



SIEBENQUELL

The Stone Door



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When the uproar of the first Easter had settled, things started to calm down in Jerusalem. Well not entirely. There was one man who seemed uncommonly agitated. His name was Ari. The violence of the day of crucifixion had ended and the surprise of the emptiness of a grave that could not hold a carpenter's son was no longer causing tempers to flare. An uneasy peace had settled over the city. But not in Ari.

He was a moderately successful stonemason in this City of David. The constant building projects of the Romans had kept him well-employed, and he was not wont to bite the hand that fed him. But things had changed. After the crucifixion and disappearance of the Galilean he had grown increasingly unhappy about making a living by collaborating with those who had brought such harshness to his people and such cruelty to his land. He had always kept his head down, done his work and tried never to be noticed. But anonymity no longer struck him as the suitable answer for what he had experienced.

It has begun with Joseph of Arimathea. A rich son of Israel's house, he had given Ari a commission. He was to carve a tomb for him, to chisel it out of the rock. Ari was proud to work for him, a good man, uncommonly kind and sensitive for a person

of his high station. When Ari had finished he was more pleased by Joseph's compliments about his craftsmanship than about the generous bonus he has paid him. He came to regard this tomb and its stone door as his masterpiece. When he heard that Joseph had laid his executed friend into his own tomb, Ari took a grim satisfaction in the thought. Now several weeks had passed, and that grim satisfaction has turned into a nagging restlessness. It drove him. Every day, when his work was done, Ari would walk to the garden where the tomb was. It was not the tomb as much as the rock that preoccupied him. He has shaped this rock with his own hands. Chiselled and hammered it with precision and smoothed it to fit the opening of the tomb. He had made a door of stone.

He would simply stop, stand and stare at it. In some deep unknown recess of his heart he felt dismayed. It distressed his heart, he knew not why, that he was the architect of the rock that angels had been forced to roll away. There were stories about angels sitting on his stone door, laughing into the tomb and revelling at the echo that gushed back out into the open air and the lush garden. But they did not gladden his heart. He had made a door of stone. It was intended to keep grave robbers out, not messengers of God. He felt that he placed a stumbling block in the way of God.

That day, like every other day, he went again to stare at his stone door. Yet on this day, unlike every other day, he stopped short and stared, but not at the stone. There, causally seated upon his stone door, sat the Lost Dweller of the Tomb. Ari had heard many astonishing stories of him appearing to his friends and followers, but this was altogether different. He was sitting right there.

The man for whom the rock had been rolled, turned and smiled at Ari. He raised his right hand and beckoned him over.

»Welcome, Ari. I have been waiting for you.«

»You know my name?«

The man smiled: »It is written in the palm of my hand.«

He stretched out his hand. There Ari saw the rough wound the nail has left on his wrist. Next to the ugly hole was his name. It was not written in ink. Instead, the lines of his hand swirled together to form his name. The flesh of this man carried his name.

Instantly, his eyes flickered to the rock, the stone door he had created. His heart cramped with grief.

»I am so sorry, so very sorry.« And his eyes, which he had allowed to become dried out stream beds, flowed with salty waters. »If I had known they would use this stone door to lock you into a grave, I would never have made it.«

The man, who sat jauntily upon a rock meant to lock him away from life and light, smiled at Ari. »You do beautiful work, my friend. I spent great parts of my childhood in a carpentry shop and I appreciate all good craftsmanship when I see it. But do not let your heart be troubled, Ari. No fault lies with you. My Father created metal so that there would be ploughshares and pruning hooks and not swords and spears. He gave us the wood of the trees, but certainly not to hew crosses out of them. So, too, the rock was given to make stable, reliable and lasting things for the good of women and men. What you made was later used by Joseph for purposes of dignity and honour. You made something beautiful for me, but did not know it.«

»It grieves me, Sir, to know that in all the stories told until the end of days, this rock that was rolled away will have its place. This rock has become the beginning of my hell, for it was fashioned by my hand.«

»Gently, gently, Ari. I am not here to berate you. I came and waited for you, because I have a favour to ask of you. May I keep your stone door? I assure you, I have a purpose in mind for it that will serve dignity and remembrance and honour. It will never shut another life into the caverns of death. It is a gift of mine to bend even the sad or tortuous things to life unto a purpose of life and grace. I would like to do the same for you and your door of stone.«

Ari died many years later, a considerably less successful stone mason. His reputation as a craftsman was lessened in his later life, The Romans grumbled that he was talented enough, that he could, in fact, make everything well, except for doors. Every stone door he carved for the rest of his days, was ever so slightly crooked and or misshapen, never entirely sealing anything out or anything in. There was always a gap.

My friends, you can scour the earth in search of that stone door and never find it. It was given by Ari to the ultimately unfettered man, whom neither rock nor wood could hold. He had the same angels who had rolled it away from the tomb carry it away and placed before the gateway of his Father's house. There it sits as the first table of greeting. All who pass into the house of his Father are warmly welcomed at this table. It is the table upon which the Book of Life rests as people are assigned their spacious rooms.

My friends, when you get to that gateway, stop and notice the man leaning against the stone pillar of the entrance. His smile will warm you with welcome. His name is Ari. And that stone table is the happiness of his heart and the beginning of his heaven.

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