

Easter 2011, St Michaels Studio City

### The Gardener

I was there, you know. I was there, in the garden. After all, I was the gardener, and the garden was large. It took a lot of time and work to keep it trim and attractive. So I was there before dawn. I clearly remember it; I had some vines that needed trimmin', and the full moon gave enough light to work. And the sun was just beginnin' to lighten the darkness, anyway. I've heard the stories passed around since, and none of them mentions that I was there, which is just fine by me. The folks involved with That Man get into a lot of trouble.

But I *was* there and if you'll buy me another beer, good sir, I'll tell you what I saw. Well now, thankee, sir, that's right kind of you. I can see that you're a real gentleman. Here's to your health. The story? Oh, yes, the story of that day, the dawnin' of the light.

Well, like I said, I was trimmin' the grape vines off to the east in the garden. You know, vines is particular. If you cut off the dead wood and trim back some of the livin', you get a much healthier vine with better fruit. Gets more sun and air, dontcha know. Allows the strength of the root and the trunk to get to the branches and leaves. Surprisin' what can happen when that vine gets goin'. I'd taken the dead wood to the two soldiers guardin' the tomb in the middle of the garden. They tried to keep warm with a small fire and they welcomed the dead wood of the vine. Silly beggars, these Romans, you know, all they had to do was walk around a little, work their arms and legs a bit, and they'd warm up proper. Silly, I said, and silly is what I mean. Guardin' a tomb? What'd they expect, someone come walkin' out of it? Through that great, ruddy stone blockin' the entrance? Not bloody likely! But Romans is Romans, and not much you can do about it. So I tries to stay on their good side and brought them the deadwood for their fire.

To be fair to the soldiers, they was there only 'cause the Guv'ner put them there. Said the Guv'ner was all hot an' bothered about folks stealin' a body out of the tomb and claimin' the guy was alive again. So there sat those soldiers, slappin' their sides with their arms, puttin' every scrap of stray wood on their pitiful fire. I'd just taken a load of deadwood to them and was back workin' on the vines. I thought I heard a noise in that direction but my hearin's not what it used to be, so I didn't pay no mind.

I was just beginnin' to think about the next job, plantin' those seeds on the west side of the garden. You know, seeds is particular. You got to prepare the soil just right, plant 'em deep, water 'em proper, an' they does their magic. New life comes out of those old, dried husks rattlin' around in your bag. Fair like a miracle it is, you know, the way how lovely life comes out of them old, dead seeds. Fair makes your hair stand on end, if you think on it a bit.

So I gathers up the last load of clippins and walks over to the soldiers. But they're not there! There's the fire burnin' all right, but they're gone. The Governor's not goin' to be happy 'bout

that! Then I sees that somethin' else ain't right. The stone is rolled away from the tomb and the mouth of the cave just sits there all black and emptylike. Fair put my hair on end, I can tell you.

So I drops the deadwood and I'm just standin' there, kinda stupidlike, when I look over by an olive tree and there's a Man standin' there. He was one of us, not a Roman, an' He looked pretty bad, all dirty and bloody. He kept lookin' at His hands and feet, feelin' His side beneath His shirt. It was kinda like He was wondrin' what was goin' on. Well, I was wondrin', too, so I walks over to Him. Boy, did I get a surprise! His hands and feet had terrible scars on them, like someone had done somethin' horrible to Him. It was the scar on His chest that really got to me, though; it must have been a great, gapin' hole that was all healed now. But no one could have lived with that wound in him. This guy should have been dead. But He wasn't, and the wounds was healed proper and just *looked* bad; He didn't seem to be bothered by them.

He looks up at me, and His eyes softens. I'm standin' there like a dumb ox, and He reaches out and takes my hands in His. He traces the calluses with His finger, and then I sees that His hands are callused, too. He is – was – is – some kind of worker, too. Anyway, He takes my hands in His. I could feel the edges of the scars but it ain't that I really remember. It's the way I felt. It was as if everythin' was suddenly all right. I got all warm and comfy and it seemed like the light was warm, too, and real comfortin'. Everythin' seemed changed, and changed for the better. Kinda crazy, huh? Nothin' had changed. My owner was still nasty, my wife was still sick, my children still hungry, my back still achin'. Yet the whole world had changed. I knew everythin' would be all right. I just knew it.

You know, people is particular. They likes their dead dead and their live live. Don't like no mixin' of the two, if you know what I mean. So, young sir, don't you go tellin' this story round. Life's hard enough for me and I don't need no more trouble. And those folk who belong to that Man keep gettin' in trouble. I 'preicate the beer and was glad to tell you my story, but you just keep it to yourself, hear? I wouldn't want people upset by the story and gittin' me in trouble. Dead is dead, and live is live, that makes us all comfortable. Gets real scary when the dead live again. People is real particular that way. Don't know why; seeds is always like that. They're hard, brown, dead. Yet every spring they die in the ground and new life springs from them. Don't know why God couldn't do the same with us. Just never seen it done before. Have you?