

The Watchman

L.M. Montgomery

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"And for fear of him the keepers did
shake, and became as dead men."
Matthew xxviii. 4.

MY Claudia, it is long since we have met,
So kissed, so held each other heart to heart!
I thought to greet thee as a conqueror comes,
Bearing the trophies of his prowess home.
But Jove hath willed it should be otherwise
Jove, say I? Nay, some mightier, stranger god,
Who thus hath laid his heavy hand on me,
No victor, Claudia, but a broken man
Who seeks to hide his weakness in thy love.

HOW beautiful thou art! The years have brought
An added splendor to thy loveliness,
With passion of dark eye and lip rose-red,
Struggling between its dimple and its pride.
And yet there is somewhat that glooms between
Thy love and mine; come, girdle me about
With thy true arms, and pillow on thy breast
This aching and bewildered head of mine;
Here, where the fountain glitters in the sun
Among the saffron lilies I will tell
If so that words will answer my desire
The shameful fate that hath befallen me.

DOWN in Jerusalem they slew a man,
Or god . . . it may be that he was a god . . .
Those mad, wild Jews whom Pontius Pilate rules.
Thou knowest Pilate, Claudia a vain man,
Too weak to govern such a howling horde
As those same Jews. This man they crucified.
I knew naught of him never heard his name
Until the day they dragged him to his death;
Then all tongues wagged about him and his deeds;

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Some said that he had claimed to be their king,
Some that he had blasphemed their deity.
'Twas certain he was poor and meanly born,
No warrior he, nor hero; and he taught
Doctrines that surely would upset the world;
And so they killed him to be rid of him.
Wise, very wise, if he were only man,
Not quite so wise if he were half a god!

I KNOW that strange things happened when he died . . .
There was a darkness and an agony,
And some were vastly frightened not so I!
What cared I if that mob of reeking Jews
Had brought a nameless curse upon their heads?
I had no part in that bloodguiltiness.
At least he died; and some few friends of his
Took him and laid him in a garden tomb.
A watch was set about the sepulchre,
Lest these, his friends, should hide him and proclaim
That he had risen as he had foretold.
Laugh not, my Claudia. I laughed when I heard
The prophecy; I would I had not laughed!
I Maximus, was chosen for the guard,
With all my trusty fellows. Pilate knew
I was a man who had no foolish heart
Of softness all unworthy of a man!
I was a soldier who had slain my foes;
My eyes had looked upon a tortured slave
As on a beetle crushed beneath my tread;
I gloried in the splendid strife of war,
Lusting for conquest; I had won the praise
Of our stern general on a scarlet field,
Red in my veins the warrior passion ran,
For I had sprung from heroes, Roman born!

That second night we watched before the tomb;
My men were merry; on the velvet turf,
Bestarred with early blossoms of the spring,
They dined with jest and laughter; all around
The moonlight washed us like a silver lake,
Save where that silent, sealed sepulchre
Was hung with shadow as a purple pall.
A faint wind stirred among the olive boughs . . .
Methinks I hear the sighing of that wind
In all sounds since, it was so dumbly sad;
But as the night wore on it died away,
And all was deadly stillness; Claudia,
That stillness was most awful, as if some
Great heart had broken and so ceased to beat!

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I thought of many things, but found no joy
In any thought, even the thought of thee;
The moon waned in the west and sickly grew,
Her light sucked from her in the breaking dawn . . .
Never was dawn so welcome as that pale,
Faint glimmer in the cloudless, brooding sky!

CLAUDIA, how may I tell what came to pass?
I have been mocked at, when I told the tale,
For a crazed dreamer punished by the gods
Because he slept on guard; but mock not thou!
I could not bear it if thy lips should mock
The vision dread of that Judean morn.

SUDDEN the pallid east was all aflame
With radiance that beat upon our eyes
As from the noonday sun; and then we saw
Two shapes that were as the immortal gods
Standing before the tomb; around me fell
My men as dead; but I, though through my veins
Ran a cold tremor never known before,
Withstood the shock and saw one shining shape
Roll back the stone; the whole world seemed ablaze,
And through the garden came a rushing wind
Thundering a p³/₄an as of victory.
Then that dead man came forth . . . oh, Claudia,
If thou couldst but have seen the face of him!
Never was such a conqueror! Yet no pride
Was in it . . . naught but love and tenderness,
Such as we Romans scoff at, and his eyes
Bespake him royal. Oh, my Claudia,
Surely he was no Jew but very god!

THEN he looked full upon me; I had borne
Much staunchly, but that look I could not bear!
What man may front a god and live? I fell
Prone, as if stricken by a thunderbolt;
And though I died not, somewhat of me died
That made me man; when my long stupor passed
I was no longer Maximus . . . I was
A weakling with a piteous woman soul,
All strength and pride, joy and ambition gone!
My Claudia, dare I tell thee what foul curse
Is mine because I looked upon a god?

I CARE no more for glory; all desire

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For honor and for strife is gone from me,
All eagerness for war. I only care
To help and save bruised beings, and to give
Some comfort to the weak and suffering;
I cannot even hate those Jews; my lips
Speak harshly of them, but within my heart
I only feel compassion; and I love
All creatures, to the vilest of the slaves,
Who seem to me as brothers. Claudia,
Scorn me not for this weakness; it will pass
Surely 'twill pass in time and I shall be
Maximus strong and valiant once again,
Forgetting that slain god. And yet . . . and yet . . .
He looked as one who could not be forgot!