

5 The Donkey Owner

(Mark 11:1-10)

Ha! Well you're dead right. No one had ever ridden her. Not for lack of trying that is! Well to tell you the truth, no one dare ride her she was that stubborn, that self-willed. No sooner had you got up on her back than you were thrown over her head and landed on the ground, and if she wasn't tied up she'd be turned round in a flash and ready to give you the most almighty kick with her hind legs. As I say, ridden her? Not likely mate! Not if you value your own life. That's how she got her name, Qusheh. In my language that means stubborn, and stubborn she was. Ha! A bit like my wi....err... no, I better not say that, not in present company anyway. Everyone in the village knew about Qusheh, and everyone steered well clear of her as well.

The two that came to fetch her were an unlikely pair. I knew straight away that they had never had much to do with animals, let alone stubborn Donkeys. One of them I fancy had been a tax collector. I thought I recognised him from one of the booths at Bethsaida. The other one I wasn't sure about, he looked a bit flighty to me. Could have been one of those Zealots you hear about these days. Any way they came striding up to Qusheh and looked like they were going to untie her. Well the neighbours were on to them straight away. Not that they'd be sad to see the back of that mad animal, she'd caused enough trouble in her short life. No they just didn't want her set loose to cause even more mayhem!

Mathias called me straight away. "Get out here Zach," he called, "there's some nutters about to let that mad Donkey of yours loose!" Buy the time I got out, there was quite a crowd around them. In fact there was a bit of an argument brewing. "What you doing with my Donkey?" I asked them, and do you know, they said the most peculiar thing. "The Master needs it, and will send it back here shortly."

"The master, the master," I thought to myself. The master of what? - mad stubborn Donkeys?" Well I have to say that my wicked streak just took over. The crowd fell silent, they all knew what I was thinking and their smiles were goading me on. "Oh well," I said, almost bowing to the floor, "If the master needs it, how can I refuse?" With that they went to untie the beast. Everyone drew back, to get out of kicking distance, and we all held our breath.

The silence went on for some time. No one knew what to say. We just stood and watched as the 2 men walked away, walked away with Qusheh walking meekly and quietly along beside them. Walking like she had never walked before! No kicking, no snarling, no curled lips, no digging her feet into the ground, just meekly walking along as if this was her normal everyday behaviour.

Once I came to my senses I rushed back in the house, grabbed my sandals and, slipping them on as I started running, headed off after them. I mean, if this "master's" friends had such an effect on a stubborn mule, then I just had to meet the master they had spoken about didn't I.

When I reached the road there was a great crowd. There usually is at festival time, but this was different. There were thousands, maybe even tens of thousands of people, and right in the centre of the crowd I caught sight of Qusheh. And the stubborn, kicking, bucking, snarling Donkey that I had wrestled with for so many months was standing still and quiet as a man climbed up on her back. No protest, no flinching, no kicking, nothing, just standing, solemnly standing as if she knew that this person, the first person who had ever ridden her was the person she had been waiting for for the whole of her short life.

Gently and quietly, as if she was carrying the most precious load, Qusheh started to walk. The crowd parted in front of her and as she walked along people laid their cloaks on the road for her to walk on. Then some cut palm branches from the trees alongside and laid them on the road. And so Qusheh continued as the crowd shouted and sang: "Hosanna" Hosanna" Hosanna to the Son of David! Hosanna to the coming King! Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

And the man? The man who rode on Qusheh? He seemed to see nothing. His eyes were fixed ahead, looking far into the distance as if he were Scanning the horizon for the first glimpse of something. I ran along the edge of the crowd, it was hard to keep up but I managed. Goodness knows how many people I ran into, you see it was almost impossible to take my eyes off of him. It was almost impossible to tear my eyes away from that staring face. And then suddenly, for apparently no reason, Qusheh stopped. I stared at this man as tears started to roll down his face, running down his cheeks, dripping off of his chin. Tears that glistened in the sunlight like a river of diamonds. And then he held out his arms toward the city.

I stood staring at this man, staring at 'the master,' and whether he did or not, it felt as if he looked at me, at me, just one of the thousands who surrounded him, He looked straight at me. And as Qusheh stood with her head bowed, looking for all the world as if she was carrying on her back the most precious load that there could ever be, looking as if this moment fulfilled not only her purpose in life, but the purpose of the life of every donkey that had ever lived, I suddenly knew that somehow those arms were stretched out for me.

I would have forced my way through the crowd and fallen into his embrace. I would have had him touch me, lay his hands on me, bless me, heal me. But before I knew it the singing and shouting had begun again, Qusheh stepped out again, steady and deliberately, and as I watched, the two of them passed me by, disappearing into the crowd as they continued towards Jerusalem.

I stood and watched. Watched till they were long gone, till the crowd had thinned, till the sun was setting blood red against the distant silhouette of Jerusalem, and then I made my way home. And everywhere I looked in the gathering darkness, those glistening tears seemed to glimmer and dance and

Qusheh? O yes they brought her back the next day. You know he could have earned a small fortune training stubborn animals. I've ridden her every day since and she's never put a foot wrong.

As for him well that's a long story that I can't tell you now. You see, Qusheh and I have to get off for Jerusalem. My friend Peter wants to borrow her for a while. He's says he's got to go to Joppa for some reason.

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