

The Gardener

'Do you think it **was** Rosh she saw in the garden? It could have been. I only met him the once, and even then I was struck by the likeness.'

'No. It wasn't Rosh.' Joram stared unseeing along the narrow street. It was quieter now. Even the pilgrims rested in this heat. 'No,' he repeated. 'I've no doubt it was Jesus that Mary saw.' He turned to look at Gareb. 'You know, Rosh was so thrilled when he heard that Mary had mistaken Jesus for the gardener. He said it was the greatest moment in his life.' The old man sighed deeply. 'I got to know Rosh well and I can understand how he felt. Maybe I got to know him too well...'

His friend saw the pain in Joram's face. He was biting his lip to force back tears. 'Come on in,' Gareb pulled aside the heavy woollen drapes hanging at the back of his shop and led Joram through the doorway into a courtyard which separated shop from house. He gestured to Joram to sit on the bench in the shade of a tamarisk. He went into the house and soon re-appeared with a jug of wine and two pot cups. 'Perhaps it would help to tell me about him,' he said, pouring the wine. 'Didn't he come from Galilee?'

Joram sipped his wine for a while before he spoke. 'Yes, he came from Galilee, or rather was brought from Galilee. He was a slave you know. His father's business lost a lot of money. He was a stone mason, but he refused a job for the Romans in Caesarea and that was the end. You don't say no to those jobs, even if you do have principles. In the end they became so desperate he sold his son Rosh to that Sadducee Timaeus.'

Gareb grimaced. 'That was a bad move. I've been up to his place with cloth a few times. There aren't many men more cruel than him.'

'But even he has his hard times,' Joram went on. 'After last year's bad harvest, Timaeus started to cut back and decided he'd get rid of Roch and a few other slaves. He wouldn't feed men when there was no work for them. When Joseph Arimathea Joseph, you know heard about it he offered to buy him.'

'But Joseph doesn't have slaves.' Gareb looked puzzled. 'His servant are some of the best cared for anywhere.'

'Oh, no, Joseph didn't buy him as a slave. He did it just to give him his freedom.'

Gareb smiled and nodded. He felt sure that was just the sort of thing Joseph would do.

'I think it was the likeness that attracted Joseph to him.' Joram's face brightened as he visualised the young man again. 'It really was amazing. There were times when I had to look twice to be sure it wasn't Jesus. You could have taken them for twins in a poor light - same height and build, same colouring, walk, voice.... I'm not surprised Mary thought Jesus might have been him. It was just first light and she'd been sobbing fit to blur her eyes. You know Joseph had taken an interest in Jesus even then? He kept it to himself, of course. There were too many other Pharisees opposed to him. It wouldn't be good for business. It was after Jesus died he came out and joined the Way.'

'So Joseph took him on as a servant then?' Gareb wanted all the facts.

'Not really. Rosh was so grateful, he volunteered to stay and work. Joseph had that tomb and garden nearly finished so he gave him the job of completing it. Rosh worked really hard at it. He made a wonderful job of the tomb with that great rolling stone. Mind you it needed someone as strong as him to move it. They could have done with him today.' Joram paused and grinned in painful sort of way before he went on. 'Then he laid out the garden. It's still a beautiful place - quiet, yet so close to all the hubbub of town. Jesus used to go there sometimes. I wonder if he knew then that he would be laid in that tomb? That's how Rosh and he met. At first Rosh was so bitter against Timaeus, his own father, and anyone else who had a bit of authority. But gradually he changed. Joseph says you could see it happening over days as Jesus talked to him about forgiving and healing and loving our enemies.'

Joram took a long drink, looking hard at his friend over the cup. 'It was like a miracle,' he said. 'Rosh was so different. He wasn't just physically like Jesus anymore but inside, he was like him. Joseph said that there were times when he talked to Rosh and if he shut his eyes, he could imagine it was Jesus there with him. Rosh told me once that he felt as though he was living on three levels. He was alive because he could breathe and feel, and then Jesus had made his mind come alive to think differently about people and things. But best of all, he said, God had given him this higher level which Jesus called 'eternal life'. We know what he meant, don't we!'

Gareb nodded. 'I expect Joseph was very cut up today?' he enquired.

'That's an understatement.' Joram spent a while biting his lip again. 'We were all cut up.' He gave another long sigh and stared ahead of him thoughtfully. Gareb filled the silence by pouring more wine.

After a while Joram spoke again. 'Rosh's problem was that he wasn't like Jesus all the time. But no, that's not right. The problem was he was too much like Jesus.'

'Tell me how it happened.' Gareb wanted the rest of the story.

'Joseph had taken him with him to the Temple. You know we often go there to pray and talk with the others. They were in the Gentile court when Timaeus came in.

He walked up to Rosh and told him to get out and that a slave like him wasn't fit to be in the holy place. Then he went on about him being one of Jesus' people. I think Timeaus was getting at Joseph. Anyhow, Rosh really set into Timaeus. He called him a murderer for having wanted Jesus dead. Next day Timaeus accused Rosh of stealing a gold seal from a Roman officer. It's so easy to drop something into a pocket. It's been done many times before, and who's going to believe an ex-slave over a rich Sadducee? Joseph would have spoken for him, but he and Nicodemus were both away for a few days, and everything happened so quickly. Before we knew it Rosh was in prison.'

'And today they took him up the hill!' Gareb brought the story to its climax. 'That's right,' Joram dropped his head into his hands. 'He was really so like Jesus... you know ... when they nailed him he remembered and cried out, 'Jesus! I forgive them too!'

Joram rose from the bench. 'Well, Joseph's tomb is occupied again tonight. I don't think Rosh will mind. He'll know he won't be there long!'