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CHRISTMAN ORPHANS

BROTHER GAS BOOKS

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The streets were abandoned, and most homes were dark. A thief's dream come true. The boys at the local pub nicknamed the "Thieves' Den" had talked about this the whole previous week. Many people would be in Bethlehem, Jerusalem, and other of the ancient towns and cities, registering for the census imposed by that crazy Roman emperor. But here, the town of Nazareth was a tiny hick town, so it was quiet and safe.

Odom was eager to see what he could find, and it was his first time working in Nazareth. He imagined the payoff might last him all year if he struck it rich. Where to start was the first part of his plan.

He talked with the local bartender about employment, but the bartender was adamant that Odom was too young to work in a bar. He was worried that the upper-crust society of Nazareth would not approve of a young boy's working in a barroom considered a den of thieves.

The bartender's answer was a perfect segue to obtain strategic information for Odom's quest. "Well, sir, where may I get a job?"

"I don't know. Most people in the town are poor."

Odom believed he had in the bartender a pigeon ready to spill information that would make his plan successful. The man needed a little more prodding.

"Sir, I am hungry, tired, and scared. While traveling on Jericho Road, my parents died at the hands of a band of robbers. I only escaped my demise because my mother hid me in tall bulrushes in a nearby pond. I had to bury—" Odom cried. He was good at this.

"Alright, kid, don't cry! Go to Straight Steet, two blocks over, and ask people there for a handout or a job. That's where most of the wealthier people live. But I doubt many are home

because they've gone to their ancestral towns for the census. If you don't get a job today, come back tonight. I'll give you a meal and a place to sleep and pay you a little to sweep the floor at closing time."

"Thank you, sir!"

Odom quickly cased the houses on Straight Street. Watching for occupant movement or evidence of anyone at home, he found conditions were perfect for burglarizing several of the homes on this street. Who would ever suspect a fifteen-year-old kid of doing such a thing?

On any row of homes, a good burglar starts with the house in the middle of the row first. If successful, they expand outward. Wealthy people fear thieves and despise nosy neighbors, so they install walls around their homes for security. But a wall also provides cover for a burglar.

Odom cautiously slipped over the backyard wall of a house in the middle. He examined the back door, which was blocked by something heavy against the door inside. He proceeded to find entrance through a window. To his surprise, no windows existed on the back of the house.

Slowly and cautiously, he walked the home's perimeter for some way to penetrate it. This house must have held valuables because it had no other entrances. He found a stone in the home's foundation that was so loose he suspected it might be an emergency exit. For a professional burglar, it was a perfect entrance.