

THE GARDENER

I'm glad I'm a gardener. It's a quiet sort of job and not too many people around. I wouldn't say I've got green fingers but most things seem to grow for me and I will say the garden looks nice - blowing my own trumpet like.

The best time is early morning. Everything looks fresh and new buds are beginning to open up. The soil is moist from the dew and it's easier to work than when the sun gets onto it. And at dusk you sometimes get a strange light that makes the flowers glow.

Talking of strange lights, we had something very strange happen last week. I've never much liked the tombs at the top end of the garden and I always try to be away from that part long before the sun starts to drop. It's usually very quiet there - too quiet even for my liking. Anyway, last week there was a lot of coming and going. Just as I was knocking off, a very respectable-looking gent came up to me and said could I help him open up one of the tombs. He could see straight away I wasn't keen and he said it was empty and there was nothing for me to worry about. Gave me two denarii he did - I'd have to work for three days to earn that. So I took his coin and followed him up the hill.

The stone was heavy, very heavy. Took both of us to shift it and by the time we'd done, a group came up the path carrying a body. I got out of there, like smartish. When I got home, the wife complained about me being late but when I showed her the coin she was well pleased.

The next day was the Sabbath, so I didn't go into the garden till the following morning. I did my usual walk around to have a looksee before I started work on the planting. Up at the top, what a mess! Stones strewn across the grass, cracks in the ground, beds trampled, pathway wrecked. I'd never seen it like that in all my years. Angry? You bet I was angry. Two women were running away but I knew it couldn't be them that had done it.

I went back down the hill straightaway to get my tools and start clearing up. I was toiling up the hill again when two men ran past me like they were chasing each other. Grown men too! Fishermen, they were, 'cos I could smell it. They stopped outside the tomb and looked in. Took me a minute to understand the stone had been rolled away. "Hoy!" I shouted, "What are you two doing?" Body snatchers, I thought. Then I saw that there were soldiers lying on the ground by the mouth of the tomb. Dead, I thought at first. Turned out later they weren't dead but in some sort of faint, unconscious. "Here! What's going on?" I called to one of the two men. He'd gone inside the tomb and come out holding up the grave-clothes. "He's not here!" he shouted back. "Who's not?" says I, and he shouted out "Jesus! He's risen from the dead like

he said he would!"

Maybe you don't know, but Jesus was the bloke they put on the cross instead of Barabbas. Made no sense to me that didn't. He died just before the Sabbath he did. They even stuck a spear in him to make sure.

Well, all hell was let loose then. I had more people in my garden in the next hour than in a whole year. Priests, temple guards, centurions, more fishermen, women, the lot. I'm the sort of guy who likes to mind his own affairs but this was my patch, my garden, and I made it my business to find out what had happened.

It took me a while; I pieced it all together from what I heard and from what my own two eyes had seen for myself. Seems that the tomb was sealed by Pilate, 'cos there were rumours going around that Jesus would rise from the grave after three days, and the Pharisees didn't want his followers to fix it so it looked like he was alive again by stealing his body. The soldiers I saw lying on the ground were the guard Pilate had posted to stop them. I heard that the Romans told the guards to keep quiet and say that Jesus' men had come in the night and taken the body when the soldiers were asleep. Well, I've rolled that stone and it makes quite a rumble. How could the guards have slept through that, unless they were drunk! Perhaps they thought it was one of them snoring! Anyway, if Jesus' followers had taken him away, why would the two I saw run all the way up the hill to have a look. They might be fishermen but they're not that stupid!

The main thing is I spoke to one of them soldiers when I first saw him. I helped him get up. He was still shaking and his eyes were staring. "What was it?" I asked. "Earthquake," he said. Then he said, "Giant. Bright light. A giant." It was all I could get out of him. Why would he change his story later? They must have paid him. And that means it must be true like Jesus said or why would they try to cover it up? He must have come alive like he promised.

I go up to the top of the garden every day now, always first thing, and then again last thing just before I go home. There's a feeling up there. It's special. They won't let no-one else near the tombs now so it's my own place.

There is one other thing. I've never told anyone before. You know how it is when there's a lot happening, especially when you're angry, it's hard to really remember what you did see and what you didn't see. The thing is, I saw a man who looked a dead ringer for Jesus. He was standing in my garden with one of the ladies I'd seen running away earlier and he had this sort of aura around him.

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