

# SILVER

**STEVEN SAVILE**



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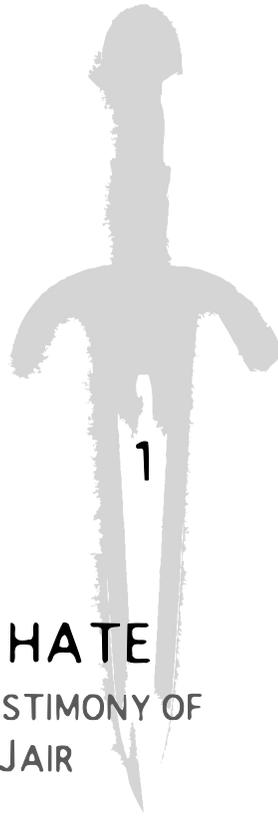


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# PIECES OF HATE

## THEN - THE TESTIMONY OF MENAHEM BEN JAIR

One garden had a serpent, the other had him.

There was a fractured beauty to it; a curious symmetry. The serpent had goaded that first betrayal with honeyed words, the forbidden fruit bitten, and the original sin on the lips of the first weak man. His own betrayal had been acted out from behind a mask of love, again on the lips, and sealed with a kiss. Both betrayals were made all the more ugly by the beauty of their surroundings. That was the agony of the garden.

Iscaiot felt the weight of silver in his hand.

It was so much heavier than a few coins ought to be. But then they were more than a few coins now, weren't they? They were a life bought with silver. They were his guilt. He closed his hand around the battered leather pouch, making a fist. How much was a life worth? Really? He had thought

about it a lot in the hours since the kiss. Was it the weight of the coins that bought it? The handful of iron nails driven into the wooden cross that ended it? Or the meat left to feed the carrion birds? All of these? None of them? He wanted to believe it was something more spiritual, more honest: the impact that it had on the lives of those around it, the sum of the good and the bad, deeds and thoughts.

“Take them, please,” he held out the pouch for the farmer to take. “It’s five times what the land’s worth. More.”

“I don’t want your blood money, traitor,” the man hawked and spat at the dirt between his feet. “Now go.”

“Where can I go? I am alone.”

“Anywhere away from this place. Somewhere people don’t know you. If I was you, I’d go back to the temple and try to buy my soul back.”

The man turned his back on him and walked away, leaving Iscariot alone in the field. “If that doesn’t work,” he called without turning back, “I’d throw myself on God’s mercy.”

Iscariot followed the direction of the man’s gaze to the field’s single blackened tree. Lightning had struck it years ago, cleaving it down the middle. Its wooden guts were rotted through, but a single hangman’s branch still reached out, beckoning to him against the dusk sky.

He hurled the pouch at the mocking tree. One of the seams split as it hit the ground, scattering the coins across the parched dirt. A moment later he was on his knees, scrambling after them, tears of loss streaming down his face. Loss, not for the man he had betrayed, but for the man he had been and the man he could have been. He lay there as the sun failed, wishing the sun would sear away his flesh and char his bones, but dawn came and he was still alive.

Under the anvil of the sun, he stumbled back through the gates of Jerusalem, and wandered the streets for hours.

His body's screams were sweated out in the heat. There was no forgiveness in the air. No one would look at him. But he couldn't bear to look at his shadow as it stretched out in front of him, so why should they want to look at him? He deserved their hate. He shielded his eyes and looked up toward Crucifixion Hill. He thought he could see the shadow of the cross, black against the grass. The soldiers had taken the bodies down hours before. The only shadows up there now were ghosts.

At the temple they mocked him as he pleaded with the Pharisees to take back the silver in exchange for his confession and absolution.

"Live with what you have done, Judas, son of Kerioth. With this one deed you have ensured your legacy. Your name will live on: Judas the Betrayer, Judas the Coward. The money is yours, Iscariot, your burden. You cannot buy back the innocence of your soul, and it is not as though you have not killed before. Now go, the sight of you sickens us," the Pharisee said, sweeping his arm out to encompass the entire congregation gathered in prayer.

He hit Iscariot's hand, scattering the silver he clutched across the stone floor. Judas fell to his knees, as though groveling at the feet of the holy man. Head down, he collected the scattered coins. The holy man kicked him away scornfully. "Take your blood money and be gone, traitor."

Iscariot struggled to his feet and stumbled toward the door.

On the road to Gethsemane he saw the familiar figure of Mary seated by the wayside. He wanted to run to her, to fall at her feet and beg her forgiveness. She had lost so much more than the rest of them. She looked up, saw him, and smiled sadly. Her smile stopped him dead. He felt the weight of the coins in his hand. Suddenly they were as heavy as love and twice as cold. She stood and reached out for him. He had never loved her more than he did in that moment. He had gone against so much of his friend's

teachings, but never more so than in coveting the woman he loved. He ran into her arms and held her, huge raking sobs shuddering through him. He couldn't cry. After all of the tears he had shed he was empty. "I am sorry. I am so sorry."

She hushed him, gentling her fingers through his hair. "They are looking for you. Matthew has whipped them up into a rage. He hates you. He always has. And now he has an excuse for it. They are out of their minds with grief and loss, Judas. You can't stay here, or they will kill you for what you have done. You have to go."

"There's nowhere left to go, Mary, he's seen to that. This is his revenge," he laughed bitterly at that. "I should never . . . I am sorry. It wasn't meant to end like this. All of this because, fool that I am, I couldn't help but love you."

"Our god is a jealous god," she said. She sounded utterly spent. The emptiness in her voice cut deeper than any words could have. She was crying but there was no strength to her tears. "Please, go."

"I can't," he said, and he knew that it was true. He needed to be found. He needed to feel their stones hit. He needed their anger to break his bones. He was finished with this life. The farmer had been right, there was only God's mercy left to him. But what kind of mercy was that? What mercy did a suicide have with the gates to the Kingdom closed to him?

Judas' mind was plagued with doubts, it had been for days. His friend had known he would not be able to live with this blood on his hands, yet still he had begged for this betrayal. So perhaps this stoning was actually one final mercy?

"Please."

"Let them come. I will face them and die with what little dignity is left to me."

She wiped away the tears. "Please. If not for me, then for our son," she took his hand and placed it flat against the

gentle swell of her belly.

“Our son,” he repeated, falling to his knees before her. He kissed her hands and then her belly, crushing his face up against the coarse cloth of her dress. The Pharisee’s words rang in his head: Judas the Betrayer. What greater betrayal could there be? He pressed the torn leather pouch into her hands. “Please, take the silver, for the boy, for you.”

He saw the life he had lost reflected in Mary’s eyes. He knew she loved him, and he knew love was not enough. He couldn’t tell her how alone he felt at that moment.

She turned her back on him.

He left her to walk the long road to death.

He had time to think, time to remember the promise he had made, and time to regret it. It was a walk filled with last things: He watched the sun sink down below the trees; he felt the wind in his face; he tasted the arid air on his tongue. He pulled off his robe and walked naked into the garden.

They were waiting for him.

He didn’t shy away from the hurt and hatred in their eyes. He did not try to justify himself. He stood naked before them.

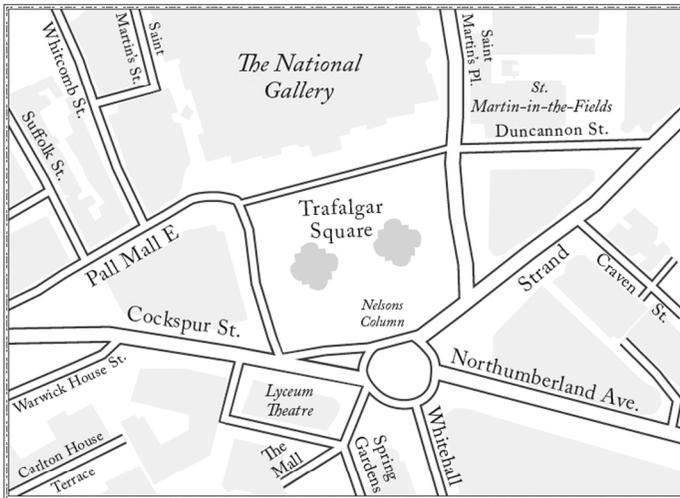
“You killed him,” Matthew said, damning him. They were the last words Judas Iscariot heard. Matthew held a rope in his hands. It was fashioned into a noose.

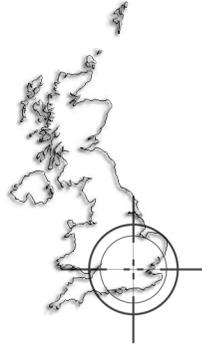
He welcomed the first stone from James as it struck his temple. He didn’t flinch. He didn’t feel it. Nor did he feel the second from Luke, or the third cast by John. The stones hit, one after another, each one thrown harder than the last until they drove Iscariot to his knees. All he felt was the agony of the garden.

Matthew came forward with the rope and looped it around Judas’ neck.

Judas wept.

## Trafalgar Square, Westminster, London





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## BURN WITH ME

Now

It was two minutes to three when the woman walked into Trafalgar Square.

Dressed in jeans and a loose-fitting, yellow tee-shirt she looked like every other summer tourist come to pay homage to Landseer's brooding lions. There was a smiley face plastered across her chest. The grin was stretched out of shape by the teardrop swell of her breasts. Only it wasn't summer. The yellow tee-shirt set her apart from the maddening crowd, because everyone else was wrapped up against the spring chill with scarves and gloves and woolen hats.

She stood still, a single spot of calm amid the hectic hustle of London. She uncapped the plastic bottle she held and emptied it over her head and shoulders, working the syrupy liquid in to her scalp. In less than a minute her long blonde hair was tangled and thick with grease as though it

hadn't been washed in months. She smelled like the traffic fumes and fog of pollution that choked the city.

Pigeons landed around the feet of the man beside her as he scattered chunks of bread across the paving stones. He looked up and smiled at her. He had a gentle face. A kind smile. She wondered who loved him. Someone had to. He had the contentment of a loved man.

Around her the tourists divided into groups: those out in search of culture headed toward the National Portrait Gallery; the thirsty ducked into the café on the corner; the royalists crossed over the road and disappeared beneath Admiralty Arch onto Whitehall; the hungry headed for Chandos Place and Covent Garden's trendy eateries; and those starved of entertainment wandered up St Martin's Lane towards Leicester Square or Soho, depending upon their definition of entertainment. Businessmen in their off-the-rack suits marched in step like penguins, umbrella tips and blakeys and segs, those uniquely English metal sole protectors, tapping out the rhythm of the day's enterprise. Red buses crawled down Cockspur Street and around the corner toward The Strand and Charing Cross. The city was alive.

A young girl in a bright red duffel coat ran toward her, giggling and flapping her arms to startle the feeding birds into flight. When she was right in the middle of them the pigeons exploded upwards in a madness of feathers. The girl doubled up in laughter, her delighted shrieks chasing the pigeons up into the sky. Her enjoyment was infectious. The man rummaged in his plastic bag for another slice of white bread to tear up. The woman couldn't help but smile. She had chosen the yellow tee-shirt because it made her smile. It seemed important to her that today of all days she should.

She took the phone from her pocket and made the call.

"News desk." The voice on the other end was too perky for its own good. That would change in less than a minute