

# The Crucifixion Of The Outcast

William Butler Yeats

A MAN, with thin brown hair and a pale face, half ran, half walked, along the road that wound from the south to the Town of the Shelly River. Many called him Cum-Hal, the son of Cormac, and many called him the Swift, Wild Horse; and he was a glee man, and he wore a short parti-coloured doublet, and had pointed shoes, and a bulging wallet. Also he was of the blood of the Ernaans, and his birth-place was the ~ield of Gold; but his eating and sleeping places were the four provinces of Eri, and his abiding place was not upon the ridge of the earth. His eyes strayed from the Abbey tower of the White Friars and the town battlements to a row of crosses which stood out against the sky upon a hill a little to the eastward of the town, and he clenched his fist, and shook it at the crosses. He knew they were not empty, for the birds were fluttering  
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about them; and he thought how, as like as not, just such another vagabond as himself was hanged on one of them; and he muttered; ' If it were hanging or bow-stringing, or stoning or beheading, it would be bad enough. But to have the birds pecking your eyes and the wolves eating your feet ! I would that the red wind of the Druids had withered in his cradle the soldier of Dathi, who brought the tree of death out of barbarous lands, or that the lightning, when it smote Dathi at the foot of the mountain, had smitten him also, or that his grave had been dug by the green-haired and green-toothed merrows deep at the roots of the deep sea.'

While he spoke, he shivered from head to foot, and the sweat came out upon his face, and he knew not why, for he had looked upon many crosses. He passed over two hills and under the battle-

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ment Ed gate, and then round by a left-

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was studded with great nails, and when he knocked at it, he roused the lay brother who was the porter, and of him he asked a place in the guest-house. Then the lay brother took a glowing turf on a shovel, and led the way to a big and naked out-house strewn with very dirty rushes; and he lighted a rush-candle fixed between two of the stones of the wall, and set the glowing turf upon the hearth and gave him two unlighted sods and a wisp of straw, and showed him a blanket hanging from a nail, and a shelf with a loaf of bread and a jug of water, and a tub in a far corner. Then the lay brother left him and went back to his place by the door.

And Cumhal the son of Cormac began to blow upon the glowing turf, that he might light the two sods and the wisp of straw; but his blowing profited him nothing, for the sods and the straw were damp. So he took off his pointed shoes, and drew the tub out of the corner with the thought of washing the dust of the highway from his feet; but the water was so dirty that he could not see the bottom. He was very hungry, for he had not eaten all that day; so he did not waste much anger upon the tub, but took up the black loaf, and bit into it, and then spat out the bite, for the bread was hard and mouldy. Still he did not give way to his wrath, for he had not drunken these many hours; having a hope of heath beer or wine at his day's end, he had left the brooks untasted, to make his supper the more delightful. Now he put the jug to his lips, but he flung it from him straight way, for the water was bitter and ill-smelling. Then he gave the jug a kick, so that it broke against the opposite wall, and he took down the blanket to wrap it about him for the night. But no sooner did he touch it than it was alive with skipping fleas. At this, beside himself with anger, he rushed

to the door of the guest-house, but the lay brother, being well accustomed to such outcries, had locked it on the outside; so

Cumhal emptied the tub and began to beat the door with it, till the lay brother came to the door, and asked what ailed him, and why he woke him out of sleep. 'What ails me!' shouted Cumhal, 'are not the sods as wet as the sands of the Three Headlands? and are not the fleas in the blanket as many as the waves of the sea and as lively? and is not the bread as hard as the heart of a lay brother who has forgotten God? and is not the water in the jug as bitter and as ill-smelling as his soul? and is not the foot-water the colour that shall be upon him when he has been charred in the Undying Fires?' The lay brother saw that the lock was fast, and went back to his niche, for he was too sleepy to talk with comfort. And Cumhal went on beating at the door, and presently he heard the lay brother's foot once more, and cried out at him, ~ O cowardly and tyrannous race of friars, persecutors of the bard and the glee man, haters of life and joy! O race that does not draw the sword and tell the truth! O race that melts the bones of the people with cowardice and with deceit!'

'Gleeman,' said the lay brother, 'I also make rhymes; I make many while I sit in my niche by the door, and I sorrow to hear the bards railing upon the friars. Brother, I would sleep, and therefore I make known to you that it is the head of the monastery, our gracious Coarb, who orders all things concerning the lodging of travellers.'

'You may sleep,' said Cumhal, ~ I will sing a bard's curse on the Coarb.' And he set the tub upside down under the window, and stood upon it, and began to sing in a very loud voice. The singing awoke the Coarb, so that he sat up in bed and blew a silver whistle until the lay brother came to him. 'I cannot get a wink of sleep with that noise,' said the

Coarb. ' What is happening ? '

' It is a glee man,' said the lay brother,  
' who complains of the sods, of the bread,  
of the water in the jug, of the foot-water,  
and of the blanket. And now he is singing  
a bard's curse upon you, O brother Coarb,  
and upon your father and your mother,  
and your grandfather and your grand-  
mother, and upon all your relations.'

' Is he cursing in rhyme ? '

' He is cursing in rhyme, and with  
two assonances in every line of his  
curse.'

The Coarb pulled his night-cap off and  
crumpled it in his hands, and the circular  
brown patch of hair in the middle of his  
bald head looked like an island in the  
midst of a pond, for in Connaught they  
had not yet abandoned the ancient ton sure  
for the style then coming into use. ' If we  
do not somewhat,' he said, ' he will teach

his curses to the children in the street, and  
the girls spinning at the doors, and to the  
robbers on the mountain of Gulben.'

' Shall I go then,' said the other, 'and  
give him dry sods, a fresh loaf, clean water  
in a jug, clean foot-water, and a new  
blanket, and make him swear by the  
blessed St. Benign us, and by the sun and  
moon, that no bond be lacking, not to tell  
his rhymes to the children in the street,  
and the girls spinning at the doors, and  
the robbers on the mountain of Gulben ? '

' Neither our blessed Patron nor the sun  
and the moon would avail at all,' said the  
Coarb: 'for to-morrow or the next day  
the mood to curse would come upon him,  
or a pride in those rhymes would move  
him, and he would teach his lines to the  
children, and the girls, and the robbers.  
Or else he would tell another of his craft  
how he fared in the guest-house, and he  
in his turn would begin. to curse, and my  
name would wither. For learn there is no  
steadfastness of purpose upon the roads,  
but only under roofs, and between four  
walls. Therefore I bid you go and awaken  
Brother Kevin, Brother Dove, Brother

Little Wolf, Brother Bald Patrick, Brother  
Bald Brandon, Brother James and Brother  
Peter. And they shall take the man, and  
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bind him with ropes, and dip him in the  
river that he may cease to sing. And in  
the morning, lest this but make him curse  
the louder, we will crucify him.'

' The crosses are all full,' said the lay  
brother.

' Then we must make another cross. If  
we do not make an end of him another  
will, for who can eat and sleep in peace  
while men like him are going about the  
world ? Ill should we stand before blessed  
St. Benign us, and sour would be his face  
when he comes to judge us at the Last  
Day, were we to spare an enemy of his  
when we had him under our thumb !

Brother, the bards and the glee men are  
an evil race, ever cursing and ever stirring  
up the people, and immoral and im-  
moderate in all things, and heathen in  
their hearts, always longing after the Son  
of Lir, and Angus, and Bridget, and the  
Dagda, and Dana the Mother, and all the  
false gods of the old days; always making  
poems in praise of those kings and queens  
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of the demons, Finvaragh of the Hill in  
the Plain, and Red Aodh of the Hill of  
the Shee, and Cleena of the Wave, and  
Eiveen of the Grey Rock, and him they  
call Don of the Vats of the Sea; and  
railing against God and Christ and the  
blessed Saints.' While he was speaking  
he crossed himself, and when he had  
finished he drew the nightcap over his  
ears, to shut out the noise, and closed  
his eyes, and composed himself to  
sleep.

The lay brother found Brother Kevin,  
Brother Dove, Brother Little Wolf, Brother  
Bald Patrick, Brother Bald Brandon,  
Brother James and Brother Peter sitting  
up in bed, and he made them get up.  
Then they bound Cumhal, and they  
dragged him to the river, and they dipped

him in it at the place which was afterwards called Buckley's Ford.

' Gleeman,' said the lay brother, as they led him back to the guest-house, ' why do you ever use the wit which God has given  
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you to make blasphemous and immoral tales and verses ? For such is the way of your craft. I have, indeed, many such tales and verses well nigh by rote, and so I know that I speak true ! And why do you praise with rhyme those demons, Finvaragh, Red Aodh, Cleena, Eiveen and Don? I, too, am a man of great wit and learning, but I ever glorify our gracious Coarb, and Benignus our Patron, and the princes of the province. My soul is decent and orderly, but yours is like the wind among the salley gardens. I said what I could for you, being also a man of many thoughts, but who could help such a one as you ? ' My soul, friend,' answered the glee man,

' is indeed like the wind, and it blows me to and fro, and up and down, and puts many things into my mind and out of my mind, and therefore am I called the Swift, Wild Horse.' And he spoke no more that night, for his teeth were chattering with the cold.

The Coarb and the friars came to him  
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in the morning, and bade him get ready to be crucified, and led him out of the guest-house. And while he still stood upon the step a flock of great grass-barnacles passed high above him with clanking cries. He lifted his arms to them and said, ~ O great grass-barnacles, tarry a little, and mayhap my soul will travel with you to the waste places of the shore and to the ungovernable sea ! ' At the gate a crowd of beggars gathered about them, being come there to beg from any traveller or pilgrim who might have spent the night in the guest-house. The Coarb and the friars led the glee man to a place in the woods at some distance, where many straight young trees were growing, and they made him

cut one down and fashion it to the right length, while the beggars stood round them in a ring, talking and gesticulating. The Coarb then bade him cut off another and shorter piece of wood, and nail it upon the first. So there was his cross for him; and they put it upon his shoulder, for  
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his crucifixion was to be on the top of the hill where the others were. A half-mile on the way he asked them to stop and see him juggle for them: for he knew, he said, all the tricks of Angus the Subtle-Hearted. The old friars were for pressing on, but the young friars would see him: so he did many wonders for them, even to the drawing of live frogs out of his ears. But after a while they turned on him, and said his tricks were dull and a shade unholy, and set the cross on his shoulders again. Another half-mile on the way, and he asked them to stop and hear him jest for them, for he knew, he said, all the jests of Conan the Bald, upon whose back a sheep's wool grew. And the young friars, when they had heard his merry tales, again bade him take up his cross, for it ill became them to listen to such follies. Another half-mile on the way, he asked them to stop and hear him sing the story of White-Breasted Deirdre, and how she endured many sorrows, and how the sons of Usna died to serve her. And the young friars were mad to hear him, but when he had ended, they grew angry, and beat him for waking forgotten longings in their hearts. So they set the cross upon his back, and hurried him to the hill.

When he was come to the top, they took the cross from him, and began to dig a hole to stand it in, while the beggars gathered round, and talked among themselves. ~ I ask a favour before I die,' says Cum Hal. ' We will grant you no more delays,' says the Coarb.

' I ask no more delays, for I have drawn the sword, and told the truth, and lived my vision, and am content.'

' Would you then confess ? '

' By sun and moon, not I; I ask but to  
be let eat the food I carry in my wallet.  
I carry food in my wallet whenever I go  
upon a journey, but I do not taste of it  
unless I am well-nigh starved. I have  
not eaten now these two days.'  
'You may eat, then,' says the Coarb,

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and he turned to help the friars dig the  
hole.

The glee man took a loaf and some strips  
of cold fried bacon out of his wallet and laid  
them upon the ground. ' I will give a tithe  
to the poor,' says he, and he cut a tenth  
part from the loaf and the bacon. ' Who  
among you is the poorest ? ' And there-  
upon was a great clamour, for the beggars  
began the history of their sorrows and their  
poverty, and their yellow faces swayed like  
the Shelly ~iver when the floods have filled  
it with water from the bogs.

He listened for a little, and, says he,  
' I am myself the poorest, for I have  
travelled the bare road, and by the glitter-

ing footsteps of the sea; and the tattered  
doublet of particoloured cloth upon my  
back and the torn pointed shoes upon my  
feet have ever irked me, because of the  
towered city full of noble raiment \*hich  
was in my heart. And I have been the more  
alone upon the roads and by the sea, be-  
cause I heard in my heart the rustling of  
the rose-bordered dress of her who is more  
subtle than Angus, the Subtle-Hearted,  
and more full of the beauty of laughter than  
Conan the Bald, and more full of the wisdom  
of tears than White-Breasted Deirdre, and  
more lovely than a bursting dawn to them  
that are lost in the darkness. Therefore, I  
award the tithe to myself; but yet, because  
I am done with all things, I give it unto you.'  
So he flung the bread and the strips of  
bacon among the beggars, and they fought  
with many cries until the last scrap was  
eaten. But meanwhile the friars nailed the  
glee man to his cross, and set it upright in

the hole, and shovel led the earth in at the foot, and trampled it level and hard. So then they went away, but the beggars stared on, sitting round the cross. But when the sun was sinking, they also got up to go, for the air was getting chilly. And as soon as they had gone a little way, the wolves, who had been showing themselves on the edge of a neighbouring coppice, came nearer, and the birds wheeled closer and closer.

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' Stay, outcasts, yet a little while,' the crucified one called in a weak voice to the beggars, 'and keep the beasts and the birds from me.' But the beggars were angry because he had called them outcasts, so they threw stones and mud at him, and went their way. Then the wolves gathered at the foot of the cross, and the birds flew lower and lower. And presently the birds lighted all at once upon his head and arms and shoulders, and began to peck at him, and the wolves began to eat his feet. ' Outcasts,' he moaned, ' have you also turned against the outcast ? '

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