

FORGOTTEN FOLLOWERS
from BROKEN TO BOLD

A NOVEL

BY ELAINE RICKER KELLY



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1. FICTION, CHRISTIAN, BIBLICAL

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DEDICATION:

to my mother,
Audrey Ricker

A follower, supporter, disciple, and apostle of Jesus

“As he was speaking, a woman in the crowd called out, “God bless your mother—the womb from which you came, and the breasts that nursed you! Jesus replied, “But even more blessed are all who hear the word of God and put it into practice.” (Luke 11:27-28 NLT)

“God doesn’t want **us** to be shy with his gifts,
but bold and loving and sensible.”
(2 Timothy 1:7 (MSG))

NOTE TO READER

I wrote this novel to inspire and empower you and I hope it gives you healing, hope, and peace. It shines the light on women who interacted with Jesus, many of whom have been demeaned or forgotten. Nevertheless, God filled them with the Holy Spirit and made them bold. I selected events based on when women were likely eyewitnesses in the four Gospels and the first two chapters of Acts. It is a biblical fiction and does not replace Scripture or historical references. Variations of the names Mary and Simon are used to facilitate the story. I invite you to imagine yourself as an eyewitness, consider who Jesus is, work out what you believe and live out your faith.

The novel uses everyday language, avoiding “church words.” Definitions/translations include:

Eyewitness: a person who has personally seen something happen and can give a firsthand description

Patron: a person who gives financial or other support to a person, activity, or cause; a sponsor/provider

Supporter: a person who promotes, advocates, or champions a cause or movement

Disciple: a student of a teacher; a follower who wants to emulate a leader; a believer

Apostle: a male or female sent by God to deliver God’s messages to humanity

Shalom: Hebrew greeting at meeting or parting, meaning ‘peace’

Rabbi: a Hebrew word for teacher or religious leader

Abba: papa, dad, informal term for father in Hebrew

Eema: mama, mom, informal term for mother in Hebrew

Prophet: a human of any gender delivering God's guidance to humanity; sometimes foretelling events

Messiah: deliverer promised in Hebrew scripture (Messiah in Hebrew/Christ in Greek)

Scripture: sacred writings; in this novel, refers primarily to the Hebrew Bible (also called Old Testament)

Demons or evil spirits: defined to refer to a variety of illnesses that were invisible or were not understood or identified. Today, we may identify epilepsy, mental illness, clinical depression, or other disorders. Whether or not the novel identifies the illness, the focus is to show that Jesus healed people, restored them to their community and gave them hope.

Full character descriptions, blogs, research, biblical references and FAQ are on my website: www.elainekelly.ca.

BIBLICAL REFERENCES TO “MANY OTHER WOMEN”

The Bible refers to “**many women**” who are eyewitnesses, supporters, patrons, disciples, and apostles. They include mothers, childless, married, single, widowed, daughters, and sisters.

The twelve were with him “along with **some women** who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases. **Among them** were Mary Magdalene, from whom he had expelled seven demons; Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod’s business manager; Susannah; and **many others** who were contributing from their own resources to support Jesus and his disciples.” (Luke 8: 2-3 NLT)

“**Many women** were standing away from the cross, watching. These were **the women who had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for him**. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of James and John were there.” (Matthew 27:55-56 ERV)

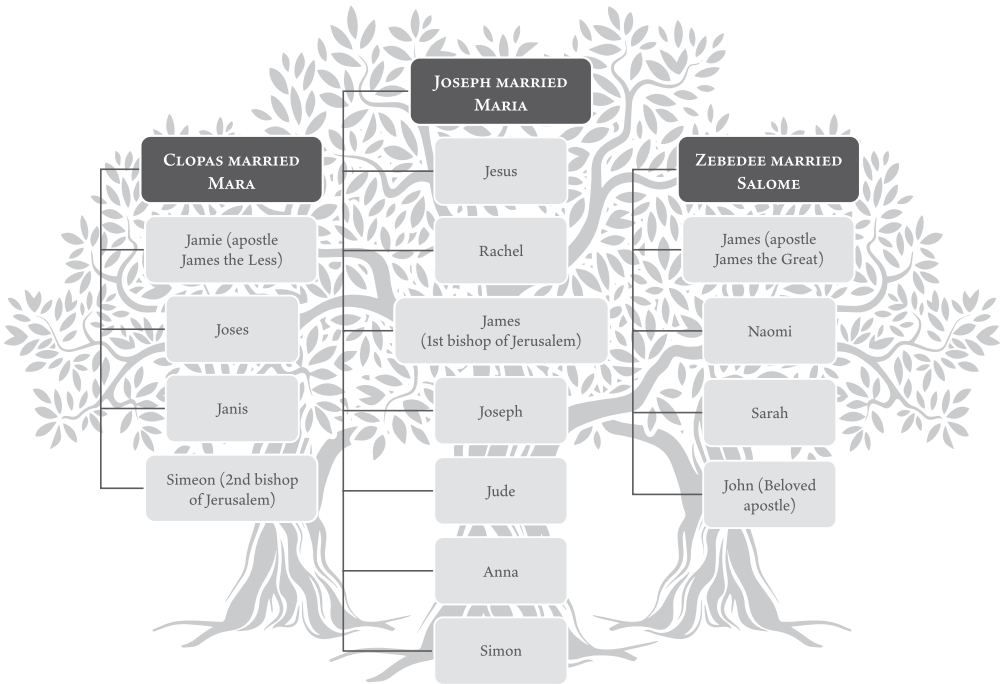
“**Some women** were there, watching from a distance, including Mary Magdalene, Mary (the mother of James the younger and of Joseph), and Salome. **They had been followers of Jesus and had cared for him** while he was in Galilee. **Many other women** who had come with him to Jerusalem were also there.” (Mark 15:40-41 NLT)

“Those who knew Jesus well, along with the **women who had followed him from Galilee**, stood at a respectful distance and kept vigil.” (Luke 23:49 MSG)

“Standing near the cross were Jesus’s mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary (the wife of Clopas), and Mary Magdalene.” (John 19:25 NLT)

“They all met together and were constantly united in prayer, along with Mary the mother of Jesus, **several other women**, and the brothers of Jesus.” (Acts 1:14 NLT)

FAMILY TREES



This novel portrays Mara as the wife of Clopas and sister-in-law to Maria. Early historians Hegesippus and Eusebius state Clopas was a brother of Joseph. James the Less, son of Alphaeus (another name for Clopas), is one of the twelve disciples (Matthew 10:3, Mark 3:18, Luke 6:15, Acts 1:13).

This novel follows the Protestant view that Jesus's brothers (named in Mark 6:3, Matthew 13:55) were children of Maria. The novel reflects that Jesus's siblings did not believe in Jesus during his ministry (John 7:5) but believed after the resurrection (Acts 1:14). Some theologians say Maria remained a virgin and view Jesus's brothers as close kin, either stepsiblings (if Joseph had children from a prior marriage), or cousins (children of Mara, conflating the two James into one).

This novel shows Salome unrelated to Maria. Some say they were half-sisters: St. Anne had a daughter from each of three husbands: Maria (mother of Jesus), Mara (daughter of Clopas), and Salome (Mary Salome).

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Twelve Women Who were Eyewitnesses, Patrons, Disciples, and Apostles

1. **Mara (Mary of Clopas)**: Traumatized by abuse, Mara battles anxiety and low self-esteem. Mother of Jamie, Joses, Janis, and Simeon. Wife of blacksmith Clopas, Joseph's brother. Sister-in-law to Maria; Aunt to Jesus.
2. **Maria of Nazareth (Mary, mother of Jesus)**: Widow of Joseph. Mother of Jesus, Rachel, James, Joseph, Jude, Anna, and Simon; receives the Holy Spirit, becomes a disciple.
3. **Salome**: Mother of apostles James, John, daughters Naomi, Sarah; fishwife, wife of Zebedee.
4. **Joanna**: Torn by loyalty to both sides of her mixed-heritage, Joanna feels unworthy of acceptance in either. Wife of Chuza, mother of Adnan. Jesus heals Joanna and Adnan of Leishmaniasis, and Joanna becomes a patron, disciple, and apostle.
5. **Marie of Magdala (Mary Magdalene)**: Healed of seven demons, she owns a business and is a patron, disciple, and apostle. She was the first to witness the risen Jesus.
6. **Susannah**: Manages a linen and clothing business. After Jesus heals her of malaria, she becomes a patron, disciple, and apostle.
7. **Perpetua** (unnamed in Bible): Fishwife, wife of Peter, mother of Jesse and Petronilla. Jesus heals her mother.
8. **Mariamne** (unnamed in Bible): Sister of Philip, she becomes a disciple and apostle.
9. **Photini** (unnamed in Bible): Samaritan woman at the well, an early apostle.
10. **Veronica** (unnamed in Bible): Healed of a bleeding disorder, menorrhagia, she becomes an eyewitness at Jesus's trial and crucifixion.

11. **Martha of Bethany**: Master of the house and hostel; supporter, disciple, and apostle of Jesus.
12. **Miriam of Bethany (Mary)**: Caregiver in the hostel and almshouse; supporter, disciple, and apostle of Jesus.

Find more Facts/Tradition/Fiction here: <https://www.elainekelly.ca/post/cast-of-characters-twelve-women>

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1

MARA: FORCED TO MOVE

Forced to leave home, Nazareth, Galilee, AD 27

Despite her size, no one saw her. Mara had learned the hard way how to make herself invisible. Being seen or heard led to trouble. She rarely left her home.

But that afternoon, Mara dropped her bread-making and went out. Her firstborn son Jamie had burst into her outdoor cooking courtyard, calling her to come right away. She banked the fire and left her baking in a cast iron pot over the embers in her brazier. She covered herself with a full-length robe and fastened it with her copper brooch. She pulled along nine-year-old Janis and six-year-old Simeon. Her eleven-year-old son, Joses, was apprenticing with his abba at the blacksmith shop. Mara soon fell behind, her chest heaving. As she reached Nazareth's market square, she was embarrassed by her son's enthusiasm.

"Has he done any miracles yet?" Jamie stretched on his tiptoes.

"No, he hasn't," replied the onlooker.

Mara kept silent, as always. She did not speak unless someone addressed her directly, did not speak in public, and definitely did not speak to men outside her family. Afraid of being judged by the religious leaders, she checked that her copper shawl pin closed her robe at the neck. She followed the Jewish code of modesty to avoid drawing unwanted attention. Jamie seemed to expect his cousin to perform miracles. The onlookers expected

it too. Mara knew better. She did not believe in miracles. Mara felt alone in the crowd.

“Are people bringing their sick relatives?” Jamie shifted his weight from one gangly leg to the other.

“It looks like it. The turnout is getting bigger,” replied the man.

The throng ignored Mara. She tucked her mousy brown hair into her headscarf and tried to hide in her loose, brown robes. She had learned how to ensure people did not see her. She was afraid of causing a man to have unclean thoughts or give her unwanted attention. Signalling to Janis and Simeon to stay with her, she backed towards the fringe of the gathering, careful not to touch anyone or draw attention to herself. Not knowing what was going to happen gave her a queasy feeling.

The baker pushed through carrying his daughter, whose twisted limbs prevented her from walking. The spectators watched with anticipation.

But Jesus did not do a miracle.

“It is because you are testing me,” said Jesus.

“These people don’t have faith,” Jamie told his mother. “I thought you would see him heal people.”

These people. Mara frowned, realizing Jamie had already separated himself from her and her neighbours. She recalled the strange stories Jamie had started bringing home more than a year ago. First, he said their relative John had ritually immersed Jesus in water and heard a voice from Heaven. Then Jamie left his abba’s blacksmith shop for days at a time, returning with stories of unbelievable miracles. Mara sighed. Her husband allowed Jamie to go because he shared Jamie’s belief in Jesus. Her nephew had started a new movement, and it was changing Jamie. *What if Jesus was from Beelzebub, the prince of the devils? What if evil spirits possessed Jamie? What if Jamie became an outcast?*

One woman said Jesus healed her of a piercing headache, but observers did not believe her. Mara shook her head. Jesus had forsaken his duty to care for his mother, abandoned carpentry, and wandered off for months at a time. She could not respect a person who did not honour his duties. *Why were people following him? Why did they expect him to do great things?*

“Just last week, I saw him heal people in Capernaum,” said Jamie.

“Are you sure? Our neighbours say he has not healed people.” Jesus had babysat all four of Mara’s children. *How could he have unusual powers?*

“Don’t you remember all the people he healed in Jerusalem?”

At the Passover Festival, Mara had seen those who said Jesus healed them. She also saw how the religious leaders controlled what they did—even what they were allowed to believe. The people hoped a saviour would deliver them from the Roman occupation. But she did not believe Jesus could help.

“I remember some said he was from God, and some said he was not,” she told her son.

“I saw it, Eema! People came, were healed, and stayed to hear his amazing stories. I cannot wait to get out of this provincial town. I am disgusted at the lack of belief of these people,” said Jamie.

“*These people!* They are our friends. They are your teachers. They have been experts in the law since before you were born. And they are skeptical,” said Mara. “Listen to them.”

“This son of Maria is illegitimate and impure. Maria committed adultery when she was betrothed,” said one.

“Jesus can’t perform miracles,” said another.

“I heard he healed someone from leprosy.”

“Some say he can raise one who has died!”

“That can’t be true! That has to be an exaggeration.”

A blind man came asking to receive sight.

Jesus did not heal him.

Jesus’s admirers blamed the poor man for not having enough faith. Jesus gave them expectations and then he disappointed them. *These are not the actions of a holy man*, thought Mara.

“Look at them, following a failure,” said a local resident.

“How does he get the nerve to posture as a healer,” said another.

“He is lying about performing miracles in Capernaum,” confirmed a third.

Jesus could not be from God. Mara looked over at Maria of Nazareth, standing with her daughter Rachel and her grandchildren. On moving to this small, rural town as a newlywed, Mara’s anxiety prevented her from leaving the house. Clopas quickly introduced her to his brother’s widow. Maria took Mara to the market and talked to the vendors for her. Mara could not talk to the locals or even look directly into their eyes. They were not like the people in her hometown of Emmaus. They spoke a rough Galilean accent, didn’t follow the laws of Moses the way Judeans did, and only talked about construction, trades, and farming.

How could Maria stay calm when people accused her son of lying? How could Maria hold her head high when they mocked her son? Was it because she was ten years older than Mara? Mara had no confidence. She hated anyone ridiculing her or her children. Mara often compared herself to Maria, and it always made her feel worse.

Now her neighbours were restless, milling about in the square. The awaited miracles did not happen. They were getting frustrated and taunted Jesus more loudly. Mara gave some fig squares to Janis and Simeon to keep them calm. Like water ready to boil, the discontented rumblings roiled.

“How can Jesus be a religious teacher?” said one skeptical listener.

“His ideas sound different from the usual lessons. He can’t be an expert,” said another.

“Where did he learn all these things?”

“The carpenter could not even afford to send him to study in Jerusalem.”

Clopas and his brother, Joseph, had a smallholding of twelve acres kept undivided as jointly-held property. Their annual crop of lentils did well in the hot, dry mountains, but the plants did not make enough to support their families. They had supplemented their farming income with trades: Joseph as a carpenter and Clopas as a blacksmith. There was no money to study in Jerusalem, but Jesus studied reading, writing, and the Scriptures with the local rabbis.

When Joseph died, Clopas had promised to take care of Maria. Clopas became Maria’s legal guardian, but the daily obligation of food and house-keeping fell to Clopas’s wife, Mara. Her parents raised her to obey her duties; she had no choice. As Mara prepared meals, Maria often overflowed with the latest news. It wasn’t until last year that Mara learned that very few locals would listen to Maria. A scandal around Maria’s firstborn child meant that locals called Maria a liar, and today they called Jesus a liar.

A labourer said Jesus had removed his back pain, but the bystanders did not believe it.

“It makes no sense that he has so many followers. He is not performing miracles,” they said.

“He’s also nothing special to look at.”

Mara looked at his followers. They wore poor fishing rags and looked desperate. They smelled from the heat and the long walk up the mountains to Nazareth. Her stomach turned at the stench of their breath.

"Listen, he's criticizing some of the new traditions of the elders!" said an onlooker.

"He must be crazy to debate with the elders and teachers of the law!"

"Doesn't he know they could arrest him for speaking against them?" said one of her neighbours.

"How can he know the Scriptures well enough to be a teacher?"

Mara wondered the same things. *How could Jesus speak with such authority? Why was Maria so proud of him?* Mara quietly thought that Maria's pride in Jesus gave her a blind spot to the needs of her other children. Mara was instantly ashamed. She swallowed that idea with all her other negative thoughts. She often regurgitated and chewed on the negative reflections that plagued her. Then another notion bubbled up: Maria and her sons took Mara for granted. Maria's children had not taken over the care of their mother when they came of age. She sighed, wondering who she would serve longer: her husband, children, or sister-in-law. She pushed down that thought as well, afraid people would judge her for being resentful and not fulfilling her duties with a smile.

The throng was disappointed each time Jesus failed to meet their expectations, and people soon drifted away. Maria invited Jesus to eat with Mara and Clopas. *That was presumptuous*, thought Mara. As Mara worked in her overcrowded home, she often ruminated on being unappreciated. Mara quickly checked the pita dough that she had set to rise earlier in the day. *Yes, it should be enough*. She cut the dough, rolled the pieces into flat circles and placed them in the enclosed cast iron pot on the brazier. She tried to make everything perfect. Clopas and Joses would soon be home from the blacksmith forge. She was upset by the conflicts that afternoon and choked by the overcrowding. Being alone energized her and preparing food in her home's open-air courtyard comforted her. With cooking, you always knew what was going to happen. Action and reaction were predictable, unlike in social situations. She liked to cook. And she enjoyed eating; her brothers had always told her she ate too much. Her favourite was apple cake, with crunchy walnuts, sweetened with honey and raisins, and sprinkled with cinnamon. Mara smiled as she cut some turnips and onions for a stew.

Then Jesus's brother James approached her gate, wearing the official robes that signified his role as a leader in the local synagogue. James had earned the role to gain his mother's admiration, but it had not made a difference. Jesus's

brother Joseph had learned some of the carpentry trade before his abba died, but Maria said his work was not up to Joseph's standards. Jesus's other two brothers, Jude and Simon, had given up on impressing their mother. They worked as little as possible in the lentil fields. Maria's daughters, Rachel and Anna, knew they would never earn the esteem their mother held for her firstborn son.

Mara ushered James in, and Maria greeted him.

"Would you like some olives?" Maria had been pitting olives and held out the bowl.

James greeted everyone but declined the snack as he turned to Jesus.

"The synagogue leaders want me to invite you to read the Scripture on the Sabbath."

"An invitation from the leaders of the synagogue? Or from you? Where's my invitation to dine with your new wife from Cana?" Jesus was teasing his brother.

"This is not a social visit. I plan to give Abigail the kind of lifestyle she knew with her parents, and that does not include introducing her to my illegitimate brother."

Maria's hands went still, and she lowered her head. Mara couldn't tell whether she was upset or praying.

"You got the carpentry shop, even though you may not even be Joseph's son. Then you abandoned it and your responsibilities to this family. You have no qualifications to be a teacher, and you're getting a reputation as a liar. I am not going to pick up your duties and rescue you. My priority is my wife and my career. I am acting in my official capacity to invite you to do the reading."

"I am happy to read the Scripture in the synagogue and to reveal the truth to the people of Nazareth."

"Wait a minute! What do you mean? We already have the truth—as written in the Holy Scriptures," said James.

"The law came through Moses; grace and truth come through me."

"Do I have to remind you not to move the spotlight to yourself? You are not always here, but I live here, and I have to deal with any consequences."

"James, you are so concerned about what people will think!"

"Yes, I am on the Nazareth Town Council and a leader in the synagogue, so don't make waves or contradict the teaching of the synagogue." James smoothed out the gold fringes on his garment.

“I have been teaching in synagogues, streets, and fields all over Galilee and even Jerusalem and Judea. People like to hear my lessons,” said Jesus.

“Well, just remember to control your tongue. A small slip of the tongue can make a big difference, just as a small rudder can change the direction of a huge ship.”

“Yes, little brother, I speak carefully. I hide the meaning of my stories from those who are not ready to hear.”

“We honour the traditions of the elders. The synagogue leaders have asked you to read the Scripture: that is all.”

“I am happy to read the Scripture. Shalom, be at peace.”

With a quick nod, James left. The hostility disturbed Mara, but Maria looked calm. Maria was always sure that Jesus was right. Maria took a deep breath, refocused on the olives she had been pitting, and offered them to Jamie and Jesus.

At fourteen, food was far more important to Jamie than local politics. He scooped up some fresh black olives from the bowl and started to chew. “Thanks, Aunt Maria!”

“We are so happy to have you back,” Maria told Jesus.

“I’m happy to be here.” Jesus also accepted some olives.

“And Rachel’s little girls will be happy to see you,” said Maria. “You can entertain them with stories and riddles, like you used to with your brothers, sisters and cousins.”

“That was a long time ago. I am a man now,” said Jamie.

When Clopas and Joses arrived, the stew was ready to serve, and it smelled delicious. Mara brought the pita bread out of the brazier and gasped. It had not puffed up and was burned. That never happened to her! When she was a little girl, her brothers would insult her if any of her cooking did not turn out perfectly. She tried to never fail. She was embarrassed and ashamed.

“It’s all right,” said Maria. “The stew looks incredible, and we have olives and fig squares for dessert.”

“Next time, I will give you bread,” said Jesus.

Mara ignored their kind words, reviewing all the steps in her head. The pita dough had sat too long. She failed because she went out unexpectedly. Mara did not like straying from routine.



That Sabbath day, everyone jammed up the narrow winding path to the synagogue on the highest point in town. Mara, Clopas, and their children went up the hill, parting ways at the synagogue's entrance. Clopas and Jamie sat with the men on the main floor while Mara and the other women and children sat in the balcony.

Each time Mara turned to go up the wooden stairs at the synagogue, it triggered memories of going up the wooden stairs in Emmaus. The Scriptures said to teach all children about religious observances and children could study the law of Moses with the rabbis. Girls often learned from women about spinning, weaving, and childcare. Mara was interested in reading, so she was enthusiastic when her teacher invited her up the stairs to his private office to pour over the scrolls. She froze when he slid his arm along her shoulders and commented on her full figure. She became afraid to speak, and when she whispered, he watched her lips. She hesitated to move for when she did, he caressed her curves. Mara tried to push down the shameful memory. He said because she tempted him and made him unclean with bodily emissions, she had to clean him. She was apprehensive each time she followed his gold-fringed robes up the wooden stairs. The only time she could avoid her teacher's attention was when she self-isolated during her monthly flow. Since then, Mara made it a habit to avoid looking a man in the eyes, speaking without being asked, walking with a sway, or doing anything that might tempt a man or cause unwanted attention.

Jesus had some women followers who came up the stairs to sit, and Mara squeezed closer to Maria, Rachel, and the children to allow space for them.

When it was time, Jesus stood at the front to read the Scripture. They handed the parchment to him; he found Isaiah 61 and began to read:

"The Spirit of the Lord has filled me. God has chosen me and sent me to bring good news to the poor, to heal the broken-hearted, and to free those who are imprisoned by greed or guilt. The time of God's favour has come."

Jesus stopped. He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant and sat down. It was the middle of the reading! Mara knew the passage finished with, 'to announce God's vengeance and the defeat of our enemies'. *Didn't he know what the reading was supposed to be?* All eyes looked at him. Then Jesus stood and clarified, "I did not come to announce God's anger or judgement, but to say the time of God's favour has come. The Scripture you've just heard came true this very day!"

The people were confused. “God has not chosen you as a special person. God chose us as a people to live by a higher standard.”

“Who are you to bring true the words of Isaiah?”

“What do you mean by God’s favour? Will we be freed from the Romans?”

“God has been faithful and restored you each time you fell away from righteousness. God’s favour today will deliver you,” replied Jesus.

“You cannot deliver us. You have no power,” they scoffed.

“What we are waiting for is someone to rise and defeat our enemies,” said the elders.

“You are just the carpenter’s son!”

“We know your mother, Maria, and your brothers: James, Joseph, Jude, and Simon. Your sisters Rachel and Anna live among us. And your Uncle Clopas and Aunt Mara and cousins.”

Men turned and looked up at the family and Mara blushed. She hated being in the spotlight. She fingered the copper brooch Clopas had crafted for her at his blacksmith shop. When they were newly married, she was embarrassed to undress in front of Clopas, ashamed of her body, afraid of pain in her marriage duty. She feared Clopas would divorce her, but he was patient and self-controlled. He told her their marriage was about more than the marriage bed and that he would be faithful. The copper shawl pin reminded her of how he protected her from pain and made her feel safe.

Maria saw Mara fidgeting nervously and whispered, “Don’t worry, this is our home. This is our family.”

“I have a bad feeling. They rejected you once before.” Mara knew that when Maria was expecting her firstborn, she said an angel appeared and told her the Holy Spirit made her pregnant. The townspeople mocked her, threatened her, and forced her to leave town for a time.

The congregation continued to badger Jesus.

“You did not perform miracles here this week! You are a liar, just like your mother!”

“If you really did miracles in Capernaum, you could do them here in your hometown.”

“I am not surprised that you ask me to do miracles here like those I did in Capernaum,” said Jesus. “But honestly, a prophet is honoured everywhere except in his hometown and among his relatives.”

“Are you saying you’re a prophet now? Do you think you speak for God?” yelled a man at the back.

“We do not believe you,” said someone else.

“Do you think you know more than we do? We are your teachers!” said a religious leader.

Mara felt panic rising, the familiar swelling in her throat that sometimes froze her ability to talk. She hated conflict. The people’s confusion had turned to disbelief and anger. She hoped Jesus would calm them down, placate them as she would have done.

But no, instead of backing down from the argument, his next words made it worse. “When the prophet Elijah was starving during the drought, God provided flour and olive oil through a foreigner, a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. When the widow’s son got sick and died, Elijah prayed and gave her son back to her, saying, ‘Look, your child is alive!’ In the same way, at the time of the prophet Elisha, many Israelites had leprosy, but Elisha healed Naaman, a Syrian. These prophets were not honoured in their hometowns, and God’s blessings went to foreigners.”

Mara’s neighbours were furious. Jesus had compared them to foreigners, tribes who did not believe in the God of Israel. Mara pulled her headscarf closer around her cheeks, worrying about the rage in people’s faces. Piercing eyes darted around the room. She took Simeon’s hand and told Janis and Joses to stay close. She looked down to where Clopas and Jamie sat.

“We honour the one true God and his prophets!” shouted an elder.

“We are not like the pagans in Sidon or Syria!”

“How dare you compare us to those who worship false gods,” said a devout neighbour.

“You have a lot of nerve saying God will bless the foreigners! Our God will not bless the Romans. God will bring vengeance to the invaders.”

“You are not a prophet!” A teacher of the law jumped up. “You are a blasphemer!”

Soon all the men on the main floor were chasing Jesus out of the synagogue. The women rushed down the stairs as everyone tried to leave at once. No matter how Mara moved, elbows and shoulders bumped her. She turned but was blocked in. She saw Rachel crouched in a corner with her three little girls. The herd crushed Mara and Maria. The stench of sweat made Mara’s mouth go dry. She found the narrow stairs, stumbled, and grabbed the

railing. She panicked and made sure her children were with her. Suddenly the churning movements inside spit them out into the open air.

The men on the main floor had gotten out first. At least thirty of them were pressing Jesus towards the cliff of the hill on which the synagogue sat. Their fury showed on their red faces as they ran. They had thrown off their Tallit prayer shawls, embroidered with God's commandments, and were yelling that Jesus had thrown off God's commandments. The mob waved their shawls and shouted the words on the corners: "No God but our God!"

Clopas and some muscular fishers were trying to protect Jesus, but the pursuers were breathing heavily and pushing forward. They were forcing both Jesus and his supporters towards the precipice.

Mara's pulse thumped as she struggled to catch up. Her face got warm, and her hands got cold. Suddenly, she saw that Clopas, Jamie, Jesus, and some others had been able to get down to a field below the town.

Mara, Joses, Janis, Simeon, and Maria rushed around by the footpath. When they got down to the field, Mara saw Jamie's face was bleeding, and Clopas had scratches all over his arms. They must have slipped through the sumac and hawthorn brambles. Mara was panting and shaking all over.

Jesus's brother, James, was there, shouting. "They are about to riot. You need to leave town!"

"Get the people in order!" the fishers yelled back at James.

"I cannot go against the majority. I'm trying to keep this town safe!" said James.

"Don't make your brother leave town," Maria told James. "The people should listen to him! An angel told me he is the son of the Most High and that God would give him the throne of David!"

"Mother, you know that people do not believe Jesus is from God. An angel did not speak to you, and there is no way this counterfeit will be reigning on a throne. These lies are against the teaching of the synagogue. Because of you, our neighbours still suspect our family of being deceitful. I will be lucky to keep my position after this. People have a long memory and a short fuse."

James turned to Jesus. "You made some crazy claims about yourself, you spoke out against the laws of the synagogue, and you offended our neighbours and friends. I told you to control your tongue. Instead, you put our mother at risk, and the mob could have killed you. You have to leave town."

“I am offering good news that the time of God’s favour has come. If anyone does not want to hear my words, I will leave and shake the dust off my feet.”

Jesus turned to the handful of men and women who were his students. “Come, I will make a new home in Capernaum.”

As they left, Maria reprimanded James. “Stop this childhood jealousy. You should be loyal to Jesus.”

“You should be loyal to the religious leaders! If you reject the synagogue leaders, you are rejecting me.” James tore his robe, signifying that his mother was dead to him. He turned his back on her and returned to Nazareth.

Maria fell into Mara’s ample bosom, sobbing as her son discarded her.

Mara looked worriedly at Clopas while she rubbed Maria’s shaking shoulders.

“It’s no longer safe for you to stay in Nazareth,” Clopas told Maria. “The establishment has rejected Jesus and anyone loyal to him.”

“They have to believe me!” said Maria, swiping at her tears.

“We believe you. My brother Joseph said he saw an angel, and he would not lie to me,” said Clopas.

Mara realized Clopas was speaking for her since she often had trouble speaking aloud in public. But this time, he was not speaking for her. Mara did not believe in angels or stories of angels. She did not believe her nephew was the son of the Most High or would have a throne. She was so alone.

“What will I do?” whimpered Maria.

“You have to leave Nazareth,” said Clopas, wiping the blood off his arms.

“This is my home! I cannot travel alone!” said Maria.

“Mara will go with you.”

Mara’s head shot up. Her pulse raced. She had to obey her husband, but she could not leave town! She could barely leave her house. Clopas knew that.

“Maria’s life is at risk, and it is our duty to take care of her,” said Clopas.

“But Clopas!” Mara’s face turned red. She could not leave! She had taken on the duties of cooking for Maria, but this was so much more. Mara could not travel. She could not speak to strangers. She could not live in a new place. It was too much. Her throat had swollen, and she was unable to voice an argument. Mara wrung her hands and shook her head.

“Where will we go?” asked Maria.

“Jesus will be living in Capernaum, but he will be busy with his work,” said Clopas. “Don’t you know someone who lives in Capernaum?”

“Salome,” said Maria.

Clopas turned and placed his hand on his older son’s shoulder proudly. “Jamie, you have trained with me, and now you are a man. Take the jeweller’s anvil, small forge, and bellows. You can make horseshoes, nails, or trinkets to sell to provide for your Eema and Aunt Maria.”

“Yes, Abba, I know people in Capernaum, and I know what to do. You can count on me.” Though he had blood on his face, Jamie stood up confidently. Like a lot of youth, he had a sense of being invincible.

Clopas turned to Mara. “You can do this. I will stay here, and Joses will help me in the blacksmith shop. We will visit when we can.”

Clopas held Mara closely. Mara had no choice. She had no control over her life. Clopas knew Mara always tried to do her duties and obey her husband. She clung to Clopas and thought fearfully: *I can’t*.