

CRUCIFIXION

The city of Jerusalem blushed under the pastel scrutiny of the lavender and rose sky, painted by the rising sun. The stone-grey streets donned gay ribbons of light, and the stream of people making their way to the foot of Mount Golgotha looked up appreciatively at the child's paintbox of a sky.

Nore, however, saw me.

My wings, immense and glowing blankets of ivory feather beat in a steady double rhythm as I soared over the city, seeking my Lord Jesus Christ, son of the Almighty One.

"Glad you could make it," Gabriel commented sarkily as I alighted on a rock surrounded by long, waving grasses.

I scowled at the archangel. "I was held up in twenty-first century Iraq, Gabby. You try getting around up there. Sky-traffic's terrible."

"Don't call me Gabby," was Gabriel's response. "Anyway, what sort of name is Mriel? Sounds like that washing-up liquid from the third millenium."

I tried - unsuccessfully - to think of a crushing retort but the archangel's back stiffened and he turned to

the crowd of people swarming around the podium

"They've arrived," he said softly, his large brown eyes filling with tears. "The priests."

Even had I not been an angel, I would have known the priests' intentions. They moved among the crowd in long, purple robes, spreading poison and discord with their serpentine whispers in the ears of those gathered.

Each year at this time, it was customary for the Roman governor in Jerusalem to release one prisoner, chosen by the crowd. This year only two prisoners had been nominated; a murderer by the name of Barabbas and my lord Jesus, or Iesu as he would be known in centuries to come.

The general consensus had been that Christ would be released, but at the time of choosing the crowd's mind was so turned by the priests' words that an almighty roar issued from their throats. One name was given - Barab

I had known, of course, what the result would be, but the tears still blinded me as Pontius Pilate 'washed his hands of Jesus' blood. Gabriel stood beside me for a moment, then took my wrist and pulled me away, allowing me a

moment without the ugly sight of the crowd in my mind.

I knelt at the foot of the wooden cross my lord had borne on his back up the hill and gazed up at Him, trying not to let the tears overcome me again.

His wrists were stained with a thick liquid that reminded me of the red wine he made from water only a short time ago, when he was still loved and respected by so many. His beard was tangled and matted with the same blood, and his skin was flayed and torn with the marks of the Roman soldiers' whips.

Gabriel laid a comforting hand on my shoulder. "I know, Uriel," he whispered. "I know, but in three days he will rise again. You know that."

I stifled a sob. "But first he must die," I whispered. "And the pain is written on his face."

Gabriel nodded. "But look; he is Jesus even now. See, he speaks to the two thieves beside him, and promises one he will be with him in Paradise."

It was true. Even as he hung on the cross, with the sky dyed an inky black, my lord had words of comfort for the young, red-headed thief on his left.

"My Lord," I creaked, but he could not acknowledge me, for the crowd could not see me, and if he spoke he would be thought mad.

I heard a cry behind me and turned to see Mary, her eyes hollow and face pale and pinched with grief, dragging herself towards her son.

Gabriel sucked in his breath. "It is only a little of over thirty-three years since I told her she would birth a child of God," he sighed, "and now she must watch him die."

"She-" I began, but at that moment a burst of laughter issued from the crowd. I looked around to see a Roman soldier in a white toga holding a cup of water to Jesus' lips. The cup wobbled precariously on the stick to which it was attached, but Jesus paid that no attention and simply drank, ignoring the mocking words of the bloodthirsty crowd

that swarmed on the mountain of Golgotha.

I looked at the angry sky and took a breath. Humans; how could they possibly be so cruel? They were God's creation, and yet they went against every principle of the Almighty One.

Yet still my lord was dying for them; to save those who condemned him. Why? I am an angel; I have seen the cruelty of humanity from what they arrived, blinking in the light, until the day when God recalls all unto him. So many years, so much selfishness and cruelty and discrimination so much... inhumanity. I felt a surge of anger well up in my throat and brushed away a tear.

And yet, even as my lord died, and the sobbing of Mary began anew, I understood, because of His words.

"Forgive them, my Father," he cried, "for they know not what they do," and his head fell upon his chest, and he was still.

John 19:30
Matthew 27:46
Luke 23:46

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