**The Second Thief**

The blow struck him squarely in the face, a stinging shock to the corner of his quivering mouth. The dung arrived as a clay-like congealing mass; warm and malodorous. It drooled down the side of his face, a bitter taste reminding him of his crimes. Rotting fruit, dirt, and rocks pelted the thief during his turbulent journey. Vulgar shouts of hate left little question as to their feelings. The putrid package, however, left no doubt as to the crowd's embittered spirits.

 He was powerless to clean himself, as the debris ran down his face. The liquifying mixture covered him helplessly. His struggling hands were lashed to an overwhelming beam of wood perched on his shoulders. His muscles began to twitch in an exhausted failing state, as he struggled along the grimy road.

 "Crucify him! Crucify him," burned in his ringing ears as the roar of the crowd began to engulf him. He stumbled and fell on his face, the heavy load crashing and bruising his burning neck. The whip rang out. His back twisted, and he struggled again to his feet. The agony took his mind away.

 The dream flashed upon his tortured mind. It was a calmer time, that burgeoning fall season when Tamar left him for good. The jewel's possessor was obvious, the letter *H* engraved on the beautiful golden necklace. He was drunk as usual, and in his affected state, he ironically took the jewelry for his wife. He would have hidden it from her more securely, but he had carelessly tossed the stash under his cot.

 "They are Hadassah’s. Could you not demean me any clearer?" The furious woman cast a bowl of dirty soapy water over his head. "I toil for her. I knew I should not trust you in her chamber! What else did you make your own?"

 Her centurion brother woke with the chaos, chasing Gestas out with his violent presence and threatening gladius sword.[[1]](#footnote-1) She was the only good thing in his life, gone now for good because of his needless betrayals.

 The jarring shock returned his sickened mind to the mayhem. He fell backward onto the ground after a shove, the wooden post lashed to his arms, twisting and breaking the sinew of his shoulder with a loud pop. The soldiers were on him with the whip, stinging, thrashing, and laying open his loins and chest. Bloody serum sprayed over his tissues. They pierced his limbs with roughened spikes. The massive, rusty mallet driving them through the bones with a ferocious crushing sound.

 Before they lifted him to the sky, one helmeted soldier urinated on him, and the warm acidy fluid burned his torn flesh. An acrid stench bubbled up from the rising steam. As he was lifted on the cross and arose, he could see out of only one torn eye. The crowd at his foot laughed, cajoled, and called for his death.

 Again, his consciousness dwindled to a prior time. Tamar was in her marriage dress, fresh, white, innocent, and beautiful. A sprig of green and red decorated her hair, and she looked of a lovely and happy time, never to be seen again. His betrayal began that very day, his forceful violation of a young bridesmaid exposed and secret to no-one.

 He reached the apex and returned to the horror of the moment, with a violent jolt. A dry wind blew, and dirt billowed up, scratching his watering eye. Suddenly, a wonderful peace overcame him. A man on an identical cross to his right looked out over the crowd. On his head was a crown of twisted thorns. His ripped beard hung from his face. Blood flowed down over his tattered limbs. Tissues of his body were thrashed, bleeding, and weeping, and yet an overwhelming love emanated from the brutalized man known as Jesus.

 The crowd hurled insults at Jesus. "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.”[[2]](#footnote-2) The chief priests and scribes berated him. “He saved others; he cannot save himself."[[3]](#footnote-3)

 Gestas repeated the indictment suddenly, without thought or control. It was like the accusation was forced from him by an evil life-force. This thief on the Savior's left repeated the indictment again, suddenly, and then felt overwhelming sorrow and shame.

 "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?”[[4]](#footnote-4) The thief on Jesus’ right rebuked Gestas. And then it happened. Jesus turned his torn shredded head to his side. With great difficulty, he made eye contact with Gestas, his silent stare beginning a super-natural transformation. The stare penetrated Gestas' tattered soul. Its disapproval hurt worse than his wounds but was eventually replaced with an all understanding peace.

 Breathing now was a tortured process. As Gestas struggled to lift himself for air, he grew weaker and weaker. Coughing was ineffective at clearing his airways. He gurgled and spat, wheezing for every ounce of air.

 Jesus would not leave him alone. Passion emanated from him. Love, adoration, and tenderness overwhelmingly obvious, and it burned the evil soul of Gestas like fire to paper. He was nearly gone when dense darkness came across the land.

 "Eli, Eli, lan’ma sabach-tha’ni?” That is, ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”[[5]](#footnote-5) “Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!”[[6]](#footnote-6) And with that, the Savior breathed his last. The battered thief felt an emptiness beyond description. Gone was the light of the world. Gone was a powerful sense of forgiveness. He struggled for air one last painful time and was catapulted into eternity.

Author’s Note:

All scripture come from the Revised Standard Version of the Holy Bible. Included scripture are in quotes with footnotes.

1. The short Roman Fighting sword used by Roman foot soldiers, introduced in the third century B.C.. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Matthew 27: 39 Revised Standard Version of the Holy Bible. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Matthew 27: 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Luke 23: 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Matthew 27:46. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Matthew 27: 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)