

A POEM BY BRUCE DAWE

'And a Good Friday was had by all'

You men there, keep those women back,
And, God Almighty, he laid down
on the crossed timbers and Old Silenius,
my offsider, looked at me as if to say
nice work for soldiers, your mind's not your own,
once you sign that dotted line, 'Ave Caesar'
and all that malarkey, 'Imperator Rex.'

Well this Nazarene
didn't make it any easier
really - not like the ones
who kick up a fuss so you can
do your block and take it out on them.

Silenius
held the spikes steady and I let fly
with the sledge-hammer, not looking
on the downswing, trying hard not to hear
over the women's wailing, the bones give way,
the iron shocking the dumb wood.

Orders is orders, I said after it was over.
nothing personal you understand - we
had a drill-sergeant once, thought he was God,
but he wasn't a patch on you.

Then we hauled on the ropes and
he rose in the hot air
like a diver just leaving the springboard, arms spread,
so it seemed,
over the whole damned creation,
over the big men who must have had it in for him,
and the curious ones who'll watch anything if it's free,
with only the usual women caring anywhere
and a blind man in tears.