

There was little more to be gained from the strained interview with the big fisherman. James was all too aware that Simon didn't like him, but at least, he had listened and hadn't ridiculed him for the wild story that he had been visited by a man they both knew to have died. James was comforted by the fact that he was not alone in this, and that Jesus had appeared to others - and that Simon was prepared to believe that he had risen from the dead. He walked silently the short distance from the house of Simon to that of Zebedee. Judah paced silently beside him. In a strange way, the silence irritated James - Judah was always silent - watching and waiting ready to pounce on any point which could be disputed.

They were totally un-alike - Judah, extravagant and polished - a typical Sadducee, inclined to pompousness and self-assurance that every word he spoke originated at the throne of God, while James was more austere, a disciplinarian who liked to believe that he kept the family together and prosperous in the face of the lack of interest Jesus had always displayed in matters of business. Perhaps, that was the wrong way of describing it, but there was no denying that it was James who concerned himself with unpaid accounts and the efficient running of the carpenter's shop, while Jesus was preoccupied with his own thoughts. James fought a battle with himself, it sounded as if he was complaining - even in his thoughts - and perhaps he was!

When later, they continued their journey back to Nazareth, the silence was maintained. Judah had allowed him to do all the talking after exchanging greetings with their mother.

It hadn't been a private interview, Salome and John being very conspicuous in their determination not to leave Mary alone.

James had broached the subject as delicately as he could.

“We had hoped you would return with us to Nazareth, mother. You can be assured that our neighbours will keep their peace.”

Mary smiled slightly.

“As they did when I became pregnant with Jesus at the age of fifteen, I suppose. I remember their peace - nothing ever said to my face, but always behind the hands - and then the coarse jokes and ribald comments in the tavern! Comments such as: Joseph testing the waters before plunging in - and many others less capable of being repeated!”

Judah had been moved to a scandalised outburst.

“Mother! That was so long ago - it’s all forgotten!”

She turned to him and eyed his flushed face.

“Such matters are never forgotten - they are always hidden under the dirty linen to be pulled out and aired at the right time.”

James interjected grimly.

“If I hear such talk they’ll answer to me!”

Mary sighed and nodded.

“I have no doubt you will try, James - but you won’t silence them. Look at what they have to add now! Something like this perhaps: ‘You remember the scandal of Mary and her first child? Now, he’s been taken by the Romans and executed like a common criminal! I always said nothing good would come of him - parading around the countryside pretending to be a prophet and a healer, while all the time he was plotting against the priests and Rome. Well, he’s come to a proper end, just as I said he would!’”

She looked to her two sons in turn - they remained silent.

“I love all my sons - not just one - believe me - but I won’t come back to Nazareth. I have no place there.”

James responded.

“Then, where is your place mother - if not with us?”

John interjected.

“Her place is with me, James - it was as Jesus wanted it. Almost the last thing he said was: ‘Mother this is your son, son this is your mother.’ She remains with me, because Jesus wished it so. Where I go, she will go - and I’ll care for her for the rest of her days!” Mary placed her hand over his, and he looked down at her with obvious love. James’ mouth tightened - Jesus had thought so little of him and his other brothers, that he had entrusted their mother to a cousin! There was no point in argument - time would prove whether the arrangement would hold.

He tried one more time.

“Mother, Jesus has - appeared to me! He told me to go to Jerusalem with Simon, James and John and the others when they go. He told me he has work for me there.”

He stared into the eyes of John, whose gaze didn’t waver. James continued.

“I know you won’t believe me - “

Mary smiled slightly.

“What is there not to believe - that you are to go to Jerusalem - or that Jesus appeared to you? He’s appeared to many - listen to the rumours.”

James gazed into her eyes.

“Has he appeared to you, mother?”

The smile widened and her eyes sparkled.

“That is between him and me!”

On the way back to Nazareth, there was so much that could have been said, but Judah maintained his aloof silence. James glanced at him once or twice, but it was hard to read behind the Sadducee complacency.

The meeting with James made Simon even more restless. He prowled around the house in a black mood, trying to fathom out what James had meant by ‘going with them to Jerusalem’. Simon had told the plain truth when he had rejected the idea. The remaining eleven disciples had only just returned safely from the city, which was fraught with danger for them, and he had no intention of returning. It wasn’t long after

that John and his brother James came to report that Jesus' brothers had visited the house of Zebedee. John repeated the conversation, and their question was the same as Simon's - what had James meant when he had said he was to go with them to Jerusalem?

There were other visitors that same evening - Thomas, the Twin, and Nathaniel and Philip. Once again the story was repeated and once again the reaction was one of dismal fearfulness at the prospect of going back to the city from which they had just escaped. Thomas summed it up in his usual gloomy way.

"We all know we were followed home by Romans - and we know they're still watching us - what do you think they'll do when we start walking back to Jerusalem? I'll tell you, they'll arrest us for sure - and crucify us the same way as they did the Master!"

Mariamne had had enough! She stood at the foot of the table with her hands on her hips and glared at her husband.

"I thought I told you to do something useful! It's a good night - take the boat and do what you're best at doing - and take these pessimists with you - and the boy too!"

Jonah's face brightened, he'd been listening to the conversation from a corner of the room, becoming more and more anxious as the gloom had developed. Simon stared into Mariamne's resolute face and rose hastily. He gestured to the others to follow.

Mariamne's face softened as she watched them flee to the shore of the sea. They were troubled men - out of their depth - and they needed something else to think about.

Simon glanced at the sky and out over the water. He muttered:

"If you ask me, we'll be wasting our time!"

Andrew came running after them. Simon turned to him.

"Did she kick you out too?"

His brother nodded.

"Told me to go fishing."

Simon muttered.

“What do women know about fishing - we’ll waste our time.”

They pushed the boat out - there was nowhere else to go and nothing else to do.

Simon’s pessimism was justified - everything was wrong, the light wind, the still water, the oppressive atmosphere. They were forced to row the boat out on to the sea, rather than use the fitful wind to fill the sail. They fished all night and caught nothing.

Towards morning, they rowed the boat inshore. A man was standing on the beach looking out towards them. They were some way south of the town - between Capernaum and Magdala. The man called out to them across the water.

“Friends - haven’t you caught anything?”

They looked at each other, they didn’t know him, he was a stranger.

Simon called back.

“We caught nothing!”

The man nodded, as they drifted closer to the shore.

“Shoot the net out to starboard and you’ll make a catch.”

Simon glanced at the others, he could see nothing and neither could they, but at a certain angle of the light, it was sometimes possible to see a shoal of fish from the shore

Simon shrugged.

“What have we got to lose?”

They threw out the net to the starboard side, and almost immediately, the boat started to tilt to that side. Andrew yelled.

“Pull it in before we roll the boat!”

The eight of them tried to haul the net on board. Simon roared.

“The net will break!”

He threw off his fisherman’s coat, which was drenched and restricting his movements, and worked naked. The others did the same. John cried out to Simon.

“It’s the Lord!”

Simon stared at him wide-eyed and then back to the man on the shore. He wrapped his

coat around him and plunged into the sea, wading towards the shore. The rest of them gave up trying to haul in the net, instead, rowing the ship towards the beach. They were only out about a hundred yards. Simon emerged from the water and threw himself at Jesus feet. Jesus pulled him up and smiled at him. He had lit a charcoal fire, and there were already some fish laid on it. He said to Simon.

“Bring some of your catch - and come and have breakfast.”

Simon ran back to the boat and helped the others to beach it. They dragged the net to the shore, it was full of large fish - they counted one hundred and fifty-three. Despite the size of the catch the net wasn't damaged.

Jesus waited for them as they joined him at the fire. Jonah shrank into the background, suddenly sure that he wasn't supposed to be a part of it. Jesus smiled and drew him forward without a word. He took bread and broke it and gave it to them, and then took the fish and distributed it in the same way. They ate without conversation, but after breakfast, Jesus said to Simon.

“Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me more than anything else?”

Simon looked startled and little self-conscious. He murmured.

“Yes, Lord - you know that I love you.”

Jesus nodded.

“Then, feed my lambs.”

There was a short silence, then Jesus said to Simon.

“Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me?”

Simon jerked to attention, and stared Jesus straight in the eye. He spoke louder this time.

“Yes, Lord - you know that I love you!”

Again, Jesus nodded quietly, but he leaned forward.

“Then, tend my sheep.”

Again, there was a shuffling silence, the other disciples looked at each other. Jesus

stared at Simon hard.

“Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me?”

Simon turned brick red, he blinked his eyes to get rid of the tears, he almost shouted.

“Lord, you know everything; you know I love you!!”

Jesus nodded again, still staring into Simon’s eyes.

“Feed my sheep.”

He paused before going on.

“I tell you this plainly: when you were young you fastened your belt around you and walked where you chose to go; but when you’re old you’ll stretch out your arms, and a stranger will bind you fast, and carry you where you’ve no wish to go.”

Simon stared at him without comprehension. Jesus smiled a little and added.

“Follow me!”

Simon looked around and saw John, the disciple Jesus loved, and the one who had leaned back on his breast to whisper the question: ‘Lord, who is it that will betray you?’.

Simon asked.

“Lord, what will happen to him?”

Jesus looked at him sharply.

“If it’s my will that he waits until I come, what has it to do with you?”

Follow me!”

This answer circulated amongst the followers, who took it to mean that John wouldn’t die. Jesus didn’t say that, he only said: ‘If it is my will that he waits until I come, what has it to do with you?’

The disciples stayed in Galilee for some weeks, before returning to Jerusalem. Those who had fled Jerusalem with Simon, now returned with Simon and the others, and this time, Mariamne couldn’t be persuaded to remain behind.

“You are my husband, Simon - my place is with you - and I sense we won’t return to Galilee for a long time. Your days as a fisherman are over, as they are for James, John

and the others.”

The other James, the brother of Jesus, and surprisingly, Judah the Sadducee accompanied them.

Marcellus and his Decade watched them and followed, but they did nothing to impede them - and so, they returned to Jerusalem, to the home of Mary of Cyrene.

Simon’s confidence had grown over the forty days since the death and resurrection of Jesus, who had appeared to the Eleven frequently, reinforcing the doctrine they had been taught in earlier days. Sometimes he appeared to Simon-Peter alone and patiently answered his questions. Constantly, he emphasised one point.

“You must wait here in Jerusalem, for the fulfillment of the promise made by my Father, about which I’ve told you. John, as you know, baptised with water, but you’ll be baptised with the Holy Spirit - and it’ll happen within the next few days.”

One morning, they met him on the Mount of Olives - just the Eleven - no others with them. Someone asked the question:

“Lord, is this the time when you are to set up again the kingdom of Israel?”

He looked at them intently, his face very solemn.

“It isn’t for you to know about dates and times, which are only set within the Father’s control. But you’ll receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you’ll bear witness for me in Jerusalem, and all over Judaea and Samaria, and away to the ends of the earth. The Father has given me full authority in heaven and on earth. I tell you to go forth and make all nations my disciples; baptise men everywhere in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to follow all that I’ve commanded you. You can be confident of this: - I am with you always, to the end of time!

Faith will bring with it these miracles: believers will cast out devils in my name and speak in strange tongues; if they handle snakes or drink any deadly poison, they’ll come to no harm; and the sick upon whom they lay hands will recover.”

The Mount was shrouded in mist, which ebbed and flowed around them in damp fingers. Simon shivered, but it wasn't the enveloping cloud. He sensed a finality, something was about to happen.

Jesus lifted his hands over them in a blessing; and in the act of blessing them he parted from them. As they watched dumbly, Jesus lifted gently from the ground, and he drifted upward to be enveloped in the cloud.

They stood spellbound trying to penetrate the mist to see where he was. Quite suddenly, two men stood beside them, they were clad in spotless white robes. One asked:

"Men of Galilee, why do you stand there looking up into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken from you up to heaven, will come in the same way as you've seen him go." As abruptly as they had come, the two men were gone. Simon turned to the others, he was shaking with tension. His companions looked no better.

He rasped.

"You heard the Lord's instructions, we go to Jerusalem!"

They trudged back down the hill, and as they did so the mist evaporated. Simon looked back at the brow, which had been shrouded only minutes earlier, but there was no sign that anything extraordinary had taken place. When they entered the city they went to a room set aside for them in Mary of Cyrene's house. With them were the group of women who had always followed the Lord, together with Mary, the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

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The following words are taken from two passages at the end of John's gospel:

John 21:25 and John 20:30.

'There is much else that Jesus did. If it were all to be recorded in detail, I suppose the whole world could not hold the books that would be written. There were indeed many other signs that Jesus performed in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.'