



Funny Day

'Where have you been? I was getting worried. I thought of sending the men to look for you. Seth saw to the goats before he left. He dampened the forge and went up into the woods to settle the charcoal burner..... No need to tell me. You've been talking!' The touch of irony in Hinda's voice was long lost on Yoram. Her man talked!

'So do you', he would reply. Living at the forge on the edge of oak woods above the lake meant some lonely days for Hinda. Except for snippets of news the workmen brought, and a few opportunities to go into town and talk to neighbours she spent most of her days alone weaving.

'You haven't been away listening to the Rabbi again?'

'Well...' At last Yoram had a chance to speak but missed it. Hinda took a cloth and lifted her hot bowl of bean and lentil stew from the fire top. *'Sit down then.'*

Yoram washed his hands, spread a mat and sat himself against the wall of their sleeping shelf with his feet stretched out to the fire. Evenings were turning cold already. He took his bowl and waited for Hinda to pass him bread and a large cup of wine.

'Well what?' She paused to grin at him. *'You were with Jesus then?'*

'Yes, but not for long. There were other things to do.'

Hinda busied herself pottering around, preparing the sleeping ledge. *'Surely it didn't take you all afternoon and night to get to Dan's and fit his hinges!'*

'You know what it's like once you get to a job. I had to go the long way round town.'

Yoram, after a morning's work at the forge, had set out with a pair of new hinges he had made for Dan's barn door. Dan's farm was just below the tree line at Amnon to the east of Capernaum. Yoram had another call to make on his way which meant taking the shoreline route.

'Did you see Judith then?' Hinda was still not ready to hear the day's story. Judith was Hinda's great aunt. A widow of many years with no family of her own, she had unofficially adopted Hinda to help her mother cope with a large family. They still had a special relationship. Judith and her husband James had only had weeks of marriage before James died of a severe fever following a dreadful accident when he had been tangled up in his own fishing net far out on the lake. Since then Judith had continued to live alone in her small dwelling in the fisher-folk community at the poorer end of town. Hinda had often suggested she should come and live with them but Judith always said she was happy where she was with her neighbours and her memories. *'I lie awake at night,'* she often told them, *'listening to the lake waters against the shore. It's like the lapping of happy and sad memories.'*

'Did I see Judith!' Yoram chuckled, causing him to choke on his latest piece of stew-soaked bread. *'You know I meant to call. You asked me to take those bits of fruit and sweetmeats, remember?'* He laughed.

'What's so funny? Is she all right?'

'She's all right now. But seeing her this afternoon is the funniest thing that's ever happened to me on the way to a job. It was still siesta time when I walked up the narrow streets from the lake, but you wouldn't have thought so. You know it's the fishing folk's quietest time but I couldn't believe what I was hearing. As I came nearer to Judith's place it sounded as though there was a party going on with people shouting, singing, crying and a few even dancing in the little square. I couldn't believe what I saw.'

It was the cue for Hinda to unfold a mat and perch on a stool next to her man. He went on.

'It was just as though the bailiffs had called. The whole contents of her house were scattered around outside. You know what a lot of stuff she has. A couple of neighbours were carrying things back in for her. It was all there, water pot, bedding roll and cushions, heating and cooking pots, mats, stools, and basketsful of her sewing, weaving and dress-making stuff. There was her drying frame in the middle of the street with clothes over it and her spindle and thread hanging from it. I carried in her favourite box of treasures. You know that one I put new iron bands on for her.'

'As soon as aunt Judith saw me she quickly hobbled over and gave me the hug of a lifetime.'

Hinda laughed. She knew Yoram was not one for hugs.

"We've found it! We've found it." she kept saying. She was crying. Tears of joy and relief. When she calmed down she told me all about it. You know that copper band she had with silver coins attached?"

'Of course,' affirmed Hinda. 'She wore in on her wedding day. It's her most treasured possession. She slept with it close to her every night. We children loved to hear the coins jangle. I've often wished I could bring it home and clean it up but she wouldn't be parted from it.'

'Well, apparently one of the coins had gone missing – broken off and fallen. She couldn't find it anywhere. She had turned everything out to search for it. She even had lamps lit to help neighbours search too. It was young Simon who found it. You know those places near the shore have basalt tiles on the floor. In the dry season the spaces open up and the coin had lodged right deep between two of them. Simon only saw it when it glinted in the light of her lamp. Judith was so grateful. Even before they started putting everything straight, she'd called all the neighbours together. She found some wine and cakes and it seems everybody else contributed something to the party. Of course, singing and dancing followed. The fisher people don't need an excuse!

Before I left Judith took me in to show me the coin and its band.'

I haven't ever seen it really up close,' said Hinda.

'Well you can now!' Yoram stretched, pulled himself up and drew another stool close to them. Reaching for his work bag he pulled from it a small light blue bundle of cloth.

'That's Judith's head cloth!' exclaimed Hinda. Yoram placed it on the stool and carefully opened the material to reveal the headband and stray coin.

'She let you have it?'

'I'm going to repair it for her.' Not usually very emotional, Yoram seemed close to tears. Hinda touched the blue cloth tenderly, lost for words.

'To answer your question. Aunt Judith's all right! I called to see her again on my way back.'

'Why's that?'

Yoram settled down again. *'If you'll pass me a slice of that melon, I'll tell you the rest of the story.'*

Hinda quickly did as she was asked, eager to hear more.

'It didn't take too long fitting Dan's hinges. He'd already taken the old door off for me. When I had finished he said he was going up on the hill behind his woods to hear the preacher, Jesus. I suddenly realised why there were so many people around and walking on the lane past the farm. I should have thought when I saw a group of Pharisees with that young Pharisee Isaac. Dan laughed at me and said, "You didn't think they'd all come to see my new door and your hinges did you?". Then he asked me to go with him.'

'Now I know why you're late!' It was not an accusation but regret that she had not been there too. Andrew, another cousin, had persuaded her to listen to Jesus speak. She had been instantly attracted to his message and to him. There was the same strong gentleness about him that she felt within herself.

'I didn't stay too long. I wanted you to share it. We'll go together sometime soon.' He paused and Judith recognised the cue to pass another piece of melon. *'I'm glad I was there. He's amazing. His teaching is so real. He says the same complicated things the old teachers do but he makes it so simple and homely. He even brought Judith into it.'*

'She wasn't there?'

'No, of course not, and in a way I'm glad she wasn't. Each time I've heard him Jesus has stressed that everybody matters to God – no-one is extra special in his sight. The poorest and weakest are in his care like the prophets said. You know the Pharisees don't like that. They think religion is a sort of competition to be best for God – to have the best seats in the synagogue.'

'So, what about Judith?'

I'm coming to that now. The teacher was saying how God loves the poorest, the weakest and the worst to the very last one, when he paused for a moment, laughed and said, "It's like Judith down in town this morning." Then he told the story of what had happened to her and her coins. He seems to take notice of everything and uses it to get his message across. A number of people knew about what had happened it and laughed along with Jesus. That young Isaac was close behind me and burst out in the loudest and coarsest guffaw. It may have been his way of telling everyone he was there, but I think it was a way of protesting against what Jesus was saying He wanted to impress his friends. Jesus stopped speaking and looked straight at Isaac and his companions. He waited till Isaac was the only one left laughing. If it had been anyone else they'd have been covered with embarrassment but instead Isaac called out "You'll have us laughing in synagogue soon!" One of his friends muttered, "That'll be blasphemy."

As people turned their attention back to Jesus he said to anyone it suited, "I hope you're not all laughing AT Judith! I hear that all her neighbours were laughing WITH her. She's such a kind servant of God. He must love her so very much." Then Jesus went on to tell us that God cares about the least of us just like Judith and her one lost coin. He talked about God's great joy and even kind laughter when the least and worst of us repent and turn back to make him the centre of our lives. He said that's when God's kingdom of love comes for each of us. I could sense a shuffling of discomfort behind me.

Then Jesus stopped again just for a moment and looked straight at me like he had done at Isaac. He held me in his gaze just for a moment although it seemed like ages to me. I felt like I did when I first heard him and knew I had to change my lifestyle. It's feels as though he takes over your thoughts and you can hear him speaking in your own mind.'

'What did he say?'

'It was so clear. 'Why don't you mend it for Judith?'

'So that's why it's here!'

'Yes. I told Dan I had to go to see about another job. As I slipped away I glanced back at Jesus. He nodded and grinned. I felt real laughter deep down inside my whole being.

Judith couldn't believe it when I called back. I got at least two more hugs! She seemed so pleased to accept my offer. She wrapped up the headband and the coin in this headcloth. "Can you stay just a little longer?" she asked me. "I want to show you something. It won't take long." He looked at Hinda apologetically. 'I couldn't say no. Judith led me outside, closed the door, took my hand and led me down to the beach. The sun had slipped below the hills and a chill wind had blown in. That was good. It had blown away the fish-gutting smells, though a flock of terns were still scouring the beach for scraps. "Up here." Judith said and pulled me with her to a steep grassy place among the rocks.'

'I know the place," said Hinda. "And I think I know what you're going to tell me."

"We sat down on the grass out of the wind. It was getting stronger and ruffling the lake. "It's been a funny day," she said, looking straight at me. "I wanted you to sit here with me a moment. It's where Simon gave me that band and coins before our marriage day. That cloth it's wrapped in is the head cloth I was wearing." There were tears in her eyes as she looked at me and asked "Yoram, when you've repaired the band will you and Hinda come here with me and will you put it on my head again, just like Simon did?"

Hinda was crying now. 'Of course we will Yoram. Perhaps the Rabbi, Jesus would come too?'