

MIRIAM

Written by

Jen Badasci & Christopher Allan Poe

BadPoe@ProtonMail.com
WGA# 2116748

FADE IN:

OVER BLACK: TITLE CARD: SEPPHORIS, GALILEE: 4 BCE

For thirty years, the Roman province of Judaea has been a thorn in the side of the empire. Placed in power by the Roman Senate, the Jewish client king, Herod the Great, has maintained order over the restless population by use of brutal force, extreme taxation, and land seizures.

As a result, the wealth gap between the aristocratic landowners ruling in Jerusalem and the impoverished, indebted farmers of the countryside has widened.

From the shadows, whispers of revolution have become pervasive. The Judaeans cry out for a messiah, a great military leader in the vein of King David, who will deliver God's chosen people from the yoke of Roman oppression.

BEGIN FLASHBACK...

EXT. OUTSIDE YOSEF'S ANCESTRAL HOME - DAY

Morning sunlight filters through a grove of olive trees. A CHILD'S GIGGLE.

CLOSE ON: YOUNG MIRIAM, female, 8. Her bright auburn eyes against her dark skin possess an otherworldly quality. She smiles as she skips up a dirt road.

WIDER ANGLE: Young Miriam holds her FATHER'S hand, beams with happiness as she looks up at him. His face is obscured in bright sunlight.

Ahead, a twelve-foot wall surrounds a large villa. Displayed prominently on the wall, a DAVIDIAN FAMILY CREST. Young Miriam's Father kisses her head, sends her off to play.

Young Miriam approaches a vast meadow, bursting with STAR FLOWERS (Ornithogalum Nutans Species). The nearby creek is swollen after a spring rain.

Young Miriam sees YOSEF, male, 10, who sits on the creek's edge with his back to her. She picks some Star Flowers, and races to him.

CLOSE ON: Miriam's excited eyes.

END FLASHBACK...

EXT. CREEK VALLEY, OUTSIDE NAZARETH - DAY

CLOSE ON: Miriam, now 16. She pushes the memory away, deftly works to unearth thistles with a flint knife. After a beat, she glances around, wipes the sweat from her brow with the back of her hand.

The late afternoon sun casts long shadows over a thin creek that drifts through a valley of brittle farmland. Dried mud covers much of what was once fertile land. Smoke sweeps over the spattering of olive trees that stand defiant against a drought-stricken field.

A few NAZAREAN MEN control mounds of burning agricultural waste, while another group of MALE and FEMALE WORKERS, ages 14-60, engage in clearing the land of unwanted weeds in preparation of planting season.

Miriam happily works. Her wrist twitches. She drops the knife and grasps her shaking hand with her left. She closes her eyes, breathes deeply. After a beat, she checks. No twitch--

RUTH (O.C.)

--Miriam?

Miriam hides her hand, turns to find RUTH, female, 17. Her nervous demeanor matches her clumsy approach. She adjusts her head shawl.

RUTH (CONT'D)

The sun will set soon.

MIRIAM

I am nearly finished.

The other workers gather in groups to return home. Ruth glances nervously at the desolate hills, then back toward the horizon, where the small village of Nazareth sits on a hill--far off, but within running distance.

RUTH

The others are leaving. I don't like being this far from Nazareth so late.

MIRIAM

Ruth, I wouldn't worry. Bandits only attack when you possess something worth stealing.

Ruth is not convinced.

MIRIAM (CONT'D)
 Besides, Mathias is with us.

Ruth SCOFFS, glances to the top of the tallest hill, where MATHIAS, 16, scrawny but armed with a shepherd's staff, searches the hills for possible threat.

RUTH
 (indignant)
 Miriam, if anyone--be they Roman or bandit--ever descended upon these hills, my brother would hide under my corpse. Then he would wet himself repeatedly as the filthy goys had their way with you.

Miriam glances at Mathias who tends to a mound of dying embers. He returns her gaze, gives a masculine nod. Miriam bursts into LAUGHTER.

RUTH (CONT'D)
 I'm being serious. Look at him.

Miriam looks back at Mathias as he kicks dirt onto his fire. An ember POPS onto his arm. He flails, slaps at it. Miriam LAUGHS harder. Ruth tries to fight it, but her scowl melts to a smirk, then a LAUGH. Miriam stands, brushes the dust from her tunic.

MIRIAM
 A strong argument. Such a fate does sound unpleasant. Perhaps we should head back now.

Ruth nods, *exactly*.

EXT. CREEKBED PATH - LATER

In the shadow of rolling hills, our small caravan of Nazarean Women and Mathias, head home along a creek which has been reduced to a trickle. Its beds are cracked mud. Ruth and Miriam walk behind the others. Ruth PRATTLES on as Miriam's thoughts drift.

RUTH
 ...And then, she kept boasting about this gift.

Ruth motions to the BEADED SHAWL around her shoulders.

RUTH (CONT'D)
 (mocks voice)
Isn't it the most beautiful shawl?
 (MORE)

RUTH (CONT'D)

*I purchased it for you in
Sepphoris.*

(normal voice)

What does she expect? How many
times must I thank her?

Ahead, Mathias strays from the path.

RUTH (CONT'D)

Ugh. *Moro*. He heads the wrong way
every single time. I will return.

Ruth hurries up to Mathias. As they BICKER, Miriam absently HUMS a haunting tune in an ARABIC MAQAM (Musical Scale). A flash of color in her peripheral view stops her. She turns, finds a trail of Star Flowers that seems to grow unnaturally from the rocks.

Ahead, the caravan pulls away, but it's still close. Entranced, Miriam follows the trail to the husk of a rotting ANCIENT OLIVE TREE, and past the ominous glares of crows perched on its branches. She lifts her tunic, moves to the final bloom, which juts up from beneath the water's surface.

Next to it, something appears to be submerged in the mud. Miriam leans in for a closer look. A human hand! She clamors back to shore. The sun overhead dims. Miriam's wrist twitches violently.

MIRIAM

No-no-no. Not now.

--WHOOSH! The muddy hand explodes from the creek, snatches her ankle. She falls back onto the creekbed. A crow's FLITTING WINGS. CAW. CAW. Miriam scrambles back to the shore, stares up in horror.

REVEAL: In the middle of the creek, three crucified men hang. Signs are nailed above two of their heads that read: **LEISTAI**. (Bandits). The main crucified boy, CAIPHAS, 17, has been stripped. Rib bones shows through his mutilated chest. The sign nailed to the cross above his head reads in Greek: 'ΚΑΙΦΟΣ ὁ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΤΩΝ ΙΟΥΔΑΙΩΝ.' (*Caiphus, King of the Jews*)

Caiphus's eyes open! As if pleading for help, he attempts to speak, releases a GURGLE. Several arachnid legs spring forth from his gaping jaw, find emergent footing on his face. Miriam shuts her eyes.

QUICK FLASH: A blood-soaked Roman chest plate cuirass with the Greek symbol for Omega stamped into the leather.

MIRIAM (CONT'D)
 (recites quickly)
 In our lands,
 Not far away,
 Not future nor in past,
 From within,
 Last shall be first,
 And first shall be the last.

Miriam opens her eyes. Everything is as it was before. Drenched and soaked in mud, she scrambles to her feet, hurries after her caravan.

EXT. INSIDE NAZARETH'S BORDERS - LATER

Dusk. Our caravan approaches the village of Nazareth, which consists of a series of two-story farm homes, constructed from stone and white-washed mud.

Miriam walks with Ruth far behind the group now. Ahead, TWINS, female, 19, cast glances back at Miriam, whisper to each other, SNICKER. Miriam hugs her arms close over her muddy tunic.

RUTH
 (loudly)
 Don't mind them. Their mouths hold
 tongues of serpents, spewing
 jealousy, that's all.

The Twins turn away with a sneer. Ruth and Miriam break away from the group, approach the outer wall of Miriam's FOUR-PILLAR HOME.

Miriam glances down at her muddy tunic, frantically tries to swipe the mud away, only makes the situation worse. Ruth puts up both her hands to calm Miriam. They lock eyes. Miriam forces back her tears. Ruth takes off her Beaded Shawl.

RUTH (CONT'D)
 Here. Keep this.

Ruth wraps the Beaded Shawl around Miriam's shoulders.

RUTH (CONT'D)
 If anyone asks, you fell in the
 creek. Nothing more.

MIRIAM
 Ruth, what am I going to do? It's
 getting worse.

RUTH

Did you recognize this dead boy?
Caiphus or what have you?

Miriam shakes her head.

RUTH (CONT'D)

Then it is of no concern.

MIRIAM

Perhaps not for you.

RUTH

Miriam, listen to me. You must
never speak of this. All of
Nazareth will say you are cursed.

MIRIAM

What if I am?

RUTH

You're not. Don't ever let anyone
determine who you are.

Ruth tightens the shawl around Miriam's shoulders.

RUTH (CONT'D)

Tomorrow, this will be nothing more
than a bad dream. Soon, Yosef will
return. You will celebrate your
wedding, and the vultures will be
left with nothing to peck.

Miriam considers it, agrees, then heads into her house.

EXT. VINEYARDS, OUTSKIRTS OF NAZARETH - DAY

Early morning. Oppressive clouds taunt the parched earth with moisture that will never come.

A loose caravan of NAZAREAN FARMERS with rough hands and sunbaked skin, trudge carts of goods up a path toward YOSEF'S ANCESTRAL HOME that sits on a hill behind a twelve-foot wall.

ANGLE ON: YOSEF in the caravan, male, 18. He walks alone. Despite his unshaven, travelled appearance, his broad shoulders and well-fed physique stand apart from the other FARMERS. Ahead, a mule pulls a cart. The animal bucks.

NAZAREAN #1, male, 50s, attempts to calm the frightened beast to no avail. The jolted cart tilts upward and then swings off of the road. Yosef rushes to help, places a hand on the mule's forehead between its eyes, the other on its muzzle.

Almost instantly, the mule relaxes. Yosef then lifts the cart back onto the roadway.

NAZAREAN #1 nods his thanks, glances down at Yosef's DAVIDIAN FAMILY CREST NECKLACE, then shoots him a dour look. Taken aback by the man's sudden change in demeanor, Yosef turns to his home at the end of the road. Displayed on the twelve-foot wall, the same Family Crest that hangs around his neck.

EXT. YOSEF'S ANCESTRAL HOME, COURTYARD - DAY

Yosef enters the courtyard of this open-aired complex. Staircases chiseled directly into the mountain connect to the second-story, while an assortment of ladders reach individual doorways to rooms on the third floor.

Several RELATIVES greet Yosef. Children play and SERVANTS tend to penned livestock, while two ROMAN SOLDIERS watch NAZAREAN FARMERS drop off their goods for transport.

Yosef looks up at a dark doorway on the second floor, takes a deep breath, heads up.

INT. YOSEF'S ANCESTRAL HOME, STUDY - CONTINUOUS

Unnoticed, Yosef enters a den filled with scrolls that are meticulously arranged on wooden shelves.

Yosef's father, HELI, mid 40s, sits with dignity at his work table. Years of tiresome responsibilities have carved permanent lines into his face.

In full military attire, a Roman commander, OCTAVIUS, male, 37, towers over the desk.

HELI

...Commander, I assure you, the people of Nazareth aren't withholding. The drought has hit us harder than most, and it has only emboldened the thieves.

OCTAVIUS

Curious, isn't it? These attacks on my men always occurring just outside your province?

HELI

(frustrated)

Our people are starving. What would you have them do?

Octavius presses his lips tightly. Heli SIGHS, acquiesces.

HELI (CONT'D)
Apologies for my tone. These dark
times take their toll.

Heli pulls a bag of coins from his desk, hands it over.
Octavius checks inside.

OCTAVIUS
This should suffice for today. But
Heli, this cannot happen again.

Heli nods a grim *thank you*. As Octavius exits, Heli looks up,
notices Yosef just inside the doorway.

HELI
(suspicious)
Yosef, what are you doing home?

YOSEF
There was an incident at Temple.
Our annointment ceremony has been
temporarily delayed.

Flustered, Heli throws down his quill pen.

HELI
Can anything else go wrong?

Yosef is taken aback. Heli composes himself, glances at
Yosef's unshaven appearance.

HELI (CONT'D)
We have much to discuss, but clean
yourself first. Get settled. We
will talk in the morning.

INT. YOSEF'S BEDROOM - LATER

Yosef enters his cold, meticulous room, shaven and clean. An
oil lamp sits upon a wooden nightstand. Next to it, a raised
bed with woven bedsheets. He sits on the bed, eyes a stone
tile that appears slightly out of place in the wall.

Yosef leans down, shimmyes the stone free, pulls a small clay
pot from a hidden cubby. He smiles to himself as he pulls off
the lid. One at a time, he removes its contents. A lock of
braided black hair. A bracelet woven from reeds.

Yosef peers down inside at the final contents. A neatly
folded bloody cloth. He gently lifts it, sets it on the end
table, unfolds it neatly.

REVEAL: Inside, he finds one small pressed Star Flower.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

Young Miriam, age 8, looks at Young Yosef, age 10, with concern. Hands him the Star Flower.

END FLASHBACK:

Disturbed, Yosef lays on his bed to sleep.

INT. MIRIAM'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Miriam awakens on a mat on the floor of her cluttered bedroom. Blurred sunlight peeks through her uneven roof slats. She wipes her face, glances down at her hands. No shaking. It is a new day. Refreshed, she rolls over, flinches back.

MIRIAM

Ugh. Levi!

REVEAL: LEVI, male, 2, sits just inches from her face with snot bubbles under his nose.

LEVI

It's morning. Miri.

Levi playfully hands Miriam a toy sword. She wipes the snot from under his nose, then snatches him up onto her bed and tickles him. He GIGGLES.

At the room's only door, HANNAH/IMA, female, 45, enters by ladder, floods the room with her busy energy.

HANNAH/IMA

Oh, Miriam, you're awake.

Hannah moves to Miriam's bed, places the back of her hand on Miriam's forehead. In jest, she lays on the guilt.

HANNAH/IMA (CONT'D)

It does not feel as though death stalks you.

MIRIAM

I am not ill, Ima.

HANNAH/IMA

Oh, I was concerned. Downstairs, grinding meal. All alone...

MIRIAM

I'm awake.

HANNAH/IMA

That's good. I just thought maybe you wanted to know that Maghala informed me that someone has returned from his long trip.

MIRIAM

Yosef?

Hannah smiles. Miriam leaps up in bed. Levi doesn't know why everyone is so excited, but he jumps up and down too.

HANNAH/IMA

Give the boy a day to get settled before you smother him. Your Abba and I will send an invitation to Heli to discuss your wedding.

OFF ECSTATIC MIRIAM...

BEGIN MONTAGE:

INTERCUT: EXT. MIRIAM'S HOUSE/YOSEF'S ANCESTRAL HOME - DAY

- Miriam HUMS a whimsical tune as she empties chamber pots.
- Yosef surveys his family's wilted grape vineyards. Many of the olive trees are diseased as well.
- As Miriam gathers brushwood, Ruth grabs a purple flower, holds it up to Miriam's eyes.
- Yosef watches beggars glean leftover wheat from harvested fields, while impoverished children snatch locusts to eat.

INTERCUT: INT. YOSEF'S ANCESTRAL HOME/MIRIAM'S HOME - NIGHT

YOSEF'S HOME - Yosef's extended FAMILY gathers around a large formal table to supper. Yosef and Heli engage in the hand-washing ceremony and formal blessing of the food.

MIRIAM'S HOME - In stark contrast, Hannah places food on an informal table that sits low upon the floor. Miriam places cushions around the table.

YOSEF'S HOME - Upon finishing the blessing, Heli pulls the chair to his right out and ceremoniously offers it to Yosef. Only then does the rest of the family sit.

END MONTAGE**INT. MIRIAM'S HOUSE, DINING AREA - NIGHT**

Miriam delivers unleavened bread and olives to her father, YOAKHIM/ABBA, late 40s. His gruff appearance contradicts his kind eyes.

Miriam picks up Levi, carries him to the table as Hannah sits. Yoakhim reaches for the food. Hannah shoots him a disapproving look.

HANNAH/IMA
Yoakhim, the blessing.

YOAKHIM/ABBA
(mutters half-assed)
Blessed are you Elah Sh-mai-yah,
King of the World, who gives us the
fruit of the land.

Yoakhim holds up his glass of wine.

YOAKHIM/ABBA (CONT'D)
Especially Blessed are you Elah
Shmai-yah, King of the World, who
gives us the fruit of the vine.

Hannah shoots Yoakhim a disapproving look.

YOAKHIM/ABBA (CONT'D)
(to Hannah)
What? He's heard it all before, and
I'm hungry.

Yoakhim winks at Miriam as Levi squirms into Hannah's lap. Hannah nurses him as she eats.

MIRIAM
Ima, do you think Dodah Elisheva
will be here for my wedding?

HANNAH/IMA
I think it probably unwise to
attempt travel while she is with
child.

YOAKHIM/ABBA
Most certainly unwise. At his age,
who knows what kind of creature
Zechariah put in her belly.

Miriam LAUGHS. Hannah hits Yoakhim's arm playfully.

--The front door opens with a frigid breeze that nearly blows out the oil lamps.

SHIMON, male, 20, enters, pulls down his hood. The birthmark across his face appears even more grim in the low light.

<p>HANNAH/IMA (stunned) Shimon...?</p>	<p>MIRIAM (excited) Shimon. I knew that you would return for the wedding!</p>
--	---

Miriam leaps up, hugs Shimon. Hannah moves to get up. Yoakhim places his hand over hers, stops her.

YOAKHIM/ABBA
Convenient, he shows up after the
land has been plowed, no work under
his belt, but always an empty
belly.

SHIMON
I am not here for food, Abba. We
must talk.

Tense stare down.

YOAKHIM/ABBA
Well, whatever is so important, it
can wait until we have eaten.

INT. MIRIAM'S HUT - LATER

Miriam prepares for bed. Angry VOICES from the next room capture her attention. She pushes a stool against the wall, pulls a loose stone free, peers through the crack.

POV CRACK: Miriam watches Shimon and Yoakhim in the middle of a heated discussion.

SHIMON
...Abba, Caiphus is dead! The
Romans crucified him.

Miriam rears back at the mention of Caiphus, then re-engages.

YOAKHIM/ABBA
Hush your voice.

Yoakhim glances toward the window.

SHIMON

Oh, let them hear truth for once.
(loudly)
The Romans murdered Caiphus.

YOAKHIM/ABBA

The Romans do not punish innocent men.

SHIMON

(with sarcasm)
Oh, yes, he committed a horrific crime. He put a crown of sticks on his foolish head and pretended to be the heir of King David. We tried to explain that it was in jest, but they murdered him anyway.

Yoakhim gets angrier, shakes his head.

YOAKHIM/ABBA

I warned you. I told you not to go to Sepphoris, but just as always, you refused to listen.

SHIMON

Of course you would find fault with me. Yes, Sepphoris was a mistake...
(implores)
But I'm glad I went or I never would have understood how bad things have become. We need to act!

YOAKHIM/ABBA

What are you suggesting? That we go to war with Rome? Have you lost your wits?

SHIMON

Abba, open your eyes. War is already upon us. The Romans stain everything with their gluttony and blood lust. Even the sanctity of the Sanhedrin itself--

YOAKHIM/ABBA

--Enough! I will not tolerate open blasphemy in my house.

SHIMON

But you would sit idle while our people are murdered, our lands pillaged?

YOAKHIM/ABBA

Will you stand against the whole of the Roman empire with your words and your sticks? Don't forget I was there the night Hezekiah called for similar things, right up until the moment King Herod took his head.

SHIMON

I'm not asking for your blessing. I am simply asking that you convene the council of elders. Let them decide.

YOAKHIM/ABBA

Our people are farmers, Shimon. Not warriors.

SHIMON

Then at least allow me to make arrangements for our family's safe passage.

YOAKHIM/ABBA

And go where? This is our land. I am not leaving, and if you continue with this madness, you will not be welcome in my house.

Shimon eyes his father for a beat, then shoves past him.

OFF MIRIAM...