

Tabor

~The First Christian~

By: Dixie Distler

Excerpt from Chapter 9

“How will we find this homeless girl?” Miriam asked Tabor, as he entered the village with his parents.

“Her name is Ruth,” Tabor corrected his mother, somewhat irritated at her judgmental attitude toward a girl she had never met. “And we do not need to *find* her. She always finds *me*.”

Tabor walked with Storm on his shoulder, while his parents walked beside one another a few paces behind. Without warning, a young girl ran between Jonas and Miriam, pushing hard enough against Jonas to cause him to lose his balance and fall against a basket of olives, spilling them to the ground.

Tabor turned to see his father on the ground with olives rolling past his feet, and watched as his mother went to her husband’s aid. Unfortunately, the loose olives rolled under her sandals, causing her to lose her footing and fall, as well! Jonas was barely able to break Miriam’s fall, when she reached for his hands, letting out a short scream before landing in his arms.

The vendor, who had all intentions of selling the olives before they were spread across the main road through town, lashed out angrily, as he watched the scene unfold. “Ruth! You’re going to pay for every one of those olives!”

Ruth knelt and began hastily picking up the olives from the dusty road, completely unapologetic to the couple who had fallen as a result of her childish enthusiasm. “I’m sorry, Yasim. Look, I’m picking them all up, and the basket is not damaged.”

“Ruth!” Miriam yelled, when she heard the vendor say her name. Still sitting in the dust with olives all around her, Tabor’s mother looked up at her son, who had

carefully stepped between the olives to stand in front of his parents. “Please tell me, Tabor, this isn’t *your* Ruth!”

Completely embarrassed by the awkwardness of the introduction, which he had imagined quite differently only moments earlier, Tabor had no alternative than to press on. “Father, Mother, I would like for you to meet my friend, Ruth.”

Immediately, upon hearing the conversation between Tabor and the woman who was sitting amongst the olives *she* was frantically trying to pick up, Ruth froze. With fear and embarrassment, she struggled to look in the eyes of the woman on the ground, who was now leering at her with bitterness. Ruth realized, just a few seconds too late, her clumsy behavior had just destroyed her chance of pleasing the one person she needed to please the most.

With a sudden lunge, she dropped the olives in her hands and cowered behind Tabor, squatted behind his legs—holding the bottom of his mantel in front of her face—and peered around his legs at the two adults who had, in her mind, every right to whip her until she bled.

Tabor stared at his parents on the ground, trying his best not to laugh at the incident, but it was more than Jonas could hold in. With a deep bellowing laugh, Jonas pointed to the young girl who was embarrassed beyond fright, and then at his wife who looked angry enough to eat sand. When Miriam saw Tabor laugh along with his father, it didn’t take long before her demeanor began to soften and she too, found the ironic humor in the sequence of events.

“I like her already, Tabor!” Jonas announced, loudly enough that the bystanders found themselves laughing along with the shepherd and his wife *still* sitting on the ground. Reaching his hand forward, Jonas said, “Tabor, give me a hand up, and then help your mother.”

Ruth did not rise to her feet until Miriam was standing, but even then, she hid behind Tabor. While Miriam brushed the road dust from her mantel, Tabor pulled Ruth around in front of him and completed the introduction. “And Ruth, these are my parents, Jonas and Miriam.”

Ruth stood with her back pressed against Tabor and both hands in front of her mouth, shaking her head back and forth in disbelief at her own indiscretion. “I’m so sorry, so *very* sorry.”

Miriam studied the young girl who was shorter and smaller framed than she, making her appear even younger than her fourteen years. Ruth wore the only clothes she owned, which was a tattered mantel without a headdress, covering a tunic meant for a girl much younger than her.

Her dark eyes seemed larger than normal, due to a life of malnourishment, but they sparkled with a gentle spirit. Before speaking her first word to the young girl, Miriam could see why her son had fallen in love.

The vendor was less amused by the calamity of the introduction and felt slighted when Ruth stopped picking up the spilt olives. As with many of the vendors who tolerated Ruth’s behavior in the market in exchange for her light chores, he was accustomed to whipping the girl when her performance was less than appreciated. “I said pick up those olives, you street urchin!” he yelled, raising a stick with which he seemed quite familiar.

Jonas caught the man’s forearm as it swung in motion to strike the girl, even though she had already covered her head with her arms to prevent the stick from hitting her above the neck. “I wouldn’t do that if I were you,” Jonas said in a threatening tone.

“And who is she to you?” the vendor lashed back.

While still grasping the man’s forearm, Jonas turned to Miriam, then looked at Tabor who had put his arms around Ruth and pulled her to the side, placing his body between Ruth and the merchant to help protect her. He then looked at the frightened girl in his son’s arms and said in a proud, thunderous voice, “This girl is going to be my daughter-in-law, and I would appreciate it if you would not break her before the wedding!”