**The servant girl**

*This is a monologue which could be split into five parts where asterisked.*

*Rhoda is a servant girl in the house of Caiaphas the High Priest at the time when Jesus is arrested. The story tells of her interactions with Peter then and later. Choose your own common accent/dialect.*

I first saw ’im on the Sunday – a giant of a man, ’ead and shoulders above the rest. I was polishing the brasses in the drawing room in preparation for the festival when I saw them – about a dozen. The leader got gently off a donkey, and they trooped into the temple.

About ’alf an hour later, I opened the door to Lord Caiaphas, who looked black as thunder. ’e bawled for ’is secretary, so I made my escape before I got it in the neck too. There was an emergency meeting that evening over dinner, and we listened agog in the kitchen as the footman told us what ’e’d over’eard – that Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth, ’ad gone berserk with a whip and chased the traders out the temple.

I’ve never known a week like it. You could have cut the tension with a knife, and we all kept our ’eads down. Then on Thursday night it all changed. The Guard ’ad arrested the prophet and brought ’im to the ’ouse for trial. The Council were sent for, even though it was nearly midnight, and you could ’ear the relief in their voices.

I was crossing the courtyard back to the kitchen when I saw ’im, warming ‘is hands by the fire. In the flickering firelight I couldn’t see clearly, but there weren’t two people that big in the city.

“You were with ’im,” I said.

“I was not!” ’e replied, too strongly to be true.

“’ave it your own way,” I said as I went into the kitchen.

When I next came out with refreshments, ’e’d gone, or so I thought. I almost bumped into ’im, ’iding in the shadows by the gate. “You were with ’im,” I said.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” ’e replied.

“With Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth,” I answered.

“No way,” ’e said.

“D’you think I can’t recognise a Galilean accent?” I countered. Well, that really set ’im off.

“I swear to God, I don’t know the man!”

Just then, a cock crowed. And it was like ’e’d been shot. ’e was on the floor, crying ’is eyes out. I was like, what’s the matter with the man? So I called someone over to see if ’e was OK, and ’e starts panicking, and ’e runs off like ’e’d seen a ghost.

“Coward!” I called out after ’im. “With friends like you, no wonder ’e’s in trouble.”

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The prophet was strung up on a cross the next day, and I thought no more about ’im. But on Sunday, the Council were called back, and their faces were grim. The rumours soon reached the kitchen. “They’re saying ’e’s come back from the dead!” Come off it!

Next we know, it’s official – the body’s been stolen by ’is friends. What sort of idiots do they think we are? That guy couldn’t have walked in a straight line, let alone got past the guards. Best to keep your mouth shut. But we’re all ears.

The rumours are spreading. ’e turned up in the garden and frightened the living daylights out of a young girl. ’e can walk through doors. ’e talked to some people on the road and then vanished into thin air. Some people will believe anything. Me, I don’t know what to believe. If only they could find the body…

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It was a few weeks later, and I’d gone to the market to get fruit for the kitchen. All of a sudden, a crowd of people surged out of a courtyard, all jabbering nineteen to the dozen. And then I ’ear someone calling out in broad dialect, so close it could have been from my own village, “Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. ’allelujah!”

What’s that?

“The ’eavens are telling the glory of God.” And there’s people running towards them, and a guy turns to me and says to me in a foreign accent, “Did you ’ear that? ’ow come ’e speaks perfect Parthian, telling of the glory of God?”

What’s going on? There’s absolute pandemonium out here. And then I see ’im.

It’s the giant. ’e’s clambering onto a dog cart so as ’e can be seen, and ’e’s silencing the crowd. And ’e starts to speak, and ’e says this is what was promised by the prophet Joel, that God would pour out ’is Spirit on all people. And ’e talks, and ’e talks, and ’e talks, and we’re all spellbound, and ’e finishes by telling us that God has made this Jesus, who we crucified, both Lord and Christ! And there’s a gasp as this sinks in, and into the silence someone cries out, “What then must we do to be saved?” And everyone’s calling out, “Yes, what can we do?” And ’e says, “Repent and believe the good news.”

Well, I’m no expert in religion, and I couldn’t understand everything ’e said, but one thing I do know. A few weeks ago, this guy was such a coward ’e couldn’t even say “Boo!” to a kitchen maid, and now ’e’s playing the crowds like the most amazing preacher. And I think, whatever this guy’s on, I want it, and I’m in.

And when I get back to the kitchen, it’s me who’s doing the whispering as I tell them what I’ve seen and ’eard. And soon there’s five of us ’umming praises to God and ’e’s filling us up with joy. And we can ’ardly ’old it in, but we know Lord Caiaphas would fire us if ’e knew what was going on in ’is own ’ouse’old.

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And a few years have passed, and we’re in a prayer meeting at the dead of night, cos Peter – that’s the giant – has been locked up by ’erod a’ead of a dinner party, and we all know what ’erod likes to do to God’s spokesmen at dinner parties. And we’re all frightened, and we’re praying, cos there’s nothing else to do, and there’s a knock on the door, and we look at each other. ’ave they come to get us as well? And it’s another knock, with our special code. And I say, “I’ll go”. So I go downstairs, and I look through the peephole, and it’s Peter! And I rush back upstairs, and I tell them all, and they don’t believe me, and there’s another knock, and I ’ear ’im say, “Rhoda! Let me in!” And I rush back down, and in ’e comes, and ’e tells us ’ow an angel woke ’im up, and led him out of the prison past sleeping guards. And ’e reminds us that Jesus told ’im ’ow ’e would die, and it wouldn’t be till ’e was old.

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I’ve been a Christian now over 30 years, and God’s never let me down – ’is ’oly Spirit gives me words to say when I need them. You could feel the tension building in Jerusalem as the Zealots challenged the Romans, and last year I moved to Antioch to avoid the coming bloodbath. I pray every day for Peter, that ’e would continually proclaim the good news of God as ’e did that day on the dog-cart when I ’eard ’im.

*(Sobs)*

Justus arrived today from Rome with terrible news about Peter and Paul. We can ’ardly take it in. And I think back to the coward by the fire, and the way God turned ’im a few weeks later into a bold preacher and the rock of the church. And I remember the day the angel freed ’im from prison, and ’e told us of Jesus’s words, that when ’e was old ’e would stretch out ’is arms and be led where ’e didn’t want to go. And ’e stretched out ’is arms, and we shuddered as we saw ’im like Jesus on the cross, and ’e nodded and walked out into the night.

And now ’e’s old, and it ’appened just as Jesus said. Except ’e told the soldiers, “I’m not worthy to die as my Lord did. Turn me upside down.” So they did. And the crowd went silent as they saw ’is courage.

And we gathered as a church tonight, and I told my story as I’m telling you now. And I remembered that day they released Peter and John and the beggar they’d ’ealed, and ’ow the church ’ad prayed for boldness. And we sang praises to God, and thanked ’im for ’is servant Peter, who’d glorified God in ’is dying, and we prayed again for boldness to proclaim the good news. And the place where we were meeting was shaken, and we were all filled afresh with the ’oly Spirit. ’allelujah!