Do you remember me?

The donkey who came from nowhere

the one you kick and beat and yell and stab at

and call ‘Scumbag!’

Eminently forgettable,

that’s what I am,

the one who really has to do the donkey work,

but could be invisible

for all you care.

Do you remember Him?

I’d carried him into the city,

he’d been so kind,

so very tender to me,

‘Thank you for doing all this,’ he’d whispered,

the only one who had spoken like that to me

since the day I was born.

I’d willingly carried him,

though boy, what a weight,

as if the woes of the world were on his shoulders.

It didn’t matter though,

I could have carried ten of him,

he made me feel so good,

so valued,

the star of the show.

Right up there at the front

with those folk who usually kicked and beat me

and yelled at and stabbed me,

folk transformed on that day

as hate turned to joy,

curses turned to blessings,

abuse turned into hosannas:

‘Blessings on him who comes in the name of the Lord,

Hosanna in the Highest.’

It didn’t last.

I knew it never would, really,

however much I hoped.

It wasn’t his fault

he never stopped loving me,

making me feel one hundred feet tall.

It was them,

the kickers, the beaters,

the yellers, the stabbers,

they turned on him

like they always turned on me.

I don’t know why, really.

Perhaps it’s human nature,

nastiness always comes through in the end.

Or the hurts and slurs life had dealt out to you

go sour

and you thrash out.

Perhaps he was too good for them,

and put their badness too much under the spotlight,

They certainly did for him,

mocked him,

scourged him,

killed him.

Hundreds and hundreds of them,

putting the boot in,

yelling, ‘Crucify him,’

positively delighting in his pain,

his anguish,

his death.

It was not a good death.

Crucifixion never is,

exquisite torture:

that’s why the Romans

invented it.

The bleeding,

the hanging,

the breath following painful breath,

the crying out,

the shrieking for the end.

He even felt God had abandoned him:

‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’

But there were other things

which made his death different from

all the other deaths

I had watched with my sorrowful donkey eyes.

He forgave them,

actually forgave the kickers, the beaters,

the yellers, the stabbers:

‘Father forgive them,

they don’t really know what they are doing.’

They knew what they were doing, sure enough.

The nails, the cross beams, the ropes, the whips, the spears:

hardly there by accident.

But I was able to get close to,

nobody takes much notice of me,

a mere donkey.

In between the cries

and the blackness

- where on earth had the sun gone? -

and the fears that even God had abandoned him,

I heard him whisper

before he died,

the strangest death rattle:

‘Father , into your hands I commend my spirit.’

The darkness was contagious

in which I panicked that I’d dreamt up

his love for me,

imagined it all.

How could he, the Lord of heaven and earth,

want to have anything to do with me,

a scumbag?

In my pit of despair I brayed,

‘Lord, how much do you love me?’

My poor Lord

turned his wounded head slowly and painfully towards me,

stretched out his hands on the cross

and said

‘This much,’

And with that he died.

All very nice,

very reassuring,

very affirming,

kept me going

in the dark hours that followed.

They were very quiet hours,

people realised they’d got carried away,

gone too far, far too far,

and laid low and skulked.

For once they didn’t give me much trouble.

Even so, I felt so lost.

How could I live another day without him?

OK, I’d only known him for a week.

But in a funny sort of way,

I felt I’d known him all my life,

that he’d always been there,

carrying me,

the donkey who was supposed to do the carrying.

Actually carrying me through the bad times.

But now he had met his end,

no doubt about that:

what was there left for worthless old me?

I found a bit of comfort,

hanging around with those in the same boat,

the little people,

the worthless people,

the written-off people,

the ones who always

had to do the donkey work.

There was one,

a girl with bright red hair

who they hurled abuse at,

spat at,

a woman of the streets

in polite language,

not that they used polite language.

She played Nancy to my Oliver,

and petted and stroked me.

But she seemed as lost as me.

She’d obviously been taken with him,

been given value by him.

We wandered aimlessly around.

She couldn’t sleep that Saturday,

that Sunday,

getting up early,

inevitably drifting into the garden

where they’d laid his body,

watching wistfully.

I saw a figure stealing up to her

as she stood alone,

vulnerable.

A man about to have his way with her:

#youtooMary.

‘Watch out, love,’ I brayed,

‘He’s going to get you!’

But he didn’t lay a finger on her,

just said her name,

tenderly:

‘Mary!’

That transformed her.

The lines on her face,

the worry lines,

the grief lines,

the I’ve-had-a-hard-life lines,

all disappeared,

vanished in an instant.

And her face

which had been so gloomy,

so downcast, so lifeless,

suddenly glowed,

eyes no longer soul-less

but radiating life in all its fullness

It was miraculous,

a sheer, glorious miracle,

a sun coming out in a sky

that had been so dark,

so very dark.

‘My God,’ I thought.

‘My God!’ she said.

That was it,

that was the first one.

Mary.

Mary with the red hair.

Mary with the shining face.

But then

it broke out like wild-fire,

like a plague flooring the world.

Except it didn’t floor the world

but raised it up.

I’m not quite sure of the sequence,

it all happened so fast

and I’ve only got a donkey brain, after all.

But I think it was Peter next,

Peter who’d been there at the trial,

warming his hands by the fire

whilst his Lord

had had to stand in the dock

shivering.

‘Eh, you’re one of them too,’

a girl had cried.

‘Nah, Miss, you’re barking up the wrong street.

I’ve never come across him before.’

‘But you talk like him,’ she persisted.

‘So do another million northerners,’ he blustered.

‘You’ve got the wrong man, Lady.’

And then the cockerel had crowed

and Peter broke down

and wept

and wept

and wept.

Friday,

through Saturday,

through Sunday:

tears followed tears.

Until a man came out of the shadows

and whispered his name,

Peter,

and in a flash

those tears of sorrow

turned into tears of joy,

his face on fire.

‘My God, another one,’ I brayed.

‘My God!’ Peter said.

At first I thought it as something they’d ate.

That was certainly true at the Emmaus Arms.

I’d trotted over there,

following a couple of them,

another two in dark depression

out for their permitted exercise.

They’d picked up a stranger en route

so then had tried to change

their booking into a table for three.

She was right mad,

was the landlady.

‘You said a table for two,

not a table for three.

What do you think you are doing,

mucking me about like that

when we’re so busy

with the Passover Bank Holiday?’

So busy?

Fussy woman,

there was nobody else there.

Her sharp tongue had frightened off all the customers.

I nuzzled my head

through the window

and saw the stranger take the bread bun,

which that mean landlady

was making them share between the three of them.

Then wallop,

as he broke the bread in two

their faces were on fire

and they galloped off

leaping for joy,

leaving the meal,

the landlady screaming after them for payment,

running all the way back to Jerusalem,

seven long miles.

I couldn’t keep up with them.

In the days and weeks that followed

so many were afflicted,

you just couldn’t contain it.

The band of shining faces

I called them.

‘My goodness me,

at this rate

they really will set the world on fire,’

I thought.

And then he came to me

sad old me,

unexpectedly,

out of the shadows,

‘Donkey,’ he whispered.

‘It’s you, Lord, it’s you,’ I brayed.

‘But, but, but, how?’

‘Don’t worry how,’ he replied.

‘Just take me as proof

that nothing can put a stop to love.

Believe in me.

Believe that love wins.

Believe that I will never ever let you go.’

‘But I’m not worth it, Lord,’

I brayed in protest.

‘I’m a no good donkey, a scumbag.

When it came to the crunch,

I just watched you did.

I should have kicked them,

After all, I really have got a kick like a mule.

I should have bitten them,

the kickers, the smiters

the yellers, the stabbers.

But I did nothing.

I just watched.’

Lovingly my Lord took hold of my head

and smiling did reply,

‘My dear donkey.

It’s not for you to tell me

whether I should love you or not.

Don’t worry yourself.

You are mine for ever.

I will never let you go.

Hold on to that.’

And then I felt my face aglow.

I had become one of the shining ones.

I had caught the resurrection habit.

You really will have to be careful, you know.

If it can afflict even me,

a mere donkey,

who’s to say

that

you

are immune?