



## St. Thomas Didymus

By Denise Levertov

In the hot street at noon I saw him  
a small man  
gray but vivid, standing forth  
beyond the crowd's buzzing  
holding in desperate grip his shaking  
teethgnashing son,  
and thought him my brother.  
I heard him cry out, weeping and speak  
those words,  
Lord, I believe, help thou  
mine unbelief,  
and knew him  
my twin:  
a man whose entire being  
had knotted itself  
into the one tightdrawn question,  
Why,  
why has this child lost his childhood in suffering,  
why is this child who will soon be a man  
tormented, torn, twisted?  
Why is he cruelly punished  
who has done nothing except be born?  
The twin of my birth  
was not so close  
as that man I heard  
say what my heart  
sighed with each beat, my breath silently  
cried in and out,  
in and out.

After the healing,  
he, with his wondering  
newly peaceful boy, receded;  
no one  
dwells on the gratitude, the astonished joy,  
the swift  
acceptance and forgetting.  
I did not follow  
to see their changed lives.  
What I retained  
was the flash of kinship.  
Despite  
all that I witnessed,  
his question remained  
my question, throbbed like a stealthy cancer,  
known  
only to doctor and patient. To others  
I seemed well enough.  
So it was  
that after Golgotha  
my spirit in secret  
lurched in the same convulsed writhings  
that tore that child  
before he was healed.  
And after the empty tomb  
when they told me that He lived, had spoken to Magdalen,  
told me  
that though He had passed through the door like a ghost  
He had breathed on them  
the breath of a living man —  
even then  
when hope tried with a flutter of wings  
to lift me —  
still, alone with myself,  
my heavy cry was the same: Lord  
I believe,  
help thou mine unbelief.  
I needed  
blood to tell me the truth,  
the touch

of blood. Even  
my sight of the dark crust of it  
round the nailholes  
didn't thrust its meaning all the way through  
to that manifold knot in me  
that willed to possess all knowledge,  
refusing to loosen  
unless that insistence won  
the battle I fought with life  
But when my hand  
led by His hand's firm clasp  
entered the unhealed wound,  
my fingers encountering  
rib-bone and pulsing heat,  
what I felt was not  
scalding pain, shame for my  
obstinate need,  
but light, light streaming  
into me, over me, filling the room  
as I had lived till then  
in a cold cave, and now  
coming forth for the first time,  
the knot that bound me unravelling,  
I witnessed  
all things quicken to color, to form,  
my question  
not answered but given  
its part  
in a vast unfolding design lit  
by a risen sun.

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