



PLANET MACCABEE

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ROSE

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Planet Maccabee: A Hanukkah Story
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Published by eXtasy Books, a division of Zumaya
Publications, 2004
Look for us online at:
www.zumayapublications.com
www.Extasybooks.com

Throughout the galaxy, men now follow Natural Law. But the Book was given to us, so we must stand by the Book. That is why they sent us to settle our own world, carrying the Book with us.

Natural Law decrees that the strong must crush the weak, but the Book tells us clearly, "Do not do to your neighbor what is hateful to yourself." And it warns us that the cries of the slaves will be heard.

Some of us wonder why we must stay here. How can we be so sure that we are right when the rest of the galaxy is wrong?

Because I am the priest's eldest son, and therefore the next priest, they often ask me that question. How can I answer it? Only by saying that the Book was given to us and we must stand by the Book.

"But that is not reasonable," Aaron said. We had studied the Book together as children but, when he came to me now, it was only to argue against it. "Throughout the galaxy, there are Teachers to prove that their law is the rule of nature

"We can only answer them with your words—that the Book was given to us and we must follow it. Given by whom? When? In what situation? Perhaps things have changed and more has been revealed."

Seeing that I was about to object, he quickly told me, "I know that you must argue against me. You are the Priest Mattathias' son. But I have invited one of

Planet Maccabee: A Hanukkah Story

the Teachers from Old Earth to come here, perhaps he can persuade you.”

I did not, of course, believe that for a moment, but I was curious to hear him. I was also too proud, perhaps, since I was sure I could hold my own against him.

I could prevail, that is, in argument. If it came to the test of arms, I saw no chance that our little desert planet, made of white rocks and sand, could prevail against the galaxy and all its forces.

At any rate, once Aaron had given the invitation, I could not take it back. The Book told us that a guest was sacred and I had to stand by this, too.

So when their Teacher arrived I welcomed him to our Temple, where a feast would be served. That may have been a mistake. He looked around appraisingly, taking in the rough walls, hewn from the white desert stone and all the fine things within them.

Beneath its dome, the room was filled with stone benches. They faced the purple velvet curtains, embroidered in golden thread, which hid the Book, like royal robes.

Candleholders stood along the walls, allowing those who worked all day to study in the evening, when the sky is reddish-brown. As costly as the velvet, the candles were made of beeswax, lovingly carved by hand.

“This would be a fine place for any Teacher,” he said, as I proudly displayed it to him. Gazing out the windows, he added, “It is in a perfect setting, with your little stone houses surrounding it and the hills beyond them.”

Despite my growing suspicions, I thanked him for his kind remarks. He seemed a friendly old fellow, with his carefully groomed silvery hair almost shimmering above his ruddy cheeks.

On his home planet, he was a professor at a great university. His charm was so great, I was sure that his students loved him. Since I taught the Book at our Temple, that gave us something in common.

"We study the Book here," I told him. That made him smile in an even more brotherly way.

"A limited curriculum, surely," he answered, with a faint smile, suggesting that we shared some scholarly joke together. "There are other Books as well."

"We read them in other places."

"But you do not drape them like kings in purple velvet," he said. "No doubt they have not much impressed you, even though we would say that they prove the Natural Law."

"They cannot prove it to us," I answered, with a shrug. "The Book was given to us..."

"I know, I know...and you must follow the Book. But the Natural Law would be a great advantage to a strong young fellow like yourself, with your powerful arms and shoulders. You could crush every man beneath you."

He winked at me, as though we shared some naughty secret. "And every woman, too," he added. "They would thrill to that angry glare, while they stroked your soft brown hair and beard. And of course, they would adore your power."

Planet Maccabee: A Hanukkah Story

With such a flourish that you could almost hear the trumpets announcing my title, he added, "Judah, Crown Prince of the Planet Maccabee. You are what we call an Alpha Male. Although, in your case, perhaps I should call you an Alef Male, in your own tongue."

He smiled again, at his little joke. "We still study it, you know, among the dead languages. But you must not be angry at me for saying so."

"I am not angry," I assured him, even though he must have seen me scowling. "And I am not a prince, but merely the priest's son, named after one like me, on Old Earth."

His smile faded. "Yes, I remember the story. He even has a holiday in his honor, lasting for eight days. But he faced only an empire, not a galaxy."

So far Aaron had been silent, although it seemed to me he was awaiting his chance to speak. Now he broke in eagerly, "But we might not have to choose. Our Book might actually support the Natural Law. Many say that it permits slavery. Our own planet was named for conquerors."

"Who fought for the Book," I reminded him. I tried not to sound angry, because he looked like the child he seemed, with his lanky brown hair falling onto his skinny shoulders. "And those who say it allows slavery might not have read it carefully enough."

More gently, I added, "That first Judah Maccabee might also have been tempted to serve the foreign empire. But we must fight our temptations, not give in to them."

Speaking of temptations, I soon saw one appear.

Having been hired to serve as our hostess, Miryam chose that moment to enter. What's more, she led three assistants who carried trays of all the good things we grew and raised here: fish, cheese, bread, honey, grapes and wine.

They brought a delicious fragrance that made us even hungrier. The delicate fish and sharp cheese blended in a savory bouquet that displayed her cooking talents, even before the first mouthful had been tasted.

"You have made this planet bloom," our guest remarked.

"We came from all over the galaxy," I told him. "We brought many talents, including ways to find water in rocks."

"And...I see they have been very useful," he murmured. Then he turned his attention back to Miryam.

She was carrying the bronze candlestick, which she set down on the table. The Teacher knew enough of our ways to wait for her to light the tapers and sing her brief hymn of thanks and praise. Then she started handing around the platters, for everyone to fill his own plate.

"A lovely girl," the Teacher said to me. "And with a lovely voice."

"Thank you, Sir," she answered, with a modest smile.

It soon faded as he continued to stare at her, even though he spoke only to me.

She was well worth staring at. Reaching from the

throat to her ankles, her white linen gown hinted at the lovely curves beneath. Her red-brown tresses fell in lavish curls across her shoulders. Their color matched both her eyes and her freckles above her round pink cheeks.

You could hardly blame any man for staring at her, as I did often enough. But the Teacher gazed at her for too long and, I thought, too intensely.

Glancing at Aaron, I saw that he was doing the same, even though he had been taught better manners. I wondered if he would have dared behave so rudely if the foreign Teacher had not been there.

"Miryam is a wonderful cook as well, as you'll learn in a moment," I told him, to break the silence. "She earns her bread serving dinners to others and singing the songs of praise."

"Such a lovely young girl should not have to do that," the Teacher replied. "She should have a man to care for her."

I waited for her to object that she could provide for herself, as she had been doing ever since her father died. Instead, she glanced at me, lowered her eyes and blushed furiously.

"I would be glad to do so," Aaron exclaimed. "But as you can see, she only has eyes for our Prince."

"She has ears, too," I sharply reminded him, as though he had been the child he seemed. "We do not talk about people as though they were not there."

"Or as though they were pet animals and you owned them," the Teacher added softly.

Obviously excited by the thought of keeping such a pet, Aaron knocked over his cup of wine. Picking up

one of the rags she carried for just that emergency, Miryam quickly wiped the stain away.

I noticed that he did not thank her for the service so I was careful to do it instead, hoping he would listen to my tone of reproach. If he heard me, he did not seem to notice. No doubt, he was still dreaming of owning humans.

* * * *

The Book warns us against the sin of pride, and I admit that I should have paid more attention. Our boastful display had tempted the others and, given their Natural Law, that was never hard to do.

If we had something they wanted and were strong enough to take, it was their right and even duty to do so. And who would not want a world that had been made to bloom? Why, then, should they not take it?

Was the entire galaxy strong enough to seize what it wanted from our little planet? The mere question must have made them smile, because the answer seemed so obvious to them. Soon enough, they acted on it.

So when the Teacher arrived next, he brought weapons from the other worlds and the few men he needed to drive them.

He seemed almost apologetic as he pointed towards the devices that were rolling out of the ship behind him. As well he might be. They looked like metal spiders with tubing for legs. He told me that they would weave unbreakable plastic webs for their

victims and, looking at them, I believed it.

"We must obey the Natural Law," he told me, as I glared down at him.

"It does not include respect for your host, I see. You came as a guest and returned as a thief, to take the things we showed you."

"You are unfair!" he cried. "These ugly machines are not the only thing I have carried here. I have brought a lovely gift to thank you for sharing the building, even though, of course, we will only be there when you are not." He grinned at me as though we had been conspiring together and I had agreed to share the Temple with him.

He clapped his hands sharply and the gift sauntered down the ramp towards me. From the iron collar around her neck, I saw that she was a slave. By the glittering silvery garment she wore, I knew she was trained to dance and entertain me in other ways. Her heavy floral fragrance came towards us in sweet waves, carried on the warm, still air.

"A very tempting gift," I told him. "But I cannot accept it."

"Because of the Book," he sighed, in a teasing way.

"And also because of my own pride," I answered. "I am too proud to accept a woman who does not want me."

"But she does want you, Prince Judah," he assured me. "Look how her entire body is swaying, from her hips to her long black hair."

Indeed, from the way she looked at me, she did want me indeed—especially if the alternative was this white-haired man.

"I can never be sure of that," I told him. "She might act that way to avoid the whip."

"What about your friend, then?" he asked, looking over my shoulder. Aaron was standing awkwardly behind me, where I could hear him breathing heavily through his open mouth as he stared at the girl. "He was the one who invited us. Perhaps he is not too proud to accept my gift?"

"It would be an insult to refuse," Aaron answered quickly, pushing past me. "We do not mean to criticize your ways, even if we do not understand them."

The Teacher replied with his most friendly grin. "You will understand our ways better, if you come to my classes."

Aaron assured him that he was looking forward to them. Both turned towards me then, but I only shrugged. "I can't stop you from going," I said.

The Teacher smiled even more widely, nodding his head in agreement. He obviously saw no need to say in words that I was right in that much. At any rate, it was Aaron's personal decision to make for himself.

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But I soon learned that the choice between slavery and freedom was not a private matter. When I went to tell Miryam that I wanted to hire her early for our Festival of Freedom, she told me bitterly that I would not have much competition for her services.

It was hard for her to compete with slave owners,

she said, since they did not have to pay one single worker. The Natural Law Teacher was assuring them that they had every right to use their neighbor that way.

"But they still come to hear about the Book," I told her.

"And they also come to hear the Teacher, often on the same day."

"Our family has not suffered," I assured her. "The Teacher still shares the Temple with us, as he promised to do, and his books are gone when we arrive there. They still treat me with respect. If you were my wife..."

She surprised me, by answering quickly, "I would not marry you for that reason."

I should have pressed my suit with her, but I had little time. Too many people were coming to me, saying the same thing she did. They could not compete with slaves.

But some refused to buy their neighbors or feared being sold themselves. These were still faithful to us. The younger men among them said that they were using their scanty coins to purchase and sharpen their two-edged swords, our namesakes' emblems.

"Swords against the weapons of the galaxy?" I asked them sharply. "That would be madness. We will have to keep standing by the Book and hoping that the others will return to it."

They insisted that I wear my own sword, against those who decided that Natural Law gave them the right and duty to silence the Book's main defenders.

They also pressed a transmitter on me, insisting I

wear it in my ear. I, in turn, convinced my father and four younger brothers to do the same. I feared that we all looked like fools wearing those devices, but they proved to be very useful.

This happened when I was walking past Aaron's house. From the rear courtyard, I heard a whip crack and a woman scream. I raced there and saw Miryam, trying to drag a wagon loaded with stones, which two donkeys could barely have budged.

Her dress was almost cut to rags, as though the lash had struck it before. Sweat covered her body and plastered her curls to her face.

Worst of all were the straps on her arms, tying her to the burden. I dared not look at her back, for fear of what I would do to him if I saw it.

"What are you doing, Aaron?" I asked, trying to sound calm, though I feared that I knew the answer already.

"Whatever I wish with her," he told me. "She is my slave now. She made the mistake of going into debt to save that little hostess business of hers and her creditors sold her to me."

"Why do you even wish to do that?" I asked, trying to keep my voice from shaking with rage. "If you own her, why don't you merely send her out as a hostess and keep the money she makes for you?"

"Why do you want to force her to replace an animal that you could buy with one day's worth of her earnings?"

"So that she will know that she must do anything I order," he said, sounding surprised that I had even

asked him. "She dared to suggest the same thing you did, thinking that she could go on living decently, on her own efforts.

"I had to show her that she must have no desires of her own, except to serve me, in every way she could. As you see," he added proudly, "we are learning to follow the Natural Law."

I glanced at Miryam, who had turned away, as though somehow hoping I had not seen her shame. That made me even angrier with the boy who had caused it, when he was not even worthy to carry one of her serving trays.

If he had been one of the invaders, or perhaps the Teacher himself, I would have argued with him and offered to purchase her freedom. But he was one of us, who had studied the Book along with me.

So I remembered what my namesake had done. I raised my sword and struck off his traitor head with one blow, so swiftly that his face did not even have time to register his surprise.

It fell to the ground and his body soon followed it, the neck spurting blood onto Miryam's torn gown. She stared with her eyes wide open, as though trying hard to scream. Her horror soon turned to fear.

"Now they will kill me," she whimpered. "I have caused my master's death."

"He caused it," I answered shortly. "And they will have to kill me, too."

"But you are the oldest son of the priest," she reminded me. "If you resist them, they will make war on us all."

"The war has started," I told her shortly. "It began

when they invaded our Temple with their learning center." Before she could say more, I switched on my transmitter and spoke into it, in the firmest voice I could manage.

"I am Judah, the oldest son of Priest Mattathias of Maccabee," I proclaimed. "I have killed a traitor and soon the invaders will be searching for me. I am going into the hills now, so all who are faithful, follow me."

Then I thought of another problem and turned to Miryam.

"What about that other girl, whom the Teacher gave to Aaron?" I asked. "She might be blamed for the killing."

With a weak smile, she asked, "You are wondering why he needed me, when he had a beautiful, obliging slave? He said Cassandra was too submissive. He wanted the pleasure of breaking my spirit for himself. So he sold her to someone else and used the money to buy me."

"I should have killed him the moment he took her as a gift," I said. "And I should have killed the Teacher, too."

"They had too many weapons with them," she reminded me, with the start of a faint smile. "They would have cut you down where you stood. You have a chance now, with the faithful beside you."

What sort of chance we had against the galaxy, I could not imagine. I was willing to die fighting our enemies, but never really believed I could win. She seemed sure of it, though, and that somehow made me feel the same.

Planet Maccabee: A Hanukkah Story

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"Whatever that man did to you, you are not to blame," I told her. "You are still a virgin to me."

She shivered in the evening chill as we watched the reddish-brown sun set, almost matching her hair and eyes. Still, she tarried there to reassure me.

"And to everyone else," she said. "He never did anything to change that."

"He could not," I insisted. "You would still be a virgin in your soul."

"And everyplace else," she said, with a smile. "He said my spirit had not yet been broken, so I would not submit to him completely."

"That is one reason he was using me as a pack animal. He was at it for weeks, making me go from pulling cabbages to hauling stones in his wagon. But I never reached the point where I pleased him enough to share his bed. I swear it."

Seeing the truth in the eyes that gazed up at me, I reached out to embrace her.

"I am glad of that," I said into her lavish reddish-brown curls, as I sniffed at her faint natural perfume. "Otherwise, I would be wishing that I had killed him slowly."

* * * *

My father also believed her. He was inclined to ask for the test to be made, but my assurance was enough for him. I was glad, because men had shamed her

enough already.

As the leader, I had one of the caverns to myself. It was even colder there, with the rocks beside us, and the water running below. But we were alone together.

As she lay in my arms as my wife, between those cold gray walls, she tempted me in a way I could not have imagined.

"We do not have to stay here," I told her. "Aaron was nothing to them. They would forgive me quickly enough, if I pretended to study the Natural Law or even said that I did not care if others did."

She went stiff in my arms and pulled back to stare at me.

"So that other women would be hitched to wagons like animals?" she demanded. "I have known you since we were children, and I never thought you would accept a thing like that."

"But we could live in the fine house you deserve. They would build it for us."

"No, Judah. Their slaves would build it. Could we live there?"

"I suppose not," I said with a sigh, and hugged her more closely. "But you know that I will probably die up here. I can't think of a better way to die than fighting for the Book, but what will become of you?"

It was my turn to pull back, as the worst thought struck me. "They could make you a slave again."

"They will not do that," she said, embracing me again. "I will ask one of our own men to kill me first."

Planning to object, I found myself nodding agreement and pulling her closer to me. Our

ancestors had made such an arrangement before, on Old Earth. I was glad to see that we had not grown any weaker since then.

"But what will I do when the fighting starts?" she asked. "You need all the warriors you have. We women will stand beside you."

"So you shall," I assured her, having thought of the same thing. "You will care for the wounded and comfort the dying. Our physicians will train you to help them."

"And we will cook their meals," she added, with a smile I could make out, even in the flickering firelight. "I am good at that, already."

As it happened, we had more men and women, too, than we had expected. Some came from Old Earth and other worlds. A few were slaves who had escaped them. Some others still remembered the Book and the other books that had followed. They had found that they preferred it to Natural Law.

Among them, some knew how the metal monsters worked and how we could destroy them. They had even brought some with them, to show us how.

Just as I had gathered, the tubes were like the legs of the metal spiders. They threw up the poisoned webs to catch their prey, and there was no hope if we were trapped there.

Every tube was made of wide and narrow rings. Our only chance was to cut through the narrow places. Ironically, our simple swords were the best weapons to do it.

We also donned simple armor made of closely-woven plastic, in place of our customary linen tunics.

It let us move quickly while giving us some protection from the poison tubes.

Patiently, they taught me every detail, starting with the way to stand and hold my sword in order to hack through the sturdy, brown, plastic tubing.

Then they showed us how to swing our weapons, with more power than we had thought we possessed. We practiced each move again and again and again, starting with the stance and then gradually advancing to the first step forward.

Led by my Miryam, the women studied just as hard, learning the best ways of caring for the wounded men. Their task, as the newcomers told them, was to draw out the poison through glass tubes, apply a strange-smelling ointment to fight the venom and bandage the wounds tightly enough so the patients could return to the fight.

We still did not have enough men to let any of them lay wounded. They could do that when the battle was over, I assured the women--even though we all suspected that, when that happened, we would all be dead.

The Teacher was very glad to tell us just that. He came to us under a flag of truce, assuring us once more that men could study both the Book and the Natural Law in the same place.

"Aaron could not," I told him, as we sat before a slab of rock that was serving as a table in one of the caves.

"He must have been unstable," he answered, with a sigh and shake of his head. "Some men react that

way at first, when the Natural Law frees them from their bonds of tradition. They do not understand."

"It seems to me that he understood perfectly," I said. "He understood your Natural Law and chose it over the Book."

"You could make all the arguments for your Book," he urged. "You could win some of your people back against us."

"But not all of us. Perhaps not even most."

"Then none of you will be left," he said, with a sigh. "I really would be sorry to lose you, Judah, Crown Prince of the Planet Maccabee. You are a brave and honorable man. But if you fight against our weapons, you must lose. That is the Natural Law."

"The only reason you will leave here alive is that I gave you my word," I answered, just as courteously, as I stood up from the table. "That is in the Book."

So we waited for their mechanical weapons to come crawling up the hills to search for us. They would find it hard, as we hid in these winding caves, but I was sure they would succeed.

Even if they only moved at random, turning blindly this way and that, from the Temple towards our hills and back again, they would eventually come to the place where their sensors would find us.

"Why are we waiting for them?" I asked my brothers, as we sat once again around that stone table. "If we wait, they will catch us. We must hunt them first."

"What should we do then, attack the Temple where they are?" Simon asked.

"It is not the Temple any longer," I told them, with

a shrug. "It is the Natural Law Teaching Center."

* * * *

A ring of their metal spiders guarded the once-sacred structure.

We came down from the hills in silence, but the machines sensed our presence and crawled towards us with their grating sound. The people inside the former Temple must have heard them, because they came outside to watch.

"You may wonder why we are not defending ourselves like men," I heard the Teacher's voice, sounding, as always, mildly amused. "Wouldn't that be following Natural Law?"

Before the students could speak, he quickly answered his own question.

"But we are following it. The machines belong to us, they came from our minds, so nature demands that we use them to protect us."

At that moment, I was wishing with all my heart and soul that those machines had come from our minds instead, so that we could hide behind them.

In my dreams, I still feel the terror of seeing those fat, metal spiders rolling slowly towards us, with their plastic tentacles reaching and groping to sense any human being.

This was not like the training field. This was hideous death coming towards us, trapped in a poisoned web, in the smell of hot metal and plastic.

My men might well have run away at the sight,

and I might have led the flight. I was wearing my transmitter, though, and saw how anxiously they glanced towards me, waiting for my words.

“Stand where you are!” I ordered. “Remember that you stand for the Book and the One who wrote it. Remember how your ancestors stood and how they are praised to this day on our Festival of Lights, the Feast of Hanukkah.

“And remember that they fought creatures as frightening as these—the giant beasts called elephants, with their tentacles growing out of their heads. Remember that we overcame them. So will we be remembered as they are, if we stand!”

And so, somehow, we stood, for the Book and each other.

And so when those mechanical monsters were on us, we fell on them with our swords flashing and hacking through the tubes. They threw up their webs in defense.

Some of us were too slow and the webs caught us; I closed my ears against their screams. Others were able to flee when the poison touched them. They would provide work for the women.

The Teacher led his followers quickly inside the building again, when the giant spiders started to stop and slow. We rebels would soon go back to our hills, I heard him reassuring them. And they had more machines than we had soldiers, so they were sure to prevail.

He was right in that, but, as it turned out, he was not entirely correct about the Natural Law. It convinced the other worlds that our own little planet

was not worth fighting for. We had some resources, true, but not enough to justify the expense of taking them.

But I sensed that they had another motive. Our rebellion might inspire others throughout the galaxy to do the same.

The Teacher left soon afterwards, to spread the word of Natural Law elsewhere. Some of our young men went with him. Perhaps they feared our vengeance, but in any case, they had no reason for staying. They could find plenty of worlds throughout the galaxy where they could follow their new beliefs. We would be left alone with ours.

"So now you will have a new reason to celebrate Hanukkah," he said, with his faint, friendly smile. He had come to the Temple to say farewell and, having been his host, I could not refuse to greet him.

"As I remember the legend, after your namesakes had driven the empire from their Temple, they found only enough holy oil left there for one day, but it lit the Temple for eight.

"A modest enough miracle, I would have thought, compared to the victory itself," he said, smiling faintly again. "But it is still one that you found worth celebrating."

His eyes went to the hand-crafted candles, in a way that was not friendly at all. Then he was smiling again.

* * * *

Since he was obviously trying to be a gentleman, I decided to do the same. I left them time to depart from the Temple with their books and other belongings.

When we returned, we gasped and howled, seeing how he had repaid our courtesy. If we had not been in that place, we would have cursed as well.

Hideous markings covered the white stone walls. In words and pictures, they showed the vilest actions. Men with women, men with men, women with women, both with animals, all with organs that were the size of the rest of their bodies.

It was not the acts themselves that so outraged us, but the fact that they had put them on those walls, in that place, to hurt and anger us.

They had also torn the Book and left the paper littering the ground. Even they could not have thought that they were taking it from us, since they must have known we had a copy in every home. This, too, was meant to arouse our outrage.

As for the gilt-embroidered purple velvet draperies that had covered the Book, and the hand-carved candles that had lit it at night, those had been taken away as souvenirs. On the empty pedestal, we found the Teacher's message.

"Many thanks for the beautiful fabric and the candles," he said. "We will make the velvet into costumes for our dancing slaves. The candles can light the pens where they wait to be sold. This disgrace should ruin your celebration, so there will be no second Hanukkah."

So, again remembering our ancestors, we all set to

work, scrubbing and painting the walls. Our finest penmen copied the Book into a new display volume, while our most gifted needlewomen embroidered the coverings for it.

Molding and carving our new beeswax candles would be more costly, but we found unexpected help in doing it.

Cassandra, whom the Teacher had given to Aaron, had decided to stay with her second owner and serve him for wages.

About half of the slaves had chosen to do the same. Many knew no other life, but some seemed to feel a genuine fondness for their former masters.

Her wages were modest, of course. Most of her payment came in the form of room, board and clothing, if you could describe her scanty costumes, perfumes and cosmetics that way. I was surprised, then, when she came to hand me a box of coins that was probably ten times her weekly payment.

"Did your former master give these to us?" I asked.

"Of course not," she answered proudly. "He is always kind to me, but not even he would be so generous to his enemies. He was hiring out his slaves and now he will have to share the money with them, which will make a dent in his profits, so he has less to give.

"We who were freed pooled our pennies together, to buy the candles that will light the Temple of Freedom."

"There is no need..." I began gently, blinking back the tears that were forming in my eyes. To my

surprise, Miryam interrupted me.

"We will be very glad to have it," she said.

"But we do not need their money," I told my wife, when Cassandra had left, carrying our thanks to her friends. "We are all donating our labor."

"But they need to give it to us," she replied. Since she had been a slave, I decided to respect her opinion in the matter.

She insisted on giving her fair share to the candle fund, from her hostess service. It was doing very well again, now that she was no longer competing with slaves.

She did, however, employ freed women who had been trained for the task. Her clients all agreed that they did them with far greater skill and zeal, now that they were no longer forced to do so.

The painters, penmen and needlewomen, who were donating their efforts, naturally wanted to know why we were paying the candle-makers.

Most of these volunteers understood when I explained. The slaves needed to be the ones to light the Temple of Freedom. Although it was doubtless beneath me, I could not resist sending the Teacher a message, telling him where the freed slaves' earnings would go.

They were the first ones admitted to the Temple to see its renewed splendor, and they clustered around the candles with special pride. Miryam had even more reason to feel proud, because she and her staff provided the feast that followed.

Smaller candles stood on every table, as they always did on the Feast of Hanukkah. Now we would

use them twice each year, as we celebrated the holiday twice—once for the victory on Old Earth and another for Planet Maccabee. And we would sing the same songs, like the one that she was singing now—

“Who can retell the things that befell us, who can count them?

In every age a hero or sage came to our aid.”

The roasted goat meat had never been more savory, the bread lighter or the fruit and honey cake sweeter than they were that night.

Naturally, we had our own celebration after the feast was over.

Lying in my arms, with her full, soft upper arms pressing against my shoulders and her red-brown curls tumbling against them, she sang those words again, for my ears alone.

“And a sage is a very great man,” she told me. “But a hero is better.”

About the Author

Living in Northern Virginia, Jackie Rose indulges her passion for history by touring restored colonial homes. A resulting newspaper story on historical reenactors led to a Virginia Press Association first prize. Four other VPA awards followed this during her ten years of feature writing for area newspapers.

Her love of history also shows in many of the romantic novels she wrote for eXtasy Books. They include "Warrior's Captive (I, Briseis)," "Captive Master (or: The Further Adventures of Simon Legree)" and "Prince Charlie's Witch" (She is really a time traveler determined to help Bonnie Prince Charlie win). On a lighter note, her romantic vampire spoof "I'm Undead – and I Vote" was the Fictionwise second best-seller for Humor in September. It was thus sure to be followed by "I'm a Viking – and I Protest."

Her husband David shares her love for history, cruising, Walt Disney World and their son Frank. He also supports her other hobbies: working out with Jazzercise, buying the latest Vera Bradley handbags and trying to choose enough Clinique cosmetics to earn the Gift with Purchase.