

Easter

The angel held the wrapping in his hands, peering at it as if there was some message hidden in the linen folds.

There was not: only mystery. He still made sure to gently put the cloth back down upon the rough stone slab.

It was dark inside the tomb by human standards, but the angel could see well enough. It wasn't really a tomb, just a natural cave that had been expanded a bit by human hands. A slab of stone: a place or two for a torch, or lamp of oil; and a great circular stone to serve the place of a door. The air was dry, with a lingering smell of blood, sweat and vinegar. The dirt on the ground showed where several people had brought in a heavy object.

"But no body," muttered the angel. "Did they drag it in, only to drag it out again?"

He looked once more at the wrapping. Stained and slightly bloody, it was clearly the sort of shroud used by the local humans to clothe their dead. But it had already lain empty and discarded when the angel had manifested - and there was something about it that had confused him...

His thoughts were broken by quiet words behind him.

"Your Hunt seems to have led you to an unusual place."

The first angel turned. "An unusual place indeed, brother." His face flushed as he realized that his emotions were visible on his face. Vainly restraining his habitual open smile, the first angel continued, "But one worth the visit, I think. What *is* this place?"

The second angel's voice was drier than usual. "A tomb, brother."

The first angel unconsciously rolled his eyes. "Well, yes. But there's more here. I can feel it! There was a *sound*, and I came down to see, and..." He stopped. The second angel's expression was eloquent in what it did not say.

"Yes, I know, I'm being too enthusiastic again," continued the first angel. "I'll start over. I was flying above to greet the dawn, and just as the sun rose above the horizon, I felt something happen on the ground below me. The Symphony itself seemed to call out in triumph, just for a moment... and I followed the echoes. I can still hear it, if I listen hard enough." The first angel's face grew thoughtful. "But I've never quite heard anything like it before. Have you?" His head cocked. "For that matter, how did you find me?"

The second angel calmly sat. "The answer is, I did not. I was merely tracing the sound myself. You must have been nearly at its epicenter, for it was very faint from where I stood to greet the sunrise, and I was not far from here. I think we may have be the only angels to have heard it at all. As for what it is - I am not certain, but I have heard something like it thrice before. No more than a millennium or so ago."

The first angel reflected almost-sourly that there are few more annoying things in the universe than being both immortal, and less than a century old. It was a familiar reflection, and as usual held little in the way of comfort.

The second angel looked about with cool eyes that missed nothing. "Do you know whose tomb this is, brother?" At his companion's rueful headshake, the older angel nodded. "No reason for you to know, actually. This was the tomb of the wandering preacher that had been executed several days ago."

The younger angel's face cleared. "Ah. The healer."

One of the older angel's eyebrows raised elegantly. "So, you were familiar with the man?"

The younger angel nodded. "Not to speak to, of course, but I've heard some stories from Mother - she and the rest of the Seraphim Council were very interested in him. He liked to talk in parables, and cure diseases; he also had a talent for seriously annoying the local priests. I supposed the last part was what got him executed for sedition by the civic authorities." He frowned. "I don't like the ways that this local Empire puts people to death."

"When you get older, you will find that few ways of putting people to death are likable," replied the older angel. He thought for a moment. "Or perhaps not. At any rate, there was more to him than that... possibly."

For some reason, the younger angel was finding it very easy for once to restrain himself from idly kicking loose rocks around. "Oh?"

"Yes. The Archangel of Judgment showed a *particular* interest - enough to have him send his best Inquisitor to judge the origins of the man. The conclusions were ambiguous, but potentially profound. The Host was preparing to watch over him, but..." the second angel raised one hand. "Events on Earth moved faster than we had anticipated. His early death suggested an end to useful speculation."

The first angel looked around. "Very well - but now we have a tomb where the Symphony shouldn't be tangible, but is, and where a body should be tangible, but isn't. Where did it go?"

His companion raised both hands. "I do not know."

Just then, a sound came from the stone that served as a door. Slowly the rock moved as several people on the other side pushed at it. Listening to the tone, the older angel remarked, "Several women in a controlled state of acute distress: it is likely that they are former disciples of the teacher who wish to ritually prepare his corpse. I suspect that finding us here will only cause their emotional state to further degrade: thus, we should depart."

The younger angel frowned. "Or at least go intangible." At the other angel's look, he continued, "After all, they may actually know something about their teacher's body. Someone will eventually ask us about this, and I would like to be able to give as full a report as possible."

The older angel nodded. "A legitimate point."

The two angels assumed celestial form and waited for the humans to enter the tomb, careful to do nothing to suggest their presence. Well, the younger angel did materialize

enough to give a precise shove at the stone, the better to get it to move, but that minor miracle passed without detection. The second angel didn't even bother to comment.

It was immediately clear that the newcomers had no prior knowledge of whatever had happened here. They showed shock, anger, and bewilderment at the apparent violation of the tomb; the perfumes and oils that had been brought up the hill were carelessly dropped as the three humans searched frantically for any sign of their former teacher. The older angel nodded. *They show no sign of knowing any more than we do about the location of the corpse.*

Yes, replied the younger, *and now they are leaving. Seeking help, perhaps? But one remains...*

The new object of their attention had dropped to her knees and began to weep in great tearing sobs. Both angels looked closer, their unique senses keen to her inner soul.

Some Dishonor... in the past, and easily overshadowed by the Honor she has shown in the past days, noted the younger.

The older replied, *And currently almost overcome with grief at her loss. Not to the point of despair, yet.*

To their surprise, the woman had raised her head at the 'sound' of their discussion. Looking in their direction, she wildly cried, "Who... who are you? Who is there?"

The same thought - *She is Aware* - went through the two angels' minds. Making the best of the situation, they both assumed corporeal form in order to stand above the kneeling woman. It was clear that her thoughts were muddled enough to simply assume that they had 'stepped from the shadows'.

The older angel spoke first. "Woman, why do you weep?"

She began to cry again. "He's... he's gone, and I don't know where they took him! Wasn't it enough for them that they killed him? Why can't they leave him alone?" Her sobbing was filled with pain.

The second angel knelt to her. "Please... please. Do not weep. He has come into his own, and that is reason for rejoicing, not tears." The woman seemed not to hear him, but she clung to one of his arms as if it was the only thing keeping her from drowning in her own tears. Awkwardly, the young angel patted her head as she poured out her grief, his eyes beginning to feel hot and oddly scratchy. He looked up at his companion.

His brother shook his head. "Let her weep. That is all that we can do for her."

The three remained there for some time. Eventually, the woman's sobs went from full to dry and racking: the younger angel's own eyes were wet from unfamiliar tears; the older angel's own eyes remained dry, but his posture seemed stiffer than usual, as if he had steeled himself to not betray any sign of grief.

They remained frozen in their tableau until the two angels heard the sound of someone climbing the path. Carefully lifting and supporting the woman, the two brought her outside, where a man stood waiting, his own face showing signs of pain and loss. He reached out for the woman, who collapsed into his arms, still softly begging, "Where did they take him... please tell me where they took him... why can't I find him?"

Above her cradled head, the newcomer nodded. "I will care for her." He paused and looked at the two angels, carefully. "Thank you for your kindness."

The older angel replied, "We could do no less."

The man smiled, but there was a deep sorrow behind it. "You might be surprised at how many good people have managed to do less, these past few days. Surely you will be rewarded in Heaven for your aid. But do not let us keep you from your journeys. The others will be here, soon, and there are things that must be resolved." He looked down. "And forgiven." The two angels, mindful of their own tasks (and the somewhat different customs of the local humans here), took the hint gracefully, although the younger angel found himself faintly reluctant to leave.

Carefully waiting until they were out of sight before resuming their celestial forms, the two continued on their original task of finding and excising a particularly nasty Shedite that had been infesting the area lately. Resting after said excision, the younger one turned to his brother. "A question. Back in the tomb you said that you had heard something like that sound before. Where?"

The older angel looked off into the distance. "A bush. A mountain's summit. A box." He turned to his brother. "I somehow know that I will hear it again, someday."

The younger angel grinned. "Careful that you don't start anticipating the moment. We couldn't have that." His grin faded as he looked up and contemplated the field of crosses where they had finally run the Shedite to ground.

"I still say that crucifixion is a disgusting way to kill a man. Remind me to discourage it, if I ever get the chance to make that disgust known."

"Of course." The older angel looked at the setting sun, his eyes unblinking. "It occurs to me that we never checked the relationship of that man to that woman. Curious. I suppose that he was a relative, or a fellow follower of their slain teacher."

"Really? I got a completely different impression," replied the younger angel. "I see what you mean, though. Well, I was going to investigate further, anyway, but now I think that I really have to." He smiled. "You may be ready to wait patiently for the next time you hear that song, but I think that I'm more suited to getting to the bottom of this one."

His brother nodded. "It seems suited for you. No doubt you will work things out to your satisfaction without too much difficulty." He paused. "So, what was your 'completely different' impression of that man?" The younger angel looked up at the first stars of night.

"Actually, I got the oddest feeling that he was the gardener."

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