

## **New World – First Morning**

*'John! Where is he? What's happened? I slept late. I've more information for you!'* John Mark was out of breath after bounding up two flights of stairs to the upper room of his home near the High Priest's house. He heard bolts draw back. John had appeared behind the part open door. John Mark had not been to the room since early last evening when Jesus and his friends had shared supper together. It was to become a regular place to meet, so deceptively close to Caiaphas' great house. John Mark lived there with his mother, Mary. His father and uncle Barnabas were away abroad much of the time. They traded in Jerusalem cloth among other things. Those cloth sales were highly regarded throughout the Mediterranean world. John Mark was too young to travel yet but was learning the trade while attending the Temple Rabbinic school. At times he served as an acolyte for the High Priest, which gave him free access to the neighbouring property and some Temple courts. A brief hint of a smile eased through John's grim stare. *'I've been hearing a story about a young man running naked around the city last night!'* he said. *'He obviously got home all right.'* Mark instinctively bowed his head, recalling his shame. *'John,'* he said. *'I'm sure there were angels in the olive groves last night? I'm sure I met one! When Judas set off from here with the soldiers and Caiaphas' guards, I followed, just as you asked me to. Then when they grabbed Jesus and a scuffle broke out and you all ran for your lives I ran too. I'd got up in a hurry and when Judas and the soldiers left, I followed as I was with just a linen sheet round me. The sheet snagged on a thorn bush as I ran. I didn't know what to do so just kept running. That's when I think I met an angel. A tall figure stood in my path holding out a robe. I just grabbed it and kept running. I hope he meant it for me. When I woke this morning, the robe had gone! John. Tell me what's happened.'* *'The very worst has happened.'* John's eyes filled with tears as he blurted out. *'They're going to crucify him! Today!'*

John Mark breathed heavily. He was lost for words. *'John,'* he said at last, *'I came to tell you that Judas was here again this morning. He threw the betrayal money at the High Priest's feet. Perhaps they'll change their minds now.'*

*'No,'* John said firmly. *'It's Pilate and the people's judgement. No one can change it now.'*

*'Why did Judas do it?'* Asked Mark. John pulled the door shut behind him.

*'I don't know, John Mark, but Jesus told me it would happen. I think Judas wanted to force Jesus' hand. He believed the whole city would listen to him and then proclaim him Christ and King. Now, come on lad. We must find out more. Your mother's gone already with Aunt Mary and my mother to the fortress where they've held him. I hear they've treated him shamefully.'*

John Mark thought how quickly everything had happened. Last night John had left the supper to find his young friend, who, like so many other young people had been enthralled by Jesus words and ideals. John had just enough time to say, *'Mark. Judas is making trouble. I want you to follow him when he leaves us and keep me posted about where he goes and what he does.'*

An inquisitive young man, John Mark had seen crosses and death processions, dead bodies, and absolute cruelty, but never involving someone he knew and loved. Least of all the one they believed to be the real, promised King of the Jews. John Mark was traumatised. He joined John and the women near to the three crosses. Mary of Magdala had joined them now, sometimes sobbing loudly and angrily. Together they witnessed the whole drama from the prison, through the Gennath gate to Golgotha, the nailing, the screams, Jesus' cries. Hearing his voice was unbearable. John's mother, Salome held on to him for support. John Mark buried his head in his mother's side. Jesus' mother stood with head bowed through it all. The earthquake, storm and long hours of darkness were almost comforting.

Their little group walked home together, grateful that Joseph, a close friend of Jesus was arranging his burial in a garden tomb of his own outside the city's north wall. As they walked John Mark's mother comforted him. *'We are all still trusting him'*, she said. *'He told us he would come back to us.'* He said, *'In three days, he will be alive again. I'm not sure how we shall see him, but we shall know it's him.'* John Mark was figuring it out. *'Day one today. Tomorrow is Sabbath, and then next day!'* It seemed an eternity. He was kept busy at Caiaphas' house and at times listening to hushed conversations as Peter and the others began to visit the upstairs room. He had a plan for the morning of the third day. A full hour before dawn he made his way to Joseph's garden. The guard Pilate had placed there were unaware of him watching and waiting in the shadows.

It was still dark when the first movement occurred. The guards did not seem to notice. John Mark saw a figure. The tomb was still sealed by a huge round stone, so he assumed the person would be a gardener preparing to tidy the ground after the burial. Soon, first light fringed the surrounding hills, leaving the garden still in gloom. Now he made out the forms of his mother and Mary of Magdala. They clung to each other in front of the tomb as the earth tremored beneath them. The stone rolled away in its furrow. He saw another standing with them, the same tall man in white who had met him on the Mount of Olives. Then, everything happened quickly. The guards, their duty complete, ran away, terrified. The angel, for surely it was an angel, spoke with the women before they hurried away. It was time for John Mark to go home and tell. As he left, he was aware of the gardener again in the shadow of the tomb. He could not see him clearly.

If John Mark had remained longer in Joseph's garden, he would have witnessed Peter and John arrive, look into the tomb, and go away again. He would have seen Mary of Magdala return, talk to the gardener and recognising him, fall to her knees before her risen Lord – Jesus - before hurrying away again.

If John Mark had stayed, he may have seen the daylight growing, the last fruit bats coming home to roost among the rocks, a gazelle nuzzle the gardener's hand, mina birds flocking in a mass of yellow feet and beaks, and the hoopoe bristling its feathered crown. Red and white anemones joined bright yellow chrysanthemums catching the first sunlight. At the far corner, behind the fading form of the gardener, Mark would surely have noticed a white lily unfold among a bush of thorns.

It was a new day for the whole world. All creation was rejoicing with its Creator!

*Friendship Files*