

Good Friday 2022

It must have been the smell of fresh blood that roused me from my daydreams. It was noisy too, but I can usually sleep through most noises; I have a kind of filter that lets me know if a noise is a threat or not. This noise wasn't a threat - at least, not to me.

You don't know me, in fact, no-one of your kind knows me. My own kind know me, but to most of you we are just trash.

I am a sort of yellowish-brown - sometimes more brown than yellow, depending on how dusty my fur gets - and I live in the streets and alleys of Jerusalem. I say, 'live,' but it's a hard existence to survive on scraps when no-one wants you around, and throws things at you

when you appear. Just occasionally an old lady or old man will take pity on us street critters and toss us a bone or leave a bowl of sour milk out; then you may have to fight to get it.

But this day I smelt fresh blood and started salivating. I couldn't remember when I had last had a piece of meat that wasn't rotten, and I could tell that this meat was seriously fresh. Time to investigate - but cautiously, because I didn't want to miss my opportunity, and I also needed to be sure that I wasn't going to have to fight for this prize.

However, I was in for a surprise. I'm not sure what I was expecting - perhaps a dropped

basket with fresh meat going to one of the rich houses, but then this was not really the right part of town for that. I was hiding in an alley behind the house of Pilate, the Roman governor. It was quite a good place for scraps because it seemed they always had more than enough to eat.

But this day there had been a commotion in the square outside, where they kept a whipping post - and that was where the smell of blood was coming from.

I shook my ears to clear my head, and, nose down, went to explore.

When I got there the place was deserted, but there had clearly been some pretty savage beating going on. The blood was already congealed, but a trail led away, so I followed it.

There's a hill outside the town which is shaped like a bald head, and so is called 'Golgotha' which is the Hebrew for 'skull'. The Greeks call it 'Kranion', and the Romans call it Calvary - from which the English would later get the word 'calvarium' to mean the bones of the skull. Not many dogs know this.

So I had to follow a crowd of people who were leaving the city by the main gate. Some of the crowd were soldiers keeping the locals away

from the centre of things, which was where the source of the blood trail was coming.

Then I saw what all the fuss was about; the soldiers were driving some poor man up the hill, and making him carry this enormous piece of wood across his shoulders. It was clear to me that he had been the one acquainted with the whipping post only a little while earlier. I have never seen a piece of raw meat walking before, but that was what he looked like - beaten, bleeding, staggering - but still alive - just.

Something in me switched off my prey-drive and I just followed along, somehow drawn and repelled at the same time - and then he fell. I remember the thud as the wooden beam hit

the ground, and then I realized that the man was still under it. I heard the breath leave his body, and then he struggled to get up. Prodded and whipped by the soldiers who were laughing at him, he made it to his feet, and then the men told him to take the beam of wood again.

It wasn't many steps further on before he fell again, and I had to get closer. This time he wasn't making any effort to get up - I don't think he could.

For some reason I still cannot understand, he seemed to me like a puppy in pain, and I had to go to him. In the crowd of jostling people and soldiers, it wasn't difficult to nip between a

few legs, and then I was there - right by his face.

Instinct told me to lick it - not because of the blood, but because his eyes were closed and he needed cleaning. We dogs have good tongues for that.

As I gently licked his face, his eyes opened in surprise - as much as they could, from the bruising - and he looked at me; I mean he really looked at me - he saw me.

People don't do that to us feral dogs often, unless it is to take aim with a sling-shot or stone, so this was a completely new experience for me. I felt recognized for being - well, just

me - a dirty yellow dog. But I was doing what I could for him.

It didn't last long before I was pushed aside, but before the soldiers could beat him back into a standing position, they called another fellow to take the wooden beam. While they were doing that, a nice lady came and knelt down beside him and wiped his face too, with a piece of cloth.

Strangely, she noticed me too, and realized what I had been doing, and she smiled at me.

Then the man was pulled up again and the horrible journey began once again.

I don't want to tell you how it ended because I think you know. Even we dogs are quicker with those we kill.

The lady with the face cloth took me home with her that day - a day neither of us will ever forget.