

In the Crook

Kerri Lynn



slowly feel my way towards him through the cloying dark of an eclipse, avoiding the bored soldiers that stand around, making bets, waiting for him to die with the same ambivalence they would any criminal.

The crowd of people surrounding this hill are no more than a mixture of silhouettes in the dark, their humanity lost in the shadows. I don't have the capacity to deal with the disheartening reality of us when we become a mob, so I steer clear of everyone.

Why should I come to him now, in this place? It's one of my least favorite stories with the long shadows it casts on humans, the pat answers I've listened to over the years.

So many preachers love to use it as a spotlight on how wicked humanity is—that we would do this to him, to each other. Sermons that hold just a little too much glee at our sin, and alternatively, too much defeat.

I near the coarse beam he hangs on, and I can't bear to look up at first. I don't even touch it as I stand here, my eyes firmly on the ground. But I can hear him above my head—long, slow breaths of drowning. It makes my chest ache.

His presence pulls at me, though. And so I climb. I'm just a wisp of imagination; it's not like my weight will shift this awful piece of wood or jostle him. But I worry anyway, squeezing my eyes closed as I near him, as I feel the struggle he's in.

His arms are stretched out and taut—strong ropes of muscle that strain but still hold him up under the weight pressing down on him. Even wrecked and nearing death, his form is so dear to me. It doesn't matter what his features look like or how they're arranged.

He is so much my home.

I curl myself into my favorite spot—the place where his shoulder meets his neck—the crook of him. It makes me picture the sturdy curve of a shepherd's hook around a lamb's belly. I am just a small, weary thing now, ages away from the physical reality he's in, and I am silent, holding my breath, aching to lift his chest for him, inflate his lungs, help hold up his arms, ease the pressure on his feet.

Despite the trauma—the narrow tunnel that pain puts him in—he senses me here.

Like he always does when I need him.

He turns his chin, just slightly, so that his cheek grazes mine. He knows my suffering. Even in his own. We're together in it; the two of us. A sob nearly makes its way out of me at the compassion in him. After I accused him of leaving me. The way he pulls me into him... *always... always.*

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

His voice is loud as he groans it out; his whole chest heaving to put those words into the air. I am startled by the effort, at the slash of sound through the quiet. It's as if he's taking my sense of abandonment and feeling it

with me, for me. I press my cheek against his, the water of tears between us, wishing he didn't feel it, while at the same time, all of me glad that he does. That he knows.

"Why are you so far away from helping me?... I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest."

The words come out angry and anguished, a familiar phrase I've prayed over and over again in the past few weeks. Twin strands of grief and love tighten around my heart as I keep my gaze from wandering, anchor it to the line of his chin, the curve of his collarbone and the blood that ribbons down his cheek.

Together we go over the lines of what David wrote so long ago. A scripture Jesus kept in his pocket to bring out whenever the darkness gets too deep. And that's when I realize David is here too, an ancient witness in this moment, his shoulder under Jesus', having poured Psalms 22 out for Jesus to have. I wiggle closer, burrowing into that crook. Here he is, my favorite person in the world. And he won't let me keep my pain from him, he makes me give it - piling it on shoulders that carry the world already.

"But you, O Lord, do not be far away." I breathe against his neck, my voice hitching, knowing how this ends. Jesus' breath sounds in my ear. He breathes, encouraging me to continue with him, coming to the most important part that he wants me to hear: "he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted... **he did not hide his face from me** but heard me when I cried to him."

He finishes, and his body slumps. He is still, and I can't feel his presence on this cursed wood anymore. It is done.

He is so unwavering, my Jesus. And he's so willing to be faith for me, when I have none left. To put me in that crook of his and carry me.

To prove to me that I am not alone and never have been. And neither have you. □

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