

My gaze fixed on mother's dark brown eyes which drooped matching the corners of her pouted mouth. Her sorrowful voice was soft, my smile danced on my face with appreciation. "Thank you Ima."

Yosef's husky voice cut in.

"It will be another early morning for us if we wish to beat the crowds, so off to bed now everyone." As head of the family he could make such decrees –though he did not usually do so, this was a special occasion.

We bid our goodnights, and though I slept; my dreams were lively. I dreamt I was searching desperately for Matzah Bread but no matter how intensely I searched I could not find any. When I awoke with the sun I felt unsettled, even troubled, but did not know exactly why. I barely remembered the dream and the small amount I could remember was difficult to make sense of. I told myself the dream was obviously a reflection of the Passover festival we had journeyed up to the City of our God to celebrate.

Shemreet busied herself with dressing her children and starting preparations for the morning meal. Guilt for the lack of freedom to assist her swept over me and fogged my thoughts.

"Tikvah, I will walk around the city with you tomorrow so you will not be alone."

It took longer than usual for me to care for my wrappings because I did not have the privacy camping here that I did within the walls of our home. Yosef made a tent of sorts hanging from the rear of our little wagon, and mother stood in front of it holding a large blanket to form a dressing area for me. I hid behind my curtain knowing that just on the other side was a world of strangers who would pass their critical gazes. They would wonder whether it were my parents or me who had excessive sin to bring this degree of judgment from the Lord.

I reached for my dress. The fabric felt soft in my hands. I gathered the edges of the garments hem up toward its neck opening, and then slipped the dress quickly over my head, fully aware of Mother's arms in the air, and pushing both arms through their side openings I allowed the garment to fall over me to its place. The dress that had once fit my body so regally now swarmed around my skeleton frame.

I tugged outward at the sides of the garment near my hips and then on the front over my stomach. When did this dress become so loose on me? So big? I had not even noticed the change until today. I felt the soft fabric pucker in my fist as I pondered the girth of my dress.

I heard mother call to me with a stern demand which I have not heard since I was a child and had exasperated her. "Tikvah! Are you finished?" I could imagine her arms ached from the weight of my privacy curtain.

"Yes, Ima. Please forgive me, you can remove the blanket now.