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The air is still tonight, though my heart is in turmoil. The gardens are beautiful in the moonlight, the olive trees silver embossed and ghostly limbed. My breath comes in short, sharp gasps. My heart beats so fast, so loud I feel sure the soldiers behind me must hear it. Tonight is the night of the end of the madness. Tonight, I am the betrayer.

The men light their torches, and the world becomes fiery and flickering. Swords scrape as they are drawn from scabbards. It is time. There lie Peter, James and John. They wake, and their eyes fill with fear. It is time. A little way off, Jesus climbs slowly to his feet, face in shadow. *Do what you have to do*, he said last night as he looked deep into my eyes, so sad and so grave. *Just do it quickly*. I walk towards him, this carpenter, this preacher, this shaker of worlds, and each step in sandaled feet is a lifetime of falling.

He looks so sombre, so vulnerable, so very *human*, that my heart gives a quiver, my lips a tremble. He nods once, a resigned, weary nod. It is time. I place a hand on his shoulder. My stomach begins to freefall. With dry lips I softly kiss his cheek. I step back and he holds my gaze with eyes full of so many feelings, eyes so alive and always dancing, and as the soldiers seize him his mouth stretches into a smile so melancholy it should surely be a sob.

Peter cries out, a harsh, animal cry, and lashes out at one of the soldiers with his sword. Blood drips from the man's severed ear to the ground, staining the grass, staining the world.

"Put away your sword," Jesus says calmly. "It is my father in heaven who will protect me, should I need it." And he touches the man with the ruby red rivulets running down his face, and at once his ear is whole.

The cowards who call themselves disciples run. The soldiers drag him away, the healer of wounds and of worlds. The healer I stabbed in the back with a well placed kiss.

"Here is your payment." The priest drops the coins into my hand. They are heavy, but heavier is the weight in my heart. The coins are silver and shiny, like little moons, but to my grieving eyes they are dull, lack-lustre. I traded in the Son of God for a few pieces of glittering metal. Judas the Magpie.

"No," I hear myself say. "I'll not take it. I don't want it. It's blood money. Filthy money. Keep it." And I throw the coins, the little moons, to the floor, where they clatter, twinkling in the lamplight.

Jesus holds his head high, but you can see that inside something is broken. I did that. I broke a man with a kiss. He stumbles, and the people jeer. The cross he will die on is too heavy. The man I thought could bear any burden struggles to carry his death upon his back. This is all wrong. The world has lost its glow. I did that.

A man from the crowd is helping him, sharing the burden. That should be me. They reach the top of the hill, though each step was a journey. As Jesus lies down calmly on the wooden cross and the hammer is raised, my world collapses and I find I cannot look. I turn away, but still I hear the cries of my master as they drive the nails through his flesh, and each scream cuts through me more sharply than any blade. When I feel able to look once more, they have raised the cross between two others, and his teeth are gritted, eyes screwed tight against the world and the pain. When did everything become so grey? I close my eyes, not wanting to see a world where the only colour is the glistening crimson of blood. I sink to the floor, drawing knees to chest. My heart is a vacuum, my mind a void. Oh, better to be torn apart by guilt than to suffer this agony of emptiness!

I remember the day, now seemingly a lifetime ago, when Jesus told me I was to be his disciple. It was a new, beautiful feeling, to have somebody believe in me. My parents didn't, the world didn't, but on that day Jesus did. On that day I was something, someone, not nothing like my father always told me.

But once you taste something, you want more of it. Deep in the back of my mind, something started to niggle, started to gnaw. Jesus was, and always would be, more of a somebody than me. Jealousy is a terrible thing, more powerful than any weapon.

As is loneliness. The other disciples were Galileans; I am from the South. They were wary of me, distrustful, and Judas the Somebody fast became Judas the Outsider. And all the time that little seed of envy was blossoming, filling my head with its poison flowers.

When the High Priest first approached me, no one was meant to die. But things escalate, blow up out of proportion, and next thing I knew I'd been half bribed and flattered, half coerced into handing Jesus over like a criminal. Things got out of hand, and I, being Judas, was too weak to go back, too weak to say no. I thought with Jesus gone I would be the underdog no longer. But nothing has changed. All my life I have been the one cowering helpless in the corner. And all my life I will be. I see that now.

I do not know how long I have been crouching here, drowning in emptiness, drowning in memories. Maybe minutes, maybe hours. But now the crowd is screaming. Reluctantly, I open my eyes, and see the reason for the panicked shrieks. It cannot be past midday, yet the sun is gone, the sky is dark and moonless. Something tells me I did that. The world is mirroring the darkness in my heart. The people are panicking; it is madness; there are cries of "Apocalypse!" and everyone runs and pushes. For three hours, three long, chaotic hours the sun hides. And then, as the sky is light once more and the people gasp in relief, Jesus cries out. "My God, my God, why have thou

abandoned me?" and everything is still. The crowd is silent. Someone holds a sponge soaked in wine to Jesus' parched, bloody lips. He raises his head a final time, and speaks once more. "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit!" A tremor shakes the very earth beneath our feet. Jesus takes a deep, shuddering breath. The hair of the girl beside me billows out behind her in the wind. It flutters there for a moment, suspended. Then the wind stills, and her hair sinks slowly down again, with something like a silent sigh; and Jesus' head drops heavily to his lifeless chest, like a rag doll fallen apart at the seams. For a moment all is silent, and something builds in my chest. Then, out of Mary, the mother of the man I killed, bursts a terrible, anguished, heart wrenching cry. I turn and run.

My head pounds, my heart is a drum. Inside I am screaming, thrashing, trapped in an all-consuming agony of guilt. He is gone, gone forever, and the blame lies with me. I run through the streets, for if I stay still the world will surely come crashing in around me. I'm drowning in feelings, red, stormy, let-me-out, let-it-end feelings. I want to bash my head against the wall to stop the thoughts whirling so overwhelmingly.

Jesus smiling little moons ruby red stormy water Jesus laughing do what you have to do shiny nails bloody nails Mary's tears bash bash thrash red screams in the dark get away Judas Magpie please stop don't stop never end let it end.

My eyes are open but I am no longer seeing. My world is dissolving into an angry storm of self hate and self pity, remorse and despair. Without knowing why I have taken off my belt. In front of me there is a tree. I run my trembling hands up its trunk, over its rough, ancient bark, heart beating painfully fast in my oh so vulnerable throat. Yes. It is time. Clumsily, with feverish fingers, I tie the belt around a branch. I take a last look round at the world, but it has lost its light, its lustre. I am cold, outside and in. Slowly, I tie the other end of the belt around my neck. When I drop to my knees it will pull tight. It is time. It is the end of time. I take a deep breath - the lull before the storm. Heart heaving, I plunge.