

“Excuse me! Hello, up there!”

Octavius peeks over the edge of Rome. There’s a figure on the floor, calling up to him.

He gasps when he sees his torturous situation. Hands and feet nailed to planks of wood, hidden under the bench.

“Remain calm, my friend! We shall help you off that cross!”

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The man rubs his stigmata in his left hand. He wears very little — naught but a loincloth and a crown of thorns. His side oozes blood, which one of Octavius’s soldiers is patching.

“Thank you, sir, for freeing me. It was quite the shock to awaken crucified.”

“It is of no issue. Pray tell — who left you like this? Surely, your crimes are not worthy of crucifixion.”

The man only laughs. “Pontius Pilate. My crimes were simple — I spoke out against Rome.”

Octavius feels his muscles stiffen.

“And you are?”

“Yeshua. Son of Mary, of Joseph, and of the Lord. I am a carpenter.”

Yeshua removes the crown of thorns from his head, and unceremoniously tosses it to the floor.

“To Rome, Rex Iudaeorum.”

“A king? This Pontius Pilate crucified a king?!” Octavius feels rage boiling in his stomach. “The political hellscape alone this would cause!”

“Forgive him; I hold no hate for him. He knows not what he does,” Yeshua says, finally patched up. “I only speak the will of the Lord.”

“Would you like some clothing?” Octavius offers. “I doubt you would want Roman garments, considering... well.”

“I would deeply appreciate it. Thank you.”

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The warm sands of the West bunched up inside of Yeshua's bandages, making his stigmata itch.

"It is a shame that you have no spare sandals, General," he says, wounds weeping blood.

"These people out west have much better footwear than I for this environment. Closed boots and light clothing," Octavius reassures.

A familiar blue rides over the horizon, upon horseback.

"Hey, Ocky! Why're you bringin' your army out here?! Lookin' to fight again or somethin'?!"

Octavius smiles as Yeshua raises his brow.

"What a manner of speech! I have not yet heard it!"

"That is my Jedediah," Octavius says, pointing to the approaching figure.

Jed hops off the horse's back and stands before the small group, covering his eyes at the sight.

"Jesus— Ock, you know better than to take prisoners! What the hell's wrong with you?!"

"How does he—?" Yeshua begins.

"He is not our prisoner," Octavius explains. "We found him tonight under the bench, affixed to a cross. We are seeking the man that sent him there, but first he needs clothing. We were hoping your people had some to spare?"

Jed blinks twice.

"They found you on a cross?" He asks, slowly.

He drinks in the scene: a nearly naked man, in naught but a loincloth, head scratched with thorns, palms and feet stained with blood of nails drawn through them.

"...what did you say yer name was, again?"

"Yeshua of Nazareth."

Jed is silent.

Octavius catches him as he faints.