

CHAPTER 1

A House by the Sea

The morning dawned bright and beautiful the day Father told us we would have to leave our home. When I awoke, the sun's rays reached through the window like long fingers and touched me. I lay on my rug and watched the shimmering light and listened to all the familiar morning sounds.

I heard Jorim outside coaxing the goats to stand still, so that he could milk them. Mother was singing softly as she set out food for our morning meal. Father and Nahum were talking quietly, planning the day. Grandmother would be sitting there too, ready to offer advice. I watched the dust jumping and dancing in the light rays above me; it beckoned me to the window.

Standing carefully so that I wouldn't disturb my little sisters asleep beside me, and leaning my elbows against the window, I examined the day. I

saw the sun, a bright yellow ball, climbing the blue dome that was the sky above Galilee. I saw the quiet blue sea sparkling like a thousand diamonds. On the far side of the sea, rolling hills rose up, and beyond them the mountains. The sun had risen above them all to shine on our sea. Tiny fishing boats sliced through the sparkles and headed for the harbor, their night of fishing done. My eyes followed the dirt road that split the hills and led to our little town of Chorazin, where the flat-roofed, mud-brick houses were all clustered together.

Everything was as I wanted it to be, so I reached for my girdle hanging on the peg beside me, and tied the long narrow belt around my waist. I smoothed back my hair and retied the thread that held my hair together. Brushing the wrinkles out of my tunic, I noticed it was getting short.

Grandmother will have to make me a new one soon, I thought, as I rolled up the rug I had slept on and folded up my cloak that served as my blanket. I laid them both against the wall and turned to join my family.

“Morning greetings, Little Miriam,” Father said, smiling, his blue eyes twinkling at me. His light brown hair was nearly covered by his cap and turban.

“Morning greetings, Father,” I said, smiling. I liked Father’s greeting even though it had been a long time since I was the little one. I was ten years old and had two little sisters. I reached for some bread from the tray Mother had set on the rug. Nahum, my oldest brother, was already busy eating. Nahum looked like Father, while Jorim had straight, dark hair like Mother and I. Father and the boys were in a hurry to get to the barley field.

“I wish I could . . .”

“I know. You wish you could come to the harvest field with us. You say it every day,” Jorim interrupted as he came through the doorway with a pail of goat’s milk.

Father frowned at Jorim.

“She says the same thing every morning,” Jorim insisted, setting down his pail. He came and sat down with us. “Too bad she isn’t a boy. Too bad she has to stay home and do the grinding and sewing.”

“But maybe today she will go with you!” Grandmother spoke up. Her blue eyes twinkled like Father’s, only hers were surrounded by wrinkles. I gave her a hopeful smile. She could persuade Father to let me help in the fields. She had come to live with us several years ago when

Grandfather died, and Father often looked to her for advice. She was the oldest member of our family and was respected as such.

“Grandmother has talked me into believing we women can spare Miriam today,” Mother said companionably as she handed me a little mug full of milk.

I looked expectantly at Father as I took little sips of the warm goat’s milk. His forehead was wrinkled in a worried expression. He was probably thinking I was too little as Jorim always said. Since Jorim had celebrated his thirteenth birthday and become a Son of the Law, he considered himself much older than I. He thought he was one of the men and didn’t want to be bothered with me anymore. Nahum was nearly grown up like Father and did a man’s work, but Jorim was only a little older than I.

“Maybe Miriam can come this afternoon and help me tie the barley bundles,” Father said, “and the boys can begin threshing. We will see how it goes.” He was looking at me, but his eyes had a faraway look.

“May I go too?” Anna, who was five, pleaded from the rug she had slept on.

“Me too!” copied four-year-old Abi. Both of my little sisters had light hair like Father. They

