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As the shadows in the great courtyard grew longer with the lowering of the sun, so did echoes keep returning to me of all that had been contested between the scribe and myself. Now, that I could speak uncontested before the multitude and my disciples, I was ready to say all that I thought. For I could see that my Father's cause would not prevail unless I was prepared to battle the powers of this Temple--which were like unto walls of great thickness. So I must speak with the mightiest words I could find. Indeed, I could finally hear the voice of the Lord coming forth from me without pause or errant thoughts of my own.

Many Pharisees were among this multitude, and I began by saying: "The elders sit in the seat of Moses and the Great Temple of Jerusalem is their throne. Whatever these elders bid you to observe, observe it. But do not do as they do. For they lay heavy pieties on men's shoulders, yet they will not raise a finger to move their burdens. Rather do they

love the chief seats in the synagogues and the uppermost rooms at feasts."

Immediately, the Pharisees stirred. Some began to leave. Yet a few, as if twice fortified, remained to spy upon what I would say further. So I mocked them. I spoke in their voice as if I, too, were a Pharisee. "'Look upon me,'" I told them, "'am I not prosperous?'" And then said in my own voice, "Do any of you grieve over the bent fingers of the old woman who embroiders the fringe of your prayer shawl?"

Bolder Pharisees began to hoot, and others, more timid, chose once more to leave. But I could see the faces of those widows who had lost their houses through the sharp practice of some of those before me. "Why," I asked the Pharisees, "did you not feed the widow's children instead of acquiring the house? Slaves of Mammon! Whoever swears by the gold of the Temple, will become a debtor before the Lord. Fools! You are blind! You pay tithes of mint and anise and cumin according to the law and you omit the weightier matters of the law, which are judgment and mercy and faith. You strain at a gnat and swallow a camel. You clean the outside of the

cup and leave the inside full of extortion and excess. You are like sepulchers, beautiful and white, that are full of dead men's bones. You build the tombs of the prophets, yet you are the children of those who killed the prophets."

The Lord had given me these words and at last I could speak in the brave voice of John the Baptist. I was truly his cousin. "Behold," I said: "I will send to you prophets and wise men. Some you will kill and some you will crucify; some you will scourge, and persecute from city to city. And upon you will fall all the righteous blood shed upon the earth from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zechariah who was slain between the Temple and the altar by your forbears. All of these things shall come upon your generation.

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You have stoned those who were sent unto you!"

And my words fell upon them like stones. But my heart was even heavier than the blows they received to their pride. For I knew that my words were not false. If these were my people and this was my Temple, then I must mourn for Israel.

And I could see that it was time to leave the Temple.

The Pharisees had summoned the guard.

Yet, the multitude who still surrounded me were like a tempest of whirling sand on the desert; this multitude, moved by my words, was so ready to protect me that no man interfered with my leaving. Some of the Temple Guard held rocks in their hands, and many Pharisees had stones in their hearts. But not one was thrown. No man laid hands on my garments. My hour was not come. The guard approached and fell back, approached and fell back, and there was that in my eye which told them not to touch my cloth.

And so I departed from the Temple on the first day.

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Once we were outside the walls, the larger part of this throng now climbed with me to the Mount of Olives. And we were full of exaltation.

One after another, disciples came forward to ask: "When are these great things to come? What shall be the sign? Will we rise at the end of the world? Will you be with us?"

I said to them, "Take heed that no man deceive you. The end of the world will come only when I am no longer among you."

As I said this, I could feel their pain, and that brought tears to my eyes. For I could see that they loved me more than they did not; I felt again the need to bring them counsel. I said: "You shall hear of wars and rumors of wars. Nation shall rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famine and pestilence and earthquake. All these are but the beginning of sorrow. Others will gather you up to kill you. You shall be hated of all nations

for my name's sake. Iniquity will abound, and the love of gold will afflict many. But those who endure to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached to all nations. Only then will the end come."

In that instant, surrounded by my people, who swayed and cried out at such words issuing from my lips, I heard the Lord warning me of the minions of the Devil. They would also come upon the earth, and in my name, and they would be armed with a store of small miracles. Each of these minions would claim to be the return of myself. Bottomless deception lay beneath our feet! I said:

"If any man shall say to you, 'Lo, here is Christ,' or say, 'He is here,' do not believe it. False prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders to deceive the very elect. If they say unto you, 'Behold, he is in the desert,' do not rush forth into the wasteland. Or, if they say, 'Behold, he is in the secret chamber,' do not believe it. Only when the lightning comes out of the east and lights up the west will there be the coming of the Son of Man. The sun will be darkened and the moon give no light; the stars will fall from heaven and the power of heaven will be shaken.

Only then will appear the sign of the Son of Man and all will see him coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send His angels with the great sound of a trumpet and they will gather together the elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. Verily, I say unto you, this generation shall not pass till all these things are fulfilled. Heaven and earth will pass away, but not my words. Watch, therefore, for you do not know the hour your Lord will come. Yet know this: if the good man of the house had known when the thief would come, he would have watched. He would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore, be ready. For in the hour that you do not expect him, the Son of Man will come.

"He will say: 'Inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. I was hungry and you gave me meat; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; naked, and you clothed me; I was sick and you visited me; I was in prison and you came to me. I say to you, whatever you have done to the least of my brethren, you have done it to me. And those who did not, shall go to everlasting punishment but the righteous will

have life eternal."

They cheered mightily, as if each of them was certain to be among the righteous. They seemed to believe that the hosannas of the many were sufficient to do God's work and receive eternal life. How would they ever find their way to the Lord?

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That night I chose to fast. The people of Jerusalem who greeted me on my path called me King, but then they did not know as yet that the kingdom of which I spoke belonged to heaven. They were looking for a monarch who would restore to Israel the greatness we had known in the reign of King David.

The dawn was cool, and I, feeling restored, was ready to go again to the Temple and sit among the people beneath a sacred tree. I would teach.

On the way, however, on the road that went by the Mount of Olives, scribes and Pharisees stood in my path and with them was a woman. And they said: "Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Moses and the law command that she should be stoned. What do you say on the matter?"

I knew that they would look to accuse me of leniency to sinners. Therefore, I gave my eyes neither to the woman, nor to them. "You shalt not commit adultery," I said. "Whoever

looks on a woman with lust has committed adultery in his heart." These words were for the young men among them whose eyes reflected their delight that they could stare openly at this woman taken in adultery; I also knew that their thoughts would soon provide idle hands with other forms of delight. And to myself, I thought: "If thy hand offend thee, cut it off."

This woman before me must have within her every filth and effluence of the Devil's spew, fornication being the most powerful instrument of the Devil. So, these Pharisees stood confidently before me, certain that I would find a way to pardon this woman and thereby admit that I was ready to traffic with whores. But, I did no more than stoop down to the earth. And with my finger I wrote in the dust as though I had not heard them.

Their minds were not empty of calculation. They knew that to an Essene, unseemly fornication deserves the fire. They would know that I had learned much from the scrolls concerning the perils of an unclean woman. I remembered what was written of Jezebel in the Second Book of Kings; this Jezebel, a princess, had been thrown down from the high

window of a tower, and her blood was scattered on the wall; courtiers, in their disturbance, trod upon her and left her under foot. And when the king saw this, he said, "Bury this cursed woman for she is a king's daughter." But they found no more of her than the skull, and the feet, and the palms of her hands. So they came and told him and he said, "This is the word of the Lord: 'Dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel and the carcass of Jezebel shall be as dung upon the field.'"

And if such vengeance had been taken upon one evil woman, what would visit all the men who had known her? She was a source of much peril. Therefore, I did not dare to look upon this woman whom the Pharisees had brought to me. Instead, I continued to write with my finger in the sand.

And to myself, I whispered from the book of Proverbs: "The lips of a strange woman are honey and her mouth is smoother than oil, but the other end is as bitter as wormwood, and as sharp as a two-edged sword. Her ways are unstable. So do her feet take her down to death, for those feet were once swift in running after mischief."

And still I did not look at her. Peter, had come to sit beside me on the ground, unrolled the scroll that he carried

to read whenever we would rest, even if he read with great difficulty.

Yet he was close to my thoughts, and he pointed to a passage with his stout finger, twice as thick as one of mine, and in the old Hebrew tongue he whispered: "It says: 'On account of a whorish woman, is a man brought to a piece of bread.'" When I nodded to go on, he whispered further:

"'An adulterous woman eateth and wipeth her mouth and sayeth, 'I have done no wickedness.''"

I kept nodding so as not to steal a look upon this woman. And, to myself, I recited the words of Ezekiel concerning the harlot Aholibah: "The Babylonians came to her, into the bed of love, and they defiled her and she was polluted with them so she discovered her nakedness, yet she did multiply her whoredoms for she doted upon men whose issue is like the issue of horses."

Fortified by these words of repudiation, I gazed at last upon the woman taken in adultery.

As I feared, she was beautiful. Her face was fine of bone and her hair flowed down her back. With art, were her eyes painted. She was gentle, even as her mouth was proud

and foolish.

My detestation of fornication, having filled my years with many furies, now cooled. I heard the soft voice of a spirit. Was it her angel seeking for mercy? I was offered a vision of this woman in the depth of sin, loose in the fumes and wallow of fornication with a stranger. Even so, she was a creature of God, as were all of us, and she might be near to the Lord in ways I could not see, even--could it be?--in fornications with strangers, not unlike the Son of Man who must be close to all strangers, yea, a woman close in her heart to God while the Devil's hands embraced her body.

So when these Pharisees, having been long silent and as patient as fishermen, now asked me again, saying, "Moses and the law commanded us that such should be stoned. What do you say?" I lifted myself up and spoke not only to my disciples but also to the circle of scribes and Pharisees, and I said: "If thy hand offend thee, cut it off." When they looked at me, I told them: "It is better to enter the other life maimed, than to have two hands to take into hell." Then I saw fear in their eyes. "If your eye offend thee," I said next, "pluck it out. It is better to enter the Kingdom of

God and see only with the eye that is left than have both eyes look into the flames. In hellfire, the worm that eats at your flesh does not die." And I was amazed. I felt purified by my own words. So I also said: "He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone."

A tumult arose among them. It was of such force that I came near to losing all balance and had to stoop once more and write again in the dust as if I cared more for what my finger could say to the earth than for all of them.

Soon, and with each moment, their fury began to dissipate. Before long, it fled. For now they were pained by their misdeeds.

I saw them go away. They left one by one, commencing with the oldest man among them, who had, perhaps, the most sin to support, and the last was young, and may have been near to innocent. I was left alone. Even Peter had left. Only the woman was standing before me.

I could not bring myself to look into her eyes, then I did. In so doing, I could not see her eyes. Instead, like a dream offered by Satan, I had visions from the Song of Songs: "The joints of thy thighs are like jewels, the work of a

master's hand," were the words I heard, "and thy navel is like a round goblet." I told myself that I was in the presence of evil angels. For I was close to evil and then it was rich and dark and begging to be cast forth from me. And I knew that in my belly evil angels still remained. And they were so powerful that I must be wary of the beauty of this woman.

So I chose to speak once more in the words of the prophet Ezekiel. I said: "Behold your sin. For, as it is written: 'I will raise up thy lovers, and they shall come against thee with chariots and wheels, and they shall deal furiously with thee; they shall take away thy nose and ears and thy residue shall be devoured by fire. They shall also strip thee out of thy clothes and take away thy fair jewels. Thus will I make thy lewdness to cease immediately and thy whoredoms be brought out of the land of Egypt, so that thou shall not remember Egypt any more.'"

And this harlot whose eyes were as purple as the last hour of evening, said gently, "I do not wish to lose my nose."

I said, "Woman, where are your accusers? Has no man

accused you?"

She said, and her voice was modest, "No man is here to accuse me, Lord."

I said, "Neither do I condemn thee. Go, and sin no more."

Yet, it was not enough. For within this woman remained every echo of whoredom. So, I said: "Where can you go? Are you not bound still to your fornication?"

She replied: "If you do not condemn me, then do not pass judgment. Without the flesh, there is no life."

She was vain. She was strong. And I could see that she was wed to the seven powers of Wrath and by their seven demons. So I must attempt to cast such seven powers and demons out from her, but I knew it would be with much pain. They would come forth slowly. And, indeed, one by one they did come forth, clawing at all good spirit between us. Some were sly and some were lewd, and more than one was hideous, seven powers and demons.

The first of these was the power of Darkness and its demon was treachery. Indeed, I was to realize even as I named each one that I had learned more from Satan than he had

wished to impart. So I knew that Desire was the second power and pride was its demon. And the third was Ignorance with a huge appetite for the meat of swine, a gluttonous demon. Love of Death was the fourth power and its demon no less than the lust to eat another. For nowhere is death so immediate as in the flesh of a fellow human. The fifth power sought Whole Domain and so its demon worked to defile all spirit; the good spirit that had come to this woman and myself was much buffeted as this demon came forth. And the sixth power was Excess of Wisdom for its demon had the urge to steal a soul. Of them all, the last power was the most fearful. It was the Wisdom of Wrath; its demon was the lust to lay waste to a city. Such were the seven powers and demons I drew forth from her, and so I could say: "Go and sin no more." And she left.

Afterward I would learn that her name was Mary Magdalene and she was from Magdala in Tiberius, a city where many Jews had died in war against the Romans. Their bones now lay under the foundations of buildings erected by former victors. So this woman Mary Magdalene had committed adultery upon the ground of our martyrs. Yet I did not regret what I had done.

For, by half, she was gentle and that half belonged to God.
Nor did I know that I would see her again.

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As I continued along the Street of Herodias on the morning of this second day, I was thinking how the street was named after the wife of Herod Antipas, and she brought death to John the Baptist. Yet, this accursed name, Herodias, had been given to the avenue that leads to the great gate of the Temple.

A blind man now accosted me. Blind from birth, he told me, and so he had known none of the delight of a child's vision. One of my disciples asked: "Master, what sin did the parents of this man commit, that he was born blind?"

I was hardly quiet in my feelings, so I replied too quickly: "This man is blind in order that the works of God can be made manifest to him. So, I will cure him."

Yet when I looked at the eyes of this blind man, I saw nothing with which to work, not even a sightless eye on either side of his nose; nothing but two hollows beneath his brow. "I believe," I said to my Father, "now help my

unbelief."

And I spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle and anointed his eyes. Then I said, "Go. Wash in the pool of Siloam," for that was the pool beside our path.

And he groped his way thereto, tapping with his stick. When he came back, he could see. I heard him speak to his neighbors and they said, "Aren't you the one who sat and begged?"

Others replied, "That is the one."

Another said, "No, it is not the same one."

To which the man who had been blind, replied, "I am the one."

When they asked how he could see, I heard him say, "A man called Jesus anointed me, and told me to go to the pool of Siloam and wash. Having done so, I can see."

They said, "Where is this Jesus?"

The man said, "I do not know. He is gone."

On the street, a Pharisees asked how he had gained his sight, and the man told his story once more. Another Pharisee was quick to say: "How can this Yeshua do such a miracle when there is only a void on either side of his

nose?"

Now, the Pharisees decided that he had not been blind from birth. So they spoke to his parents who were filled with confusion; they could only say, "We know that this is our son and he was born blind, but by what means he now sees or who has opened his eyes, we don't know." Then they said, "Our son is of age. Ask him. He can speak for himself."

Again the Pharisees called to the man who had been blind and said: "The person who laid clay upon your eyes is a sinner."

The man answered: "Whether he is a sinner, I do not know.

But I was sightless and now I see."

"How then," asked the Pharisees, "did he open your eyes?"

He replied: "I told you and you do not hear. Why would you hear it again? Do you wish to become his disciples?"

The Pharisees said: "We are followers of Moses. God spoke, we know, unto Moses. But we do not know where this Jesus came from."

Yet, for each moment that this man could see the world as

it was, he became bolder. I felt blessed to have given sight to such a fellow. "A marvelous thing," he said now, "that you don't know where this Jesus is from, yet he has opened my eyes. If he did not come from God, could he do anything?"

The Pharisees reviled him for such a remark. They beat upon him with their fists and said, "Born in sin, and now you teach?" They cast him out.

When I had him brought to me, he said, "Lord, I believe." And he fell at my feet. I said, "I am come into this world that those who are without eyes might see, and they who would claim to see, may learn that they are blind."

I knew more anger than had come upon me at the tables of the moneylenders, even more. This fury was not in my hands nor in my feet, and it was not in my voice; it had forced its way into what had been the quiet reaches of my heart. So it was that when one of the Pharisees who overheard me say these words, now asked, with much mockery, "Am I blind?" I replied, "In your sin you are blind."

He was a man most important to himself, and he said, "This Jesus has a devil and is mad." Others argued, "Can a devil open the eyes of a man who was born blind?"

There was much dispute.

As I walked further on the Street of Herodias, an old Pharisee with a kind face, and many lines of wisdom in the twist of his nose and his mouth, come up to me and asked if we might talk. He said, "Many of us who are devout Jews feel that you did well to overturn the tables of the moneylenders. For your act gives tribute to God. There are not enough who are willing to rebuke greed." Next, he said that he wanted me to understand something that he had not understood when he was young. I nodded and he began to speak. Indeed, I wished to calm myself before entering the Temple.

"The Lord," he said, "is generous, and created us to be much like Him. Yet though we are in His image, still we know that we are not as one with Him. We do not have His powers."

This elder seemed a man of much decency. I said: "Man is like God, and is created in His image, yet there are no miracles in his hand."

"Yes," he said. "But what of the man who does have miracles? Is he nearer to God? Or has the Devil deluded him? For the Evil One might use his power to do good; that may also be within the art of the Devil. Why would Satan not

give sight to one who is sightless? In that manner, he could delude you further, noble Jesus, concerning the source of your miracles. Thereby, he could also enlarge the delusions you bring to poor Jews."

"What you say," I told him, "is so finely crafted that you could be speaking for the Serpent."

He sighed. He said, "I know you have a noble heart. It speaks from your eyes. I thought only to give warning. Already a few say that you are the Son of God." And he cast his eyes to the ground, before he could speak again: "Some claim that you say it yourself. I pray that no harm will come to you from this. If you meet the High Priest, Caiaphas, do not say anything of this nature to him. For if he should hear such words from your mouth, the sacrilege would be beyond measure. Yet so long as he does not hear it from your mouth, but only from the lips of others, he will prefer not to listen. For then he will not have to declare that a sacrilege exists. Of such is your safety."

I smiled at him but I did not know if I could take his advice.

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On this second day in the Temple, my throng had multiplied. Now they were numerous in the courtyard, and unruly; there was need to speak on this matter. For they did not know how to comport themselves in the Lord's house nor even when alone and in prayer.

"Do not be like the hypocrites," I said, "who love to recite pious verses while standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets. Rather, shut your door and pray to your Father in secret. Do not use vain repetition. That deadens the soul. Never be guilty, therefore, of excessive prayer; your Father knows what you need."

But they wanted to hear only of wondrous things, and of portents in the heavens that would give forewarning of the end. So soon as there was calm again among them, I chose to tell them, therefore, of how there would be signs in the sun, the moon, and in the stars, with much upheaval upon the earth, and in sea and on the waves: "Men's hearts will fail

them for fear of these things before they shall see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and glory. Only then may you lift up your heads. For your redemption draws near." To myself I said, "Oh, Lord, let my words be true."

I felt as if I cried out to Him but remained alone. Yet my words still had to reach into their hearts for each word might be as valuable as a timber to keep a man afloat in a sullen sea.

From afar, beyond the throng, I could see several Chief Priests talking to officers of the guard. And one of the lesser priests standing close to me, spoke: "By the scrolls it is said that the Messiah shall be from Bethlehem. So how can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"

Another said, "Jesus is of Bethlehem. For where is a man's nature to be found if not in the land where he was born?"

The priest said: "He is of Galilee. Out of Galilee can arise no Messiah." He nodded his head wisely. He knew. He knew nothing about God but he could tell you from where the Messiah could arise, and from where he could not.

Listening to such declarations, I told myself: "A man

of small mind develops a hard shell to protect his small thoughts." But aloud, I said: "Your fathers killed the prophets, and now you build the sepulchers of the prophets. God will send new prophets and you will persecute some of them, and slay the rest. So great will be this bloodshed that all the blood of all the prophets that has been shed from the foundations of the world may yet be required of this generation."

When the priest drew back a step so did I go forward to say more: "And this has been so from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zacharias who perished between the altar and the table."

Before me were the ancestors of this priest and their hands were stained with the blood of the prophets. Yet this priest would give no more ground. He might be small in mind, and small in body, but he was as certain of what he knew as a scorpion; he chose to scold me for offering cures on the Sabbath.

I was bereft of patience over this matter, and so I said: "In you, is not the love of God."

How I wished to smite the piety of these Jews who were

sharp of practice and narrow of mind. And I could have prayed that they find some of the good spirit of those other Jews with whom I had built houses in Nazareth. Those had been equals; those had been my friends.

I said more. I said: "The hour is coming when all that are in the grave shall hear His voice and they shall come forth, they who have done good and they who have done evil. And my judgment will be just unto all your ancestors." And this I chose to repeat: "Unto all your ancestors."

By these last words, I had aroused among them a rage greater than from anything said on the first day. It burned in these priests and Pharisees who had been listening. If they suffered in their souls from many sins and knew lust for Mammon, still they could also believe that they were protected in heaven against their worst acts by the intercession of their glorious forbears. They believed in their ancestors before they believed in God. Indeed, their faith was that these ancient members of their family would carry them across the abyss now separating them from God. Yet, was I passing judgment on old and evil deeds; I was revealing what their ancestors had done in defiance of God.

So they closed their ears. Indeed, they believed that they must not listen. Thereby, they could protect themselves against giving any kind of audience to the Devil. The tears stood forth in my eyes like sentinels on guard. For I knew that the most powerful of my own people, and their highest priests, saw me as a messenger for the Devil. And I could not believe how deep went this wound into me: I was repugnant to the leaders of my people, yes, as repugnant as the swine of Gadarene.

So great was their rage that the light of the day turned red before my eyes. It was as if their souls were already in the fire. Toward such rage, I offered no peace. I could not restrain my tongue: "You shall know the truth," I told them, "and only the truth shall make you free." Yet these Pharisees had much pride; from invisible towers that rose to the heights of their self-esteem, they offered homage to themselves. So, they answered: "We are of the seed of Abraham. So we were never in bondage to any man. How then can it be said: 'You shall be made free'?"

I answered: "You are Abraham's seed yet you seek to be rid of me. But I am a man who has come to tell you the truth

as he has heard it from God."

They answered, "We, too, have one father and He is God."

To which, I replied, "If God were your father, you would love me. But you cannot hear my word. The Devil is your father."

Was I preparing a furnace to melt iron? Never had I seen Pharisees more provoked. "Now, we know," they said, "that you have a devil. For you dare to say that you are greater than our father Abraham?"

"Your father Abraham rejoices to see my day," I told them. "That is because he knows me. Before Abraham was, I am."

They took up stones to cast at me. No longer could I pass among them as on the first day. Then, some had been ready to hurl a rock, yet could not. I had passed through their midst and gone by. Now, one, and soon another, would be bold. And after the first stone, many. So I stepped behind one of my disciples, and he behind others, and we slipped away. Even as they raged in their fire, they still had fear of chasing after me.

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My disciples were concerned about where I could stay, and chose the house of Simon the Leper in Bethany. No one would think of searching there. Yet word of my presence went out. As we were at table, a woman came with an alabaster box of spikenard; very precious was such ointment, and she laved it into my hair. This spikenard was of great worth, as much as three hundred denarii, which is equal to what a poor man earns by his labor in many a month, even a year.

Its power over me now felt equal to its worth. For as I breathed, so did the aroma bring to my ear the Song of Songs. First was the voice of the Bride. She said: "While the king sat at his table, my spikenard sent forth its fragrance."

Some of my disciples felt indignation. One even said, "Such waste! Why was this ointment not sold by our Master, and the money given to the poor?" It was Judas who asked this question.

And I looked at him with such disfavor that he was uneasy before me. Then the woman who brought the gift, and her name was Mary, (the same as my mother, and Mary of Magdalene, and the Mary who was Lazarus's sister), but this was yet another Mary whose name I would not forget for she anointed my feet with the last of the spikenard, and wiped my feet with her hair. Nor was I without a sentiment of peace as she gave this homage to my ankles and toes (as if blessing each of the miles they had walked.) Verses came to me from the scroll of the Song of Songs: "Rise up, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over, flowers appear on the earth and the time for birds to sing has come." The house was filled with the sweet odor of the ointment.

Judas asked again: "Why was this pomade not sold?"

When others also complained against the woman, I said, "Why trouble her? She has left her good work on me." And to Judas, I said more: "The poor are with you always," I said, "and whenever you can, you may do them good. But me, you will not have always."

Now, I was of two minds. The love that had come from

this woman's hands had given me a moment of happiness; at this instant I did not feel like a friend of the poor: Indeed was I not poor myself, living with all the short breath that is one's companio when there is fear of death? How soon it might be upon me! And the perfume of the spikenard had been like balm to the loneliness in my belly.

I knew how the rich feel. For the first time, I could understand their need for display. To them, a lavish display was as worthy as their own blood. So could I also understand now that greed was like a potion to them against foreboding. I, too, therefore, could speak with a forked tongue. I had said it was easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven, yet, from the other side of my mouth, I had, if only for an instant, been scornful of the poor.

Did I speak in two tongues so that I might reach out to all? The perfume of the spikenard was in my nose and I had an image of beautiful temples erected to me; I could see how I wanted to be all things to all men. Each could take from me a separate wisdom. Indeed, I now thought: Many roads lead to the Lord.

But, Judas had left. Now I noticed that Judas had left. If he loved me, so did he also hate me. And he had gone away into that same night where many wandered on the road between Bethany and Jerusalem wondering about changes to come. And they would be great.

Disciples came up, and said that Judas was speaking ill of me. He had declared that I was ready to betray the poor. I was like all others, he had said; I did not remain true to those convictions that cost the most. Yet, I was obliged to forgive Judas. For had I not scorned the poor? And that was true even if I had said the words for one moment, only one moment.

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In my dream it had been foretold that the first day of Passover would be my third day in Jerusalem, and then the Romans would lay hands on me. Was it for this reason that my limbs were heavy on the morning of this third day? I could not rise. My eyes ached from all I had seen, my ears from all that had been heard; an unholy congestion of spirits was in my chest. Multitudes would be waiting to accompany me to the Temple, even more than on the first day, or the second. But I was not ready. I asked myself whether it might not be God's will for me to quit this city so that I might preach by the Sea of Galilee once more.

How many debates had there been among the chief priests of the Temple during the night? How would they look to capture me? Today was the feast of the Passover, and so these priests would hesitate to take any action that might cause riots among the people, and so enrage the Romans. The priests could find themselves in much disfavor for failing to

protect the peace of the city.

So, they would not know what to do concerning me. Nor did I know. On this third morning, I could not rouse myself to go to the Temple. If prudence comes to us from God and cowardice from the Devil, the line between cannot be marked. Not by a man. On this morning I was not the Son of God, but only a man. God's voice was not in my ear, only a low fear in my heart.

By afternoon, the disciples gathered about my bed. "Where shall we go," they asked, "that we may all eat together on the Passover?"

At last some kind of message seemed to come to me, and I said, "Let two of you go into the city, and follow the first man who is bearing a pitcher of water. Walk behind him to his door. And say: 'My Master asks for the guest chamber. He would eat the Passover here with his disciples.' That good man will show you a large upper room, furnished and prepared. Make it ready for us."

I saw this as clearly as if God had told it to me. And the man was found. All was as I had said; they made ready the Passover. In the evening, in the dark, I came to that

house with my twelve, and we ate.

I remained silent until I took the bread. Then I blessed it and broke it and gave a piece to each of my friends. And this gave a recollection of the hour when I had broken bread in the desert and five loaves had fed five hundred. In that hour I had lived in the miracle of God's favor, so I said now: "Eat of me, for this is my body." And what I said was true even if solemn in its truth. For in death our flesh returns to the earth and from that earth will come grain. I was the Son of God. So I would also be present in the grain.

I took the cup and offered thanks to the Lord, and poured our wine, and recalled other nights when we had drunk together and had felt as if all were one, and things hidden would be revealed to us. Now, indeed, was much revealed. The wine made me feel near again to my Father, and I looked upon Him as if He were a great king. Indeed, for these few breaths, my fear of Him was smaller than my love; I felt close to His long labors. He had sought to bring order to the chaos our people had made. How hard He had worked and how often had He fallen into rage and sent us into exile for our

sins. Yet even as He had scattered us, so had He brought us back. He had sought to forgive us once again no matter how we had despoiled of His Creation. Could I now tell these twelve men at the table that God would come, and soon, to save us when I knew that we Israelites were a scattered and sinful people who would prefer, doubtless, not to be saved but judged. For just so vain were we as to believe that we could pass judgment.

Like a soldier loyal yet weary, I said to myself, "O, Lord, help my unbelief."

And as I gave them to drink, I said: "This is my blood which is shed for you and for many."

Whereupon, tasting the sorrow of the grapes that had been crushed to make this wine, exaltation entered this sorrow, and rose to my head. I told them: "I will drink no more wine until I drink it in the Kingdom of God." Yet, at this instant, the Kingdom of God seemed near.

My apostles stirred among themselves. One said: "How can a prophet give his flesh to eat and his blood to drink?"

And I said: "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, you will have no life. But he who

will eat my flesh and drink my blood will have eternal life. I will raise him up on the last day. He will dwell in me and I in him."

I heard much muttering. Another spoke out: "This is a hard saying. Who can hear it?"

I answered: "Have I not chosen you? Are you not my twelve?" And I resisted what I was ready to say next, but then I said it: "And among your twelve, is not one of you a devil?" And this was said with certainty. It was so close to the sorrow I tasted in the wine. Did I feel near to the boundless sorrow of the Lord? So I said: "One of you shall betray me. And woe to him. It would have been good for that man if he had never been born."

Whoever he was, he must be close to me, as close as my own sins and my own fatigue for now I felt grief for this man even if he would betray me. His suffering would be greater than mine.

And so, by thinking such thoughts, I grew stronger. Strength came to me with this spirit of compassion and I felt grief for all who would suffer. Again, I was stronger.

I arose from supper and laid aside my garments and with

a towel, I girded myself. Then I poured water into a basin and began to wash the feet of each disciple.

When I came to Peter, he said: "You shall not wash my feet."

I replied, "If I do not wash you, then you are no part of me."

Peter replied, "Then not only my feet, Lord, but my hands and my head."

A fine calm had come to me. Some of their feet were clean, and others stank of the alleys of Jerusalem; still, I knew whose limbs were brave and which men were ready to flee. So, when I was done, I said: "In time to come, wash one another's feet, as I have washed yours."

I was still troubled. My thoughts kept repeating the same few words: "One of you will betray me." I must have whispered these words to myself for now Simon Peter asked, "Lord, who is it?"

I answered: "He is the one to whom I shall give a sop when I have dipped it."

And lowering my bread in the wine, I gave this sop to the one I chose, and it was Judas Iscariot. Much passed

between us on that touch of our hands.

The lights in Judas' dark eyes grew bright and I saw what was in his purpose. Yet, I told myself that he was still loyal. Just so much did I wish to believe in him, so or no. And such leniency of judgment obliged me to see how I might be the Son of God, yet not much more than a man. So I could also understand how men could have faith, yet be faithless; praise God and worship Mammon. Therefore, I said to Judas, "What you will do, do quickly." Since I did not know, not for certain, I said it tenderly. No other man at the table understood, therefore; some could have thought I sent him out with a blessing. I had clasped him by the shoulder. And he went out. The night was dark.

I was as moved as if I were ready to walk again upon the water in the Sea of Galilee.

I said, "A new commandment I give to you: Love one another as I have loved you. By this alone shall others know that you are my disciples. For soon I must go, and where I go, you cannot come."

Peter said: "Lord, where do you go?"

I answered: "You cannot follow me now. Only afterward

will you be able."

Peter said: "Lord, let me follow now. I will lay down my life for you. I am ready to go with you into prison and into death." He believed it. He believed he was strong. His countenance was smug. Even the best of warriors can grow so fond of all that they are, that they become fond at last of no more than what they are. Yet I could feel the vertigo of his spirit. He was blind to himself. I said: "This day, even on this night, before the cock crows once, thou shalt deny me thrice."

He spoke vehemently: "If I should die with you, I will not deny you. Not in any way." And the others said the same thing.

I said: "Are there swords among us?" The truth and the life, he had sworn to the Father tonight by me. It was late, and they would not wait that I see the way, and with the web, they were to follow.

Martha said, "Lord, show us the Father." I told him "Believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me."

Now I saw no more before that they were to follow.

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When there was no answer, I said, "He who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one."

Then they spoke. "Lord, here are two swords," they said, and two of them showed that they had short swords, whereupon Peter took one.

I said: "It will be enough." I knew that twelve legions of angels might not be enough.

The apostle Thomas now asked: "Lord, how can we know the way?" He was simple and one had to tell him in the same words many times. So, I said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father except by me." It was late, and they still did not know that it was the way, and not the man, they were to follow.

Whereupon Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father."

I told him: "Believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me."

Now I saw as never before that they must believe this or

they would be without power to do any works. I told them: "Know only that you must love one another as I have loved you."

Never had I felt more love for them, nor more compassion for their weakness. So many perils were awaiting them. "Know," I said, "that I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves. Try then to be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves. But beware of men. For they will deliver you to their councils and, because of me, they will scourge you and have you subject to evil judgment by governors and kings. Yet take no thought of what you shall speak, for it will be given to you in that hour of trial. It is not you who will speak but the Spirit of your Father." To that, I could bear witness.

These words brought fear to many of them. But then, how many are ready to seek for greater faith by climbing upward, ever upward? So I added: "Be not afraid, my friends, of those who kill the body; fear, rather, Him who has the power to cast you into hell. Fear Him."

Now, they might understand at last the fear that lay beneath all other fear: Would they see that death was not

the end, but the beginning of joy or of suffering? The joys or agonies to come would surpass all that they had known before. Had I accomplished this much--that they would no longer keep from looking upon the face of death in the hope that all judgment might thereby be avoided?

I spoke as if I had already left them. I believed it. Yet I also believed that I would never leave them, and would be with them tomorrow.

I knew that all I had told them was true but for one saying. I had told them: "Love one another as I have loved you." My love had been mixed with anger.

So, I would tell them what must be true and had always been true: "Greater love," I said, "no man can have than this, that he lay down his life for his friend. I tell you again: Love one another. You must. For even as the world has hated me, soon it will hate you."

I looked at my apostles and some were ugly and some were misshapen of body; some were misshapen of nose; the hands of many were thick and broken; the legs of others were crooked. Yet, they were not only my followers but my friends. I would love them. "They have persecuted me," I said. "They will

also persecute you. And all these things they will do to you for my name's sake. For if I had not told them of their sins, they would not have had to know that they sinned. Now there is no cloak for their evil."

I heard a roaring in the wilderness and it was far away from my ear even if it was inside my ear. The rage of the Devil was immense. If many Pharisees were now without a cloak for their sin, so was the Devil being cheated of his harvest. So I knew that the war struggle between the Lord and Satan was also fought in the Temple. And I wondered again if God had brought me forth from Mary to help Him in such a contest. Had I been God's lieutenant before I was His Son?

"The time shall come," I said to my people, "when whoever will look to kill you will think that he does God service. Wars shall be waged in God's name that will profit the Devil."

And if I was feeling the sorrow that I might not live to see my disciples for even one more day, still I said: "Your unhappiness shall turn to joy. For you will come to know yourselves, and then you will see that you are also the sons

of the living Father."

I wanted this to be true for now and all of eternity, but I also knew that my Father's heart was heavier in this hour than my own. Again I did not dare to wonder whether I had failed in the larger part of my ministry. Instead, I lifted my eyes and prayed, "O Father, give back to me the glory which I had with You before the world was." And it gave me great hope against all the trials to come that He might have been with me from the beginning, and even before the beginning.

"Father," I said, "if I am no longer to be in this world, my men are still here and I have given them Your word. So I pray that You will take them into Yourself, and keep them from the evil of others. As You, Father, are in me, and I in You, may they also be in Us, and be One with Us. And then the world will believe that You have sent me. The glory which You have given to me I would give to them so that they may be one even as We are One, I in them and You in me."

I could feel the love of God. Such love was like an animal of heavenly beauty. Its eyes glowed in my heart.

As these prayers echoed within me, so did I know that I

must go again to the Temple even if it was the night of the third day. And I must go with these questions in my heart. I set out.

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As I walked, my foreboding increased; my legs grew heavy.

When we came to Gethsemane, I said to my disciples, "Sit here while I pray."

I chose Peter and James and John to come with me. How exceedingly heavy my legs had become! I began to mount the small hill to the garden of Gethsemane, but my limbs could hardly stir. And my soul was sorrowful unto death.

"Sit here, and keep watch." I said, "while I go and pray." I hardly knew why, but I said to Peter, "Do not enter into temptation."

Then, I went forward where they could not see me and fell to the ground. I prayed that this hour might pass. I wanted to live again, and in less terror. Sweat was on my brow, heavy, and like large drops of blood. Again I wished for this hour to pass. I said, "Father, take this cup from me." Yet I knew that the cup of misery would not pass; the

pit might be bottomless. I tried to speak. I said to my Father: "It is not what I will, but what You will." I rose up, but as if I were bearing a great weight.

When I made my way to the disciples, they were sleeping. I said: "Peter, could you not watch for an hour?" And then I knew that Peter was imbued with his own terror and it was equal to mine. For what does a strong man do in the hour of his cowardice but sink into sleep? Yet once again he swore loyalty to me and said he would stand guard. "The spirit may be ready," I told him, "but the flesh is weak."

I went away to pray by myself in this garden of Gethsemane: The odor of betrayal was in the flowers of the garden. When I returned to Peter and to James and John, so they were again asleep.

I said, "It is enough. The hour is come."

And as I spoke, Judas came toward us. With him, were Temple guards and Roman soldiers. He marched straightaway to me and said, "Master, Master." And he kissed me on the mouth.

His lips were burning with unholy fever; his embrace was for the guards. He must have said: "He whom I will kiss,

speaks as the Messiah." They came forward at once to lay hands on me, but Peter drew his sword, and struck a servant of the High Priest on his ear, and that turned raw with blood.

I said to this servant, "Suffer no further." And touched his ear and healed him. I asked his name which was Malchus. The Roman soldiers were silent and did not come to aid Malchus because he was a Jew, but then they also drew back from me because I had healed him.

I said to the Temple Guards: "Have you come to find a thief? I was with you in the Temple and you did not try to take me."

Hearing this speech, they seized me, and James and John fled. Even Peter was gone.

I suffered these guards to lead me away.

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They took me to the house of Caiaphas, the High Priest, and it was a large house. At the other end of a long hall, there was a fire kindled; and that was where they all sat together, all these followers of the High Priest and the Temple. I could see how Peter, having stolen after me, sat among them warming himself by the fire.

The men who held me now put a blindfold to my eyes. So soon as I could not see, one slapped me on the face. Then, several said: "Tell us who struck you. Prophecy!"

And one began to spit on me.

Then came the priests and the elders and some of the council of the Sanhedrin, and I knew they were bringing false witnesses, and soon, indeed, they were followed by two men who told the High Priest that I had said, "I will destroy this temple, and within three days I will build another." Yet they did not agree on whether I had said I would use my own hands or would rebuild the temple without hands.

Caiaphas, the High Priest, now ordered my blindfold to be removed. He was a tall man, and his white beard was worthy of the prophets. He stood in the midst of the others and asked of me, but gently: "Will you reply to my questions?"

I did not answer. My silence must have seemed insolent for now this High Priest Caiaphas said: "I adjure you by the Living God to tell us whether you are Christ, the Son of God, our Messiah."

He had adjured me. I could not swear a false oath to the High Priest of my people; no, not even if I was the Son of God and, by this half of myself, superior to any priest. So, I said, "I am what you say. You shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of God." These words might as well have come from the sky. They seemed distant to me even as I said them.

He did not seem surprised. With deliberation, the High Priest tore his robes from his chest and said, "We need no witnesses! All of you have heard this blasphemy."

And because Caiaphas had ripped his garment, behold! He had declared to all that I was not my Father's Son, but a son

of the Jews. And this son had committed so great a sacrilege that he, as the High Priest, had rent his clothes to show that I was his offspring, and was to mourned as dead.

The Guard beat upon me. These words by the High Priest had removed all fear in them I might yet bear witness against mistreatment. They felt free to beat me now on my face.

Peter remained still on a bench at the other end of the hall. I saw a servant come up to him and ask, "Were you not one of those who was with Yeshua of Nazareth in the Temple?"

He said, "I don't understand what you say."

Peter left her and went out onto the porch even though the night was cold. There another maid saw him and she said: "This is one of them."

But again he denied me. "Woman," he said, "I do not know him."

A man came by and said to Peter: "Aren't you one of them? Your speech has the sound of Galilee."

Was Peter in fear of retribution for the wound he had given to Malchus? He declared: "I do not know this man of whom you speak."

The cock crowed. And Peter was stricken. Now, he

recalled what I had said.

He left the porch. He was weeping. He wept. And I tried to feel no pain at being struck on the face. Indeed, it was his sorrow that came into me like the point of a lance. Peter would spend his life offering amends for this hour when he denied me. So his life would be hard.

The High Priest Caiaphas now left with the elders of the Sanhedrin. And I was thrown into a small dungeon and kept there through the night. Through all of those hours I tried to understand what to do next. No matter that Judas had betrayed me, it was he, of all my disciples, who had been the wisest in knowing how our priests liked to arrange matters with the Romans. By his teachings in this matter, I knew that in the morning, much would depend on how agreement would be found between the Procurator of Judea, Pontius Pilate, and Caiaphas.

Judas had spoken often of those two. They were close on many matters, and that is how they kept peace in Jerusalem. Pontius Pilate tolerated no insolence against the Great Temple by his soldiers, and Caiaphas gave no veneration to those Jews who died in attacks upon Roman soldiers.

As a peace, it was without strong constitution. For the Romans had their greatest belief, as such pagans would, in Roman destiny. Whereas, the Jews believed in one God, One, and He was more powerful than all pagan gods and demons. Where, then, was agreement to be found?

Nonetheless, between Caiaphas and Pontius Pilate, there was agreement. As Judas had assured me, the Roman Procurator received gold in secret from the Temple; such gold made much difference in the way he treated the Jews. In his first year of governing Judea, Pontius Pilate had displayed the Roman eagle upon the standards of his garrison in Jerusalem. In a city so holy as Jerusalem, that was idolatry, and it had aroused a demonstration against Pontius Pilate. A great gathering of Jews stood outside his residence and refused to leave. They were encircled by Pilate's legions and ordered to leave or be massacred, but none of these Jews gave way. Pilate had to give way on this occasion and remove the Roman eagle from the standards. He had not wished to give offense to Rome by a war so early in his reign as Procurator of all Judea. Now he had ruled over this part of Israel for more than five years, and peace had been preserved in the face of

his great fear of revolt.

Caiaaphas had been High Priest for more than ten years, and the sum of his agreement with Pontius Pilate was that he shared the same abhorrence of uprising. So said Judas, who had spoken often of his dissatisfaction that I was not willing to lead such a revolt. It was not enough, he had said, to wish to bring my people to my Father. No, I had told him, that was all I wanted. Indeed, I was innocent of any urge to rebel against the eagle of Rome.

Could this be cause for hope? Already, my limbs had begun to brood upon their misery, the bruises on my face were swollen, and it was blacker than night in my dungeon.

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At dawn, I was brought to a small chamber near the court of Pontius Pilate, and the guard who took me said that during the night, Judas had come to return the thirty pieces of silver paid to him by the elders. When the priests refused his offering, he had cast down these coins in the Temple, and left. And hanged himself.

Nor could I speak. Judas had repented.

"Our priests," said the man of the Guard, "do not know what to do with these thirty pieces of silver. It is not lawful to put blood money into the treasury."

Now, I stood before Pontius Pilate. He was a small man with a sharp nose and sharp shoulders. His knees were also sharp, as if he had climbed to many a position by the quickness of his mind and his joints. And indeed it is rare to find a man with a sharp nose who is stupid. Nothing of benevolence passed from him over to me, but I could see that he was wary, and might not wish my death. Rather he looked

upon me as if I were part of the winds of disarray, and he detested such.

To the priests who now appeared, he asked: "What accusation do you make against this man?"

They said modestly: "He is, sir, a malefactor who is perverting our nation."

"Then take him," said Pilate, "and judge him according to your law."

They answered: "It is not lawful for us to put a man to death." Indeed the Romans did reserve the power of execution for themselves. Whereupon, Pontius Pilate left his hall of judgment to take counsel, and when he came back, he asked more questions of these priests, and they said that I had forbidden everyone to give tribute to Caesar and called myself a king.

Whereupon Pilate asked: "Do you call yourself the King of the Jews?"

I answered, "Did others say so?"

Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your priests have delivered you to me. What have you done?"

I answered, "My kingdom is not of this world."

He looked at me then with attention and yet with amusement for he saw many colors of punishment upon my skin. He asked, "Are you nonetheless a king?"

I answered: "I can bear witness to the truth. In that way only am I a king."

And Pilate said to me, "What is truth?" He was without belief. For next he said, "Where there is truth, there will be no peace. And where peace abides, you will find no truth."

Some Jews from the party of the High Priest gave a small sound of dissent. If they knew nothing else, they knew what truth was. And on this morning their truth was that I should be condemned by the Romans.

Having heard this modest utterance of unhappiness, Pilate asked again: "Yes, what is truth?" And answered the question himself. For he added, "In property is truth. In land is truth, especially in the ownership of it. And in the law of the land is the most truth. Since you are a Galilean, you are under Herod's jurisdiction, not mine. For he is the Emperor of Samaria and Idumea and Galilee as appointed by Rome. Indeed, Herod is not only in Jerusalem this morning

but is visiting my court. He has spoken of you and desires to meet you, having heard many things. Perhaps he hopes to see a miracle." Pontius Pilate smiled. "Can your miracles be performed in the courts of the gentiles? The gods of the gentiles, after all, may have more domain in this place than the gods of the Jews."

So I was taken across many courtyards of the palace and into the chambers of Herod Antipas. He was fat and he did not say much. He was distracted by the presence of a beautiful woman who sat at his table. Yet, when his soldiers smiled at seeing me, for by now my robe was filthy, Herod ordered another to be brought worthy of a king. Or, as he amended it, a robe fit, at least, for the officers of a king. And he had it put upon me.

Then he said: "Since you are in Jerusalem, you are in the jurisdiction of Pontius Pilate." And these words pleased him for I could see that he would send me back to Pontius Pilate. He wanted nothing to do with any man who could remind him of that other man, the prophet, now dead. Instead, Herod said: "Since you are a Galilean and come from lands I oversee, I will send you back to Pontius Pilate

properly dressed." And his eyes were small and buried far in his head. So had they hidden from the bloody sight of the head of John the Baptist. Now, indeed, he hardly looked at me. Herod Antipas had his hand on the woman.

I was led back through the palace to Pontius Pilate; there before the Procurator stood Caiaphas. He looked as if he, too, had not slept in peace.

Pilate was speaking: "You have sent this man to me as one who perverts your people, but as yet I have found no fault in him that corresponds to your accusation that he breeds revolt against Romans. Nor does Herod. Behold, he has sent him back in a robe of purple. Therefore, I will chastise this man and release him. When you ask that I condemn a man to death, it can be done only if he is a grievous malefactor. Death, when all is said, is a grievous punishment."

I could see that this was not a contest but a game. For Caiaphas showed no discontent. He merely smiled, and ruefully, as if he knew that the price of Roman justice would not be small today. Pontius Pilate might be ready to condemn me to death, but only for his price.

Now, he said: "I will condemn this man if you insist, but is it necessary? Today is one of the days of your feast. By our law, and also by your law, it is agreed that I am to release one Jew who is in prison during this time. Will you let me release to you this King of the Jews?"

The priests of the Temple made a show of looking at the people around them for an answer: I could see that none of my disciples were here.

My people were poor, or, if rich, timid; nearly all were unlettered, and in fear of the Romans. Whereas here were many elders of the Temple, and scribes, and Pharisees, and rich townspeople. They were the men surrounding the priests. So I understood, much too late, that the voice of a multitude is no more than a high wind: It can do much damage in its passage, but will leave no better trace of its purpose than the spoil strewn in its path.

So when Pilate asked: "Whom do I release?" this multitude, loyal to the priests, answered, "Barabbas." And this Barabbas was a prisoner who had killed a Roman soldier.

Pilate said: "What then should I do with this Jesus who

is called Christ?"

Some shouted: "Let him be crucified!" But they were not many, not enough, and so Pilate smiled at Caiaphas. Now, his price could increase again.

And Pilate said, "Why should he be crucified? What evil has he done?"

I could see that he was curious. Why had those Jews not chosen Barabbas for crucifixion? Since Romans believe in all judgments that serve public order, they would decry murder; that they would see as a deed worthy of the sentence of death. Whereas, blasphemy is merely an insult to a god; it can be placated by prayer to him. Or, indeed, by shifting one's worship to another god. As these Romans looked upon it, the Kingdom of Heaven was no more than a marketplace and prophets were to be esteemed no more than merchants. You do not kill a dishonest merchant, you merely fine him. Yet the multitude had become aroused by the question, "What evil has he done?" More of them now cried back to Pontius Pilate: "Crucify him! Crucify this Jesus!" And he saw that their truth was not to be found in land but in the punishment of sin.

Pilate called for a bowl of water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this person." Yet all knew that this was his way of accepting their decision.

Caiaphas and his people replied: "Let his blood be on us, and on our children." They were sincere. They would take a vow upon their children, whereas Pilate would only take a gift.

I wanted to cry out: "Do not take such a vow! My blood will be not only upon your children but upon your children's children, and all descendants, and there will be catastrophe beyond catastrophe." But I was silent before the certitude of these people who were also my people.

Soldiers took me into their common room and stripped me of all but a loin cloth. Then, they covered me with that purple robe fit for a king, or the officer of a king. They plaited a crown of thorns, and placed it on my head, and handed me the stout stalk of a reed for my right hand. It would be my sceptre.

Now, they bowed before me, touching their knees to the ground and cried out: "Hail, King of the Jews."

Whereupon they rose and spit in my eyes and whipped me upon the head. They were Romans and crude.

They forced the wreath onto my forehead, pressing down on the thorns until the blood began to run from my brow. And such trickle of blood was like the white worm of death creeping upon my flesh after the bite of the scorpion that had lived in the thorn.

Soon, the robe was taken away. In my nakedness, they returned the old garment to me. And it felt as tender upon my skin as the hand of the Lord upon a newborn babe.

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As we came out of the palace of Pontius Pilate, there was a man, Simon by name, a Cyrene, who was chosen to bear my cross. Now, I knew why they had jeered at me when I had stood before them with no clothes. For I was no longer equal to the carpenter who had worked with vigor each day in Galilee; now, naked, what was left but my bones? And they laughed and called me King of the Jews.

We came to a place called Golgotha, where we were followed by many women who lamented after me. Now that I had been condemned, few from the Temple chose to remain, but some of my followers had returned, these women being first among them. And they cried out as if they were feeling the pain I was yet to suffer.

I had not sought to save the world through the efforts of women. Only through the strivings of men. Now, my throat was dry. But this much I could say aloud: "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me but for your children. The days

are coming in which they shall say, 'Blessed are the barren, for the wombs that never bore and the breasts which never gave suck.'"

I thought of the fig tree I had cursed and added silently, "For that, too, I ask forgiveness."

In the crowd, I saw my mother. I was of her flesh and soon I would be torn from her. Now, and too late, I understood her love. I was a gift from the Lord, and so, in her awe of me, she had contended with all I did. For to live constantly in awe is equal to not knowing one's own child. Yet now she was in great pain for me. Beside her was standing my disciple Timothy, so I said to her, "Do not cry. I am returning to my Father. Woman, behold thy son." And to him I said, "Here is your mother." He nodded. He would take her into his home. Of all my disciples, he was the one to take care of her.

Not far from my mother, I saw Mary Magdalene. I said to her, (and it was at odds with what I had said to the daughters of Jerusalem), but still I whispered: "Take hope. Have children. For God hath forgiven you."

Now, two crosses were raised on the hill of Golgotha. With me would be two thieves. Indeed, they had already been

tied to their frames and raised. Even as they were uttering cries of pain, Pontius Pilate approached. He looked at the sign tied around my neck which said: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." Not many priests of the Temple were still present, but there was one who said to Pilate, "That should not read, 'the King of the Jews.'" He did say: 'I am King of the Jews,' but one does not become a king by saying it."

Pilate answered, "What is written, is written."

Again, I could understand his purpose. If, in years to come, they would speak of me as the King of the Jews, then Pontius Pilate would have been one of the first to agree. And if I were not a king, he would be admired for his power of ridicule. By one road or the other, he was a good Roman. It took wisdom to benefit from either one of two opposite conclusions. Too late was I learning how these Romans were conquering so much of the world.

The soldiers led me to my cross where it lay on the ground. It was a crude cross, nailed together at off-measure, and they made me lie down upon it and stretch out my arms. I took a breath and the morning was dark.

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They drove a spike into each of my wrists and another spike through each of my feet. Nor did I cry out. I would not cry out. Yet, I saw the heavens divide.

The pain was so bright that I knew the colors of the rainbow; my soul was luminous in pain, for that is also the possession of God. In pain, has He dwelt.

Into greater pain did I climb when they raised my cross. Now my agony was equal to the four nails in my flesh, and this pain was larger than all the seas. I swooned. When I opened my eyes, it was to see Roman soldiers kneeling beneath me. They were arguing how to tear my garment so that there would be a share for all of them. But my robe was without a seam, being woven from one end to the other. Therefore they decided: "Let us cast lots. It is only good for one."

The soldier who won took up the garment, and I remembered the woman who had been cured of an issue of blood by touching it; now this worn robe hung from the arm of the

soldier. And the cloth was as limp as the skin of a snake.

Beside me, someone groaned. Another man answered. I looked at the two thieves. One was on my right hand, another on the left. Below us, a man said: "He saved others; why can't he save himself?" Another said: "If he is the Son of God, where is his Father?"

The thief by my right side spoke: "If you are Christ, save yourself and me!"

I told myself: "This man thinks only of his own life. He is criminal." And I turned to the other thief for he said, "Lord, remember my face when entering your Kingdom."

I said to him: "Today, you shall be with me in paradise."

But I could not know if I believed my words, nor whether the thief would hear them. My pain did not abate and my voice was less than a whisper.

Though it was still morning, darkness came over the land; it was dark. I recited from the Psalms: "My bones are burned with heat and cleave to my skin. The pain that gnaws takes no rest. My bowels boil; my skin is black."

Had the hand of the Lord set me down in a valley of

bones? Behold, they were very dry. And I knew the words of Ezekiel when he said: "Can these bones live?"

Yet, as Job had passed from fever into the chill that is worse than fever, so I shivered in my loincloth. Out of my nakedness, I said aloud: "The face of the deep is frozen." God did not reply. When I said, "I thirst," one soldier offered me vinegar. When I refused, for vinegar was worse than thirst, he said: "King of the Jews, why can you not come down from the cross?"

And I remembered what was written in the second book of Kings: "Hath he not sent me to the men who sit on the wall, that they may eat their own dung and drink of their own piss?"

I cried out to my Father, "Why do You do nothing? Evil opens like a flower. What damage will come if You allow me no miracles in this hour?"

When my Father replied, it was like a voice from out of the whirlwind; He said in my ear, and He was louder than my pain, "Would you annul My judgment?"

I said: "Not while breath is in me."

But my torment remained. Pain was written on the sky.

Pain came like lightning from a dark sky. I prayed again to my Father: "Grant me one miracle," I asked.

If my Father did not hear me, then I was no longer the Son of God but only a man. How awful to be no more than a man. I cried out, "My Lord, hast Thou forsaken me?"

There was no answer but my own. I saw the Garden of Eden and remembered the Lord's words to Adam: "Of every tree in the Garden you must freely eat, but of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, you shall not eat."

My Father's lightning might strike on the hill beside Golgotha, and His thunder could be as loud as His voice, but I had come to believe what one must not believe: Like Eve, I had wanted knowledge of good and evil.

God was my Father, but I still must ask: Is He all-powerful? Or, is He not? And as I asked, I knew the answer. God, my Father, was one god and there were others. If I had failed Him, so had He failed me. Such was my knowledge of good and evil.

One soldier took a sponge and filled it with vinegar and forced me to drink. And he jeered at me.

The taste was so vile that I cried out with the last of

the heavenly rage my Father had given to me. Yet I also knew: I must not die with a curse in my heart.

I looked upon the face of the Roman soldier who had forced this vinegar on me. Had I not told my disciples, "Whoever seeks to kill you will think he is performing service for God." So was this a comfort in my extremity. I said: "My Lord, they are blind in their hearts and do not see. They came into the world empty and will depart from the world empty. Meanwhile they are drunk. Forgive them. For they know not what they do."

The strength of my life passed then into the Spirit. And I said, "It is finished." And I died before they put the spear in my side and blood and water ran out of my body. I saw a white light that shone like the brilliance of heaven.

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In the lifetime of those who came after me, scrolls were written (and most pious) by those who had known me and gospels were set down by those who had not. (And they were more pious!) Such scribes--and now they were called Christians--had heard about my journeys. They added much. They spoke of angels arising at my death while others described a lightning that broke the great lintel of the Temple on that day, and they told of rocks splitting apart, and graves that opened. When they pulled the nails from my limbs and set me on the ground, they said that the earth shook. Some even wrote that the bodies of many prophets came out of their tombs, and marched into the holy city where they appeared to many. And the people said: "Truly, this was the Son of God."

Many of those who had been near me were given to exaggeration; few had believed in the son or in the Father enough to say no more than the truth, which, as you have

seen, was much. Therefore, I, like Daniel, would now seal my gospel and hope that its truth is everlasting.

Yet I cannot. For I must speak of what was said after I was gone. I have been told many tales, and some are closer to the events I knew than others. Indeed, it is true that I rose on the third day; yet my disciples were too fabulous in their accounts. When a man sees a wonder, Satan will enter his tale.

Yet, this much is true: On the afternoon of my death came Joseph of Arimathea, who was one of my followers, and a rich man. In secret he asked Pontius Pilate for permission to take my body, and, for a good sum, Pilate agreed. Therefore, Joseph of Arimathea took that body which once had been mine and with him came a man named Nicodemus, and they brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundredpound weight, and washed me, and wound my body with new clothes and put me in a linen shroud together with these spices, which is how we Jews bury the dead. And near where I had been crucified there was a garden with a sepulcher, newly hewn from the rock, and this place Joseph of Arimathea had had prepared for himself. But such was his generosity that they

laid me there.

So I was placed in a rich man's tomb. And they rolled a large stone before the door, and left.

Now, Caiaphas and some of his high priests had slept in doubt. They could not be certain that what they had done was wise, for many good Jews were beating their breasts in the streets of Jerusalem and saying, "Our sins will bring woe upon us." The priests of Caiaphas were, therefore, concerned that no ill consequences befall them. On the morning after my death, they came back to Pilate, and told him that I had said to many: "After three days, I will rise again." So they asked the Procurator to safeguard the sepulcher for three days. "Otherwise," they said, "disciples of Jesus could come by night and steal him away, then say to the people, 'He is risen from the dead.' Should that happen, the first disruption will be compounded by the last."

Pilate said to them, "Keep your own watch." For they would not pay him what he asked, and it was a large sum. Pilate then said, "I am clean of this man's blood. It is all your doing." Those words they took as a threat, and so they decided to pay him after all. Pilate gave them Petronius the

centurion, with his Roman soldiers, to stand guard by the tomb. And these Romans put seven seals against the large stone at the entrance and set their watch.

There are some who say that there was an earthquake, and the angel of the Lord descended from heaven and rolled back the stone from the door. Since the raiment of this angel was as white as snow, the guards all fled.

Others say that very early on the morning of the third day, even as the harlot and the woman who is virtuous can be brought together by death, so, at dawn, Mary Magdalene came to the sepulcher and met Mary, my mother. And they agreed to perform proper rites for me. But now that they were here, who would roll away the stone?

Yet when they looked, they saw that the tomb was open. They could enter. Inside, they met a young man who wore a long white garment and he said: "You seek Jesus of Nazareth, but he is risen. Tell his disciples that he goes before you into Galilee and there you shall see him."

This may be close to the truth. For I know that I rose on the third day. And I also recall that I left the sepulcher to wander through the city and the countryside.

Some would say I appeared among my disciples and said, "Why are you sad?" And they did not recognize me. They thought I was a stranger in Jerusalem and did not know what had happened. They even said to me, "Our sorrow is for Jesus of Nazareth who was a mighty prophet. But our rulers have crucified him. Yet we believed that he would redeem Israel."

I said to them: "Behold my hands and my feet!" And Thomas looked and then asked to feel the holes in my wrists (which is why he is known to this day as Doubting Thomas.) And these holes made them believe. Soon all came to agree that I had been received in heaven and seated on the right hand of God. Many of my disciples went forth and preached that the Lord was with them. In my name, many came to believe that they had the power to cast out devils, and they spoke with new tongues and were ready to take up serpents and many another deadly thing. When they laid hands on the sick, some of these sick even recovered.

But the Jews were much divided by my death. Many went forth with my disciples and became new followers, calling themselves Christian; others remained close to the Temple and

argued among themselves for a hundred years over whether I was, or was not the Messiah.

The rich among them, and the pious, prevailed; how could they believe that the Messiah was a poor man with a crude accent? God would not allow it! Indeed, they live by the same beliefs today.

Still it must also be said that many of those who now call themselves Christian are rich and pious themselves, and are no better, I fear, than the Pharisees of the Great Temple. Indeed, they are often greater in their hypocrisy than those Jews who condemned me then.

There are many churches in my name and in the name of my apostles. The greatest and holiest is named after Peter; it is a place of great splendor in Rome. Nowhere can there be found more gold.

God and Mammon still grapple for the hearts of all men and all women. As yet, neither the Lord nor Satan can triumph. I remain on the right hand of God, and look for greater wisdom than I had before, and I think of many with love. My mother is much honored. More churches are named for her than for me. And she is pleased with me.

My Father, however, does not often speak to His son. For, even as Eve, I came to know His secret. Nonetheless, I rejoice, and honor my Father; I understand that His vision is mightier than His powers: surely He sends forth as much love as He can afford; His love cannot be without limit. For His wars with the Devil grow worse. Great battles have been lost, and this is true even on the second millenium of my birth.

Yet it is believed by most that God gained a great victory through me. It may be that the Devil was not ready for my Father's skill. My Father knew how to recover from debacle, disaster, and catastrophe. For it is true that in some fifty years after my death, the Gospel According to John was composed, and the work of this John (unknown to me) must have been illumined by my Father inasmuch as the words proved unforgettable: They say: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son that whosoever believed in him should not perish but have eternal life." Indeed, so great was this message that never was any other prophet followed by so many ready to die in his name. But then, I was not only a prophet but His son.

Thereby let it be understood: I did not vanquish the Devil, and a great victory was lost. More than a million Jews would die in a war against Rome not forty years after I was crucified, and the Temple was left with no more than one wall. Still, my Father proved as wise and cunning as the Devil. For He saw how to gain much from defeat by calling it victory. In these days, many Christians believe that everything has been won for them. They believe it was even won before they were born. This victory is theirs because of my suffering on the cross. Thereby does my Father still find much purpose for me. And, in truth, by way of my blessing does the Lord send what love He still possesses down to that creature who is man and that other creature who is woman, and I remain the bearer of all love that is tender.

Yet with such love must we also remind ourselves of Pontius Pilate who said that in peace there was no truth, and in truth, no peace. So, I do not bring peace but a sword. This sword would wage war on all that makes us less generous than we ought to be. And of all such sins, none excites my sword more than the arts of the Devil as he enters the avatars of our greed and calls them noble.