

ALL ON AN EASTER EVENING

by John B. Wintermute



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(There are two reading stands or a pulpit and a lectern. During the opening remarks of the NARRATOR, while the eyes of the congregation are closed, MARY takes her place behind the second reading stand or lectern.)

NARRATOR: When was the last time you paused to thank God for the wonderful gift of imagination? Why, in the twinkling of an eye you can cover years of time and return to your childhood days or travel hundreds of miles to stand silently beside someone you love. You don't believe me? Well, will everyone present close their eyes? Would you keep them closed until I tell you to open them again? There! Thank you! Now, with your eyes tightly closed against the lights and other distractions within this room, try to picture yourself standing on a rooftop, beneath a star-studded, springtime sky. Directly overhead, scattered, translucent clouds pass before a full moon. Deep shadows fill the low places.

You are an unseen guest at the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark. The large, rambling palace stands about halfway up the side of Mount Zion, and looks down over the indigo shadows and gleaming white marble of the Holy City of Jerusalem. This has been an awesome day for the disciples who are staying here. First, Mary from Magdala; then Peter, from Capernaum; later Cleophas and his wife; and, finally, all of the disciples (except Thomas) have claimed to have seen the Risen Lord.

But mortal men, clothed in robes of flesh and blood, can stand only so many miracles during the course of a day. Now they are tired and seek the solitude of sleep.

It is midnight. There are only two other people awake besides you — Mary from Magdala, who leans against the rampart that circles the roof, and Thomas, who steps forward from the slumbering shadows.

Now you may open your eyes and eavesdrop on the

1 whispered conversation that takes place between these
2 two.

3 **THOMAS:** *(Forever the skeptic)* Do you see him out there in the
4 night, Mary?

5 **MARY:** *(Startled)* Oh! *(Then, relieved)* It's you, Thomas. I
6 thought for a moment you might be . . . well, someone else!

7 **THOMAS:** Where is Jesus now?

8 **MARY:** Where he's always been — in my heart.

9 **THOMAS:** *(With the suggestion of a sneer)* You can't see him
10 floating out there amid the shadows?

11 **MARY:** No. Should I? Do you see him, Thomas?

12 **THOMAS:** *(Indignant)* Certainly not! I thought you might. I'm
13 glad to see you've recovered some semblance of your
14 sanity.

15 **MARY:** *(With a light laugh)* Why, Thomas, you must think me
16 mad.

17 **THOMAS:** *(Sober and concerned)* What else can I think after
18 the hysteria of this day? For hours I've listened to graphic
19 descriptions of various hallucinations. Mary, can't you
20 see the havoc you've created in everyone's mind?

21 **MARY:** No, Thomas. How?

22 **THOMAS:** This crazy tale of yours about seeing Jesus. You've
23 got them all believing it.

24 **MARY:** It's only natural that they should. He loved them as
25 much as me.

26 **THOMAS:** Natural? You think it natural to see a dead man
27 disguised as a gardener? Or hiking a dusty road? Walking
28 through a solid stone wall? Eating fish?

29 **MARY:** I meant it was natural that he should appear to them.
30 They loved him so! *(Pause)* But I can't understand why
31 you haven't seen him yet.

32 **THOMAS:** *(Almost in anger)* I'll tell you why! I'm not fooled by
33 shadows that turn into people; apparitions that
34 materialize out of nowhere and just as quickly fade away
35 into nothing. He never shows up when doubting Thomas

1 is present.

2 MARY: If you'd only believe!

3 THOMAS: I believe what I see. What my senses tell me is true.

4 MARY: But I did see him. He was more real than you are,
5 Thomas.

6 THOMAS: (*With infinite patience*) Once more, tell me what
7 happened. But carefully.

8 MARY: Well, I couldn't sleep. I woke up Joanna and Salome.
9 We hurried down the path to Joseph's garden. It had
10 been a long, weary weekend for all of us.

11 THOMAS: Had you slept much Friday or Saturday?

12 MARY: How do you sleep when there's nothing to look
13 forward to at the dawn of another day?

14 THOMAS: Then you were physically and emotionally
15 exhausted.

16 MARY: Yes, I suppose you could say that.

17 THOMAS: And it was in this unhappy, unhealthy state of
18 mind and body that you started off toward the tomb.
19 What time was it?

20 MARY: There was hardly enough light to see the path — an
21 hour before sunrise, more or less. It was all misty and
22 gray — and very quiet.

23 THOMAS: Now, when you arrived at the tomb, what was the
24 very first thing that attracted your attention?

25 MARY: Someone had rolled the stone away from the tomb. I
26 tiptoed up and looked inside. The body was gone! I was
27 frightened half to death!

28 THOMAS: (*Patient, as with a child*) Can you remember the very
29 first thought that came into your mind when you
30 discovered that the body had disappeared?

31 MARY: Yes. I remember thinking someone had stolen it.

32 THOMAS: But you would have been overjoyed to know he
33 wasn't really dead, wouldn't you?

34 MARY: That thought never entered my head. Then it seemed
35 to me that there was an angel and he said, "Jesus isn't

1 here. He's risen from the dead! Go and tell Peter and the
2 disciples that he has gone before them into Galilee."

3 **THOMAS:** *(Sternly)* Those were his exact words?

4 **MARY:** Well, no! That's what he seemed to say. And it wasn't
5 so much what he looked like but how I felt when I saw
6 him. All peaceful inside, yet a little frightened.

7 **THOMAS:** Mary, I'm willing to admit that something must
8 have happened in the garden to shock you into a state
9 of hysteria.

10 **MARY:** *(Who has not been listening)* But, Thomas, the angel
11 wasn't really an angel — he was the gardener. Only he
12 wasn't the gardener, either, but Jesus! When I turned to
13 face the voice, it seemed as if I saw an angel — with his
14 back to the rising sun, a halo of light surrounded his head.

15 **THOMAS:** *(More to himself than to MARY)* Emotionally
16 exhausted; in a highly suggestive mood. If the light was
17 right it could explain why one would mistake the
18 gardener for a supernatural apparition.

19 **MARY:** I asked him where he had taken the body of Jesus so I
20 could go bring it back. I couldn't see too clearly. The
21 shadows played tricks on his face. I wasn't sure until he
22 spoke. "Mary," he said and it sounded like the eternal
23 sea caressing the shores of time. I rushed to him.
24 "Master!" I reached out my arms to him. He raised his
25 hand. "Don't touch me," he said.

26 **THOMAS:** You're sure that's exactly what he said?

27 **MARY:** Oh, Thomas, there are times when words are
28 unimportant. I felt his presence. It was more real than
29 anything I've ever experienced in life. I thought I had
30 lost him forever. I couldn't even remember what he
31 looked like. I stood there, studying his face, so I'd never
32 forget it again. Gradually he faded away with the rising
33 sun.

34 **THOMAS:** *(After a thoughtful pause)* Mary, after the climactic
35 experiences of these past few days wear away, you'll

- 1 never see Jesus again. Then what?
- 2 **MARY:** It doesn't matter if I don't. I know he's somewhere out
 3 there and here — close at hand. Oh, Thomas, I pray that
 4 you will see him soon.
- 5 **THOMAS:** *(As near to anger as he will allow himself)* I'll thank you
 6 not. Rather, pray for the forgiveness for all the trouble
 7 you've created. Mary, Mary, you've turned your dreams
 8 into reality. You couldn't accept the fact of Jesus' death,
 9 so this was your way out!
- 10 **MARY:** There are some things in life more difficult to accept
 11 than death — the loss of someone you love; too many
 12 tears; too much sorrow; too deep a despair.
- 13 **THOMAS:** What's worse is that you've shared this illusion
 14 with everyone until they've all lost touch with reality.
 15 This morning you talk to a gardener and think it's Jesus.
 16 But by evening, Cleophas comes rushing in, shouting,
 17 "We've just seen Jesus! We walked and talked with him
 18 all afternoon but we didn't recognize him until he broke
 19 bread with us! Then he disappeared!" Not to be outdone,
 20 all of his comrades, except me, saw him walk through
 21 the stone wall of this Upper Room behind us and eat a
 22 piece of fish!
- 23 **MARY:** *(Assuredly)* I saw him!
- 24 **THOMAS:** Anyone but a fool can see how your story's grown
 25 since daybreak! Well, I'll not believe until I place this
 26 hand of mine into his side or trace with my fingers the
 27 nail holes in his hands.
- 28 **MARY:** You'll have that opportunity when he appears to you!
- 29 **THOMAS:** *(More upset than before)* I loved Jesus as much as
 30 anyone. When he was crucified three days ago across this
 31 valley on the Hill of Calvary, I, too, felt as if my world
 32 had come to an end!
- 33 **MARY:** So did I, three days ago. Now I feel as if my life's just
 34 begun.
- 35 **THOMAS:** God knows I felt as guilty as anyone else. I ran away

1 and hid. I betrayed him in spite of my boast, "Let us go
2 up to Jerusalem and die with him!" You remember! I
3 didn't know the nearness of death then; the suffering and
4 the shame; the long, lingering pain. I wish I could conjure
5 up a vision like the rest of you have managed to do and
6 fling myself at its feet and cry, "Forgive me, Jesus!
7 Forgive me! I didn't know!"

8 MARY: But he has forgiven you, Thomas.

9 THOMAS: It would be so easy to escape this hell on earth if I
10 could only pretend. But I can't. I can't betray the mind
11 God gave me! I can't shout the good news, "He's risen!"
12 when I know he's dead and done with.

13 MARY: You put great faith in your senses, don't you, Thomas?
14 Then where's his body? It's not in the tomb. Even you
15 saw that. It's gone!

16 THOMAS: *(Confused for the first time)* Who knows what
17 happened? Maybe the Scribes or Pharisees stole it.
18 Perhaps he wasn't really dead but only in a coma. When
19 he awoke he got up and walked away.

20 MARY: Next time you'll tell me that we, his disciples, stole
21 the body. Did you steal it from the tomb, Thomas?

22 THOMAS: This is no joking matter, Mary.

23 MARY: Or if he walked away, then why hasn't he come here,
24 to us, his friends?

25 THOMAS: I don't know. Except it must be something like
26 that. Your story's too impossible to believe.

27 MARY: You dare accuse me of believing whatever I want to
28 believe. But you also invent your tales to explain the
29 empty tomb and protect your sacred five senses.

30 THOMAS: I'm not asking for anything but the truth. Truth
31 based on facts — not mere feelings.

32 MARY: What are the facts? Robbers stole his body? He awoke
33 and walked away?

34 THOMAS: How should I know? I wasn't there.

35 MARY: That's right — you weren't there! I was! But you call

1 me insane because I felt something that made sense to
2 my heart. I feel sorry for you, Thomas.

3 **THOMAS:** Don't! You're the one who needs the sympathy.

4 **MARY:** Why must we stand here and argue over this?

5 **THOMAS:** It's of the utmost importance, and you know it is,
6 Mary!

7 **MARY:** No, actually it's of very little importance — my seeing
8 Jesus, I mean. The fact remains — the truth is — whether
9 or not you believe I saw Jesus with my two physical eyes
10 or not doesn't change my feelings a bit. The important
11 thing is that I know Jesus is alive! He lives in me; he isn't
12 dead!

13 **THOMAS:** Then you must admit he got up and walked away.

14 **MARY:** No, not at all. I was a witness as he rose from the dead
15 in some strange fashion so that I could see him. Wherever
16 he is at this moment, whatever his condition may be, I
17 know he is alive!

18 **THOMAS:** I want to believe he lives, but how can it be?

19 **MARY:** You must let his words and your faith help you to
20 believe. Thomas, we've all grown too accustomed to
21 measuring life in terms of physical bodies that walk down
22 the narrow corridors of time and space. We've somehow
23 forgotten that there's an eternal measurement to life — to
24 people and their relationships.

25 **THOMAS:** Our relationships — our loves die with our body.

26 **MARY:** Oh, no, you're wrong, Thomas. Whether we live or
27 die, what we have become remains forever a force for
28 good or ill in this world. *(Pause)* And our loves, oh yes,
29 Thomas, our loves never die! They're the most eternal
30 part of all that we are or hope to become.

31 **THOMAS:** So, our ideas live on! What does it matter?

32 **MARY:** Is it no little thing that Jesus' ideas about God will
33 live as long as this earth? "How blest are the sorrowful,
34 for they shall be comforted."

35 **THOMAS:** *(Forgetting his mood for a moment)* "How blest are the

1 gentle people; they shall have the world as their
2 possession." Aye, Mary, I'll agree there's an echo of
3 eternity in his words.

4 **MARY:** Wherever there's a mind in this vast universe capable
5 of appreciating the truth, his words will live. Even the
6 angels of heaven will find solace in them.

7 **THOMAS:** *(Suddenly sad)* But if men forget the creator, the
8 author, what's the use of having uttered the words?

9 **MARY:** Though the name of Jesus be forgotten during the
10 passing of time, his truth will continue to save the sanity
11 of men. Would he mind very much if men forgot his name
12 and followed his truth to life and freedom?

13 **THOMAS:** So, his works and words will live, but what about
14 us? In spite of my sarcasm, I don't want to die and be
15 forgotten.

16 **MARY:** But it was in answer to our needs that he spoke his
17 words of comfort and performed his acts of love. We live
18 in him.

19 **THOMAS:** Still not enough for me, Mary. I want to live, not as
20 a fast fading memory, but as a person who thinks and
21 acts and feels.

22 **MARY:** I agree. I can't bear to think of this love of mine
23 buried in the grave with my body.

24 **THOMAS:** Mary, it's the fragile fragments of our lives that
25 scream aloud for immortality! The sudden insight into
26 the mind of God or a friend.

27 **MARY:** The seconds when your heart spills over with too
28 much love and you weep with joy.

29 **THOMAS:** The tug at your heartstrings when you see a dirty-
30 faced boy in a torn tunic.

31 **MARY:** The sense of sisterhood when you sit and share
32 another's sorrow.

33 **THOMAS:** The little things, so common, so readily remem-
34 bered, which transform a dull existence into life.

35 **MARY:** The thinly scattered hours of tears and laughter that



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