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Pontius Pilate

**...they might have seen themselves as brothers
a soliloquy by Pilate's wife
based on Matthew 27:11-23 and John 18:28-40
by Ralph Milton
from [Is This Your Idea of a Good Time, God?](#)
Wood Lake Books**

I wonder sometimes, if they might have been friends. If they had met in some other circumstances, I think my husband and Jesus might have liked each other.

They were about the same age. Both of them passionate, committed, opinionated. Bullheaded sometimes. And intelligent too, I think. Except they thought so differently.

Jesus was a Jew. Pilate was a Roman. And Pilate never understood the Jews, and that drove him almost to distraction. "You can't get a clear answer out of them about anything," he would fume. "Ask them a straight, logical question and they tell you a story, for gawd sake!"

Pilate wanted so badly to make a success of governing the Judeans. He knew perfectly well he would never have gotten the appointment as Governor if he hadn't been married to me, granddaughter of the Emperor Augustus. And even so, Judea wasn't exactly a plum of an appointment, insofar as these diplomatic posts go. But Pilate hoped that if he did this well, his next appointment would be to something he and I would both be proud of. Something a little closer to Rome, we hoped.

But things got off to a bad start as soon as we arrived in Judea. Pilate had a showdown with the Jewish leaders over whether Caesar's image could be displayed in the temple area. It was a dumb thing to fight about and Pilate knew it. "But I've got to show them I am strong and resolute, Claudia," he said to me. "If I show just a hint of weakness, if I back down even an inch, that snake of a high priest, Caiaphas, will take every slight advantage that I give him."

The showdown came when a whole bunch of Jewish men kneeled down in the market place, bared their necks, and dared Pilate to massacre them. Pilot folded. I don't think he ever really recovered.

Judea was a 'no-win' situation for him. The bureaucrats in Rome just read the bottom line. Did he collect his quota in taxes? Did he avoid any embarrassments? If the answer was "yes" to those questions, you stayed on and maybe eventually got promoted to a better posting. If "no" you were recalled to Rome and sent to shuffle papers in an office somewhere. But Judea was so much more complicated than that.

Pilate tried. My gawd he tried. He read that blessed policy manual every night and memorized every procedure. But of course they never fit.

"Who wrote this stuff anyway," he fumed. "I bet they've never been outside of Rome. They sure as hell have never been out here in Judea." And then he would throw the scroll in the corner and read the philosophy he loved so well – philosophy that seemed so clean and rational to him, and so unlike reality around him in Judea.

And then the Jesus business broke. It was a recipe for disaster. Pilate couldn't win this one and I knew it. I even had dreams about it.

"Get this man Jesus out of your life, Pilate," I said. "no matter what you do, you'll lose,"

"I'll do what's appropriate and necessary, Claudia," Pilate said in his official voice, which meant that he was frightened. "I will interview the prisoner and judge him according to our Roman justice. He will be treated fairly."

"I know that Pilate, but that's not the game here."

"I'll decide what the game is, Claudia!" he said. And there the conversation ended.

They brought the prisoner up to the Prætorium. Pilate met them outside, a gesture of good will, so the Judean leaders wouldn't need to contaminate themselves, or whatever terrible thing is supposed to happen when they set foot inside a Roman building. He interviewed Jesus there in front of them.

"Look," he finally said. "the guy is just a little crazy, and yes, a bit of a trouble-maker. But he hasn't done anything to deserve execution. I mean, I can't have him killed just because you people don't like him. What I'll do is have him flogged. That'll straighten him out."

Well, you should have heard the halabalo. "We want him dead!" they yelled. "We want him crucified!"

Listen. Pilate has integrity. He's shown that before and he showed it now. He wasn't about to execute a man unless a crime had been committed, and blasphemy was no crime in Roman eyes. But Pilate was no fool either. He knew that Caiaphas had his ways of getting messages to Rome.

What followed was a mish-mash of political maneuvering and charges and counter charges. I don't quite know what happened. I was in pacing the halls for most of it, fighting off a migraine.

But I'll not soon forget what happened when Pilate dragged this Jesus up into our quarters so he could talk with him, away from all the yelling and screaming outside. I was walking the corridors trying to get rid of my headache, when I stopped just outside Pilate's office. I watched the soldiers march Jesus in to stand in front of Pilate.

That was when it struck me how alike they were, and yet how different. Two men of talent and integrity speaking to each across such vastly different realities.

In spite of all the pressure, Pilate still wanted to do the right thing. "Look," he said to Jesus. "Give me a reason. Give me something that'll satisfy that mob – something I can put in my report to Rome so I don't have to have you killed."

Jesus looked right back at Pilate – looked at – through him. But he said nothing.

Pilate lost his cool. "Look, I have the power of life and death over you. I can send you out to be torn apart by that mob, or I can save your hide."

"You have no real power over me," said Jesus. "No power that really counts. You and I are caught in this evil drama. You have your role to play and I have mine. "

"Alright," said Pilate. "What is your role except to satisfy the blood-lust of that mob?"

"I am called to live the truth," said Jesus.

"What is truth?" Pilate asked quietly, almost cynically. Jesus looked at him intently. And yes, compassionately. But he said nothing.

"Look, I asked you a question. What is truth?"

Pilate lost his cool again. He paced around the room and banged his fist against the wall. But both men knew, I think, that Jesus could not reply in any way that Pilate could comprehend. Nor would Jesus have understood had Pilate defined truth for him.

The conversation stopped. There was nothing else to say. Jesus would die. And Pilate knew he'd spend the rest of his life rehearsing that conversation.

"Why couldn't he just explain to me, logically and rationally what he was up to?" Pilate asked that question over and over. "Those Jews. You ask them a question, and they sing you a song or tell you a story."

I too have rehearsed that conversation. I am back in Rome now, by myself. Pilate has been banished from the capitol, not because of what he did to Jesus but another diplomatic fiasco in Judea... Pilate did not understand the Jews.

And yet I wonder. If Pilate and this Jesus had met some other way, perhaps they would have learned to like each other – if they had a chance to really talk, without the pressure. Pilate, the logical philosopher might have discovered the poetic dreamer deep inside himself. And Jesus the poetic dreamer might have shown to Pilate the philosophy on which his dream was built.

There would have been respect at least. And just perhaps they might have seen themselves as brothers.

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