

## FATHER & SON

Learn a trade, I said to him. I mean that's what my old man said to me. Of course, I could have chosen other jobs, I suppose. I can turn these old hands of mine to pretty much anything if need be. Practicality, you could say, is in my nature. But there's something about wood. Grasp it and it's solid to the touch. Study its surface and you can see its life written in that sandy grain.

When I first started out I'd go up to the cedar groves to collect it for the old man; giant logs, thicker than my thighs, with dark knots like serpents' eyes staring back at you. Then I'd watch him in the workshop; stripping it, sawing it, sanding it down to reveal that hidden beauty under the surface.

As for the boy, well, it's the wife's fault really. I could hear her sometimes with all that baby talk when I was slaving away in the workshop. "Mummy's little angel," she'd be calling him as she carried him down to river to collect water. I told her straight: you'll spoil the lad carrying on like that. And when he was older., well, she wouldn't have a bad word said about him, as if criticizing him was some sort of blasphemy.

You see, there was always that funny distance between us. Like sometimes I would look at him when he was still in his swaddling clothes and I'd think 'Who does he take after?' It's not like he looked like anyone on my side of the family with those curly, blonde locks of his but then he didn't seem to look much like his mum either.

He was no trouble at that age, of course. I mean, sure we had our moments but, well, kids... you can't expect them to be perfect, can you? But it was after his Bar Mitzvah that I began to notice the change.

One day I've seen him standing outside the house in the sweltering midday heat gazing up at the cloudless sky with that thousand-yard-stare of his.

"Why don't you go out down to the Kinneret and fish with your mates?" I say to him but he just stands there and mumbles something.

“What's that, Jez?” I say and do you know what he turns to me and says?

“Father, one day I will be a fisher of men.”

And I know what you're thinking. Yeah, I thought it was a bit weird too but then I didn't want to bring up with missus. I knew she'd say I was just picking on the boy.

Then we had a bit of trouble that time we took him down the Temple. We've just popped in to show our faces what with it being Passover and I've only taken my eyes off him for five minutes but when I turn around he's started all this bloody commotion with the money changers.

“What's bloody got into you?” I say pinching him by the ear as I march him outside, “You can't go starting aggravation in there. It's a disgrace. You've really shown your mum and me up.”

It wasn't long after that he went off one day. Of course, Mary told me to go out looking for him but I told her: “There's a time when a young bloke's got to make his own way in the world.” After that we didn't hear a peep out of him. Not even a letter or a card on his birthday. And then last week I heard it from the neighbour whose brother has just got back from Jerusalem. Seems he's got himself into a spot of bother with the authorities down there.

We talked it over last night. I told her I would go down to see him but I've sold the donkey now and what with the leg I can't get about as good I used to. “And remember that last time we went?” I say to her, “It turned out to be a real nightmare finding somewhere to stay.” And she nodded. I'm hoping they don't go too hard on him though. He's not a bad lad really. Just got in with the wrong crowd probably. But then you know these Romans, right? They're an unforgiving bunch of bastards really.