

## The Crucifixion

Longinus was mad, red mad, at everything and everyone in sight. He hated this Jerusalem, these Jews. He, a fighting centurion, sent to guard a lot of detestable foreigners while other centurions were marching with their legions on the other side of the world. He kicked out furiously at every stone in his path, mumbling to himself that he wished he might be kicking Jews. He even snarled at the innocent morning sun just then coming up over the city wall, for the rising of the sun reminded him that he must hurry: three Jews were



wanting to be crucified. Longinus  
hated crucifixions. Why couldn't  
criminals be matched like  
gladiators, one against the other,  
as they were in Rome? Rome!  
Now he wanted to be there.

Homesick, disgusted, half  
asleep after a night of wine  
and riot, he stumbled blindly over  
a wriggling bundle of rags in the  
middle of the street. The trained  
right hand flashed to the sword  
at his belt, but came away  
again as a trembling, curly-haired,  
dark-skinned youngster scrambled  
out of the rags and backed slowly  
away as he rubbed the sleep  
from his eyes. Longinus almost  
smiled.



"And who art thou, asleep in the gutter at dawn?"

"I - I am Rufus, from Cyrene"

Longinus knew Cyrene. He had put down a rebellion there. They were hard men to keep in line, the Cyrenians. Always revolting, forever spilling blood. But this startled youngster looked like anything but a dealer in revolt.

"And why art thou here, Rufus of Cyrene?"

"For the Passover - with my father. He - he's lost me."

Longinus grunted, tugged at his sword again. Was he to be guardian of the lost children of Jerusalem, as well as executioner of Jerusalem's enemies? Let the



but find his father, it was none  
of his business, anyway: "Well, go  
find him then. And have a care  
where you go today. You may be  
hurt. Better get thee into a  
cellar and stay; yobels of out of  
place in a mob." And without so  
much as another glance, he wheeled  
and went off down the street.

Now military heels have always  
played Pied Pipers tunes to the hearts  
of little boys. Rufus knew that tune  
when he heard it. Enchanted, wondering  
what was meant by this talk of  
mobs and being hurt, the 12-year  
old followed until the man of war  
disappeared within the door of the  
city prison. Then he sat down to  
wait.



Other boys came, and now  
As the crowd grew, a confused  
gibberish found its way into the ears  
of the spell-bound boy. "There are  
3 of them: 2 thieves and a crazy  
prophet from Galilee ---- Barabbas  
got away, again, the rascal. He'll  
start more trouble, you'll see ----  
He helped a lot of people, but  
Pilate was afraid ---- The  
witnesses lied." It all meant  
nothing to Rufus except that 3  
men were to die --- and he lucky  
boy, was to see them die.

Suddenly, they came. The  
prison door flew open, like the  
black mouth of a great hungry  
animal, and a hellam of shouts  
and curses came forth to meet



the shouting of the mob. Two kicking, squirming, fear maddened men, with huge beams of oak lashed across their shoulders, were dragged out into the sun. Behind them quietly came a third. His eyes were blood-shot, his body a mass of cuts and bruises. The soldiers did not push or curse this man: they seemed to pity, almost admire him, as they led him out and down the street.

There was Longinus, leading the procession, carrying a little white sign. People read it and shouted with laughter: "He's a king, is he? King of the Jews! No wonder the Romans are killing him." Rufus was nudged aside



by a man who sneaked swiftly  
from one to another in the crowd  
speaking softly. "Shout at Him. Throw  
this stone at Him. He is a blasphemer  
who would tear down the synagogue.

He has made trouble for the priests.  
Rufus didn't believe it. This  
man, a king, with His arms  
bound to a wooden beam, going  
so quietly up to die? A blasphemer.  
He was not cursing like the others.

A few stones were thrown as  
the column moved toward the  
city gate. A few of the  
bolder ones even reached out  
to strike the "king" only to be  
hurled back by the Romans. The  
quiet one did not see the  
stones, did not even seem to



hear the angry shouts that greeted him. He was having trouble with his burden. He walked slower and slower, staggered a bit now and then. A hush went over the jeering mob as he fell, ~~and~~ with a low moan, at the feet of Longinus. Quickly, they unloosed the ropes, while the centurion scanned the crowd for a strong man to help the fallen one. His eye was halted by a massive pair of shoulders and a pair of arms that were like 2 great knots of iron. "Hou! Come here!" With a shout that was half a sob, young Rufus tore himself loose from the crowd and ran to the big fellow now in the clutches



of the Romans. This was his father Simon and they were going to hurt him. Rufus clung to him, even kicked out at the skins of Longinus. Simon of Cyrene smiled courage and understanding into the lad and threw him his cloak as he straddled the fallen beam and wrapped about it his bulging, swarthy arms. The thieves were hustled to their feet, the soldiers got into line and the cruellest march of time was on again.

The rest was a bitter dream for Rufus. He heard the ring of hammers and the screams of pain. The thieves were



shouting and railing at the crowd, the quiet one was white with agony as the three black crosses went up against the sky. Rufus, sickened at the sight he had come to enjoy, went running from the hill and collided with a shouting, drunken fellow who kicked him roughly aside. It was Barabbae, come with his old cronies to watch the fun.

Barabbae was drunk, half with wine and half with unexpected freedom. He had fully expected to die where these fellows were dying, but a trick of fate had turned him loose. Hands on hips and legs astride, he stood before the center cross and looked up into the face of Jesus Christ. Something stronger than



wine made him reel and fall.  
The leering grin flew from his  
face, his hands were trembling, as  
he dashed them across his  
eyes: "Jehoval God! That's my  
cross, he's dying on!"

Out of the depths of my  
heart and yours, a cry of  
anguish is wrung:

"That's my cross he died upon."