

Jehovah stood on the Mount of Olives, gazing out over the city below, tears streaming down his face. He turned to Sophia as he heard her quiet footsteps on the path behind him and choked on a sob as he took in the sight of her: the exposed skin of her arms, chest, neck, and face swollen and bruised. “What have we done?” he breathed.

“We have to bring her back. It’s useless,” Sophia said. She was beyond tears, in shock from the violence she’d just witnessed in the city and exhausted by the beatings her own body felt vicariously through the physical violence done to Joanna.

Together, Sophia and Jehovah entered Jerusalem, stepping in and amongst the crowds in the streets, unseen and apparently unfelt by those around them. Jehovah whispered blessings under his breath as he passed, letting his fingers brush against the robes of those around him. Sophia felt her anger welling up anew at this undeserved act of grace and spun around to face him: “What are you doing?” she spat. “They are killing us and you would bless them. Do you not hear Joanna’s screams? Do you not feel the rocks cracking her bones?” Now Sophia was screaming, her face red, eyes wet. “She is your child!”

Jehovah’s heart was broken and so was Sophia’s. They stood staring at each other, her bruises spreading and darkening before his eyes. Her gift was also her curse: she was not only spiritually connected to Joanna and himself as they were with each other, but also had a physical connection with

the two of them. Their pleasure was her pleasure; their wounds were her wounds. As the wisdom arm of the Holy Trinity, Sophia spirited through the earth with a grace and agility at which he could only marvel. But the past season had taken its toll on her. She was toughened and angry by the deep-seated grief she felt for their people.

Since even before they set about their work of creation, the Three had been head-over-heels in love with it. The dreaming and then speaking into existence of their most beloved earth and the culmination of their work in humanity was the labor of an intense love for which no word exists in all the universe. They were happy then. And even though their people had not remained faithful, the Three loved and cared for them, cried and cheered for them. They were proud of the freedom they’d bestowed in love and reveled in the full complexity of the human race and all its members.

It had been Joanna’s wish to join humankind in embodied form. They had known from before the beginning that some would choose to use their freedom for evil and ultimately Joanna understood it as her purpose to be with and among their people to bless and love them in their own particular, human way. “We’ve never been away from them and yet they’ve never known what it is to be truly with us,” she’d always said. She was—is—the very face of God. Up close. Intimately. And now it had cost her greatly.

“They are my children too,” Jehovah finally responded.

“They have gone too far this time,” Sophia seethed and, turning on her heel, she swept through the throng.

Reaching a broad opening in the crowd, Jehovah’s breath caught and he knew in his heart that there were not enough tears in creation or beyond to capture the depth of his sadness. The assailants had departed just ahead of their arrival, leaving a ring of on-lookers keeping their distance from his daughter, the savior of the world, lying crumpled on the ground. Mary, a young woman who had attached herself to Joanna early on, knelt with Joanna’s head in her lap, bent over her nearly lifeless body, sobbing.

Sophia flew to Joanna and held her as Jehovah knelt before Mary. Taking her face in his hands, he brushed her tears away. She gazed into his eyes and asked, “Why?”

Jehovah closed his eyes and exhaled. Why, indeed. “Sin,” he finally answered, “Sin is real and it is powerful.” He felt her dissatisfaction, as it was one with his own. “You have done well, my faithful servant. You are the first disciple of the Christ, and you will be rewarded in this life and the next.”

As if suddenly noticing their shameful voyeurism, the gawkers began to avert their gazes and slowly disperse, pretending they’d been on the way to some place all along, not watching the violent stoning of a young woman. Jehovah helped Mary

to her feet and blessed her again and then one more time. Sophia stood and embraced Mary fiercely, saying, “Thank you. Thank you.”

“But I didn’t do anything,” Mary sobbed in protest. “I couldn’t save her. I couldn’t stop them. I’m sorry, I’m so sorry.”

Sophia looked deeply into Mary’s eyes and said, “You knew her. You recognized her when no one else would, and that is *everything*, Mary.”

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Emotionally frayed, the Three entered the garden and Sophia and Jehovah gently laid Joanna down on in her favorite shady grove. Sophia waited only a beat before turning on Jehovah once again, shoving him hard and yelling, “You knew! You knew this would happen and you still let her go. How could you?!”

Crying, always crying now, Jehovah responded, “Sophia, please—you knew this too. You saw it from before the beginning.”

“No, not like this,” she gasped, clutching her chest and doubling over. The physical pain was too much to bear and she felt she would be split down the middle. “I never knew it would be like this,” she spoke more softly now. “Why didn’t you stop her? You should have stopped her. You should have kept her here. And when you didn’t stop her, I should have stopped her,” she trailed off, breath heaving.

“There’s no way I could keep her here against her will. And neither could you. The pull

on her heart is too strong. Her desire is to be with our people and nothing would get in her way. You know that. You know her. You feel it too.” He wrapped his arms around her and she leaned against him, exhausted to her core.

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As the two stood together, Joanna’s voice rose next to them, softly and clearly, “I’m going back.”

Sophia and Jehovah turned slowly toward her. “You can’t be serious,” Jehovah said while Sophia’s mouth hung open in disbelief.

“Of course I’m serious,” Joanna replied. “I didn’t accomplish what I went to do. I need to go back and finish what I started.”

“Yes, well, absolutely,” Jehovah replied, flustered. “I know there’s work to be done, but not now. They’re not ready. Wait. Later generations will be better equipped. They’ll be able to receive you.”

“Ready?” Joanna blinked. “*Ready?* No, of course they’re not *ready*. That’s the point. If someone were *ready* for redemption they wouldn’t need to be redeemed. If I wait, the time will never come. No, the time is now. Right now.”

Sophia and Jehovah stood silently. They looked from Joanna to each other and back. As much as they wanted to, they couldn’t disagree. Joanna’s presence in the world changed the very fabric of it in a way that their presences never had or would. But she hadn’t gone to change the world as such; she had gone to change what it meant to live a human life. Without being recognized for the prophet-savior she was, and without a community to bear witness after Joanna’s time on earth, humanity’s sin remained unredeemed.

As the hard truth of Joanna’s words washed over Sophia, she slowly sank to the ground weeping. The toll on her was enormous, and it showed. If Jehovah was Joanna’s father, Sophia was her twin sister, and the pain she felt was crippling. Joanna rose from the bed, her bruises already fading more quickly than Sophia’s, and knelt next to her, drawing her into an embrace.

“It won’t work,” Sophia argued through her tears. “It won’t get better for them, look ahead, Joanna. There will still be war, sickness, death, destruction. Your being human won’t annihilate Evil. It won’t work.”

“Look farther ahead, Sophia,” Joanna said gently, patiently. “Our work will not be fulfilled until the end of the story, and—you know this—the end will not begin until I start it.

“The violence of sin is too great for humanity to survive it,” Joanna continued. “They need me to show them divine justice, mercy, and healing. It’s the only way out of where they’ve found themselves.”

“They will kill you,” Jehovah said softly, a statement of fact.

“They will kill my human body, but then I will show them the power of resurrection. Let them kill me so that I can defeat death for their benefit.”

Joanna and Jehovah looked to Sophia, who shook her head, tears streaming. “What did we do wrong?”

Jehovah and Joanna knew that Sophia, the very soul of creation, blamed herself for the violent state of the world. It was this sense of guilt that had hardened her as she witnessed generation after generation self-destruct in greed and jealousy. From before the beginning, the Three had been bursting

with such joy at the works of their hearts, but it had been Sophia, with her deeply felt intuition and unique intimacy with creation, who had been the first to experience the agony of loss as, one by one, their children turned away. The bruises on her body only obscured the deep scars she bore.

The seer, Jehovah knew that Joanna's sacrifice really would finally tear Sophia asunder. He also knew that is what it meant for God's power to be greatest in humanity's weakness, for what cost Sophia the most was not in fact her sister's pain, but the hearts of the people who perpetrated it. However, it would be this final rending of herself that would loose her presence in the earth in a new, more powerful way. It would be tandem to Joanna's initial salvific work and change the course of humanity.

"We loved them well," Jehovah said tenderly. He shared in her grief and he longed for wholeness for their own sakes as well as for humanity's, and yet he was certain he didn't regret their decision to gift humans with free will. "We gave them freedom, and they have embraced it with all their might. Our beautiful children, so filled to bursting with life in all they do, good and bad. Onto whom would we lavish our love without them?"

After sitting quietly together for some time, Jehovah asked Joanna, "What would you like to do next?"

"I want live a fuller human life on earth. I want to start out as an infant and grow up—with siblings, neighbors, schoolmates." Sophia and Jehovah nodded, listening. "And I need to go as a man this time."

Sophia looked skeptical. "Joanna," she said. "Your human body isn't going to make a difference.

It's the content of your message that makes people angry, not the packaging."

"No, it *does* matter—humanity is so mired in sin that I have to take on a form they recognize, wrong as they may be. They'll still reject me, but maybe this way they'll hear me first."

The Three were quiet for some time as they reflected on the acute pain they were about to enter into once again. Jehovah mourned the loss of true partnership and community in the early days of creation. Sophia felt the ache of her muscles and bones and looked down at her bare arms, lightly running her fingers over her bruises and the scars beneath. Joanna was scared and defiant at the same time; unlike her partners, she had experienced oppression firsthand. She gazed at the horizon and knew she would never be the same.

The very air surrounding them crackled with the intensity of their emotions and they were finally of an accord, ready to act. Sophia spoke for all of them, calling the angel Gabriel. He appeared opposite her and, nervous in the highly charged space, remained silent and expectant.

Sophia made eye contact first with Joanna and then with Jehovah for their final assent. They each nodded in turn and Sophia, eyes moist, looked at Gabriel and said, "We have a message to deliver to the first disciple. Go to Mary and tell her that she will give birth to a baby," she paused. "And his name will be Jesus."