

Young Jesus

stay. For the incompleteness that taught me
perfection lives in process, not product."

He paused at the door, looking back. The lamp
cast dancing shadows, making the tools seem to
move, making the wood seem to breathe.

Making the whole space feel alive with
possibility.

Tomorrow would bring new challenges. Two
more years of building, teaching, preparing.
Then marriage to Sarah. Then... something
else. Something the whisper hinted at but
didn't fully reveal. Something that would

Young Jesus

require everything he'd learned here about
patience, presence, and the power of proximity.

But tonight, a lamp burned in a carpenter's
shop. A cup waited for a wedding still two years
distant. A wooden bird nested in a mute girl's
hands. Nathan prepared to teach what he'd
learned about watching. And somewhere in the
grain of every board they'd shaped, the
kingdom grew.

"Let it burn," Jesus said one more time,
stepping into the night. "Let the light find who
needs finding. Let the warmth draw who needs

Young Jesus

drawing. Let the workshop work even while we sleep."

He walked home under stars that seemed to pulse with their own inner light. Behind him, the lamp continued its vigil. A small light in a small shop in a small town.

But light, Jesus had learned, didn't need to be large to change everything.

It just needed to keep burning.

And to trust that other lights would catch its spark and carry it forward, one heart at a time,

Young Jesus

until the whole world glowed with the quiet
revolution that began in sawdust and silence.

The boy who had bled on Joseph's tools had
become a man who made those tools sing.

The whisper that had gone silent had returned
as burden and gift intertwined.

The workshop that had seemed too empty now
overflowed with kingdom.

And in the corner, under its cloth, Joseph's
unfinished project waited. Still incomplete. Still
perfect. Still teaching that some things are

Young Jesus

meant to remain open, inviting others to add their cuts, their curves, their contributions to the endless work of becoming.

One year later, everything had changed.

And everything was just beginning.

Young Jesus

EPILOGUE:

THE VOICE

PREPARING

Three months after the anniversary

The Jordan River ran low that autumn,
exposing stones that usually slept beneath the
current. Elizabeth stood ankle-deep in the
tepid water, her aging hands cupped around
her swollen belly. At her age, pregnancy was

Young Jesus

miracle become burden—every movement
cost, every breath came short.

But the child inside her had been restless all
morning. Leaping. Turning. As if trying to tell
her something beyond the reach of words.

"Soon, little prophet," she whispered. "Soon
you'll have voice for all this moving."

A shadow fell across the water. Elizabeth
looked up to find a woman she didn't
recognize—young, travel-worn, beautiful in the
way of those who carry secrets. The stranger's

Young Jesus

hand rested on her own belly, though she
showed no signs of pregnancy yet.

"Elizabeth?" the young woman asked.

"Yes?"

"I'm Mary. From Nazareth. I think... I think we
need to talk."

The moment Mary spoke, the child in
Elizabeth's womb nearly turned himself inside
out. The movement was so violent, so sudden,
that Elizabeth gasped and would have fallen if
Mary hadn't caught her.

Young Jesus

"He knows," Elizabeth breathed,
understanding flooding through her like river
water. "My child knows yours."

They stood there, two women in the shallows,
hands clasped, futures intertwining. Around
them, the exposed stones seemed to hum with
possibility. Even the river changed its song.

"How far along?" Elizabeth asked, though she
already knew. The knowledge came with her
son's recognition—bright and terrible and
necessary.

Young Jesus

"Three months. Maybe less." Mary's voice trembled. "The angel said... but I needed to tell someone who might understand. Someone whose child also..."

"Also comes with heaven's fingerprints all over him." Elizabeth guided them to the bank, movements careful. "Yes. I understand. Zechariah still can't speak—mute since the angel's visit. But his eyes..." She smiled. "His eyes shout hallelujah every time he looks at me."

Young Jesus

They sat on the grass, two unlikely mothers
comparing impossible burdens. The sun
climbed higher, but they barely noticed. There
was too much to say. Too much to recognize.

"My son hasn't moved like this before,"
Elizabeth said as another wave of motion
rippled through her. "It's as if he's trying to
bow. Can you imagine? Bowing before he's
even born."

"Mine doesn't move yet," Mary admitted. "But
sometimes I feel... warmth. Like carrying
summer inside me. And the dreams..." She

Young Jesus

shuddered. "I dream of wood and nails. Of
crowds and mountains. Of water that becomes
wine and bread that feeds thousands."

"I dream of water too," Elizabeth said quietly.

"But also of blood. Of dancing girls and sharp
blades. Of my son's voice crying out in
wilderness places." She touched her belly. "He'll
prepare the way, the angel said. But preparation
has its own cost."

They sat in silence, watching the river run.

Somewhere upstream, a dove called to its mate.

Young Jesus

The sound made both women shiver, though they couldn't say why.

"There's something else," Mary said eventually.

"My son—Joseph's son, the one I'm raising.

Jesus. He's... changing. This past year, since

Joseph died, he's become something I don't

have words for. The workshop has become..."

She struggled. "Like a place where heaven leaks

through. Where broken people become whole

just by proximity."

"And you're afraid," Elizabeth guessed.

Young Jesus

"Terrified. Because I can see where it leads. Can see how light that bright draws darkness. How power that gentle threatens those who rule through force." Mary's hands clenched. "I want to protect him. Want to hide him. But he keeps choosing visibility. Keeps building kingdom in broad daylight."

"While mine will choose wilderness," Elizabeth said. "The angel showed me glimpses. Hair like a wild man. Clothes of camel skin. Honey and locusts for food. A voice that will make kings tremble." She laughed, but it held tears. "Two

boys. Two paths. Both leading to the same necessary ending."

"Don't say that."

"Why not? It's written in the water. In the wind. In the way my son leaps when yours is mentioned." Elizabeth took Mary's hand. "But here's what else I see—their endings aren't endings. They're doorways. What they'll build, what they'll begin, will outlast Rome. Outlast temples. Outlast every empire that thinks power means swords."

Young Jesus

The child in Elizabeth's womb went suddenly still. The kind of stillness that felt like listening. Like preparation.

"He's coming," Elizabeth said with sudden certainty. "Tonight. Maybe tomorrow. But soon. My voice in the wilderness is ready to be born."

"Then I should go—"

"No." Elizabeth gripped her hand tighter. "Stay. Please. Let my son know yours before breath separates them. Let them recognize each other

Young Jesus

in the space between womb and world. It may be the only peace they get."

That night, as Elizabeth had known, the pains began. Mary held her hands through the long hours, sang the old songs, whispered courage when the waves grew fierce. Zechariah paced outside, mute but praying with his whole body.

The child emerged at dawn—silent at first, as if gathering himself. Then he opened his mouth and released a sound that shook dust from the rafters. Not a cry. Not a wail. A declaration. A

Young Jesus

voice that would make straight the crooked
paths, already practicing.

"John," Elizabeth gasped. "His name is John."

The moment she spoke it, Zechariah's tongue
loosened. Nine months of enforced silence
broke like a dam. He burst into the room,
words pouring out—prophecy, praise,
warning, promise, all tangled together:

"Blessed be the Lord! For He has visited His
people! And you, child—" He lifted his son
with shaking hands. "You will go before the
Lord to prepare His ways. To give knowledge.

Young Jesus

To guide feet. To be the voice that says 'Look!

See! He comes!'"

Baby John stopped crying. His infant eyes seemed to focus on something beyond the room. Then he turned his head toward Mary, and something passed between them—the child minutes old and the young woman carrying salvation.

"He knows," Zechariah whispered. "Already he knows."

Mary stayed three days. Long enough to see John settle into the world. Long enough to feel

Young Jesus

her own child quicken for the first time—a
flutter like wings, like promise, like the future
arriving early.

On the last morning, as she prepared to leave,
Elizabeth pulled her aside.

"They won't meet again for thirty years," she
said quietly. "Your son and mine. But when
they do, here at this river, everything changes.
John will baptize. Jesus will rise from the water.
Heaven will tear open." Her eyes went distant.
"And three years later..."

Young Jesus

"I know," Mary said. "I've always known.

Swords will pierce. But first..." She touched her belly, where divinity grew cell by cell. "First they get to be children. First they get to learn and laugh and skin their knees. First they get to be human."

"May it be enough," Elizabeth prayed. "May the human years give them strength for the divine ones."

They embraced at the door—two mothers carrying the future, knowing the cost, choosing yes anyway.

Young Jesus

As Mary walked the road back to Nazareth, she felt her child move again. Stronger this time. A greeting, maybe. Or a promise. Or just a baby stretching toward life.

Behind her, in a house by the Jordan, a voice that would prepare the way learned to cry.

Ahead of her, in a carpenter's shop, a young man built furniture and kingdom with equal care, not knowing his cousin had just been born. Not knowing the countdown had begun. Not knowing that in thirty years, these two

Young Jesus

boys would meet at water's edge and split
history in half.

But knowing enough. Knowing that today
there was wood to shape. Family to feed. Light
to tend in broken people.

The voice was born. The Word was growing.
The kingdom crept forward one heartbeat at a
time.

And somewhere between Jordan and Nazareth,
between prophecy and carpentry, between
what was and what would be, the future held

Young Jesus

its breath and waited for two boys to become
who they already were.

* * *

When They Know Too Much

A Letter to Parents

Dear Friend,

You've just finished reading about a boy who knows when babies will die. Who sees which marriages will break. Who carries tomorrow's griefs in today's chest.

This isn't just a story about Jesus.

It's about every child who knows too much, too soon.

Every child who sees the ending in the beginning. Who notices which parent has been crying. Who understands what the hushed voices mean. Who carries family secrets they never asked to hold.

Maybe that's your child.

The one who stopped being surprised by bad news. Who helps without being asked because they already know. Who gives away their best

things because they've learned nothing lasts anyway.

Or maybe it's you.

Maybe you were the child who knew which uncle drank too much. Which bills made your mother's hands shake. Which smiles were real and which were performed.

Here's what Jesus learns in these pages:

Knowing doesn't mean telling.

Sometimes the kindest thing is to let people have their moment of joy, even when you see the shadow coming.

Presence matters more than prevention.

He can't stop the fever. But he can sit through the night. He can't save every baby. But he can build each cradle with extra love.

The knowing is for you, not them.

To help you treasure the temporary. To teach you that every ordinary moment is someone's

last moment. To show you how to love without reservation, knowing the cost.

Your child who sees too much? They're not broken. They're just carrying a different kind of sight.

Your child who knows what's coming? They're learning the hardest lesson: that love chooses to stay anyway.

Your child who works harder when they're sad? They've discovered what Jesus did—that sometimes the only way through is to keep your hands busy while your heart sorts itself out.

Book Four is about the terrible gift of seeing clearly in a world that prefers soft focus.

Just like your child.

Just like you once were.

With understanding,

<3EKO

Young Jesus

Thank you for reading.

This is the 4th 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.

Book 1: The Bird and the Whisper

Book 2: The Carpenter's Apprentice

Book 3: Questions in the Temple

Book 4: The Firstborn

To explore more books, artwork, and behind-the-scenes insights, visit:

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