

Dismas accompanied Joseph and Mary to the opening of the cavern.

The hurricane was at its height raging so furiously that Mary shuddered.

"It will be a terrible night," whispered the bandit timidly. "The child will be cold and perhaps harm will befall Him . . . if you would like . . ."

Mary glanced uneasily at the sky, now of inky blackness, pierced at times by flashes of vivid lightning and threatening soon to send down torrents of rain.

"Here," pursued Dismas "you will be safe. Gesmas sleeps heavily. No one can follow you into this retreat, and to-morrow, at day break, I will guide you through the forest by paths known to me alone."

Joseph and Mary were still hesitating when they noticed that the Child, still in Dismas' arms, had again fallen asleep. His blond head pressed against the tawny cheek and His little arm around the robber's neck.

They remained.

Before Gesmas awoke next morning, they took leave of the outlaw who had given them hospitality in his cavern, Mary saying to him in her sweet tones: "Mayest thou who compassionated my Child, be blessed and consoled in thy last hour."

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After having, for thirty years, spread terror through Judea by their robberies, extortions and cruelty, Dismas and Gesmas were at last captured by the soldiers of Pontius Pilate, then officiating at Jerusalem as Roman Governor. They were sentenced to the most infamous of all deaths, crucifixion.

A man of sinless life was also to die with them; His only crime was that of declaring Himself to be the Son of God, loving the poor and lowly and preaching a law of charity and mercy to the pitiless arrogant jews.

The cowardly Governor, who found "no cause in this just man," was not brave enough to shield Him from the hatred of the pharisees and boldly proclaim His innocence. He tried however, to excite the compassion of the deicidal jews by bringing Jesus before them when He had been reduced by scourging to the most lamentable state. From the balcony of the prætorium he showed the now