

Jerusalem Garrison 34 A.D.

Lynda Mackey

Night is a smoke tonight;
Black, full of poisons
And the spitting of cats.
But I must be the poison—
Nights are born black
And cats have reasons.

*

I'm sick of the talk of the streets.
I have need of a dreamless night.
Curse Jerusalem!
This place is heavy,
More nearly a tomb than a city.
Didn't I come to be free of burdens,
Free from the fevers and ghosts of Rome?
You know what things I ran from.
I begin to fear, friend,
There is no land that frees a man
From his own sullen chains.

*

Oh, I'm tired!
This city was more mad today
With signs and blood
Than I have need of to forget
What I wish to forget.
Its careful Jews have things locked
Behind their sharpened mouths
That are no Roman's business,
And I'm glad of that.
More such days and I'll begin to fear
This bargain I have made is nothing more
Than one blood-lusting zoo

For a market place of lunatics,
Both lovers of a law.

*

Yes, you're right,
Tonight is no night for this.
I am weary past trusting
These half-dreamed thoughts.
At your advice I will forbear
The usual games of hopeless guessing
And sink beneath an ignorant sleep.

*

I see you think there is some educated worm
At work with too much patience in my brain.
No, Paulus,
I have overeaten of ideas,
Been haunted by philosophies—
Now I'm just tired.
And tomorrow I must watch at some new grave.

*

You know then of the Nazarene?
Some Galilean madmen
Have it he is God.
Indeed some careful prefect
Has deemed him worthy of a double-guarded tomb.
But speak not of him!
Oh, how I'm tired!
Morning will I be new
And fit for guarding a poor corpse
In the noble name of Rome.

*

Yes, I heard the man.
Herod was right to fear him.
I almost found myself
Hungry to hear more.
A kingdom, he said,
Where men were made free from themselves,
Where sins and leper's sores alike
Were washed off in his blood.
Is that not madness?
His taxes were of hearts and souls.
He envied Caesar nothing of his gold.
No wonder Rome is jealous.

One day I saw him make a blind girl see.
But enough!
What matters what I thought I saw.
He is nothing. He is dead.
We must goodnight.

*

Wait!
Forgive me one more question.
Friend Paulus—
If you love me—
What are all these thunders do you think?

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