

THREE

Felix tasted blood as he gripped the man's leg. Men gawked at him as he remained tucked behind the leader in the front of the group. He inched forward, moving as one with the bold stranger. This man did not retreat in a panic toward the sea.

"That's my father." Felix had prayed for help, and suddenly several men appeared from the shore. Would a crowd deter his father? The man the others referred to as a teacher strode to meet his father. Was the man brave, or foolish? Or both? This teacher didn't seem afraid to confront a crazy man full of evil spirits. Many had tried to help his father early on, but no one could cast out the demons. This man spoke as if he could end their possession.

Felix peeked from behind the leader. To his amazement and relief, his father fell on his knees in front of the brave man.

In the torchlight, Felix could see the line of every rib on his father's chest. Dried blood crusted on his father's arms. A sour taste burned in Felix's throat. Had he come too late? He barely recognized this heap of flesh.

"What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?" The words came from his father's lips, but the voice wasn't one Felix recognized. "Swear to God that you won't torture me." Father's body quaked. His bones threatened to break through skin.

How could this Jesus torture his father any worse than the demons inside? Felix came alongside Jesus and stared at his bearded face. He wore a damp cloak and sandals. How could this man be a god?

Jesus stepped forward, close enough that at any moment, Father could lunge and attack. "What is your name?"

Caius. My father's name is Caius. Felix walked with Jesus. If anyone should be assailed this night, it should be him, for he had awakened the demons from the tomb.

"My name is Legion," Father replied in an awful growl.

That isn't true.

"For we are many." His father's frame trembled. A pathetic cry emanated from his mouth. "Don't send us from here. We beg of you." He, no Legion, jerked. "We want to stay. Don't banish us from our home." Contortions marred his face, or the demon's face, or whoever knelt in front of Jesus. Father sobbed like a child.

Tears slipped from Felix's eyes. Was he too far gone? The name of his father hadn't been uttered, only the name of that evil spirit. He stared at Jesus, this godman. "Can you help my father? His name is Caius." Tears dripped down Felix's face. He didn't care if these men thought him weak. His mother and sister needed a provider. He needed a protector, and for Father to return home and make their family whole again.

"We're begging. Don't send us from here." The evil spirits laughed and cried and growled. Father lurched to a stand. "Send us among the pigs." His gnarled hand pointed toward the pigs on the hillside. The small shadows of the livestock made the distant mound of dirt appear alive. "Allow us to go into them."

Jesus rested a hand on Felix's shoulder. His touch was firm yet comforting.

"You have my permission." Jesus spoke in the voice of a Roman centurion who ordered men into battle.

A gust, like the closing of a door, brushed by Felix. The shadows of the lazy pigs half-asleep on the hillside rushed toward the sea. Snorts awakened the night. Farmers shrieked, calling after their livelihood. Splashing echoed farther along the shore. A blanket of white-capped waves aroused the calm sea.

His father collapsed into the dirt.

“Father,” he yelled. He ran and scooped his father from the ground, hugging his scarred body close. “I beg of you, Jesus. If you are the Son of the Most High God, then save my father.”

The bearded bulk of a man who stood near Jesus walked over, blanket in hand, and knelt. “I believe He already has.”



Felix wrapped the blanket around his father’s body. As he did so, Father’s eyes opened, and his mouth quivered into a smile.

“My son,” he whispered. A finger as hardened as granite traced Felix’s jawline. “It is you, Felix. It is you.” Sobs wracked his shoulders.

Footsteps thundered into the clearing where Jesus and his men had gathered.

“Did you see them?” A pig farmer braced his hands on his knees and breathed heavily. “My herd is gone. Into the sea. What am I going to tell my buyers?”

The outspoken friend of Jesus beheld the others and shrugged. “Tell the buyers something spooked the pigs. That terrible storm gave us a fright too.”