

“TWO MOTHERS”

by Velma West Sykes

The city slept, and in the burial place
Slept still more soundly its inhabitants,
Indifferent to the early morning calls
The birds were sending out. There in the gloom
That lingers from the night to tint the day,
Two women met. Both paused, for each well knew
Some great emotion brought the other forth
Like as herself, at this hour of the dawn.

They were not young, but care and grief had added
More lines than Time to each sad, stricken face.
They spoke, though strangers, and as both were tired
And felt the need of company, perhaps,
Seated themselves together on a rock
And gazed into the east's approaching light.

“I could not sleep,” the first one softly said.
“This is the day of which he used to speak,
Saying he would return – my son, I mean.
They crucified him yonder on that hill
Two nights ago – I never knew his crime,
And even Pilate wished to let him go
But, at the last, bowed to the priests' demands.”

“Your son was Jesus?” asked the other then,
And caught her breath as if in sudden fear.
“My son was Jesus,” softly said the first.
“Folks often wondered why I named him that,
But I could not explain to everyone,
Nor could I understand all that he did,
And things he said would often puzzle me,
Even when he was small. These past few years
I have not understood why he must do
The things that caused his death, as he had known
They would, and often spoke of it to me.
Have you a son?”

The other's startled face
Paled as she said, "I had one – but he, too,
Died three days since – only – he hanged himself!"
"Ah," said the first, "but did his enemies
Stone him and spit upon him – call him vile names?"

"No," was the answer. "Even the friend he wronged
Forgave him – but your son had many friends
Who suffered with him on his way to death.
My son went all alone to hang himself
Nor had a single friend to stay his hand."

"Poor boy," said Jesus' mother. "How I wish
He might have known my son. He had a way
Of healing people's spirits, and perhaps
He might have kept your son from doing this.
He always said he died for others – Strange
How much he wanted death, yet shrank from it.
Tell me, why did your son wish to die?"

"He had betrayed a friend," the other said,
"And afterward he felt such stark remorse
He vowed he could no longer bear to live.
I know it must seem strange that I should say
My son loved this friend with a love he gave
No other, yet a stronger power within
Impelled him to betray the friend he loved."

"Tell me," said Mary, clutching at the hand
That grasped the woman's shawl. "Who was your son?"

The other bowed her head and slowly spoke,
"His name was Judas – Judas Iscariot!"