

Lazarus

Emile Zola

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translated by Frank J. Morlock.

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LAZARUS
(lyric drama in one act)
by Emile Zola (1894)

translated and adapted
by Frank J. Morlock
c 2002

A deep and savage grotto. To the left, through an opening, a ray of light falls through a narrow gorge. Some blocks of rocks have rolled into the midst of the grotto. It's against one of these rocks that Lazarus' tomb is found; a simple opening hollowed into the earthen rock which is covered with a heavy slab.

CHORUS: Lazarus is dead O Jesus, and we've been weeping for him four the last four days, despairing, all of us, his friends. Here's the tomb where we laid him with our charitable hands. And we are bringing you here, you who walk on water, and who reopen to the light the dead eyes of the blind, so that you can restore him living to our affection. A word from you, all powerful master, and he will revive.

JESUS: Lazarus is dead and my heart is filled with infinite pity. With you, I weep for him; I weep for the misery of suffering humanity. Why reawaken him to this life of terrible torments?

CHORUS: We loved him so much, we want him among us, to love him still. Look at your feet; his mother is there, and his spouse, and his child, who beg you to return him to them.

JESUS: When one has lived, one has done his duty; it would be unjust and cruel to revive him. My mercy, my immense goodness goes to poor creatures freed of accomplished labor, who sleep under the eternal earth a good refreshing sleep.

MOTHER: Oh, Jesus, Lazarus is dead, and I'm his mother. My torn womb cries to you, you, who with a word can close my wound. All the blood of my veins is leaving with my poor child who is gone. Don't you know that I gave him the best of myself, of my suffering, and of my tenderness? He came out of my flesh, he drank my milk,

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he grew in my tears beneath all my wrinkles is a misfortune of his. Return him to me, even if it's necessary that he suffer and that I suffer again. As a child, I kept him on my knee to protect him, without budging, from death which was prowling about. Return him to me; we will weep together; and we will be happy.

JESUS: Ah, poor mother, how I wish you to be happy.

SPOUSE: I am the spouse, O Jesus and Lazarus is dead and I want you to return him to my caresses. In giving me our child he became me. It's as if half of myself has left, fallen into dust there in this tomb. We loved each other with all our hearts, with all our flesh. The wind can no longer pass through my hair without my remembering his kisses. I shiver everywhere in the sun recalling his embrace. And now here I am alone in my bed. I am quite lost and frozen. Return him to me so that I can warm him in my loving arms. Return him to me so I can take him again in my heart and so the world will no longer be empty.

JESUS: Ah! Poor wife, poor lover, how I want to console you!

CHILD: As for me, I am the child, O Jesus. Lazarus is dead, my father is dead, and I am orphan, the frail young offshoot at the foot of the great downbeaten oak. All my young being is terrified and exhausted; return to me his kindly shadow so I can grow in strength and beauty. I have only my weakness and my grace to touch you, and I hold them out to you. I am so small, so shivering, so artless that you cannot leave me there alone on the way. O good friend of little children give me back my father.

JESUS: Ah, poor child, dear child, whose tears I would like to dry.

CHORUS: You hear them. They implore you and we implore you with them. Why are you resisting their tears? You loved Lazarus as much as we. Give to the world a shining example of your power and your love. Perform this miracle.

MOTHER: Perform this miracle, return my son to me. And let all mothers adore you on their knees!

SPOUSE: Perform this miracle, return me my husband and each kiss of mine will glorify you.

CHILD: Perform this miracle, return my father to me so that little children will bless you at night.

CHORUS: Perform this miracle. Give to the world a shining example of your power and your love.

JESUS: You wish it; I accede to your lamentations, insatiable creatures, thirsty dreamers of the eternal living sorrow. But my heart is full of anguish, no man has known the misfortune of returning from the dead. Ah, divine pity, delightful pity, death consoles where all beings rest! you wish it, you wish it, this terrible example?

ALL: Yes, yes, reawaken Lazarus and you will be God and we will bless you, we will adore you.

JESUS: Raise the stone. (three men raise the lid which they keep standing against the rock. Lazarus appears lying in the tomb, wrapped in his shroud.) Lazarus, arise! (a silence) Lazarus, arise!

LAZARUS: (motionless, in a weak voice) Who's calling me?

JESUS: Lazarus, arise!

LAZARUS: (still motionless) Is it you, O Jesus, who troubles my sleep?

JESUS: Lazarus, arise!

Lazarus

LAZARUS: (sitting up) O Jesus, I was sleeping so well.

JESUS: Lazarus, arise!

LAZARUS: (standing, getting out of the tomb supported by two friends) It was so good, O Jesus, this great dark sleep, this great dreamless sleep. Never had I known the sweetness of absolute repose. It's only in the tomb. Still, I slept, I was reposing in the delightful infinities of the night and of silence. Nothing came from the earth anymore, neither the echo of a noise, nor the chill of a day. And I was motionless, ah, the eternal immobility, the endless bliss, so divine in the annihilation of the world. O Master why have you reawakened me? Why this cruelty of snatching the poor dead from his joy of tasting the eternity of sleep? It hardly began; I had thousands and thousands of years to sleep. And it was so good, it was so good.

JESUS: Poor being, these are your friends, they are your relations, who desired it for their happiness. You are going to live again. **LAZARUS:** Live again, oh! no, oh! no! Haven't I paid with suffering my frightful debt of living? I was born without knowing why; I lived without knowing how and you would make me pay double, you would condemn me to start my time of hardship over on this sorrowful earth. What inexplicable sin have I committed for you to punish me with such a chastisement? to live again, alas! To feel oneself die a little each day in his flesh, having the intelligence only to suspect, the will but not the power, the tenderness to weep for the sorrows of my heart. And it was over, I had leaped over death, this second so horrible that it suffices to poison your entire life. I felt the sweat of agony soak me, the blood withdrew from my members, my breath escaped in a last death rattle. And this affliction you want me to experience it twice? that I die twice and that my human suffering exceed that of all men. Oh, no, Master, oh, no!

MOTHER: Lazarus, don't you recognize me? I am your mother, and my bosom crackled with glee when I saw you living, standing. Ah, what prodigious joy to hear you again, to have you still. Come let me escort you, let me take care of you as in the long distant days when you were little.

LAZARUS: No, no, mother. Love me enough to leave me to solitary happiness. What new suffering, if living, I were to lose you! Soon you will rejoin me and you will see how good it is, how good it is. When one has known the delights of this sleep, there's no comparable joy on earth.

SPOUSE: And as for me, Lazarus, me, your wife who sighs after your embrace and who shudders there, when your voice passed over the nape of my neck like a June breeze. Don't you want to know me any more and make my happiness?

LAZARUS: O wife, darling wife, I am no better than an unfaithful spouse who has slept in the bed of another, the softest, the most tempting, the most unforgettable. I have slept with death, the eternal lover, and it was so good, so good to sleep in the arms of silence and of night that my lips are no longer made for the lips of the living.

CHILD: And as for me, father, your child, are you going to forget me? You took my small hand, you led me by the ways. Are you going to leave me thus, all alone? And you repeated to me every morning that we must love life.

LAZARUS: Life, oh, I loved it with all my strength, with all my passion. I lived as one loves, I gave myself completely to the joy of being. And it's thus, my child, that you will live and continue my work! Your mother is there to guide you. As for me, I performed my task and I went to bed, day came and no one has the right to awaken me from my slumber, from my good sleep.

JESUS: You don't wish to live again, O my brother, O poor man who makes my tears flow?

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LAZARUS: No, no. Don't inflict the torment of living on me again. This torture is so frightful that you have never condemned any man to it. I've always loved you and served you O Master, don't make me the greatest example of your wrath which will dismay generations.

CHILD: Father, have you seen heaven? Is it for this you are leaving us?

SPOUSE: What superhuman delights recall you to paradise?

MOTHER: Tell us what you've seen from the other side of the wall from which no one ever returns.

LAZARUS: Nothing, nothing, nothing. I slept: the black immensity, the infinity of silence. Why, if you knew how good it was, to no longer be, to sleep in the nothingness of all. O Master, if you can do it, I beg you perform this other great miracle so I can sleep in this tomb again without suffering, I can receive my eternal interrupted sleep. O my mother, O my wife, O my child, O my friends, if you love me, do me justice, beg Jesus to return me to the sweet death from which no one had the right to bring me back.

MOTHER: Perform this miracle again. I love my son enough to want only his joy. Let him sleep while waiting for me, since he knows where happiness is.

SPOUSE: I implore you, also, perform this miracle. The memory of our kisses will be more ardent than this pale ghost from the tomb. And I will be happy if he is happy.

CHILD: My father is tired, perform this miracle so he can sleep again without suffering. Life won't cease for I am here to continue life.

CHORUS: Without pain. We conjure you that Lazarus shall not suffer more; he mustn't suffer more. Perform this miracle and let Lazarus resume sleep without pain.

JESUS: Yes, yes, without pain this time, poor Lazarus. You would have it, and you've understood, you know now. After the passion of life, death is the great comforter. My austere heart bleeds for him from the effort to revive him. And it is wise, it is just, it is good, that he sleep again.

LAZARUS: O Jesus, thanks! (he goes back into the tomb)

JESUS: Lazarus, go back to sleep. (Lazarus lies down) Lazarus go back to sleep.

LAZARUS: (in a weak voice) What sweetness! Thanks, O Jesus.

JESUS: Lazarus, go back to sleep.

LAZARUS: (lower and lower) The black immensity, the infinity of silence, O Jesus thanks. (his voice is extinguished.)

JESUS: Lazarus, go back to sleep. (a great silence) Replace the stone. (the three men replace the slab on the tomb) Ah! poor human creature, creature of suffering and of misery, sleep. Sleep now forever happy and for eternity.

ALL: Ah! Poor Lazarus, poor tired man, broken by misery and suffering, sleep, sleep now, happy forever, for eternity.

CURTAIN

Lazarus