

Andrew and John were hailed from all sides as soon as they came to Capernaum. The company of fishermen to which they belonged, was well known in the town and it was generally realised that the connections they had throughout Galilee, and even as far distant as Jerusalem, had contributed in no small measure to their general prosperity.

If their neighbours were pleased to see them, the reception couldn't be expected to be reciprocated by those closer to them in their own families.

They had been away for far longer than they had originally planned and Andrew guessed correctly, that he could expect a searching interrogation.

He and John parted company before Simon's house and John went on his way to confront his father Zebedee, his brother James and his nephew Judas, who usually answered to his second name Thaddaeus, because the town was a confusion of men named Judas.

Andrew surveyed the outside of the silent house, which was broiling in the afternoon sun and considered whether the silence was ominous, or whether it was just a result of the early season of enervating heat. He looked in the other direction and the surface of the Sea was a shimmering cauldron, trapped as it was between the hills to each side. There was hardly a breath of air and if anyone was out on the water, they would have a hard job rowing, there wasn't enough breeze to fill a sail. Momentarily, he had a surge of hope that his brother would be out there - anything to postpone the inevitable explanations - but it was a hope quickly dashed.

"So - you've decided to come home at last!"

It was an uncompromising welcome. Andrew turned and smiled amiably.

"Greetings, Simon! it's good to be home!"

Simon glowered at him.

"If it's so good to be home, you might have thought about coming back earlier!"

Andrew eyed his older brother - in actual fact, there wasn't a great deal of difference in their ages, but Simon had always taken the leading role and Andrew had been content to allow it - sometimes, he wondered if he had been too compliant - particularly at moments similar to this.

Simon glanced at the Sea and the heat shimmer and announced.

"We'll go inside - I don't intend to argue in the sun!"

Andrew responded softly.

"And - I don't intend to argue!"

Simon's eyes jerked wide in surprise, but Andrew didn't drop his gaze.

He followed his brother into the house. Simon silently poured some wine from a large pitcher and pushed it across the table at which they were seated.

"What kept you so long? - Don't tell me! You swallowed everything the Baptist had to say and couldn't drag yourselves away! You and young John - a pair of dreamers who forget others have to do your share when you get a crazy idea to follow cranks and madmen!"

Andrew let him have his head, it was a favourite topic and he'd heard it all before. Eventually, Simon exhausted the subject and stared at his silent brother.

"Well - don't you have anything to say?"

"I was waiting for you to finish!"

He could see the anger rising, but he didn't want to provoke a fight,

Simon had a ferocious temper when he was roused. Andrew continued.

"I waited for you to finish because what I have to tell you is too important to be told in the middle of an argument!"

Simon's look was still hostile, but at least he wasn't ranting.

"We've found the Messiah!"

Simon leaned back in his chair and waited.

"Well - go on - I suppose it's logical - you've swallowed what the crazy man has to say and now you think he's the Messiah?"

Andrew shook his head slowly and carefully recited all he and John had experienced during their time with the Baptist and up until their conversation with Jesus.

"I tell you, Simon, we sat with him from the tenth hour until the end of the day and he told us marvellous things - things I've never heard explained in that way before. He has a way of putting things which makes everything seem so simple."

"What things?"

Andrew groped for words.

"The sort of things we discuss when we're together with John and James and Thaddaeus and the others. You know what I mean - it was as if he had been sitting with us and listening and he answered all our questions."

"Such as?"

Andrew groped again.

"I don't know, there was too much to take in - you have to talk to him yourself - then you'll understand."

Simon eyed his excited brother, he said in a softer voice.

"I still think you're gullible to enough to have been taken in by a trickster! Did he ask for money? - In a crowd the size of the one around John,

you get all sorts of thieves and robbers and people whose only aim is to find someone who is a soft touch. Brother, you and John went to the Baptist with big hopes and you were ready to be taken in by this so-called Messiah.

It wouldn't be the first time that someone like the Baptist has tried to make a fortune out of anyone ready to listen to any smooth talker who comes along - perhaps, this - Messiah - was an accomplice and was working the crowd - you happened to be there - you swallowed the bait - you even asked to talk to him!"

Andrew shook his head.

"You're wrong, Simon - but I take your point - a stranger might do that - but he wasn't a stranger, we know him - he's a kinsman of John and James!"

Simon leaned forward - his interest finally roused.

"Does he have a name - this kinsman of our partners?"

Andrew stared at him, steeling himself for what was to come.

"Jesus."

Simon stared at him without blinking.

"Jesus?"

"Jesus, the carpenter from Nazareth!"

Simon didn't laugh, he leaned back and stared at the wall behind his brother.

"Now - I'm sure you've got a touch of the sun!"

A similar conversation was taking place between John and his older brother James. There was an age gap of more than fifteen years between them and John was closer in age to his brother's son, Thaddaeus, than to James, but there was a surprising sympathy of views between them despite the age gap. When he had finished his story, James also stared at him.

"I've been covering your tail with our father. I told him you were visiting

Jerusalem - now you back with this crazy story!"

John protested.

"I DID visit Jerusalem - I did business with one of the stewards of the High Priest - I struck a good bargain with them - so father doesn't have to be annoyed!

When I finished in Jerusalem, I went down to the Jordan to find Andrew and I found him helping the Baptist by organising the crowds who came to be baptised - so I lent a hand. Then, what I've told you happened. James shook his head in bewilderment.

"Jesus! - Our Jesus? Our cousin - the Messiah!? Sorry, John - I know he's always been the odd one out in our family and even if he is our kinsman, I tell you plainly, I haven't always felt close to him - because he was different! Don't get me wrong - he's a good man and he's got a generous nature, but he's always seemed - what's the word? - separate! When he was with us, somehow, he wasn't with us - Jesus is a man who walks alone with his own thoughts."

John argued warmly.

"I think you'd soon have a different opinion if you talked to him for as long as Andrew and I did. He gave us simple answers to hard questions. The sort we talk about between ourselves and our friends."

James shook his head doubtfully."

"I don't know, John - Jesus - Jesus of Nazareth! You want me to believe he's the Chosen One of God - the Messiah - the one for whom we wait? I'd need a lot more convincing!"

John said eagerly.

"Talk to him - you'll see what I mean!"

James nodded soberly.

"All right - I'll talk to him if that makes you happy - Did you bring him here with you?"

John's face fell.

"I told you, Andrew and I went to find him and he'd vanished - we don't know where."

James shrugged.

"Then, I can't talk to him - perhaps, the next time he comes to Capernaum - that is, if he ever comes! Why would the Messiah come to Capernaum?"

Later that day, in the cool of the evening, James and Simon met.

"Our brothers seem to have been swept off their feet by the Baptist."

Simon nodded.

"I admit, I'm worried - Andrew's a level-headed man. It isn't like him to be taken in so easily."

"What makes it worse is that Jesus is our cousin - it doesn't matter how I try, I can't match the Jesus I know with being a Messiah."

Simon murmured.

"He's a quiet sort, pleasant enough but keeps himself apart, I can't see him having the makings of a king who is supposed to establish again the Kingdom of Israel!"

James looked around cautiously.

"Keep your voice down, my friend. Herod has his spies everywhere - even in Capernaum - and remember the Roman who stopped John and Andrew on the road. That tells me that they're interested as well."

"Your kinsman had better watch his step, James - he won't last long if he starts proclaiming himself to be the Anointed One. If Herod doesn't arrest him, the Romans will. Can't you warn him? Through his family, perhaps. They

should know where to find him."

James nodded in agreement - in the silence which followed, they stared out over the water. James spoke after a while.

"I think we ought to ask the opinion of the others."

Simon jerked into alertness.

"About what!? Why involve more than the four of us?"

James faced him squarely.

"Because we've often talked about the coming of the Messiah to free us from oppression - because people like Simon from Cana and James bar Alphaeus - perhaps, Thomas and Philip, might have their own ideas - perhaps we're wrong, Simon - who's to say whether my kinsman is or isn't the one?"

Simon laughed softly.

"James, ever the optimist, always full of hope! - All right - but we must bind them to secrecy - and John and Andrew as well - until we can prove it or otherwise!"

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Marcellus had been transferred to Tiberius on Pilate's orders. The posting had been abrupt and unexplained, and since such a move was generally construed as a fall from favour, Marcellus was left wondering whose toes he had managed to trample upon. He couldn't question his orders, his military training denied him that recourse. He could only hope that some explanation would be offered, but as the hours dwindled before his departure, that hope faded. His commander had been abrupt to the point of brusqueness and whatever friendly relationship might have existed earlier was frozen by his unwavering and uncompromising glare.

Marcellus was despatched with his troop and clattered out of Caesarea, feeling that they were being studiously ignored by their fellows. Marcellus drew some comfort from the fact that he hadn't been separated from his men, this was countered by the knowledge that their relationship had also condemned them to the backwoods posting and that they were condemned to share in his unknown transgression.

He nursed the hope that he might meet up with Lucian - unless his new headstrong friend had managed to get his throat cut. He couldn't get out of his mind the thought that in some way, their mutual entanglement with the declaration of a new Messiah was involved with his sudden posting.

Riding over the Carmel range, which jutted out towards the coast above Caesarea, he turned back to look over the town he had left - a very Roman place which invaded the ancient landscape of Palestine - it was said that Tiberius was even more Roman, but it had been built to suit the taste of Herod Antipas, it was a new city, barely five years old and pessimistically, he accepted the probability that it was rough at the edges and certainly, another alien intrusion in the old established pattern of regional life.

He took in the marble whiteness of Caesarea and the deceptive blue of the Mare Nostrum - the Jews called it the Great Sea - beyond the horizon was Rome and he had a sudden and unexpected surge of homesickness. He thought the thought that every soldier thinks at one time or the other during his service: 'What in the name of all the gods was he doing, sweating away his life on foreign soil, far from home, watching inhabitants who hated your guts to the extent that they looked for the first opportunity to plant a knife in your back as a token of gratitude for the Roman presence?'

He turned his horse abruptly and signalled his men to go forward. Now was the time to keep a watchful eye, for no matter how well the roads were

patrolled by the special force detailed for that service, bandits still lurked in the hills and the journey to Jerusalem earlier, had been a salutary reminder that even a group the size of that which accompanied the Procurator, were a target for desperate men who had nothing to lose but their lives.

They cleared the ranges, leaving the massive bulk of Carmel to the north-west. This was the Plain of Esdraelon and they had crossed into Galilee, the first town of any size was Nazareth, but it was of no consequence and they clattered through without stopping, raising the dust and attracting half-hearted attention from the locals, who were used to squads of military riding through between Caesarea and Tiberius. When the dust had settled, they returned to the tasks which had occupied them and their ancestors for generations - one invading army or the other didn't matter - so long as they were left in peace.

The way led past the flanks of a looming massive of peculiar shape - in the local tongue, it was called the Horns of Hattin. It commanded the heights above Tiberius and obviously, it wasn't a place to be conceded to a threatening enemy.

When they came in sight of Tiberius, Marcellus' spirits rose a little.

The Sea of Tiberius lay beyond and along its shores to the north and south were small fishing communities built around the indented shoreline. Out on the waters, was a small fleet of various craft. Some were obviously, local fishing boats, but others were the toys of the affluent. It looked as if the new citizenry of this new city named in honour of the divine Caesar, enjoyed their pleasures and ensured that they were available.

The city itself was dazzling, the brilliant sunlight reflecting off its marble. Herod Antipas had neglected no expense to bring it into being.

Marcellus flickered a glance at his men, who had been atypically quiet during

the long ride. There was a lightening of the dour expressions of resignation.

He called hopefully.

"Perhaps our posting to Tiberius won't be so bad after all."

There were a few half-hearted murmurs of agreement, which did encourage him. He kneed his horse into action and they descended the road towards the garrison gates. As small squad met them. Marcellus saluted the officer leading them, there was a mutual assessment. Marcellus guessed him to be a veteran of a few of the more testing campaigns in the provinces to the north and west of Rome, posting him to Tiberius, was the equivalent of putting him out to grass.

As they rode down to the town, Marcellus started a conversation which was supposed to be friendly and casual.

"I suppose you don't have much trouble in a place like this?"

Gratus, gave his a sharp look.

"You would suppose wrong! We're expecting trouble - the religious fanatics are stirring up the people again."

Marcellus eyed the peaceful countryside. Gratus went on relentlessly.

"Don't let appearances fool you! It looks quiet enough, but there are Zealots in the hills, just waiting for a new leader to give the word. There's already reports of unrest in the back country. People wandering around the villages dropping the word to anyone who wants to listen. They're being told to be ready, a new leader is coming - in fact, we had a trader from Rome here a couple of days ago - he's actually seen him - and a couple of his generals!"

Marcellus checked his horse and exclaimed.

"Lucian! Lucian was here? He actually made it?"

Gratus reined his mount.

"You know him?"

"Lucian! Lucian Quintus."

Gratus scratched his chin.

"That would be him - says he's talked to the two men I was telling you about. Julius Achaicus pushed him in front of Herod, or so the story goes, and he nearly choked on his own bile!"

Marcellus exclaimed.

"So, Lucian's in Tiberius."

Gratus shook his head.

"Left yesterday, in a hurry, before dawn. Our Commander seemed in a hell of a hurry to get him out of town. The story going the rounds is that Herod wanted him to point out the two men and start a local war - which didn't suite the Commander, who decided to get him out of the way, so he sent him packing back to Caesarea!"

"He must have been back before we left!"

"More than likely."

They nudged their horses into a walk. As they neared the gates.

Gratus warned.

"Herod's in town - and it is his town - so watch your back, if you ask me, he's paying the Zealots to make trouble."

He turned and called the troop to attention and they rode under the gates with military precision, before wheeling into the courtyard of the garrison.

Marcellus reported to Julius, who kept him standing to attention while he consulted the sealed despatches he had brought with him.

"Stand easy, Flavius."

Marcellus relaxed slightly. Julius eyed him steadily.

"I had asked our Procurator for considerably more than the ten men

you bring. You are aware of the situation we face here?"

"Not specifically, Commander - it wasn't discussed."

Julius' gaze didn't shift.

"I see - however, you are aware of a potential new leader for the Zealots?"

"I believe I have seen him, Commander."

"Tell me about that."

Marcellus repeated the story of his special reconnaissance for Pilate and the outcome. Julius nodded.

"Your report coincides with what we have heard from another source - You are aware that your companion, Quintus visited us recently?"

Marcellus opted for the truth, it was less complicated than lying.

"Gratus mentioned it earlier."

Julius nodded.

"Of course he did, it was to be expected."

He played with the despatch.

"The Procurator has posted you and your men to us, so that you can assist in the apprehension of this man before he becomes a potential threat to the stability of the region.

I am quite sure his highness, the Tetrarch, has made representations to Pilate - to ease his anxiety.

Flavius, you are one of two men who can identify all three men. I saw fit to send Quintus back to Caesarea, firstly to forestall the Tetrarch's eagerness to settle matters in an impetuous manner - and secondly, because Quintus is an amateur and not under military discipline.

He gave one piece of useful information of which you are not aware.

He was confronted by the two men as soon as they realised he was following

them - no doubt in a clumsy way! They obligingly told him that they were returning to Capernaum - which we must assume to be their base.

It is, therefore, my intention to supplement the garrison in Capernaum, by yourself and the men under your command!"