

## ~ The Centurion ~

I knew it when the earthquake came. Already, the day had changed its face completely. It was so dark the birds had gone to roost! People were carrying lanterns. I never saw midnight any darker. And, I never saw midnight in the middle of the day! Over 2 hours, already, and it showed no sign of daybreak.

So, now, what? All those tales, these superstitious people, told had been true! I had barely listened. But I retained what I had heard and this was too much! What do I do? I never uttered the name of God, except in an expletive, and this guy looked so ordinary - so like any other man. How could I have known? Should I stop the whole thing? I am a soldier and I've earned my way up the ranks. Though I hold some power, it was gained by obeying orders. So, I could not take it upon myself to undo what they had ordered. I am only a centurion.

I sat down and watched. When the lightning came and illuminated His face, I saw the suffering. But, also, that face held love. I even heard Him say, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do." I never heard that one before. I was used to the filth spewed out from these criminal's mouths. But, this was something new.

Now that the sun was gone (it wasn't just that the sun was gone, it was really dark!) and the wind had risen, and the rain came, it sounded like all of nature was mourning. The thunder came, again, with the lightning illuminating the sign above His head ... "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews". Was I executing a King?

It was more than that! Cesar, himself, could not have called down this storm and certainly not the earthquake. That was what settled it for me. More than a King, an area that I completely avoided in all my studies. I preferred not to clutter my brain with those superstitious lies.

What did it matter how this world came to be? I was here and I would do the best I could with the one life I had. But, if Someone made it, controlled it, cared about it ... well, that's something I had never toyed with. But, I sure would want to know everything about it. Where had He been all my life?

The night hadn't been a good one anyway. They called me to oversee the collection of some guy that had hung himself. The Jews take this week too seriously; killing all those lambs, letting blood until the Kidron is discoloured with the blood! What a strange people!

I thought, today, I would have to oversee the execution by crucifixion of two thieves. Sometime through the night, they had thrown this fellow in. So, what's one more? It would not take any longer part of the day. But this was no ordinary man.

We divided His few possessions. His robe was seamless, woven in one piece, quite a masterpiece. So, we cast the dice.

He spoke to no one, until that thief said, "Remember me when You come into Your Kingdom!" and then He said, "Verily I say unto you, today, you shall be with me in Paradise!"

The day had grown so dark that I couldn't see His face when He said, "My God! My God! Why have You forsaken me?" But I could feel the agony of the cry.

When things got back to normal, I would certainly do some investigating on this Man. I watched it all. Sitting in the rain with trembling earth beneath. He had directed his last words to only a few, that thief, his friend, John, and his mother, and some unseen force. He

had said, at the last, "Father" and looked toward the sky, "Into Your hands I commend my spirit!"

I had never overseen a crucifixion like this. We had Him down before the sun set, having been certain of his death by the spear. We didn't break His legs and, suddenly, I didn't want anything rash to happen to this body. So, His soul was gone. Do we possess a soul? No matter, I would pursue that later.

I told my soldiers to be careful. Let Him down gently, not the way we put Him up. His body was evidence of the last 24 hours. There had been enough pain inflicted.

Already, there were two men, there, with proper papers to take the body. No one needed to tell them to be careful. They handled this Man as if He were Precious Stone! These men were in that high court the Jews have, the Sanhedrin. I had seen them both at the temple grounds and at the palace.

We took our spoils and left. I knew I had a lot of questions to be answered, never given to staying in ignorance.

The storm let up and the sky lightened. It was strange, like having daybreak from the west.

I just thought I was through with the Man. Only a couple of hours and the call came to set a guard at His tomb. "Why would we need soldiers to guard a tomb?" I had asked. They told me because of some tales passed around, by this Man's friends, and they were afraid of someone stealing the body and saying He had risen from the dead.

What a riot that would cause! It would have been better if they had left this Jesus alive! Well, the men would be thrilled at their exciting job. I

would dispatch them and they would complain and be bored for a few days.

Meanwhile, I had plans for my free time. I had the sign that had been above His head: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" and now I brought it out. Strange words for a criminal, strange day. Strange feelings in my heart, so callused by all the "orders" I had followed.

I had the feeling that I was beginning a great adventure, for it had grown quite dark, now, and there was a definite chill in the air. I reached for my coat and started out in the night air. Nicodemus had said I could come anytime, said he once made a midnight visit that had changed his life. I would chance it. For, I had questions too great not to pursue!

Stepping out in the night air only brought back the events of the afternoon. I really expected the earth to tremble. That came the first day of the week.

My guards answered to me. But I answered to Pilate. Even the Jews had set a guard, and the body was gone! I never saw such scurrying! Money was flying. Pay us all to say His body was stolen! We knew better. For, we knew the penalty. But, better to take the bribe than to face the truth.

Someone had made a serious mistake, and, for my part, I knew I would never be the same. I had found some answers, and I was on my way to more.

What would you do if you had been there ... if you had seen the signs and heard the jeers, felt the earthquake, and seen the day disappear ... heard kind words, from a man dying, because you did your job? What would you do if you had been in charge of the guard?

The door to my soul was open and I could not but follow. He had,

truthfully, said, "They know not what they do ... Father, forgive."

I know I need many answers. But, until I get them all, I will repeat what I said on that hill, on that dark day, "TRULY, THIS WAS THE SON OF GOD!"

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