

## **The Murderer & Serapis**

A murderer spread his palliasse  
beneath a rotten wall  
and in his dream came Serapis  
and warned him it would fall:

*Jump for your life, wretch and be quick  
or in a second you'll be dead.*  
He jumped, and tons of crumbling brick  
came crashing on his bed.

The murderer gasped with relief,  
he thanked the gods above.  
It was his innocent belief  
they'd saved him out of love.

But once again came Serapis  
In the middle of the night,  
and once more uttered prophecies  
that set the matter right:

*Don't think the gods have let you go  
and connive at homicide.*  
*We've spared you that quick crushing, so  
we can get you crucified.*

*Palladus, c. 360 – 430*  
*Trans. from Greek by Tony Harrison*