

THE BOOK OF LILY  
A TRUE AND FAITHFUL ACCOUNT OF  
THE MAJESTY OF JUDAS

EXCERPT

**BOOK 8**

*THE CUTTING OF THE LOCKS*

**D**EEP in the following night one of Her girls comes to wake me. Ruth, she says. Ruth you must come. I am tired and my dreams were soothing and I do not want to get up but she keeps whispering at me: Ruth. She said so. She said that you must come.

I pull on my cloak and put my braids up around my head and follow her as she beckons me down towards the inner chambers of the cave. On the rough ground in the relative dark I struggle to keep my feet. She has a small lamp which throws great shadows across the walls, she uses it to light her way and I keep as close to her as I can. We come to the entrance of a small chamber that is better lit and I know this particular chamber. It is the place where I am brought so that She can access my visions, where She can gaze into me for as long as She desires and have no one gossip about it. I never look forward to these times but now I brace myself against whatever wild temper She might be in. But as I enter the chamber I am taken completely by surprise. I was ready to distance myself from Her but not to be brought so suddenly close to Him.

**M**y beloved sits in an improvised chair facing away from the entrance. There are lamps set on rock shelves and also one on the small table next to Him. The table is set with various implements including a small polished mirror. I know what these things are and how to use them but I cannot understand why He would need them. As I look at the sharpened razors and the pots of ointment I feel a sharp cavern open up in the middle of my chest. Brute scenes rush into me made out of unspeakable horror and dread, they blind me and rip sudden wound channels through the centre of my heart. It takes all of my effort not to pitch forward into the abyss, I teeter for a few seconds until these visions abate and I can breathe out and steady myself and remain upright on my feet.

**H**is bare back is hunched and His ribs show starkly through His skin. He is more slender than I had imagined but very finely made, His bones articulate smoothly as He breathes in and out and His skin is laid deftly across the scrollwork of His body. I approach quietly and when I reach the chair I brush His shoulder with the lightest of touches. It is the first time I have ever touched Him and I feel how He has gone untouched for a very long time. He feels tension leave Him as I touch Him and He sits up with a start until He sees who it is, and seeing me He smiles and relaxes down again. I am still unsure about what is expected of me, surely He cannot want me to cut His hair. But then I see how this has not been His choice, how He has been put to it by the things She and His brother have done. He looks down at the implements laid on the table beside Him, and then looks back up at me and says a single word very quietly: Please.

**H**e straightens in the chair as I pick up the razor. My hand trembles a little to be in His presence but also to think of the sacrilege I am about to commit. I want to tell Him this, I want to warn Him against the loss of His strength but I cannot find the words. And if I did speak? I would only be telling Him something He already knows. He feels me hesitate and He looks over His shoulder and smiles at me and says: it's alright. It's nothing to be afraid of. And then He says: why should my brother get all the attention? He laughs quietly at His own joke and it is one of the most forlorn sounds I have ever heard and yet also one of the most beautiful. He laughs to put me at ease with the desecration of His vows, and it gives me the strength to do anything He asks of me.

I stand behind Him with the razor in my hand. He waits quietly and patiently for me to begin. His hair is thick and heaped in thick strands against the back of His neck and shoulders. I do not know where to begin, I pick up lock after lock and I don't have the temerity to set the razor to any of them. He asks me for my name and again I am unable to speak it, He ventures to call me: Ruth? And I nod and squeeze His shoulders quickly to tell Him yes, yes that is my name. He calls me by name and says to me: Ruth. I promise you, it is time for this to happen. He feels how nervous I am and also how reluctant and He repeats very gently to me: It's time, Ruth. It is time for it to be gone.



**H**e calls me by name again and that gives me strength and I resolutely pick up one of His locks. I set the sharp edge against it and just as He promised there really is nothing to fear. I cut until it comes loose from His head and lies there wilting in my hands. I want to stop after every cut but He sighs each time I touch His hair, and lock after lock falls loose in my hands and drops softly to the floor. His cut hair will be burned or buried for pressing and secret reasons but for the moment it just falls to the floor of the chamber and lies there like this is the most ordinary thing in the world.

**H**e feels each cut as a relief but I feel what it does to His strength. His power drains out of Him with every incision I make but there is something even stranger that happens. With each lock that falls a parcel of His strength flows into me, taking up residence within my body and causing my soul to swell. None of this feels accidental. I am destined to receive His strength but never to own it, I hold it on His behalf as custodian and for His benefit in some near future that beckons. I see hints of why this is so but I blind myself to that sight the instant it arises because the only thing that matters is that His strength will not be lost, it will be available to Him for as long as I cleave to Him and do not let Him go. And there is the pleasure He feels as I pull and shape His hair, when I hold it out in thick strands before me and choose where to set the blade.

**A**s I work at His hair I begin to sing quietly. It is a song in my mother's tongue that I have always known, and as I sing He begins to shiver with pleasure although He cannot discern the words. I sing that song to its end and then I begin another song in a lower register and He sighs and allows His head to loll back against me and He says: I could listen to you sing that all night. He cannot know that I have seen nights where I do exactly that, where we are nestled together in the open air and I sing because it brings Him such pleasure and it is a pleasure for me too. I have sung to Him all night and when He arises without sleep He feels as fresh as though He were newly cut from the stone. And the ancient pines we lie amongst also listen to my songs, they are no longer sung to as they were in Elder Days when the land ran with milk and honey and songs of oak and pine and elder.

**H**e has done no wrong. If I could find the words to tell Him that I might beg Him to come away with me. We could just walk out of these caves into the mild spring night, we could tell nobody of our plans and simply disappear. The cold rains have passed and the fruit trees are in bloom, the vines are setting fruit and the grass is sweet and green. We know how to travel light without being seen. I could steer us away from danger until we were far beyond its reach. We could swear that we were married and then urgently fulfill those vows, we could settle on the plains or in the lake country or as far as we wished to go. I would go wherever He goes and I would be a Wife of Valour, I would work hard and not complain and He could take His comfort in me, just as I would take comfort in Him.

**H**is hair is dark and the closer to His scalp I get the darker it becomes. He seems younger and younger with every cut, as the proof of His vows is cut away and He ages before me in reverse. I feel His responsibility lift from Him, along with the tangled insignia of His strength. His hardship drains away from Him also and I see what the People always forget: that He is still barely out of His boyhood, charged with doing the difficult work of a man. He has done things that He would rather forget, His hands are not unbloodied but His actions have always been to protect the innocent, to fight on behalf of other people who could not fight for themselves. But even these things seem to be absolved as His hair falls softly to the ground. He was faithful to His vows even when they prescribed that He must break them, He is acquitted through His faithfulness to this most perplexing part of His vows.

**A**fter His hair is cut there is more work to do. I pick up the fine razor and run it quickly over the stone, testing its edge to make sure it is keen enough. I then start to angle it across the lean slopes of His face, doing my best not to pull His skin in directions it does not wish to go. The blade shaves the downy hair from His cheeks very easily, and it slides through the thicker beard growing on His jaw and chin. He continues to sigh and lean His head backwards without fear or restraint as the blade clears a path across His exposed throat. As His beard falls away He looks even more youthful, and more innocent and sincere, years fall away from Him as I shave His beard all the way down to nothing.

**W**ith His hair cut and His beard shaved I begin to treat His skin. I scour His face gently with a stone until every stray hair is removed, then I pick up one of the pots of ointment She has set out on the table. It is the same balm She applies to His brother to clear and lighten His skin, I dab it across the face of my beloved and He sighs with the pleasure of me smoothing it into His skin. It comes to Him as a pleasure but for me there is something troubling about what this lotion is doing. It erases every sign of His hard work in the sun and leaves Him looking soft and indulged like His brother. He begins to look quite Roman and I know why this must be, but to me this could never seem like anything other than blasphemy.

**A**fter the lotion is applied to His skin there is one other thing remaining. I pick up the rougher jar of scented wax that She has provided and I begin to stroke it through His hair. As it warms and softens I continue to pull it through, and as it grows even softer I begin to touch my fingernails to His scalp. He starts to sigh again and He also shifts very slightly in His chair. I know why this is but I continue to pull His hair back with my nails. I learn to alternate one hand after the other, reaching down to the very base of His skull where His great wall of hair always shielded Him from the sun. I pull my fingernails gently upwards from His unprotected nape, I move up from there to the very top of His head and He sighs every time I do it.



**H**is skin is soft and responsive, with clear lines delineating where the sun has hit it and where the sun has not. Underneath His beard He is almost pale, as are His neck and shoulders where His hair used to fall. I have never before wanted to touch a man and I am surprised at the pleasure it brings me. I take a loose cloth dipped in water and gently wipe His skin, I draw the cool compress across His forehead and He sinks back further into His chair. He sighs repeatedly as a token of His appreciation as I continue to wipe His brow. His face is now almost horizontal beneath me, His head pushes back gently against me and I push forward to show Him how I feel. His breath deepens and catches on itself as I soothe both of His burning cheeks, and the slight roughness the razor has left when cutting around His chin.

I set the cloth aside and look down at Him. His eyes are closed but His lips part slightly as I stroke His face with my hands. I move my face down towards His and hesitate for a moment. I want to kiss His brow which seems hot with tension but I don't know whether I should. It feels forbidden but I feel myself move downwards until I am pressing my lips to His skin. As I do that I feel all tension suddenly leave His body, to be taken up with another kind of tension that I also feel. I leave my lips pressed against His forehead for as long as I dare, and then I pull my mouth up just far enough to hear my lips come unstuck from His skin. I shift down softly to kiss Him on the bridge of His nose, I kiss Him at the very tip of His nose and I know that I should stop but I have lost any will to do so.

**I** bring my lips all the way down to meet His lips. His body slackens with initial surprise but then He pushes back up to meet me with the kisses of His mouth. We are facing the opposite way to each other and I part my lips just so that His bottom lip can slip slightly into my mouth. I push my head forward and open my mouth a little more and I am grazing His bottom lip with my teeth. I do not know what I am doing but I like doing it and I know that He likes it too. His hands rise up to take hold of my head on each side at my temples, He splays His fingers across my coiled braids and pulls me very gently down towards Him.

**I** kiss Him without thought or restraint and certainly without any technique, but I seem to know exactly what I am doing and just how it must be done. I taste His tongue and feel its roughness as it opposes my tongue, my hands move underneath His nape and pull His heavy skull upwards towards me as He pulls my head ever more insistently down. We flow against one another and also within one another and I hear a voice calling this our Kiss of Death because He now has me unto death. Because I shepherd His strength and He flows with my deepest secrets. I see how He has genuinely become mine, and that He always was, the Word within me proclaiming that His ramparts are mine and His battlements are mine, and everything He ever was or will be resides also within me. I am invested with the keys to His rightful kingdom, the keys to the gates of His most sacred heart.

**O**ur kiss comes to an end and I slowly pull myself upright, with my hands still cupped around both sides of His face. I feel wetness against my hands and I realise He is in tears. With my thumbs I wipe His tears across the top of His cheekbones and into His hair but they are only met with further tears. I bring my face down beside His and feel His warm tears touch my cheek, and suddenly tears are also coursing down my face as His sadness merges with my own. Out of what I showed Him when I was kissing His lips, His foretaste of things He no longer has the strength to bear. I go to pull my head back but His hands move gently to stop me, and as He holds me steady with His warm hands He presses my face against the side of His face and breathes in sharply and says: Ruth. Forgive me for calling you that, now that I know your True Name.

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She does not know everything, He says. She thinks that She does but She lies when it suits Her and She lies even to Herself. He wipes His tears with the tips of His fingers and then calls me by my name, saying: Lily I have no idea why I must tell you this but I am sorry for what I have done. Every time it seems that I am the mad one, I try to be so virtuous but it only causes pain, and in the end it does nothing but break your heart. I think I know better than other people and this is my worst fault. He keeps wiping tears out of His eyes but they are no longer tears of relief, they are the salt, sore tears of self-reproach and His insight into the past. I move to wipe them away for Him and He shakes His head and says: even these tears, Lily, you would wipe away for me. Why do you always comfort me, as I drag us towards disaster?

**T**hen He says words that I have never before heard. I do not know why we come into this world, He says, or when we might return, but I know that I must tell you: meet me on that day when your Full Name will be revealed, on that night beneath the mountain when Love streams back into the world. I will be given breath for the sole purpose of asking where you are, and you will know me in the instant you meet me just as scripture says. Underneath the mountain, Lily, where the streams converge in the wilderness, when Love speeds through the world to heal every broken heart and there is nothing to yearn for anymore.

When His words are finished we remain quietly with one other. It pains me to see Him speak so harshly about Himself and I look within myself for better words, words of reverence and honour and the means to say them to Him. I find words of praise that were spoken of Him long ago, and there are words of love from future writers and the devotion with which they are set down. But His life mostly becomes a byword for condemnation, with so many cruel words welling up against Him, and although I would spare Him any trace of these accusations there are already hints of the future folded within Him. He sees their turbulent streams, I would show Him praise but He hears their black words increasingly and He cannot make sense of them.



**I**n the end it is enough for us to remain together in the soft light of the chamber. He shifts back upright in His seat and wipes His eyes, and as I also wipe my tears He says: a fine couple of revolutionaries we are. He grins as He half-turns to look at me and my tears retreat and I smile with Him and He says: there she is. And then He says something very simple that clears my conscience and my whole heart at once. Thank you, He says. And then something like: I owe you one. I smile broadly and look down at Him and squeeze His shoulders to tell Him the very same thing back.

I hear people approaching and suddenly I feel exposed and ashamed. I look down at the little table and begin arranging things on it so I can keep my eyes downcast. A group enters the chamber and I glance up and see it is Her with Her full retinue of girls. As He stands up to greet them the whole entourage stops dead to see how changed He is. I could never confuse Him with His brother but the girls do so completely, they do not see Him with any inward sight and so they are hopelessly confused. He has that preening Roman look exactly like His twin, and although He harbours such a different heart they all see Him with the same desire they feel for His brother. Thinking nobody knows.

She has made a heavy necklace for Him, strung out of the fine silver coins that made up Her wedding girdle. She tells Him that it will protect Him and guide Him, through Her power which owes to the moon and its effect on subordinate metals. She drapes it around His neck as He bends His head to receive it, but as soon as the metal touches His skin He stiffens and grimaces. It doesn't feel right, He says. She tells Him to give it time but He begins to shudder and reach for the necklace and He says again that the silver doesn't feel right. He holds the necklace clutched in His hands for a moment, and then He pulls it straight over His newly shorn hair and drops it on to the floor. This does not belong to me, He says. You should render it unto Caesar, aren't these my brother's words? As you intend to render me too.

I have seen Her anger before but this is something more glittering and dangerous. At His rejection of Her gift in front of Her whole retinue, at seeing how He would now choose me over Her. I look down and away but not before I see Her eyes flashing with green fire. She becomes terrifying and even He trembles at the wrath that is to come. But Her composure suddenly returns and She becomes haughty again, lifting Her face to Him and stabbing Her finger at His chest, saying: have her then, you stupid boy. Take any one you like, in the hours that are left to you. Oh yes they will remember you, and likewise your brother, but because you are false and fleeting and perjured they will slander you for your sins. They will forget about me, as it seems so easy to do, but you would be glad of mere forgetfulness once you see what is in store.

The retinue leaves us abruptly and the fallen silver stays. And only now that the preparations are complete do I see how exhausted He is. He stoops a little and breathes hard and I beckon Him to come into the bedchamber that has been prepared. He sees the soft bedding and He begins to protest, He sleeps on the ground like His men do but I gesture for Him to lie down. I leave briefly to pull together a little food, small cakes and a cup of water, but when I come back His eyes are closed and His breathing is deep and rhythmic. He does not wake up as I set my offerings down beside Him. I find a small sleeping mat rolled up against one wall of the chamber and I unfurl it at His feet, carefully uncovering His feet so as not to wake Him. I know that His sleep will be better if I remain there with Him, and so I lie down and smell His warm scent through the unguents I have used to anoint Him. As I lie there listening to His breath, gently feeling my way towards Him.

