

Garden of Gethsemane sketch

This is a dialogue between a Roman soldier (Sergius) and a Jewish gardener (Benjamin). The soldier, though not averse to a bit of corruption, is generally straightforward and open but a little simple. The gardener is more astute and upright, but preoccupied with matters to a degree where he - rather than the soldier - is the one who misses the crucial point.

The scene opens with Sergius and Benjamin sitting together in a favourite spot in the garden. Benjamin is worried and is looking down.

Benjamin: This could spoil a really good friendship, you know.

Sergius: I know, I know. I'm sorry.

B: Sorry?! It's all very well being sorry, but that's not going to bring my plants back is it?

S: But it's only a few flowers!

B: Only a few flowers?! Some of those were my prize petunias!

S: Okay, okay. Look – I'll buy you six new packets of seed.

B: You don't understand. It was a special display of flowers. For her indoors.

S: [Looks puzzled] Her indoors?

B: No, not the wife. *Her* indoors. You know, Herodias. King Herod's wife.

S: Oh no!

B: *Now* do you understand how serious this is?

S: Oh no! You mean I've flattened a display of flowers you were growing for Queen Herodias?

B: Yes!

S: Oh no!

B: She could have our heads - like she did with John the Baptist - if she's in a bad mood.

S: Oh no, no, no!

B: I feel *very* cut up about it.

[They both ponder their possible fate miserably for a moment.]

B: Anyway, what I don't understand is – how did you do it?

[Sergius looks awkward and says nothing.]

B: Come on, you can tell me. What happened?

S: I can't tell you. It's er... a military secret.

B: What! Oh don't give me that, Sergius. You're just an ordinary soldier. You've never been involved in military secrets.

S: Well, er... um... I have this time.

B: Oh come off it, Sergius. Pull the other foot, it's got bells on.

[He notices Sergius's feet] Here, come to think of it, what is that on your feet?

[He looks closer] You're wearing Nikeus sandals! Where'd you get them? You can't afford designer sandals! [He looks into Sergius's eyes] You've taken a bribe, haven't you?

S: No! Not at all! Well, not exactly. It was more like a... well, er... um..... Yes.

B: There! I knew it! Now come on, Sergius. We've been friends a long time. Tell me what happened to my flowers.

S: You promise you won't tell, Benjamin? I could get into big trouble!

B: You're in trouble already! But yes, I promise. Now tell me – what happened?

S: Well, er... It was like this. You know that guy Jesus? The one who was preaching about God and doing all those amazing things?

B: Yes, I know. The Pharisees got really jealous.

S: Yeah, and they pressurized Pilate into having him killed.

B: That was a nasty business. They crucified him on Golgotha.

S: Yes, and then a rich guy called Joseph came and laid his body in that tomb over there. [Points a little distance away]

B: What, that one just over there?

S: Yes, that's the one.

B: Well! I wondered why the grass was all trampled down over there.

S: Yeah. Anyway, the Pharisees didn't leave it at that. They went back to Pilate and said they wanted a guard to watch the tomb.

B: A guard! Whatever for?

S: Well, they were afraid someone would steal the body.

B: Steal it! Why would anyone do that?

S: Because while he was alive, Jesus said he would rise from the dead. The Pharisees remembered that, and didn't want his disciples playing any tricks.

B: I see. So who was the guard? ... Let me guess!

S: Yeah. They came to see my sergeant and he picked me. He doesn't like me, you know. He knew I'd hate doing night-watch by a tomb all on my own.

B: Yes, he's a bad 'un. Anyway, so there you were in my garden, at night, on your own. What happened?

S: Well, it got really cold, so I moved up close to the tombstone to get out of the wind.

B: Yes. So?

S: Around midnight it was really quiet and I was really bored, when suddenly there was this tremendous sound.

B: What was it?

S: It's a bit hard to describe. It was kind of like a trumpet and kind of like a voice. And then I saw this blazing light. I turned to see what it was and – you're gonna find this hard to believe Benjamin – but there was this huge angel!

B: Wow! What did you do – attack him with your spear?

S: Er, no. Not exactly.

B: Well, did you tell him to clear off in the name of Caesar?

S: Um, no.

B: Well, what then?

S: I was terrified. There was a kind of power about him. My knees were knocking together like hammers. So I dived for the nearest cover I could find.

B: What was that?

S: Um... it was your flower bed.

B: My flower bed! So you crushed all my flowers hiding from an angel?!

S: Um... yes.

B: I can't believe it! [He stares dumbfoundedly at Sergius for a moment.]

B: So what happened next?

S: I was so scared, I could only open one eye, but I saw the angel move over to the tombstone and roll it over. That was a huge stone, Benjamin. It would have taken three men to shift it, but he just pushed it like it was a little ball!

B: Goodness! What did he do then?

S: He bent over and looked inside. And you know what? There was nobody there! The tomb was empty except for a few cloths lying on the ground.

B: So what did you do?

S: Well, while the angel was bending over, I seized my chance.

B: You attacked him with your spear?

S: No, I ran away as fast as I could! I went back to my barracks and saw my sergeant. As soon as he saw my face he knew something had happened. I was too scared to speak at first, so he made me drink some wine. I nearly choked on it, but after a few minutes I was able to tell him what had happened.

B: So what did he do?

S: He looked really serious and he sent someone off to call the Pharisees.

B: And did they come?

S: Yes, after a few minutes two of them turned up. They were in a bad mood because they didn't like having to come into our barracks, but when they heard my story they got all serious... and all crafty.

B: What did they do?

S: Well, they made me tell what happened all over again, and they asked some questions. Then they whispered together for a few minutes. Then one of them suddenly pulled out a bag of money and gave some to my sergeant and some to me. They said, "Take this for your trouble, and if anybody asks you, just say you fell asleep and the disciples came and stole the body. Keep quiet about the angel, and we'll make sure you don't get into any problems".

B: Oh Sergius! So you took a bribe! From the Pharisees!

S: Well, what else could I do, Benjamin? My sergeant had taken the money, so I knew I would be in big trouble if I didn't. And anyway, I needed that money. I've got a wife and six kids to support, and a soldier's pay isn't much.

B: Oh Sergius! So what happened next?

S: Well, my sergeant could see I was still scared, and I think he wanted me out of the way. He gave me some leave and told me to go and get some rest. So I went off home and tried to sleep, but I had some terrible dreams. I finally woke up this afternoon and it all seemed like I'd imagined it, so I thought I'd come over here and have another look. I've been sitting here for the last hour or two, thinking about it all, and then you turned up.

B: Well, yeah. I've been furious about my flowers. I've been asking all over who did it, but nobody seemed to have seen anything. So now I know.

S: I am sorry, Benjamin. But you know what? I think there's something here even more important than that. That guy in the tomb – Jesus – he must be someone really special.

B: What makes you say that?

S: Well, think about it. Who else has ever had an angel come to help them? And what about that empty tomb? How could the body have gone unless he really did rise from the dead? If he did, then he really must be the Son of God. I think I'm gonna go and talk to some of his disciples and find out a bit more about what he was teaching. Do you want to come along? This could be really important.

B: What? Oh for goodness sake, Sergius. No! I'm sorry, but I've got far more important things to do than that. [He stands up] Right now, I've got to go and get some more petunias. Do try to get a grip on what really matters. [He walks off from the stage shaking his head]. Dear oh dear oh dear!
