

## Before the cock crows

There was no point in him trying to deny it really. It was written all over him! His look, his clothes, his accent. Everything about him shouted Galilean. A fisherman I'd guess, by the look of those scars from old rope burns on his arms anyway.

I first noticed him when they came to the gate. He stayed outside but Jonathan came straight in. I've seen him many times before, a friend of someone who knows someone who is something in the high priests household. He often came to visit, so I let him through without a word. The other guy though? Well he stayed outside, pacing up and down, clearly wound up about something with a look on his face that quite frankly looked like death its self.

But then it was a mad night. There was something in the air. They had dragged that Jesus guy in about half an hour before and they were accusing him of all sorts of things. Old Annas was really wound up. He's not a young man you know. I half expected him to drop dead he was that angry.

They rushed him into the courtyard and then Rufus came in with Malchus. Virtually carrying his cousin he was. There was blood all over him and he was screaming something about his ear. Turned out you know that in the scuffle at the olive grove some nutter had drawn their sword and swiped it at Malchus's ear. Cut it right off they had, right off!

Personally I didn't know what all the fuss was about. I'd heard this Jesus talk in the temple courts and he seemed harmless to me. But they argue about law and words all the time here. It's not unusual for voices to be raised and tempers to be lost.

This was different though. As I say, something was in the air. A sort of brooding, almost menacing heaviness. I may not have understood what the argument was about, but one thing I did know for sure, this was not going to end well!

Jonathan came back. He pushed his way through the people milling in the entryway. In fact he almost knocked me flying he was in that much of a hurry. 'Watch it mate!' I shouted at him, but he didn't acknowledge me at all. Then he came back with him.

I stood in front of them, after all that is my job. No one gets in here unless I know who they are. 'It's alright,' muttered Jonathan as he tried to push past, 'he's with me.'

And that's when I said it. I was half joking really. Just teasing him that his Galilean looks were so obvious. I mean, have you ever seen a Galilean with any sense of style?

'You're not one of that lot are you? You're not one of his disciples.'

He stopped. His face drained of what colour was left in it. Jonathan pulled him away but for a second our eyes met.

'I'm not,' he said in hardly more than a whisper, 'I'm no one's disciple.'

Jonathan led him over to the fire. I watched them. Everyone else was watching this Jesus but they didn't look at him once. They stared at the ground, at the fire, away into the distance, but, even though it seemed several times that Jesus looked at them, they didn't turn towards him at all.

Suddenly the crowd around Jesus broke away. One of the officials struck him in the face. The temple guards tightened the ropes that bound him and they marched him quickly across the courtyard and through the gate.

Jonathan and the Galilean stayed by the fire. Someone close by spoke.

‘Don’t you want to go after him Galilean? You must be one of his disciples, look at you, it’s no use pretending that you aren’t.’

‘I don’t know him,’ the man replied, ‘he’s nothing to do with me!’

Then Rufus came across the courtyard. He stopped in front of the Galilean and looked him square in the face. He’s a big guy Rufus. Very few people would argue with him. Everyone around the fire fell silent, they stepped back in anticipation of the fight that seemed inevitable.

‘Didn’t I see you with that Jesus in the olive grove when we came to arrest him for his crimes?’

It seemed an age before the Galilean replied.

‘No, it wasn’t me,’ he said as the anger welled up in his voice. ‘I don’t know this man and he has nothing to do with me!’

Rufus stared at him, the blood stains still thick on his tunic. Who would have won had the fight started was hard to tell. Yes, Rufus was tough, but this Galilean was tough too. But suddenly in the distance came the thin cry of a cockerel crowing for the first light of dawn. It was as if a lightning bolt hit this Galilean. His body jolted, convulsed, and in a second he was running. Through the crowd, across the courtyard and out through the entryway. One second he was there in the middle of us, the next he was gone. Jonathan ran after him and I ran back to the entrance where I should have been. Did I hear the echo of Jonathan’s voice on the wind. I can’t be sure, but if I did I think I heard him call ‘Simon!’ But it might have been something else, or even someone else.

The next day we were all taken to the square where this Jesus was brought out by Pilate himself. Annas and his cronies told us what to do so we shouted, ‘Crucify him! Crucify him!’ And sure enough, that’s what they did.

I don’t know why, but for some reason I found myself wondering about that Galilean. I didn’t see him in the square or at Golgotha, but then who in their right mind would willingly go to see a man so brutalised? We were ordered to be there, and in my job orders are always obeyed.

I did fancy I saw him again a few months later though. A man speaking in the streets. Clearly a Galilean. He was speaking about this man Jesus. Claiming that he rose from the dead of all things. He wasn’t the pale, death-filled man from the courtyard though. No he was shining, vibrant, alive in every way. But they called him Peter, not Simon so I’m certain it’s not the same man. After all, no one could change that much, could they?

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