

LAZARUS AND HIS BELOVED

By
Khalil Gibran

Courtesy:

Shahid Riaz
Islamabad - Pakistan
shahid.riaz@gmail.com

THE CAST

Lazarus
Mary, his sister
Martha, his sister
The mother of Lazarus
Philip, a disciple
A Madman

THE SCENE

The garden outside of the home of Lazarus and his mother and sisters in Bethany.

Late afternoon of Monday, the day after the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth from the grave.

At curtain rise: Mary is at right gazing up towards the hills. Martha is seated at her loom near the house door, left. The Madman is seated around the corner of the house, and against its wall, down left.

THE PLAY

Mary: (Turning to Martha) You do not work. You have not worked much lately.

Martha: You are not thinking of my work. My idleness makes you think of what our Master said. Oh, beloved Master!

The Madman: The day shall come when there will be no weaver, and no one to wear the cloth. We shall all stand naked in the sun.

(There is a long silence. The women do not appear to have heard The Madman speaking. They never hear him.)

Mary: It is getting late.

Martha: Yes, yes, I know. It is getting late.

(The mother enters, coming out from the house door.)

Mother: Has he not returned yet?

Martha: No, mother, he has not returned yet.

(The three women look towards the hills.)

The Madman: He himself will never return. All that you may see is a breath struggling in a body.

Mary: It seems to me that he has not yet returned from the other world.

Mother: The death of our Master has afflicted him deeply, and during these last days he has hardly eaten a morsel, and I know at night that he does not sleep. Surely it must have been the death of our Friend.

Martha: No, mother. There is something else; something I do not understand.

Mary: Yes, yes. There is something else. I know it, too. I have known it all these days, yet I cannot explain it. His eyes are deeper. He gazes at me as though he were seeing someone else through me. He is tender but his tenderness is for someone not here. And he is silent, silent as if the seal of death is yet upon his lips.

(A silence falls over the three women.)

The Madman: Everyone looks through everyone else to see someone else.

Mother: (Breaking the silence) Would that he'd return. Of late he has spent too many hours among those hills alone. He should be here with us.

Mary: Mother, he has not been with us for a long time.

Martha: Why, he has always been with us, only those three days!

Mary: Three days? Three days! Yes, Martha, you are right. It was only three days.

Mother: I wish my son would return from the hills.

Martha: He will come soon, mother. You must not worry.

Mary: (in a strange voice) Sometimes I feel that he will never come back from the hills.

Mother: If he came back from the grave, the surely he will come back from the hills. And oh, my daughters, to think that the One who gave us back his life was slain but yesterday.

Mary: Oh the mystery of it, and the pain of it.

Mother: Oh, to think that they could be so cruel to the One who gave my son back to my heart.

(A silence)

Martha: But Lazarus should not stay so long among the hills.

Mary: It is easy for one in a dream to lose his way among the olive groves. And I know a place where Lazarus loved to sit and dream and be still. Oh, mother, it is beside a little stream. If you do not know the place you could not find it. He took me there once, and we sat on two stones, like children. It was spring, and little flowers were growing beside us. We often spoke of that place during the winter season. And each time that he spoke of that place a strange light came into his eyes.

The Madman: Yes, that strange light, that shadow cast by the other light.

Mary: And mother, you know that Lazarus has always been away from us, though he was always with us.

Mother: You say so many things I cannot understand. (Pause) I wish my son would come back from the hills. I wish he would come back! (Pause) I must go in now. The lentils must not be overcooked.

(The mother exits through the door)

Martha: I wish I could understand all that you say, Mary. When you speak it is as though someone else is speaking.

Mary: (Her voice a little strange) I know, my sister, I know. Whenever we speak it is someone else who is speaking.

(There is a prolonged silence. Mary is faraway in her thoughts, and Martha watches her half-curiously. Lazarus enters, coming from the hills, back left. He throws himself upon the grass under the almond trees near the house.)

Mary: (Running toward him) Oh Lazarus, you are tired and weary. You should not have walked so far.

Lazarus: (Speaking absently) Walking, walking and going nowhere; seeking and finding nothing. But it is better to be among the hills.

The Madman: Well, after all it is a cubit nearer to the other hills.

Martha: (After brief silence) But you are not well, and you leave us all day long, and we are much concerned. What you came back, Lazarus, you made us happy. But in leaving us alone here you turn our happiness into anxiety.

Lazarus: (Turning his face toward the hills) Did I leave you long this day? Strange that you should call a moment among the hills a separation. Did I truly stay more than a moment among the hills?

Martha: You have been gone all day.

Lazarus: To think, to think! A whole day among the hills! Who would believe it?

(A silence. The mother enters, coming out from the house door.)

Mother: Oh, my son, I am glad you have come back. It is late and the mist is gathering upon the hills. I feared for you my son.

The Madman: They are afraid of the mist. And the mist is their beginning and the mist is their end.

Lazarus: Yes, I have come back to you from the hills. The pity of it, the pity of it all.

Mother: What is it Lazarus? What is the pity of it all?

Lazarus: Nothing, mother. Nothing.

Mother: You speak strangely. I do not understand you, Lazarus. You have said little since your home-coming. But whatever you have said has been strange to me.

Martha: Yes, strange.

(There is a pause.)

Mother: And now the mist is gathering here. Let us go into the house. Come, my children.

(The mother, after kissing Lazarus with wistful tenderness, enters the house.)

Martha: Yes, there is a chill in the air. I must take my loom and my linen indoors.

Mary: (sitting down beside Lazarus on the grass under the almond trees, and speaking to Martha) It is true the April evenings are not good for either your loom or your linen. Would you want me to help you take your loom indoors?

Martha: No, no. I can do it alone. I have always done it alone.

(Martha carries her loom into the house, then she returns for the linen, taking that in also. A wind passes by, shaking the almond tree, and a drift of petals falls over Mary and Lazarus.)

Lazarus: Even spring would comfort us, and even the trees would weep for us. All there is on earth, if all there is on earth could know our downfall and our grief, would pity us and weep for us.

Mary: But spring is with us, and though veiled with the veil of sorrow, yet it is spring. Let us not speak of pity. Let us rather accept both our spring and our sorrow with gratitude. And let us wonder in sweet silence at Him who gave you life yet yielded His own life. Let us not speak of pity, Lazarus.

Lazarus: Pity, pity that I should be torn away from a thousand thousand years of heart's desire, a thousand thousand years of heart's hunger. Pity that after a thousand thousand springs I am turned to this winter.

Mary: What do you mean, my brother? Why do you speak of a thousand thousand springs? You were but three days away from us. Three short days. But our sorrow was indeed longer than three days.

Lazarus: Three days? Three centuries, three aeons! All of time! All of time with the one my soul loved before time began.

The Madman: Yes, three days, three centuries, three aeons. Strange they would always weigh and measure. It is always a sundial and a pair of scales.

Mary: (In amazement) The one you soul loved before time began? Lazarus, why do you say these things? It is but a dream you dreamed in another garden. Now we are here in this garden, a stone's throw from Jerusalem. We are here. And you know well, my brother, that our Master would have you be with us in this awakening to dream of life and love; and He would have you an ardent disciple, a living witness of His glory.

Lazarus: There is no dream here and there is no awakening. You and I and this garden are but an illusion, a shadow of the real. The awakening is there where I was with my beloved and the reality.

Mary: (Rising) Your beloved?

Lazarus: (Also rising) My beloved.

The Madman: Yes, yes. His beloved, the space virgin, the beloved of everyman.

Mary: But where is your beloved? Who is your beloved?

Lazarus: My twin heart whom I sought here and did not find. Then death, the angel with winged feet, came and led my longing to her longing, and I lived with her in the very heart of God. And I became nearer to her and she to me, and we were one. We were a sphere that shines in the sun; and we were a song among the stars. All this, Mary, all this and more, till a voice, a voice from the depths, the voice of a world called me; and that which was inseparable was torn asunder. And the thousand thousand years with my beloved in space could not guard me from the power of that voice which called me back.

Mary: (Looking unto the sky) O blessed angels of our silent hours, make me to understand this thing! I would not be an alien in this new land discovered by death. Say more, my brother, go on. I believe in my heart I can follow you.

The Madman: Follow him, if you can, little woman. Shall the turtle follow the stag?

Lazarus: I was a stream and I sought the sea where my beloved dwells, and when I reached the sea I was brought to the hills to run again among the rocks. I was a song imprisoned in silence, longing for the heart of my beloved, and when the winds of heaven released me and uttered me in that green forest I was recaptured by a voice, and I was turned again into silence. I was a root in the dark earth, and I became a flower and then a fragrance in space rising to enfold my beloved, and I was caught and gathered by hand, and I was made a root again, a root in the dark earth.

The Madman: If you are a root you can always escape the tempests in the branches. And it is good to be a running stream even after you have reached the sea. Of course it is good for water to run upward.

Mary: (To herself) Oh strange, passing strange! (To Lazarus) But my brother it is good to be a running stream, and it is not good to be a song not yet sung, and it is good to be a root in the dark earth. The Master knew all this and He called you back to us that we may know there is no veil between life and death. Do you not see how one word uttered in love may bring together elements scattered by an illusion called death? Believe and have faith, for only in faith, which is our deeper knowledge, can you find comfort.

Lazarus: Comfort! Comfort the treacherous, the deadly! Comfort that cheats our senses and makes us slaves to the passing hour! I would not have comfort. I would have passion! I would burn in the cool space with my beloved. I would be in the boundless space with my mate, my other self. O Mary, Mary, you were once my sister, and we knew one another even when our nearest kin knew us not. Now listen to me, listen to me with your heart.

Mary: I am listening, Lazarus.

The Madman: Let the whole world listen. The sky will now speak to the earth, but the earth is deaf as you and I.

Lazarus: We were in space, my beloved and I, and we were all space. We were in light and we were all light. And we roamed even like the ancient spirit that moved upon the face of the waters; and it was forever the first day. We were love itself that dwells in the heart of the white silence. Then a voice like thunder, a voice like countless spears piercing the ether, cried out saying, "Lazarus, come forth!" And the voice echoed and re-echoed in space, and I, even as a flood tide became an ebbing tide; a house divided, a garment rent, a youth unspent, a tower that fell down, and out of its broken stones a landmark was made. A voice cried "Lazarus, come forth!" and I descended from the mansion of the sky to a tomb within a tomb, this body in a sealed cave.

The Madman: Master of the caravan, where are your camels and where are your men? Was it the hungry earth that swallowed them? Was it the simoom that shrouded them with sand? No! Jesus of Nazareth raised His hand, Jesus of Nazareth uttered a word; and tell me now, where are your camels and where are your men, and where are your treasures? In the trackless sand, in the trackless sand. But the moon will always come again.

Mary: Oh, it is like a dream dreamt upon a mountaintop. I know, my brother, I know the world you have visited, though I have never seen it. Yet all that you say is passing strange. It is a tale told by someone across a valley, and I can hardly hear it.

Lazarus: It is all so different across the valley. There is no weight there and there is no measure. You are with your beloved.

(A silence)

Lazarus: O my beloved! O my beloved fragrance in space! Wings that were spread for me! Tell me, tell me in the stillness of my heart, do you seek me, and was it pain to you to be separated from me? Was I also a fragrance and wings spread in space? And tell me now, my beloved, was there a double cruelty, was there a brother of His in another world who called you from life to death, and had you a mother and sisters and friends who deemed it a miracle? Was there a double cruelty performed in blessedness?

Mary: No, no, my brother. There is only one Jesus of one world. All else is but a dream, even as your beloved.

Lazarus: (With great passion) No, no! If He is not a dream then He is nothing. If He had not known what is beyond Jerusalem, then He is nothing. If He did not know my beloved in space then He was not the Master. O my friend Jesus, you once gave me a cup of wine across the table, and you said, "Drink this in remembrance of me." And you dipped a morsel of bread in the oil, and you said, "Eat this, it is my share of the loaf." O my friend, you have put your arm on my shoulder and called me "son." My mother and my sisters have said in their hearts, "He loves our Lazarus." And I loved you. And then you went away to build more towers in the sky, and I went to my beloved. Tell me now, tell me, why did you bring me back? Did you not know in your knowing heart that I was with my beloved? Did you not meet her in you wandering above the summits of Lebanon? Surely you saw her image in my eyes when I came and stood before you at the door of the tomb. And have you not a beloved in the sun? And would you have a greater one than yourself separate you from her? And after separation what would you say? What shall I say to you now?

The Madman: He bade me also to come back but I did not obey, and now they call me mad.

Mary: Lazarus, Have I a beloved in the sky? Has my longing created a being beyond this world? And must I die to be with him? Oh, my brother, tell me, have I a mate also? If this thing be so, how good it is to live and die, and live and die again; if a beloved awaits me, to fulfil all that I am, and I to fulfil all that he is!

The Madman: Everywoman has a beloved in the sky. The heart of everywoman creates a being in space.

Mary: (Repeating softly as if to herself) Have I a beloved in the sky?

Lazarus: I do not know. But if you had a beloved, an other self, somewhere, somewhen, and you should meet him, surely there would not be one to separate you from him.

The Madman: He may be here, and He may call her. But like many others she may not hear.

Lazarus: (Coming to the centre of stage) To wait, to wait for each season to overcome another season; and then to wait for that season to be overcome by another; to watch all things ending before your

own end comes-your end which is your beginning. To listen to all voices, and to know that they melt to silence, all save the voice of your heart that would cry even in sleep.

The Madman: The children of God married the children of men. Then they were divorced. Now, the children of men long for the children of God. I pity them all, the children of men and the children of God.

(A silence)

Martha: (Appearing in the doorway) Why don't you come into the house, Lazarus? Our mother has prepared the supper. (With a little impatience) Whenever you and Mary are together you talk and talk, and no one knows what you say.

(Martha stands for a few seconds, then goes into the house.)

Lazarus: (Speaking to himself, and as though he has not heard Martha) Oh, I am spent. I am wasted, I am hungry and I am thirsty. Would that you could give me some bread and some wine.