



HOLY WEEK AT HOME

A collection of poems by
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PHARISEE

I was one of those who hit him.
He did not know it.
He did not resist.
Bound, blindfold, he could not strike back.

I wish that I could say it was satisfying,
But even then I knew I was a coward
Striking so that I wouldn't have to think.

If he had been Messiah,
He would have known I had struck him.
I watched his eyes afterward
But they betrayed only the knowledge of pain.

He gave his silence to us like a gift,
Inviting us to interpret him:
Stilled to accept the imprint of our judgement on flesh
That sinned only by being ordinary.

I had desired arrogance. I was disappointed.
Given no foothold in him, my anger recoiled on me
like a beast,
Scalding me to excesses of zeal for justification
To rage at this sheep who made me feel my wolfishness.

He was the mirror in which we saw ourselves.
We had made him powerful
And now must unmake what we had spoken into being
around him,
Writhing in the looped snare of his silence.

We had to destroy him, to erase
That image of ourselves, to mask with blood
The face of a hope that would not speak its name.

We gave the condemnation he had expected.

I was one of those who condemned him.

PILATE

You, man-who-had-to-die,
Why do you haunt me;
Turning ever in dreams that death-marked face
To answer the question of my fear and petulance:
Unravelling me with dark Gallilean eyes,
Hounding me down the brain's blank corridors?

I was not prepared -
You weren't part of the routine:
Marched in bedraggled in the barely light.
King!
The harsh gaze of the morning wasn't kind.
I never saw a man who looked less like
A king - or more like one. Yes, it was new -
That something - something
Indefinable in the quiet pools of your eyes.

You, flesh for their feasting wrath,
Why do you haunt me;
Taunting the mind with better possibilities,
Leaving the unanswered questions boring like weevils,
Stealing me from myself, so I am searching for bloodstains
On robes of state fresh-laundered?

I was not responsible.
Your own people brought you -
Marked for murder as the price of peace.
I shouldn't have felt anything - troublesome Jew!
Dumb as a Passover Lamb - the irony!
Harried into my presence raw with blows
In a cage of stabbing fingers and hate, tongued
Through the acceptable jealousies of law;
Your bearded, rent-robed elders, flurrying like startled birds,
Risking defilement in my Roman corridors.

You, animal-dumb, seeking death,
Why do you haunt me?
You were so long ago, I have been judge far too often.

Another peasant revolutionary
Should be a pebble in my sack of wrongs -
Why am I crushed
As though by boulders, unseen so more real,
And flushed - fevered even in the cool of marble?

I had to do something.
Your people demanded it.
While I was searching your maddening silences
For our escape,
You bound me - complicitous - asking for nothing
Amid the clamour of their accusations.
King - teacher - rebel - blasphemer - son of their God?
Not my words - I said none of it.
Neither did you, it appears;
At least, never to me.

You, great King of Elsewhere, empire of silences,
Why do you haunt me;
Still while they robbed you in mock majesty,
Curseless in cruelty's crown,
Your flesh trembling in ribbons
Beneath their violent homage:
How can a man be so crushed, undefeated
And clear?

It was only natural - they're soldiers and you,
You enraged them.
I permitted - not seeing - but only - I thought of the sympathy
If Jews saw you the loser, beneath the Oppressor. The Feast
Was our safety net, you were free-falling.
And so, I misjudged them.
You did your part - trembled with pain's fragile message of needing,
Trophied on my marble threshold,
Against its white so darkly Jewish, so one of their own.
But it seems you were easy to hate. One must kill to be lauded.
One must kill - to be lauded.

You, thorn-in-my-side, paradox,
Why do you haunt me,
Dark-eyed and tragic in my doorway
Propped and oozing,
Maddening in helplessness's
Strangely uncaptive stare,
While the mob screamed your death ever closer -

Why not a word? Not a friend's voice to call for you?
I - I was drowning.

Would washing hands cleanse me? Ask if I really believed it.
You seemed to imply guilt for others,
You speared me with pity;
Left no doubt which of us was the conqueror. So I released you
Into the hands of their whitewashed hate,
Closed my eyes, nailed thought shut. But the dark cross still intruded
Despite all. They came. I was stronger - clean-handed:
What I've written
Stays written -
For all time it stays written.
Help me God: in my mind, on my soul,
It stays written.

JUDAS

I did not mean to kill. You understand?
I sought to force Your hand for freedom's cause.
I was so sure You'd rise and roar and fight,
And show Your vaunted might. I did not know
That You were formed for suffering and strange woes,
Or that You must be pierced to let in light
From realms beyond the kingdoms built on swords
Upon this darkened world of darkened man.
I did not know You'd let the dogs close in,
That You could be so crippled by a kiss.
I never thought it was betrayal, this:
To make things come more quickly, make You win.
I knew not that to win You must be dead,
Destroyed. I stole Your life: take mine instead.

GOLGOTHA

"Physician, heal yourself!" they hurl. But cruel
Love binds me, blinds me, keeps me still a fool.

I search for help, for healing. None is given.
I AM the leper, for you all avoid me.
I AM the blind man while dark sin hides Heaven.
I AM the paralysed, whips have destroyed me.

I AM bent double and see only earth.
I cannot staunch my bleeding, hide my shame.
Dumb to retort, my tongue sticks in my mouth.
Deafened by blows I resonate with pain.

My hands are withered round the nails and I
AM racked with spasms as fear's demons clutch.
I AM possessed by darkness and I cry.
I AM the outcast, and no kindly touch

Relieves my lonely fate. I AM bereft.
I AM the beggar, thirsty and in need.
I AM the robbed man, beaten stripped and left.
I AM oppressed by violence and greed.

I AM made criminal, falsely accused.
I AM kissed treacherously and betrayed.
A prisoner of politics: abused,
Disowned, denied, misunderstood, afraid.

I burn with shame, hung naked as a whore.
I AM the one you spit on and despise.
I AM so lost, so hideous, so impure
My foes exult, my loved ones close their eyes.

I AM the dying, there is no love near me.
I AM abandoned while all angels praise me.
I AM the crying in the desert - hear me!
I AM YOU!

Trust God to raise me.

WORD & SILENCE

The silence is the worst; no stories now
Or laughter. All the gaps you used to fill
Now crowd me with their emptiness. My friend,
I miss your knack of being glad but still:

I miss your bright contagious peace. Your smiles
Were so specific and your hands so strong,
Hauling our nets and lightening the miles
We tramped, bearing our burdens even then.

I must confess, I eavesdropped on your prayers
And envied you, and learned your words and tried
Them out on my own tongue like stolen wine
And felt such warmth of answer that I cried.

I miss your teaching: listening like a child
Through the fire's flickering rhythms as you told
Us things in pictures - on the edge of sense.
Your voice like blankets, keeping out the cold.

The miracles amazed me - to be part
Of that, part of the joy, the touching heaven
Of promises made flesh – it was, I swear,
The greatest privilege my life has given.

I can't believe your light has darkened now.
You were so full of life – live lived in you
In all its fullness, as you taught it could.
You made us see, by being, that it was true.

What now? Only the silence and the tomb
The stone like a full stop, the story's end.
You are worth more words than this world has given:
King of the Jews? Rather, my King, my friend.

Yet here we are: their stone a wall between us
And I, now half again the man I was,
And half this new thing, feathers barely dry:
If you call, ever, will I fall or fly?

JUDAS

You were my lost coin, slipping through the holes
Of life and into death, rolling just past
My straining fingers' grasp, precious as gold
To me. My dear one. Destined to be lost.

My heart cried bitterly against your fall,
You fought so hard but for such little things.
You looked down, the immediate was all:
Miracles merely means to make us kings.

You were my lost lamb, whom I strayed to seek.
I found you among wolves. Do you recall -
The Shepherd lays his life down for his sheep?
Your wayward heart stood proxy for them all.

You justified your act: mechanically
Went through the motions: contact, offer, bribe;
Cloaked your intent in righteous secrecy
Until I stripped the veil and stood inside.

I gave you bread to say "Judas, tis you."
Our sign of union turned to mark of Cain.
You kissed to say "This is the man". It's true
We both bound knives in silk to spare the pain.

And when I yielded, then we both were falling.
Your longed-for outcome never burst from me.
And in my yielding to their wrath appalling
You felt the first sting of your treachery.

The priests could not absolve: you knew before
You ran there that, once used, you were unclean.
Coins scattered will be gathered from the floor,
Souls scattered are left lying, cold, demeaned.

I writhe within your mind, pinned to my doom –
A doom you feel you sealed. Dear heart, no blame:
The stone's full stop outside my hurried tomb
Is just a pause for breath to speak your name.

In death you curse yourself, hoping the weight
Of suicide will sink you into hell
Where you can hide, where we can never meet
Or speak the truths we each know far too well.

You fall. I must fall faster, then, to seize
My treasure from the dark of the abyss.
Hell clawed you close with talons in the heart –
Guilt poisoning love through one sad poisoned kiss.

There is no help in life, no balm to mend
A wound so grievous in our hopeful band.
I climb my own cursed tree, unforced, and spend
My heart's blood in the darkness: lost, unmanned,

I stare it down, become you, take your route.
I plummet, fathom-fast, into the pit.
You will not cower from a darker heart.
Damnation drowns me, equalised we sit.

Our eyes meet and you know me. Do not speak.
Your pain is your repentance. Your solution
My heart refutes. Hell's claims are far too weak.
My resurrection is your absolution.

WAIT

Wait.

You do not even say it.
I infer it from your stillness
And your silences;
And, having numbness in my limbs
And no better solution
And nowhere else to go,
I do.

There is a horror in this waiting:
The absence of you a tearing black hole in a sky of threatened stars.
I watch a hundred lights blink out one by one
Knowing they were consumed long before
Their light failed to reach me;
Knowing the dark is coming for me
With wide, howling mouth;
Knowing that I can only flee while I see the path;
Knowing that while some light remains I will not flee.

Lord, if darkness and light are the same to you,
To me they are so different.
Lord, have mercy.
Why do you always catch me
Only moments before impact
When the fall is so many miles down toward jagged rock?
Christ, have mercy.
I have said my farewells a hundred times
In the empty chapel of my head.
Must you raise the dead?
Lord have mercy.

Can we not walk among flowers in the cool of the evening
And talk of nothing or of love
Beneath a slow sunset that carries seeds of a future dawn?

Why must I guess your heart from silences?
Why do you call me to you only in the dark
And only in whispers?

And why, when I am angry with you -
Angry -
Do you kneel here at my lashing feet
And wash them with your blood, your sweat, your tears,
And dry them with your shroud?

Lord of the tearing-black-hole waiting spaces;
Christ of the tender, cleansing silences;
Lord of intimate, awful, perpetual surrenders:
Have mercy on me.

GRAVITY

God kisses the world
Extravagantly,
Indiscriminately
As a Friday night drunk
While still holding sorrows as sober as stars.

How can he be Jesus?
Crawl to us
Eating dust.
So far to fall, tipping himself out
Over us, then still more,
Shattered like a fallen glass
Upon the floor.

Why does he wash our kicking feet?
When will he bleed enough?

We break him as far as he lets us
And his far is endless:
In our anger we can only ever break into him
Never truly away,
His wounds baptising us
As we dig ourselves like burrs

Into his side.

God of Calvary's dusty shuffle and collapsing
Help us to let go
And fall upward into the gravity of you.