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Abraham's Son

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Jonas Neuborn was drunk, not gloriously drunk, but unhappily drunk, tired and restless. It was an icy winter night in Boston. The snow was dirty and it had been dark by four for a month. Jonas was not from the Northeast, had never gotten used to the winter, had grown up in the sunny heyday of Southern California. And yet, every Friday he managed to stumble hom over snow drifts and through the cold wind blowing from the harbor, through his old neighborhood in Back Bay, which had once been swampland and still always felt wet to the bone.

I would be drowned right now if I had lived a hundred years earlier, he thought, and shivered.

The T ricketed above him, almost empty. The street was silent and the antique shops that lined it closed and dark. The neighborhood was deserted by the tourists, especially in this month, and by the usually languid students, who walked down the streets without enough in their pockets to actually purchase anything, but taking in the atmosphere nonetheless. Jonas had been like them once – a student who had come East for school and never made his way back home.

Now the street was left to Jonas, and his neighbors, and their hundred-year-old street lamps and sidewalks.

An old church, square and brick and Puritan, stood at the end of the silent street. There was a dormant dogwood tree in front of it that bloomed white in spring, but in the winter it stood with large icy branches like hands. The church's bell never rang, hadn't for as long as Jonas could remember. Sometimes tourists stopped before it and mistook it for the Old North Church until their spouse would look at their traveler's guide and say, "Ah, no, honey. That's on the other side of town."

Jonas imagined that the bell might ring sometime. He imagined that if he were living in another time, in some small village, it would ring then, for his father's death. The parishoners would gather about and recognize Abraham's death – "A pillar in the community," they would say. But in the wide world that Jonas had created, no one knew, and the bell stood silent.

His mother had called him that afternoon. Her sobs filled the phone as he picked it up, and immediately he knew.

"What's happened?" he had asked.

"Your father. Jonas, he's dead."