

Biblical Narratives by Horane Smith

If I Could...

An eagle hovered above gracefully, its wings slicing through the early morning sky along the coast of Galilee, with little effort.

The eyes of Rebecca, a middle-aged woman of Gadarena, a small village along the rugged coastline, followed the eagle as it flew past her window and disappeared into the blueness of infinity. She was a troubled woman – troubled because of this mysterious sickness that had been a menace in her life for the past twelve years.

Rebecca was an unhappy woman. Although she could have easily been mistaken for someone older, Rebecca was forty years old, only two weeks ago. Her bronzed skin tone had no sign of any wrinkles and its smoothness made it somewhat of a challenge to estimate her age.

Rebecca had jet-black hair and eyes that seem to be able to penetrate any object they wanted. She was a good-looking woman with a face as charming as they came.

In recent years, the charm appeared to be slowly draining from Rebecca's face. The blood disease that had been eating at her body had become a threat to her. It had robbed Rebecca of her ability to work, play, and even smile. It had become one big challenge for her and husband Mathias.

Repeatedly, Rebecca, accompanied by her husband, had gone to Ozi, Gadarena's lone physician, only to be told there wasn't anything much he could do. Ozi was a well-respected physician and was known to have helped many people overcome whatever maladies they faced. At the same time, there were some he could not help – Rebecca was one of them.

"You have an issue of blood," he had told Rebecca on her first visit. "It's one of those puzzling diseases that one cannot do much about, except hope for the best," he added.

"Do you mean I will have to live with this all the days of my life?" Rebecca had asked anxiously.

"Maybe, maybe not my dear. We don't know much about this problem and so there isn't much we can do," Ozi said, trying not to sound too negative.

“What am I going to do?” Rebecca had said, her hands trembling. Mathias, who was nearby, placed his hand around her.

“Something good will come out of this,” he assured her.

Rebecca looked at him expressionless, although she admired Mathias for his positive attitude. They had been married for fifteen years and sometimes Rebecca felt ashamed that she had been unable to bear him a child primarily because of this blood problem. Mathias wanted a boy desperately, but was very understanding that her inability to mother a child was due to a health problem.

Mathias, a tall man, with muscular features, very much desired to have a son that would look just like him. Ruggedly handsome, Mathias’ huge hands and broad shoulders, were features that were not that common in his small village. He worked the land tirelessly to feed his small family as well as that of his sister, who was a widow, and his brother-in-law, who was blind. As a result, his muscles got the work they needed in order to expand and exercise their power.

On her last visit, two weeks ago, Ozi handed her some herbs, a concoction of various types of plants that have reportedly helped a lot of his patients with a similar problem.

“I tell you it will help this time Rebecca. There have been so many people who told me that they are feeling much better now. Try it because it’s the only thing I have got,” Ozi had said confidently.

Rebecca had taken it reluctantly. She hated to build up her hopes only to see them wane and sent her back into despair. “I hope it works this time,” she had said. “I only hope it works.”

“Let’s give it a try,” Mathias encouraged her. With that, Rebecca started a new treatment for her blood disease.

The words of the doctor echoed into Rebecca’s ear now because since she started to take the new treatment she wasn’t feeling any better. In fact, she felt the problem was getting worse. What was the next thing to do? She asked herself aloud.

The presence of the eagle reminded her she must leave because today was the day one Jesus of Nazareth would be passing through the village on his way from Galilee. She got word yesterday from a relative that he would be passing there some time during the day.

Word coming out of Galilee said that some extraordinary miracles occurred. A blind man got his sight back, a couple of crippled men were able to walk again, and the one that got Rebecca scratching her head was the talk that a young woman came back to life after being dead for a few days.

Immediately, Rebecca and Mathias decided they must go and see this Jesus who some said could be the prophesied Son of God, the Messiah that was to come. If he had been healing people, then he must be able to heal her. Rebecca felt confident about that. The physician could not help so if this man claimed to be the Son of God, then she could be healed. All I want to do is just touch him she smiled to herself.

Last night, Rebecca didn't sleep well. She tossed and turned in her sleep all night while Mathias, who had become accustomed to her sleeping difficulties, snored his way into another world.

Rebecca was lying in bed thinking tomorrow could bring a change in her life. The window beside her bed remained opened some nights. Last night was one of them and it gave Rebecca a perfect opportunity to stare out into the heavens at the twinkling stars.

Rebecca believed that far above those stars was the throne of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. She believed in him with all her heart; she believed that if this were the prophesied Messiah her issue of blood would just disappear from her body. All she must try to do was to touch him.

For a while, she sat there watching the stars so far away. A number of times she sensed being far away from God, too, but a God who she believed was merciful would always be there for her. Israel had done so many abominable things against God, nevertheless, He said he would still be with them because of the promise he made to their earthly father, the faithful Abraham.

A gust of wind blowing from the east came right into her face as she laid on her back. It was refreshing to say the least. Rebecca whispered a prayer and asked God to give her the strength to endure her trials. She also prayed for the opportunity to touch the Messiah when she saw him tomorrow.

"If I could only touch him..." she whispered to herself. That was the last thing Rebecca said and then fell asleep. She slept like a newborn babe.

Morning came with a golden tint and not a cloud in the Middle Eastern sky. It would be a beautiful day; even the birds in the sky and that lone eagle that flew past Rebecca's window detected that. She had been looking out the window, having been the first to rise the moment the sun started to crawl up from behind the rugged mountain peak in the distant. Mathias rose wearily from the bed shortly after and went to feed the chickens. That gave her some time to get her thoughts together and prepare for the visit.

Rebecca's thoughts turned to the talk she had heard about this Messiah. He must be the one, she thought. Who else could let the blind see? Furthermore, he did the unthinkable; he had raised someone from the dead. So many people could not have been spreading falsehoods regarding such an important matter. This must have been the one spoken of by Easias, the prophet. As far as she was concerned, no other human being had done something similar. Indeed, Messiah has come to heal the sick and give some hope to the poor and oppressed under this oppressive Roman government. Rebecca had no reason to doubt that she would be one of those people to receive that blessing.

The walk was pretty short. By the time Rebecca and Mathias walked up the dusty street and turned a corner they could see a crowd gathered in the middle of the road. The crowd swelled to capacity and they could see some people trying to hold their ground as they tried to get nearer to the centre of attraction.

"He is here already," Rebecca said, walking faster.

"How on earth are we going to get to see him?" Mathias asked.

"I have to see him...to touch him," Rebecca answered, walking even faster. By this time, the crowd started to get thicker and they began choosing consciously, a place to put their feet.

"It's hopeless Rebecca, look there," Mathias said, pointing to the throng of heads moving in all directions.

"It's almost impossible."

"Hmm, we will see...I am going through that crowd," Rebecca mumbled to herself. "You watch me..."

Mathias felt his hand slipped out of hers as a large person bounced against him. Before he could reach for her, along came another one.

"Rebecca! Rebecca!" Mathias shouted on top of his voice. The burgeoning crowd swallowed her.

“I’m over here,” he heard someone said. However, there was no way he could know exactly where she was standing.

“Rebecca! Come back over here!”

There was no answer. Mathias started to shiver, wondering whether something happened to her. His head made a complete circle in order to pick out the faces around him. It was futile; he didn’t want to move from where he stood, but somehow he found himself being pushed away from the spot where Rebecca disappeared.

“Rebecca! Rebecca!” Mathias shouted again. The only sound he heard was the buzzing of voices coming from the crowd.

Meanwhile, Rebecca wormed her way through the huddled bodies. Her small figure enabled her to make use of every little space she could get to move closer to the person everyone was trying to reach.

“If I could...” Rebecca kept telling herself.

There he was – the young man said to be the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, as he was called. Rebecca admitted he looked like an ordinary young man. In fact, he looked just like any other person in the crowd. He was speaking; the silence was deafening, the moment he opened his mouth. The roaring crowd was no longer boisterous and seemed to have been waiting for him to say something. A great teacher, he must have been perceived to be; yet he called himself the Son of God, something the religious leaders objected to strongly.

Rebecca edged closer listening to his authoritative voice as she tried to reach nearer to him. “If I could...” she kept reminding herself.

All heads were turned in one direction so people in the crowd didn’t bother to see who was stepping on a toe pushing out of a sandal, or a shoulder rubbing against another. Rebecca took advantage of that opportunity to reach within touching distance of Jesus.

Rebecca made a step, then another, and yet another. As Rebecca did, her outstretched hand reached for its target. It was shaking a bit but only because of the bounces from people bracing against her and she doing likewise. As she watched the hand leaving her body and heading for the person in front of her, Rebecca felt confident that once and for all her health troubles would disappear, not tomorrow, or next week, but right now! She

reminded herself that all she had to do now was touch the Messiah, the Son of God, and she would be made whole.

“Just one more step,” she said to herself, “one more.”

An elderly man was standing right beside Rebecca and he looked at her and smiled. Apparently, he was more interested in hearing him than anyone else. He was in Rebecca’s way because when she tried to make another step, she stepped on him.

“I am sorry,” she whispered with a smile.

The old man nodded and smiled, backing away a little from her. Rebecca took his signal and made that step. With her hand still outstretched, all Rebecca had to do was merely to hold on to Jesus’ garment.

Mildly and gently, Rebecca touched him, feeling her hand brushed against the soft material that made his garment.

Instantaneously, something happened that she could not explain. Somehow, she felt different; her body was taken over by a sensation that Rebecca had never felt before. It was hard to explain, nevertheless, it made her feel anew, wholesome, and like all the worry she ever had was no more.

Suddenly, she saw people around her smiling; maybe because she was smiling with everyone. The discomfort she had lived with daily since the onset of the blood problem disappeared instantaneously after the touch.

“Who touched me?” a calm voice said.

Rebecca saw Jesus looking around in search of that person. No one answered. A man who must have been travelling with him joined in the search.

“Master, it must be the crowd pushing against you,” he said.

“No Peter, somebody has touched me, for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me,” Jesus replied.

Some people were looking at Rebecca, including the old man who had earlier allowed her to make that step. She was too close to deny touching him.

“Rabbi, I did,” she answered nervously.

Jesus smiled warmly. “Daughter be of good comfort, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace,” Jesus said with a wider smile.

The calmness in his voice made Rebecca shudder with glee. There was something in that voice that had authority of some sort, Rebecca concluded. This had to be the Messiah.

“Thank you very much Rabbi. Thank you,” she said, as tears poured down her face.

The old man touched her hand. “Indeed, this must truly be the Son of God,” he echoed in her ear.

“He is the Son of God, the one prophesied by Easias. Glory be to God, I am healed...I am healed. I wanted to touch him, I did and I was healed,” Rebecca said, looking down on her self and the crowd around her. All eyes were on her including Mathias who pushed himself through to join her.

“I’m healed! I’m healed Mathias! Look at me Mathias, Jesus has healed me. He is the Son of God.”

“I am so glad for you dear; this must be the prophesied Messiah of a truth.”

Jesus continued his speech and once again it was quiet. But Rebecca and Mathias were so happy, they kept mumbling to themselves.

“If I could...yes, I did and I am healed,” Rebecca whispered in his ears, “glory be to God.”