Barabbas

Joan: Good evening and welcome to “A Close Shave”, the show where I, Joan Humphrys, talk with members of the general public who have narrowly escaped death about their experiences. Tonight I am joined by a convicted criminal, a murderer in fact, who this time last week was on Death Row. Without further ado, ladies and gentlemen, please welcome my guest for this evening, Barabbas.

*(B enters, they greet, and sit)*

Joan: So then, Barabbas…….

Barabbas: Please call me Rab; everybody does.

Joan: OK, so Rab, tell me, how you came to be in prison.

Barabbas: That’s a bit of a long story Joan. When I was a lad, me and some friends used to hang around the Roman garrison, and we’d do a few odd jobs for the soldiers; you know the sort of thing, cleaning equipment, fetching water and so on. As we grew up, we learned that the Romans were our enemies, and not just a good source of pocket money. Knowing the layout of the soldiers quarters and so on, we were in a good position to cause them trouble. Anyway, we were on a bit of a lark when we were spotted by a guard. He chased us, and when he caught me there was a bit of a scuffle. He fell and hit his head, and I got the blame. I can’t complain, because I knew I was risking crucifixion just by being there, so when I was arrested, I knew what was coming.

Barabbas: Well Joan, I was in the dungeon with a couple of other lads; thieves they were, but in the same boat as me. We were all due for crucifixion the next day, but despite our situation we had a bit of hope. You see, it was coming up to the Passover, and the Romans had always released one prisoner to the Jews each year, so we figured it was a one in three bet for each of us to get off. So there we were casting lots as to who it would be, just for a bit of fun to pass the time, when the guards threw a proper spanner in the works. To be more specific, they threw another prisoner into the cell.

Joan: So what was the problem with that? One in four isn’t such bad odds.

Barabbas: At first we didn’t recognize him, because he had been so badly beaten, but after a while we worked out who he was. It turned out his name was Jesus, and He was the one who had been going round performing miracles, healing people and even raising the dead back to life. Well, you can imagine, our hearts sank.

Joan: What do you mean? Surely it was a great pleasure to spend time with such a great man?

Barabbas: It would have been but for two things. Firstly, because He had been so badly beaten, He wasn’t saying much. Secondly, when it came to having one prisoner released, who were the crowd going to shout for now? Was it going to be a thief, a murderer, or someone who had dedicated themselves to performing good works and speaking words of hope and love, the man who only the previous week had been welcomed into Jerusalem with waving palms and cries of “Hosanna to the King of kings”? The only people he had ever upset were the Pharisees, but we all knew that he was only telling them the truth about themselves. You can imagine, none of the three of us slept very well that night.

Come the morning, we were roused by the guards coming down the stairs. We were taken up several flights of stairs so that we were near to the place where the governor, Pilate, was addressing the crowd. We heard him call to the crowd “Who do you want me to release?” We strained our ears to hear the crowd’s reply. I thought I heard someone shout my name, but I thought that maybe it was just wishful thinking. There was a bit of a scene, but eventually, and it seemed to be ages later, the guards came to me and unbound me. The two I had been in the cell with originally looked enviously at me, and muttered something, probably obscene, under their breath. Jesus also looked at me, but there was no bitterness in Him. After all, He was the one who deserved freedom, yet He was being crucified instead of me. As He looked at me, His eyes were full of love, for me, a common criminal. Since that day, I have been trying to live a better life. One thing’s for sure, since I looked into Jesus’ eyes, I will never be the same again.

Joan: And I’m sorry but there we will have to call it a day, as we’re out of time. Thank you to my guest this evening, and mostly to you for watching. Goodnight.