

Andrew

by Jeanna Goodrich

When he stepped through the doorway, he made more of an effort than usual to not let the rickety wood make a noise as it shut. He noticed, taking his sandals off by the tattered mat at the door, that the callus on the big toe of his right foot had grown exponentially today; he had done much more walking than a normal day might have required of him. The cold, solid dirt of the floor was a relief from the sweaty, rough leather of his shoes. He walked to the small wooden table in the middle of the room and took a seat at one of its small wooden chairs. He smelled his mother cooking.

It occurred to him that he wasn't sure he'd have the courage to find the right words at right time. As the aroma of bread baking and fish simmering filled their small house, his nerves began to shatter, one by one. One for bringing it up, one for actually telling her, one for his assumptive lack of not knowing how he would comfort her when it finally sunk in. One by one. First it caused his wrists to shake, then his feet to tap, and then his palms to grow sweaty.

"Were the waters somewhat benevolent today?" he heard his mother ask from behind the stove top. He wondered if he'd have to swallow the lump in his throat and start the conversation before supper had even started.

Hesitating only slightly, he answered. "We had our ups and downs." It was an illusory statement, but it wasn't a lie.

"And the boat? Was your friend, oh, what's his name, able to patch up that crack?"

"Yeah, mom, he came by."

Adjusting in his seat in his small wooden chair, Andrew pulled his right leg up into his lap. Suddenly, the callus on his big toe became painfully interesting, and the intensity with which he studied it, picked at it, formed and re-formed it, in the chair at the table in the middle of the room, saturated the air with an incredible tension.

"Well, how many fish did you bring in?" His mother's voice grew louder as she walked from the stove to the small wooden table in the

middle of the room. The cooked fish she was carrying only increased the anxiety that he could possibly be making the biggest mistake of his life.

He cleared his throat of the 'what if's that had accumulated there. "None today." It was the only answer he could think of.

"You said 'ups and downs,' dear; then what were the ups?"

He couldn't tell her that it wasn't just any ordinary day. He couldn't tell her that the ups were abandoned. He couldn't tell her that he doubted the ups, anyway. So he didn't tell her anything. He just shrugged.

As she made her way back to the stove, he realized that his shoulders told her more than he had wanted. She walked with the sudden stiffness of a concerned mother, a walk he hadn't seen since he was thirteen and he and his brother had each taken the evening to chug two bottles of wine. It was the walk she walked when she *knew*. She'd be short with him now. In anticipation, he looked down; his callus was still there.

"Where's your brother?" his mother quipped, carrying a plate of bread in one hand and wiping the other on the hip of her skirt. She set both on the table—the plate and her free hand—and kissed him on the top of his head. Yes, she knew. She sat down at the small wooden table in the small wooden chair to his left.

Well, it had to begin somehow.

"He won't be here tonight, mom," Andrew said.

"Were the 'downs' that down, then, that your brother couldn't come home for supper?"

He paused. "I guess you could say it like that."

She paused too. "How else could I say it?"

It was coming and he knew it and before he knew it, it came.

"Mom, Simon and I are leaving."

"Leaving?" she asked, looking up from her plate. Because he didn't want to think about responding, he pointed his eyes to where hers had been before. His blank stare rested on a hand-sized lump of white-ish brown fish and a fist-sized mound of doughy bread. He thought too hard about their colors and lost his appetite.

"Yes, leaving."

"Leaving on your boat? Will you be on the waters for a few days?"

"No. We're leaving our boat, too."

It took a moment for the realization to reach her eyes, but Andrew noticed it as soon as it arrived. "You mean, you're *leaving* leaving?"

"Yes, that's what I mean."

His mother looked down at her plate. "Andrew, I forgot the oil. Would you like to go get the oil? If you want some, well, you know where it is, on the shelf above the powdered grain."

Andrew didn't need oil and neither did his mother. In fact, the only reason oil was on his mother's mind was because it was the last thing on her mind. He did not get up to get it, and she did not protest.

"You're leaving your father and I? You're leaving Capernaum?"

"Yes, if I have to."

"What do you mean, 'if you have to'? Of course you don't have to. You shouldn't be leaving at all!"

He didn't know how to tell her that he had to. He *had* to! The net full of fish had sealed the deal for him, and so he'd dropped it. His brother too.

"I don't know how to tell you that I have to."

She stared.

He tried again. "His words, mom..." That didn't seem to work either.

"Whose words?"

"Jesus's."

"Jesus? Your carpenter friend? The friend that came to work on the boat today?"

"Yeah. Him."

His mother had many idiosyncrasies, but, before this moment, his favorite had been her expression of incredulity. Now, now that it was directed towards him and his confession, he couldn't help but fear it.

"And what in God's name has this Jesus done to convince you to act like this, Andrew?"

"His ideas, mom, and his teachings. His lessons. He has ideas about men, about nations, about life and death... and, and then he filled our nets with fish. Completely. So heavy, Simon and I almost couldn't pull them in. It was unbelievable."

"He did that?"

"Yes, mom."

"*He* put those thousands of fish in your net?"

"Yes, mom."

"Did you see him put those thousands of fish in your net?"

"Well, no, but..."

"My God, Andrew. Listen to yourself. Go back out on your boat and catch those same fish and teach yourself your own lesson."

"Mom?"

She only looked at him. Her look said, I dare you to tell me anything more, but she herself said nothing.

"Mom, Simon already sold it. And the net. But Jesus is saying that we won't really need any money at all."

"'Jesus is saying'? He's saying you can need and starve and so you decide to just pack up and follow him? Jesus can say all day—the boy hasn't worked a day in his life. Always out of the house, for days, weeks; Joseph consistently complaining about the fantastic lack of help Jesus so graciously provides. What would he know about selling your boat? About fishing? Much less what he'd know about ideas and teachings?"

Andrew, once again, lacked the substance for a real reply. Instead, he addressed her, calmly. "Mother, please stop yelling. The neighbors will hear."

Naturally, her voice climbed louder. "Fine, Andrew. I *want* them to hear. I want them to know that my son, the son that Jonah and I raised to be decent and respectful and appreciative, I want them to know that you are willingly abandoning your home and your family to wander the wilderness with the nutcase down the road. I want them to know"—she was shouting now, and standing—"that you and Simon both value insanity more than your own lives."

"There's just something about him that I can't put words to," Andrew tried to explain, failing even himself.

"Look at me. Look at me in the face and tell me that you're going to leave everything you have to follow an insane man with a whore mother and no family name."

He knew that he could have replied with some cliché phrase. "This is different" or "It's not like that" or, worse, "You just don't understand," but instead he remained silent. Instead, he sat there and looked at her, and he let his doubt in her show through in the silence, in the challenge behind his eyes.

She gave up the challenge with six quiet words: "This is a crock of shit."

What came out next he hadn't planned on saying: "He, he said he'd make us fishers of men."

The look of incredulity transformed into a look of terror. "My sons," his mother said, "Fishers of Men. Simon and Andrew. They bait men with bullshit from the mouth of their illegitimate, bastard-child best friend. It will go over swimmingly at afternoon tea."

In one swift movement, a plate flew off of the table and a chair slammed backwards onto the ground, but Andrew took none of it in. He heard none of it, and he saw none of it, because he couldn't take his gaze off of the solitary tear that had formed in the innermost corner of his mother's left eye. He stared at it and it stared back at him; his mother left it on the edge of the table to continue its staring. She walked towards the door, stopped, and then ducked through the doorway. She left him to pick up the pieces of the broken plate, and to push in the small wooden chair underneath the small wooden table in the middle of the room, but he left them there too.

Instead, he picked up his father's jug of wine, swallowed until the bitterness reached the top of his throat, and wondered why Simon hadn't come home to help him tell their mother why they'd never be coming home again.

