

First chapter of "One of the Twelve"

Chapter 1

Something big awaits us.

James stopped to study his feet. He had blisters from the straps of his new sandals. He had walked far today, and he knew that he had to stop for a few days to allow his blisters to heal before they got any worse. Not far from where he was standing the river was slowly running through. James turned off from the road and crossed the meadow towards the dark water of the river.

"How long should I walk this country, God?" he asked and quickly glanced at the sky. The wound on the right foot was causing great pain and James saw a streak of blood finding its way between the straps, continuing towards the arch of the foot. He limped into the shadow under a tree a couple of metres from the river. He had earned his new sandals by helping a family to lay a roof on their new house. The village where they lived was beautifully situated by a small lake and it had almost felt like home in the Galilee. The family had welcomed James to stay for as long as he wished, but his inner voice had urged him to move on. After having walked north for quite some time he decided to continue west, over the mountains, but the last stretch was strenuous. He could tell he had been walking ever since the last full moon.

James put his things down and then continued down towards the water. Slowly he took his sandals off. He came to think about his first sandals - the ones he had received from his mother - and smiled at the memory. He had felt like a man that day. Up until then he had run barefoot with the other children. When his mother had called him, they had, as usual, been playing in between the small houses, which were clustered together on the lake shore. He was probably no more than eight, perhaps even younger, but in his mind he was all grown up - he had already been helping his father with the fishing nets for several years. James and his younger brother John were to follow in the footsteps of their father, Zebedee, and become fishermen and boat builders too. Their father was a large man. He was calm and often quiet, a bit thoughtful. He did lose his temper, however it happened rarely. In his looks and manners, James was the one most resembling Zebedee. His brother was more like their mother, even if he too had a bit of their father's temper.

His mother had taken out the sandals, which she had been hiding behind her back, and held them out in front of him.

"It is about time you got something decent to put on your feet, James," she had said with curiosity in her voice and a soft smile on her lips.

He could see her before him, and the memory of her smile warmed his heart. She was a kind and loving mother, always very happy and friendly in the way she treated everyone. He had felt loved from the moment he was born. The sandals had been dangling back and forth in the air, and he had been jumping for joy. She had laughed. And then she had danced with him in front of the house.

James would never forget that moment. He missed his beloved mother Salome and wondered what she was doing right now, and he also wondered what John, Simon, Peter and the other apostles were at this very moment.

Dirt was covering his feet and had found its way under the straps into his wound. James lowered

his feet into the cold water.

"Oh, how wonderful," he whispered. Then he slowly laid down on his back, stretched his arms straight out and gazed up at the sky. Yet another warm and sunny day with blue sky, just a few soft white clouds stretching out above him. The sky was the same wherever he went in the world. It was shining equally as blue and beautiful here in Hispania as it was back home.

"How did I end up here?" James thought to himself. Not because he lacked the answer, but because he was amazed at how it turned out this way. As a child and young man he had never thought he would end up far from home, hardly even that he would leave Capernaum and the fishing boats by the sea of Galilee. His future was more or less predetermined; that he too would work as a fisherman and a boat builder, just like his father and his father before him. And he would marry Sara. That, he had decided at an early age, when he still barely knew the meaning of marriage, and that decision was something he had held onto. As they had grown older, and James still stayed firm to his decision, no one questioned it. Sara and James were to be married - that is the way it was. Everyone agreed. But suddenly she had become ill with a severe fever and shortly thereafter she died. James could not understand how it was possible.

When the news about Sara's death had reached him he had felt all empty inside. It was as if he, in that moment, had become numb. He fell into a great void. When someone spoke to him he had replied by staring, he could not bring himself to answer. He had carried out his daily duties without any feeling or conscious thought. He had not had any appetite and at night he had been lying awake staring into the dark. Everything had suddenly changed. The life he had planned and dreamt of, had been taken from him. James disappeared into the greatest of darkness, and there he wrestled with God. Why had God taken Sara away from him? Why was he punished? No one could reach him in that darkness, not even God, because it was towards God that James aimed all his wrath and accusations. In his mind God carried the blame for all his suffering. His father had left him in peace, but his mother and brother had done everything they could to rekindle the light and hope in him.

"Let him be," his father used to say. "Give him some time and everything will be all right."

But that is not at all how James had looked at it; that there would come a time when everything would be fine again. Never would he embrace Sara again, hold her hands, look into her eyes and talk to her about love. She was forever gone, and this had triggered hatred in him. He had avoided seeing his friends and their families; he could not bare facing other people's happiness and love. At nights he had sneaked down to the lake to be alone, and sometimes, while mumbling angrily, he looked for big rocks to throw into the water, whereas other times he would just sit there feeling completely empty and look at the moonlight playing on the surface of the water.

One clear starry night he thought he had heard her voice and he had turned around to listen into the dark. Then he had heard it again - Sara calling him. Like a sleepwalker he had walked towards the village. Coming closer, reaching one of the houses at the outskirts, he could hear other sounds: the sound of a couple making love. James had remained standing not far from the house. He had been listening with his entire being. Before his mind's eye, he had seen himself and Sara making love inside the dark house. A strong feeling of desire had hit him, hot and vibrating. His chest had felt as if it would explode and he had wanted to scream; the reality of what had happened finally hit him. He had not wanted to feel desire, because it made the pain unbearable.

That night he had buried his desire deep down, which now made him feel regret. He had not allowed himself to live life to the fullest. But at the time it had felt like the only possible way, and somehow, and for whatever reason, the pain in his chest had eventually eased off. Despite the pain having left its mark, the James that his family had been missing for such a long time began

to return. However, getting married was no longer an option. Even though he was close to turning thirty he had discarded all such thoughts. He had noticed that it worried his parents that neither James nor his brother John were married. John was of course several years younger, but usually most men their age already had families. But James was somehow resting assure that something greater awaited him. Fairly soon he had discovered that his brother carried the same feeling. They had talked about it late one night as they were lying on the roof top looking at the stars.

"We will be part of something great James. Can you feel it?" John had asked him.

In astonishment, James had looked at his brother in the dark and wondered how it was possible that Johannes felt the same way he did.

"Yes, I think you are right. Something great is waiting for us, but I have no idea what. Sometimes I think I am just imagining things."

"I don't think so," John had replied. Then they had continued to silently gaze at the stars. One and a half years later they both knew what it was they had felt that night, and that they had not been wrong.