

THE DREAM OF CLAUDIA PROCULA

A Play for Easter
by
Jewell Ellen Smith

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"When he (Pontius Pilate) was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, 'Have thou nothing to do with that just man; for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him.'..."

But "Then released he Barabbas, and when Pilate had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified."--*Matthew 27:19, 26*

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TIME: The week of the Jewish Passover Festival, about 30 AD.

PLACE: Jerusalem

CHARACTERS: (in the order of appearance)

Crowd of People

Scribe

Pharisee

Sadducee

Longinus, a centurion in the Roman Army of Occupation

Atticus, a centurion

Felix, a soldier under the command of Longinus

Senator Petronius, the father of Longinus

Christ Figure

Three Bystanders

A Father from Jericho

Lame Child

Simon Peter

Claudia Procula, the wife of Pontius Pilate

Damaris, Claudia Procula's attendant

Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor of Judea

Two Roman Guards

Isaiah, an Old Testament prophet

Servant

Barabbas, a notorious bandit

1st and 2nd Thieves
 Angel of The Lord
 Enemies of The Christ:
 1st, 2nd, and 3rd False Witnesses
 Three Soldiers
 Simon of Cyrene
 Mary Magdalene
 Salome
 Joanna

THE STORY TOLD

This drama presents the Biblical story of how Jesus of Nazareth was crucified and buried and then rose again and ascended into heaven--told from the viewpoint of the Roman Centurion in charge of the crucifixion, a Roman senator visiting in Jerusalem, and Madam Claudia Procula, the wife of Pontius Pilate, who--because of a dream--almost prevented her husband from condemning the Christ to death.

The plot follows Biblical facts--often verse-by-verse, line-by-line--and offers details any careful reader can find between the lines.

THE ACTS

ACT I -- Thursday afternoon of Passover Week

ACT II -- Thursday evening

ACT III -- Friday morning

ACT IV -- Saturday afternoon, late; Sunday morning, early; Some 40 days later.

SCRIPT

ACT I Scene 1

Scene 1. On the street which passes in front of the great temple in Jerusalem, commonly called Herod's Temple. It is Thursday afternoon of Passover Week.

A large crowd is gathering, by twos and threes, and waiting on the temple steps for the arrival of Jesus of Nazareth, who teaches here daily during the festival season.

Several women, and others from Galilee, are seated on the steps. Claudia Procula and Damaris--disguised as peasants--arrive. Claudia carries a basket of oranges; Damaris a mesh bag holding two round loaves of bread.

Next to arrive are three leaders of the Jews. They are talking, in confidential tones, as they come into view.

SCRIBE: What we've got to do is to trap this great teacher, this so-called prophet, in his speech!

PHARISEE: Right! Entangle him! Get him to say something in such a way that he will incriminate himself. He teaches right here at the temple every day. So, it ought to be easy.

SADDUCEE: If it were left up to me, I'd have him arrested and then think up a charge.

SCRIBE: I have it on good authority that certain members of our Council are determined

to get rid of him. A week or so ago when he went down to Bethany and raised that man Lazarus from the dead, that was the last straw!

PHARISEE: I have an idea!

SCRIBE: What?

PHARISEE: Let's ask this teacher from Galilee a leading question about paying taxes to Rome! I'll say, very seriously of course, "Great Teacher, is it lawful to pay tribute to Caesar?" Then, if he says "no," we can claim he is trying to get the people to revolt. If he says "yes," then we'll say he is a traitor to our nation!

SCRIBE: That's a brilliant idea!

SADDUCEE: Right!

Three meld into the gathering crowd. Longinus and a fellow centurion, Atticus, come striding up the street, making small talk between themselves. Both wear their scarlet capes over their regular uniform.

LONGINUS: I suppose you heard the rumor?

ATTICUS: Which one?

LONGINUS: About us being put on 24-hour alert.

ATTICUS: I wouldn't be surprised. Do you realize that of the 3000 troops we had in Caesarea, nearly half of them have been ordered here to Jerusalem!

Pontius Pilate must really be afraid of an uprising.

LONGINUS: *with a tinge of contempt* The great Roman governor is afraid of everything and everybody--except his poor little wife. He won't listen to her.

ATTICUS: She's a pretty lady. A real lady, I hear.

LONGINUS: Pontius Pilate sure would get along better with the Jews if he would take Madam Claudia Procula's advice. She understands these people.

ATTICUS: You knew the governor and his family back in Rome, didn't you?

LONGINUS: Yes, but only through my father and his connections in the senate. Father knows everybody in Rome! Even Emperor Tiberius.

ATTICUS: Is it really true that Pontius Pilate is kin to Emperor Tiberius? And that that's how he got to be governor here in Judea?

LONGINUS: How he got appointed governor I can't say. But his wife is the granddaughter of the late Caesar Augustus. *lowers voice* And, poor lady, she is the illegitimate daughter of Madam Claudia, who is now the third wife of Emperor Tiberius.

ATTICUS: Wow! I didn't know all that! *glances toward temple* I see there's another crowd gathering to listen to that man from Nazareth that everybody's talking about. He is some teacher! Just fascinating! You ought to hear him.

LONGINUS: I have heard him. Last winter, when I was sent up to Capernaum. There was such a crowd down by the Sea of Galilee that he had to teach from a fishing boat tied there. And--

Roman soldier Felix comes running up the street, calling to Longinus. Senator Petronius follows Felix, at a much slower pace.

FELIX: Wait! Wait! Centurion Longinus! Sir, please wait up!

Centurions halt, turn around

Sir, your father is here! He's come all the way from Rome!

LONGINUS: Why, Father! What a surprise!

Two greet each other warmly

PETRONIUS: Ah, Longinus! It's been a long time!

LONGINUS: Yes! *turns to Atticus* Father, this is my friend, Centurion Atticus. Atticus, I'd like you to meet my father, Senator Petronius--whom I haven't seen in a year!

ATTICUS: How do you do, Sir.

PETRONIUS: It's good to meet you, Centurion.

LONGINUS: *still elated* How is everything in Rome? And Mother? Is Mother well?

PETRONIUS: Why, yes. Everything's fine. Your mother sends warmest greetings. I came just to congratulate you! On your promotion!

LONGINUS: Oh, that. It wasn't such a big thing. After all, I--

PETRONIUS. It was a big thing to me! It's not every day that a man has his son promoted to the rank of Centurion in the Imperial Army of Rome!

LONGINUS: You're kind to say so, Father.

ATTICUS: Longinus, I'd best be getting on to the fortress. Senator Petronius, sir, I hope to see you again while you're in Jerusalem.

PETRONIUS: Yes, of course.

FELIX: *to Longinus* Sir, shouldn't I be going back to the barracks?

LONGINUS: Yes, Felix.

FELIX: Sir, do you want me to put your father's baggage in your quarters? We left it in the guardroom.

LONGINUS: Yes, do that.

PETRONIUS: Thank you, Felix.

Felix salutes, exits.

LONGINUS. Well, Father, it's wonderful that you've come. If I can manage to get leave, I'll start showing you around Jerusalem--this very afternoon. There's lots to see. It's an unusual old city. Rather crowded this week on account of the Jewish Passover Festival.

Petronius notices crowd assembled on temple steps.

PETRONIUS: I recognize the great temple over there. Do the people still call it Herod's Temple?

LONGINUS: I think so.

PETRONIUS: Why do you suppose all those people are gathered on the steps?

They gradually move toward crowd.

LONGINUS: They're waiting for Jesus of Nazareth.

PETRONIUS: Who is Jesus of Nazareth?

LONGINUS: Ah, I'll tell you, Father, that's a question not so easy to answer.

For one thing, he is a great teacher. And, a physician. He heals all manner of diseases. He works miracles!

Some people say he is an old Jewish prophet come back, the one named Elijah.

His followers have seen him raise three people from--

Grasps his father's arm

My word! Look, Father! There's Madam Claudia Procula!

PETRONIUS: Claudia Procula? Here?

LONGINUS: Right in the middle of the crowd. Her maid is with her. See her?

PETRONIUS: No, I don't see her. Of course Claudia Procula and Pilate have been gone from Rome three years, but--

LONGINUS: She's disguised! Looks like a peasant. See the woman holding the basket of oranges?

PETRONIUS: Yes? Why, yes! That is Claudia Procula. As beautiful as ever! She's always been a princess royal. Even as a child she was sensitive, and, quite sophisticated.

LONGINUS: She is a secret believer in this Jesus of Nazareth, but I'm surprised to see her out here in this crowd. I'll bet Pontius Pilate doesn't know it.

PETRONIUS: Before I forget to mention it, I have letters to deliver to the governor and to Claudia Procula.

LONGINUS: Letters?

PETRONIUS: Yes, Emperor Tiberius sent an official letter. And when his wife heard I was coming to Judea, she dashed off a personal note to her daughter. So, I'll have to call at their residence, pay my respects, and deliver the letters. There's no hurry, though. I--

CHRIST FIGURE enters, followed by Simon Peter and other disciples. There's a stir among the crowd. The Christ moves to a vantage point in their midst. People gather closer.

LONGINUS: There he is! The man in the white robe is Jesus of Nazareth.

Those men with him are some of his disciples. He has twelve close followers who go with him everywhere.

PETRONIUS: That's interesting. I'd like to hear this man speak.

LONGINUS: I'll tell you what let's do, then, Father. Suppose you stay here and listen, and I'll hurry back to headquarters and see if I can arrange for at least three days leave.

I'll meet you back here--say in half an hour?

PETRONIUS: That will be fine, Son.

Longinus exits, Petronius moves closer to crowd. Spotlight shifts to CHRIST FIGURE. Scene 2 opens as Christ Figure begins to speak. There is no break.

End of Scene 1

Scene 2

Scene 2. On the steps of the Temple in Jerusalem. The CHRIST FIGURE is seated, with a large crowd gathered 'round him.

CHRIST FIGURE: Verily, verily I say unto you that two sparrows are sold for a farthing.

And not one of them shall fall on the ground without your Father in heaven knowing.

Fear not, therefore, you are of more value than many sparrows.

Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in Heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in Heaven.

...

Whosoever shall give a cup of cold water unto one of these little ones--in the name of a disciple--verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.

Cf. Matt. 10; Luke 12

"Consider the lilies how they grow; they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

"If God so clothe the grass, which is today in the field, and tomorrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith.

"And seek not what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be of doubtful mind...
Your Father knoweth that you have need of these things.

"But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you.

"Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom ..."
Luke 12:27-32

"The kingdom of God is at hand."

1ST BYSTANDER: Great Teacher, you say that God will give us the kingdom. How? Tell us the way.

CHRIST FIGURE: "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." *Cf. John 14:6*

"I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep ... and I know my sheep, and am known of mine...."

2ND BYSTANDER: *sharply* How long will you keep us in doubt? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly! *Cf. John 10:24*

3RD BYSTANDER: Yes! Tell us! Are you the Christ, or not?

CHRIST FIGURE: "I told you, and you believed not; the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me.

"But you believed not, because you are not of my sheep, as I said unto you.

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me;

"And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

"My Father, which gave them to me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.

"I and my Father are one." *Cf. John 10:24-30*

2ND BYSTANDER: *indignantly* That is blasphemy! No man can make himself God! Our Sanhedrin will hear about this!

3RD BYSTANDER: Yes! And before the sun sets! We should stone you to death!

Two shake their fists at Christ Figure, exeunt hurriedly

FATHER from Jericho, holding his lame child in his arms, steps out of the crowd, brings the child to the Christ.

FATHER: Great Master, have pity on my poor child! He has been lame from birth. See?
Shows bandaged leg and foot

He wants to run and play like other little children. Heal him!

CHRIST FIGURE: You are from Jericho, aren't you?

FATHER: Yes, Master, I am.

CHRIST FIGURE: Do you believe I have the power to make your child whole?

FATHER: Yes, Master, I know you can make him whole. Everybody in Jericho has been telling me that wherever you go, teaching men about the kingdom of God, that you work miracles!

"The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up." Cf. *Matt. 11:5; Isaiah 35:5-7*

CHRIST FIGURE: You have great faith. *Takes child in his arms, prays, looking toward heaven.*

Oh, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, let this child be made whole, according to the faith of this his father.

Christ Figure unbinds child's limb, stands him on his feet. Child runs to his father.

CHILD: *crying out* I can walk! Look! Father, look!

Father grasps the child up in his arms and turns to Christ Figure.

FATHER: Oh, Master, let me follow you! Let me be your disciple!

CHRIST FIGURE: Go to your home, and tell all Jericho what great things God has done for you.

FATHER: I will, Master! I will! I will tell it every day as long as I live!

Father exits, leading his child, who skips along with great glee.

CHRIST FIGURE: "If any man would be my disciple, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me."

A new message I give to you: Love one another. Love your enemies.

A murmur of surprise sweeps through the crowd.

1ST BYSTANDER: That is a hard teaching, Master! We hate our enemies!

CHRIST FIGURE: I say unto you: pray for your enemies. Now, "come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and you shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Cf. Matthew 11:28-30

SCRIBE, PHARISEE, and SADDUCEE come forward. Cf. Matthew 22:15-22.

SCRIBE: Great Teacher, you speak of burdens. All of us know that the Romans have placed on us an enormous tax burden.

SADDUCEE: A grievous burden!

PHARISEE: Yes, Great Teacher, the tax Caesar Tiberius requires us to pay causes many hardships. Now you are well versed in the law. Tell us what you think. Is it lawful to pay tribute to Caesar?

CHRIST FIGURE: You hypocrites! Why do you tempt me? "Show me the tribute money."

Pharisee hands him a coin.

CHRIST FIGURE: *looking at coin* "Whose is this image and superscription?"

PHARISEE: Caesar's.

CHRIST FIGURE: *as he returns the coin* "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's."

Christ Figure turns back to crowd. Pharisee, Scribe, and Sadducee leave, muttering among themselves. The audience hears the remark of the Pharisee.

PHARISEE: I never expected such a clever answer as that!

CHRIST FIGURE: *to crowd* Do you understand what I have said to you this day?

CROWD: *In unison* Yes, Master. We understand.

SIMON PETER: *to Christ Figure* Come, Master. The hour is late. We have made ready the Feast of the Passover. So let us go.

CHRIST FIGURE: Yes, Simon Peter. The hour is late. And my hour is almost at hand. Come.

Crowd breaks up. Some leave in one direction, some another. Claudia Procula and Damaris scurry away, not noticing Senator Petronius. As the last person departs, Centurion Longinus returns. He looks, and is, dejected.

PETRONIUS: Ah, you're back! Just in time. Longinus, I wish you could have heard the things this Galilean taught!

LONGINUS: So do I.

PETRONIUS: What's the matter, Son? You look dejected. Didn't your commander approve your request for leave?

LONGINUS: Oh, Father, it's not just that. All troops have been put on 24-hour alert. So there's no leave for anybody. But that's not the worst thing I learned from the commander.

PATRONIUS: What do you mean?

LONGINUS: *desperately* I've been assigned to take a detail of four of my men and crucify two thieves! Tomorrow morning!

PETRONIUS: Why, that's-- That's-- That's--

LONGINUS: *imitating voice of commander* "That's just routine!" My commander said. "Two thieves are nothing!" he told me. Then he added:

"Don't look so glum. Maybe they'll die before sundown and you can take the rest of the afternoon off!"

Then, as I was going down the hall, the commander called out: "Break their legs and they'll die quicker!"

PETRONIUS: I'm truly sorry, Son.

LONGINIUS: I do bring you one bit of good news. Pontius Pilate has learned of your arrival, and he wishes you to come to the fortress and have dinner with him and Madam Claudia Procula. He invited me, too, but of course, I'll be on duty.

PETRONIUS: The invitation is nice, but to be truthful, Son, I'd rather be spending the time with you.

LONGINUS: Yes, I know.

PETRONIUS: Pontius Pilate and his wife are staying in the Antonia Fortress?

LONGINUS: Yes. I understand their quarters there are in one of the small towers. I'll walk with you back to my barracks, and you will have time to rest a while. *Two talk on as they exeunt*

PETRONIUS: I hate to admit it, but I am slightly worn out. We docked in Caesarea day before yesterday. But it seems I've been on the road a month....

END OF ACT I

ACT II, Scene 1

Scene 1. Thursday evening, in a small dining-sitting room at the living quarters of Pontius Pilate, in the Antonia Fortress. There is a table set for three persons, low chairs, a small table, and a couch.

Claudia Procula is seated near the small table, reading a tattered scroll. She wears a lavish flowing gown and has ornaments in her hair--such as she would wear if she were still in Rome.

Damaris enters, carrying a silver bowl of freshly cut flowers. Her attire is plain.

DAMARIS: Madam Claudia Procula, do you want me to put these flowers on the dinner table, or here on this table?

CLAUDIA: Before you set them anywhere, let me smell them.

D. holds bouquet for C. to take a sniff.

Oh, how sweet! I'm always glad when springtime comes to Judea. The flowers here in Jerusalem are just lovely.

Put them on the dinner table. That way, we can enjoy them during the meal.

DAMARIS: I see only three places set. I thought you were expecting several guests.

CLAUDIA: No, Damaris. Just an old friend from Rome. Dear Senator Petronius. I've known the senator since I was a child.

DAMARIS: Do you want me to give the servants any special instructions about when to serve dinner?

CLAUDIA: Just the usual: "Wait until Governor Pontius Pilate comes." The servants know Pilate is always late. And I don't know just when to expect the senator.

DAMARIS: Madam Claudia, you remember my little Jewish friend, Miriam?

CLAUDIA: I think so. Her husband works in the kitchen of the High Priest Cai-a-phas?

DAMARIS: That's the one. Well, Ma'am, Miriam is right sick. Will it be all right if I run over there after while and see about her?

CLAUDIA: Of course. But be sure to wrap up good. It's chilly these nights in Jerusalem.

Resumes reading scroll

DAMARIS: Yes, Ma'am. *Damaris exits, returns almost immediately.*

DAMARIS: *hurriedly* Ma'am, your husband has arrived. And the old gentleman from Rome is with him. And the guards, of course.

CLAUDIA: Thank you, Damaris.

DAMARIS: I'll tell the servants.

CLAUDIA: There's no hurry. Ask them to wait a few minutes before they bring the food.

Damaris exits as Pilate and Petronius are entering. Two Romans following Pilate stop at the doorway. Pilate turns to them, as Petronius goes to greet Claudia Procula.

PILATE: *to soldiers* Wait for me in the hallway.

FIRST SOLDIER: Yes, Sir.

PILATE: I may want to go back to my office later this evening.

BOTH SOLDIERS: *in unison as they salute, exit.* Yes, Sir.

CLAUDIA: *warmly as she rises to greet Petronius* Senator Petronius! Welcome to Jerusalem!

PETRONIUS: Ah, my dear child!

CLAUDIA: It's so good to see you!

PETRONIUS: I suppose I'll be calling you "dear child" all your life! I'm glad to see you!

PILATE: Claudia, I told the senator you'd be delighted that he has come.

PETRONIUS: I've brought you a letter from your mother. *Hands rolled up letter to Claudia*

CLAUDIA *much pleased* Thank you, very much. It seems ages since she wrote to me. Pilate is always getting letters from Emperor Tiberius, but Mother Claudia seldom sends me a message. Here, Senator Petronius, have a seat.

Three sit down at the dinner table

May I open and read my letter now?

PETRONIUS: Of course, of course. Governor, you may read your letter now, too, if you like.

PILATE: No, thank you. It can wait. Senator, don't tell Emperor Tiberius, but he wastes time, ink, and paper when he writes to me!

PETRONIUS: Oh?

PILATE: Every fool letter from the emperor says the same thing:

- "Keep the Jews quiet! I don't want to hear of any riots! And no uprisings!
- Watch the chief priests! They are cunning. Keep your eye on the Zealots.
- Report to me personally, by return post."

Every time, it's the same thing.

Servant begins placing food on table

CLAUDIA: Mother's note is sweet! She wants me to come to Rome for a visit.

PILATE: You can go to Rome any day you want to go. Ships sail from Caesarea all the time. I've been telling you that for three years.

CLAUDIA: *pleasantly* Yes, Pilate, I know. Maybe I'll go sometime this fall.

PILATE: *turning to Senator* Senator, I don't understand my wife. I hate this place! And I detest these wretched Jews.

But Claudia Procula likes it here! She speaks the Aramaic dialect like a native. She studies the ancient writings of the Jews. She has learned all about their customs and their religion!

Why, they've even got her thinking there's only one god! Can you imagine that?

PETRONIUS: I never think too much about any of the gods.

PILATE: What I say is if you're going to believe in a god, believe in all of them. Be on the safe side. Worship all the gods of Mount Olympus!

But these stupid Jews say there's only one god.

And what are they doing?

These Jews are sitting around, waiting for this god of theirs to send some great king who is going to make all of us Romans go away, and they'll have their own glorious nation once more!

CLAUDIA: *gently* Ah, Pilate, dear, you just don't understand these people. And that's the reason you have so many problems with them.

PILATE: Well, at least I don't dream about any of them at night like you do! *Turns to Petronius* Why, Senator, last night this lovely wife of mine dreamed she saw an ancient Jewish prophet who lived 700 years ago. And he was standing--

1st GUARD enters, briskly

1ST GUARD: Excuse me, Governor, Sir! The notorious Barabbas has just been captured!

Pilate, much excited, jumps to his feet.

PILATE: Barabbas captured?

1ST GUARD: Yes, Sir. Your deputy wanted you to know.

PILATE: *much elated* So! We've finally caught the big bandit! This is great! *Turns to Petronius*

Senator, you'll please forgive me. I have to go to the prison. This Barabbas they've caught is a dangerous guerrilla fighter--a member of the "Sicarii," or, the "dagger men."

Claudia, you should tell our guest about Barabbas. And go ahead with dinner. I don't know when I'll get back.

Pilate leaves quickly. The guard follows him.

CLAUDIA: I'm sorry, Senator Petronius.

PETRONIUS: That's all right.

CLAUDIA: It's this way almost every evening when we're in Jerusalem, that is. Over at Caesarea, things are quieter. But every spring when it's time for the Jewish Passover Festival, Pilate insists on coming with the troops to Jerusalem.

PETRONIUS: Your husband suggested that you should tell me about this prisoner Barabbas.

CLAUDIA: I had much rather tell you about the wonderful teacher who's in the city this week for the festival. Barabbas was a leader in a recent Jewish uprising, in which many people were killed. But I've never seen him.

PETRONIUS: And the wonderful teacher? Could that be the man from Galilee who healed the little child at the temple this afternoon?

CLAUDIA: Why, yes! How did you know?

PETRONIUS: I was there, waiting for my son. I saw you and your companion, too. But--

CLAUDIA: *with finger on her lips* Shh-hh-h--It's a secret that I believe in Jesus and his teachings!

PETRONIUS: I thought he presented some fantastic ideas. And to heal that lame child the way he did was nothing short of a miracle.

Do you think he is some kind of a god?

CLAUDIA: I'm not sure, yet. I've been studying--that is, reading and re-reading--some poetry written by an ancient Jewish prophet named Isaiah. And I'm beginning to think Jesus of Nazareth is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy.

PETRONIUS: The fulfillment of a prophecy? Sounds intriguing.

CLAUDIA: Isaiah's poetry--even after it has been translated--is still what I would term lofty, sublime. But there is in it a sad, foreboding element quite difficult to grasp.

PETRONIUS: It is that deep?

CLAUDIA: Yes. In my dreams last night the aged prophet was standing right here in this room, reading his poetic prophecy. And he talked to me.

I can still hear him. Almost see him.

Prophet Isaiah appears, scroll in hand, and reads to Claudia. Petronius does not see, or hear, Isaiah; he merely notices his hostess has lapsed into something of a reverie.

ISAIAH: *reading* "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.... The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness. Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

"Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain;

"And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

"Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him....

"He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." --*Isaiah 40*

"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.

"Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing...." --*Isaiah 35*

"Who hath believed our report? And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?...

"Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

"But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed.

"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

"...he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter ...

"...He was taken from prison and from judgment ... he was cut off out of the land of the living ...

"And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth ...

"...He hath poured out his soul unto death ..." --*Isaiah 53*

Isaiah rolls up his scroll, speaks gently to Claudia.

ISAIAH: Claudia Procula, let thy tears run down like a river, for thou shalt see come to pass these things written so long ago.

Isaiah fades away. Claudia continues to sit still, lost in reverie.

PETRONIUS: *Cautiously, gently.* Claudia, child?

CLAUDIA: *as if startled* Oh! I'm sorry.

PETRONIUS: You were suddenly so quiet that I--

CLAUDIA: I'm very sorry. And I apologize. I suppose I was just lost in the dream again. *brightens tone* Do you believe in dreams, Senator Petronius?

PETRONIUS: To some extent. Yes. But I don't think anybody knows why, or how, dreams come.

Our dreams seem to mirror what is happening all around us. I think perhaps--

A servant entering with a large platter of fruit is almost knocked down--some of the fruit is spilled and rolls all over the floor--when Damaris bolts in, much distraught, and out of breath.

DAMARIS: *speaking loud and fast* Ma'am, it was a terrible thing! Mal-chus went with them to that garden and he got his ear cut off!

That fisherman from Galilee whipped out his sword and sliced it clear off!

It was real dark, and they all looked alike, but the one named Judas--

CLAUDIA: *calmly* Damaris, calm yourself. Now, that's better. Tell us what has happened. We don't know who Mal-chus is or what dark garden he went to, or who was there, or anything.

DAMARIS: *more slowly* Ma'am, Mal-chus is the husband of my friend Miriam. He's a cook at the palace of the Jewish high priest.

CLAUDIA: Yes, now I remember.

DAMARIS: Well, Ma'am, the way it happened was, the high priest got a whole gang of people together--some more priests and captains of the temple, and the elders, and guards, and officers--and they took swords and staves and lanterns and torches and went stealing along, real quietly, across the little brook Kidron to that garden called Gethsemane.

A man named Judas Iscariot was showing them the way, because the high priest had already paid him--paid him 30 pieces of silver, mind you--to tell them which man to arrest.

CLAUDIA: *anxiously* Which man to arrest?

DAMARIS: This Judas gave a kiss to the good teacher from Galilee! The kiss was the sign, you see.

CLAUDIA: Oh, no!

DAMARIS: They tied his hands, and bound him with ropes. And that's when all the commotion broke out.

CLAUDIA: Oh, goodness!

DAMARIS: The next thing Mal-chus knew the man called Peter whacked him with his sword and cut off his right ear! Mal-chus screamed and started fighting the man.

Then, somehow, the Galilee teacher got one hand out of the ropes and reached over and touched Mal-chus' ear and healed it! Just like that!

Then--now Mal-chus himself told me this because he thought it mighty strange--the good teacher turned to the man with the sword and said:

"Simon Peter, put your sword into the sheath; the cup which my Father has given me, shall I not drink it?"

Ma'am, those were his very words. But there was no cup there! No cup at all.

CLAUDIA: This is dreadful! Where is Jesus now? And his disciples? Where are they?

DAMARIS: They all ran away, but he is still at the palace of the high priest. The Jewish Council they call the San-- San--

CLAUDIA The Sanhedrin.

DAMARIS: The Sanhedrin is holding his trial--tonight!

CLAUDIA: Trial? How terrible! *Turns to senator* I've been hearing for weeks that the Jewish leaders were plotting against Jesus of Nazareth. But I had no idea it would come to this.

PETRONIUS: The man hasn't committed any sort of crime, has he?

CLAUDIA: Why no! Not unless it's a crime to tell people about the one true God.

Or, a crime to make the blind see and the lame walk, and to cleanse lepers and to heal all manner of other diseases. That's what he has been doing.

PETRONIUS: Perhaps your husband could use his influence and get the Sanhedrin to release him. He knows the high priest and the other council members, doesn't he?

CLAUDIA: Oh, yes. Pilate knows the cunning Cai-a-phas. And the others. But the Jews have their own court system. And Pilate wouldn't interfere in one of their trials. Not for anything. Or anybody!

DAMARIS. Ma'am, may I go now?

CLAUDIA: Of course, Damaris. Go have your supper. Thank you for telling us these things.

DAMARIS: Yes, Ma'am. *Exits*

PETRONIUS: Dear Claudia, it's time for me to be going.

CLAUDIA: So soon?

PETRONIUS: I promised my son I'd get back to his barracks in time to visit a bit before bedtime.

CLAUDIA: I see Centurion Longinus now and then. Give him my regards, and please tell him what has happened to Jesus of Nazareth.

PETRONIUS: I certainly will. He will be sad to hear it. Longinus is already much upset over his orders for tomorrow morning. And I can't blame him.

CLAUDIA: What kind of orders?

PETRONIUS: He and a detail of soldiers from his company have orders to carry out the crucifixion of two thieves!

CLAUDIA: Oh, mercy! The poor thieves. Senator Petronius, I hope I live long enough to see Rome outlaw death by crucifixion!

I just hope I live 'till that day. A crucifixion is so brutal! So inhuman!

PETRONIUS: Yes, I know. Thank you for this visit. And the dinner.

CLAUDIA: It was a pleasure to have you. And I hope we see you again before you leave. When will you be going back to Rome?

PETRONIUS: In about a week. I want to see the ancient city of Jericho while I'm down here.

CLAUDIA: It's a very old city.

PETRONIUS: Well, good night!

CLAUDIA: Good night.

Petronius exits. Claudia, still much upset, walks the floor. A servant begins clearing the table.

SERVANT: *holding platter of grapes* Ma'am, would you like some of these grapes before I put them away?

CLAUDIA: No, no thank you. *Servant exits* I must think of what to do. I believe I'll wait up for Pilate but I am so weary.

Pilate might help. Even if he is afraid of the Jewish leaders.

The problem is Pilate has never even seen Jesus of Nazareth, much less heard his wonderful words. Words of Life!

Sits down on couch

That's what they are: Wonderful Words of Life!

Damaris enters, speaks gently to Claudia.

DAMARIS: Madam Claudia, don't you think you should be going to bed now? It's getting late. And you didn't sleep much last night.

CLAUDIA: Yes, I know, but I want to wait up for my husband. You go ahead to your

room, Damaris, and I'll just rest here on the couch 'till Pilate comes. *Leans back on couch*
 DAMARIS: You'll need a blanket. The night chill has set in. *hurries to bring in coverlet, tucks it around Claudia's feet*

CLAUDIA: *as an afterthought* Please hand me that scroll of poetry, Damaris. I'll read a while.

Damaris bring scroll, exits. Claudia begins reading.

CLAUDIA: *reading* "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.... He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom... *voice begins to fade* ... He was taken from prison.... He hath poured out his soul..." *voice drifts off as Claudia falls asleep.*

End of Scene 1, of ACT II

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Scene 2

Scene 2 -- Immediately following Scene 1. There is no break as Claudia sleeps and her dream unfolds.

CLAUDIA: *Fitfully, in her sleep* That must be a huge crowd. What are they chanting?

(1) *Off stage, a crowd of many voices chants, as if far away:* "Barabbas! Barabbas! Barabbas!"

Barabbas, a wild looking man brandishing a dagger, comes dashing by Claudia's couch, laughing and shouting: "Ha! The Romans will never keep me in jail! Not me! Not BARABBAS! Not the Bad Bandit! I'll kill ever' Roman I see! Starting with Pontius Pilate!" *storms on out*

(2) *Off stage the crowd's muffled chant becomes:* "Crucify! Crucify! Crucify!"

Two Thieves, despondent and disheveled, and with their ankles chained together, stumble past Claudia's couch, following the same path as Barabbas.

First Thief: *glumly* Do you think the Romans will actually crucify us?

Second Thief: I don't think it. I know it. And it's going to be Friday morning.

Wham! Wham! Wham! They'll nail us up!

First Thief: *groaning* Ahh-hh-h-- What a way to end life.

Second Thief: Yeah. I wish I had never been born. *Thieves drag themselves on off stage*

Off stage the crowd again chants: "Crucify! Crucify! Crucify!"

Claudia Procula wakes suddenly, screaming.

CLAUDIA: Oh! Oh! Oh! *Sits up* The guards! The guards! Call the guards!

Damaris rushes in.

DAMARIS: *gently shaking Claudia* Ma'am, you're dreaming again! Lie back down, now. And I'll stay with you.

CLAUDIA: *leaning back on her pillows* Yes, it was a dream. Just a dream.

DAMARIS: Do you want me to get you anything?

CLAUDIA: No, no, Damaris. Nothing. I'll be all right. You can go back to your room.

DAMARIS: Yes, Ma'am. *Pulls coverlet over Claudia, tiptoes out*

Claudia, the scroll still clutched in her arms, falls asleep. ANGEL OF THE LORD enters, comes near Claudia's couch.

ANGEL: *with great kindness* Ah, lovely Roman lady with a pure heart, sleep on. Take a

sweet rest. For tomorrow your heart will break.

Your husband, Pontius Pilate, the powerful Roman ruler here in the land of Judea, will make the mistake of his life.

Tomorrow Pontius Pilate will become a part of the greatest crime ever committed in the history of man. His name will go down in infamy for all ages to come.

Tomorrow your tears will "run down like a river", as the old prophet said. You will weep. Not for your husband, or his name, but for Jesus the Christ. You will see him wear a crown of thorns, carry a cross.

Perhaps I should not tell you these things, Claudia Procula. God in heaven did not send me to earth to speak to you.

My mission--given by the Lord God of Hosts--is to come to Jerusalem at dawn on the first day of the week and go to a certain garden. There I am to roll away a stone which seals a tomb.

I came three days early, that's all.

Let me leave you, lovely Roman lady, with a thought of joy. You like the sound of poetry; so consider the meaning of this ancient line, and let it comfort you:

"Weeping may endure for a night,

But joy cometh in the morning." --*Psalms 30:5*

Claudia Procula, I shall roll away the stone, and there will be great joy! Joy in heaven and on earth!

Angel exits. Claudia Procula sleeps on.

End of ACT II

ACT III, Scene 1

Scene 1. It is almost dawn on Friday morning. At the quarters of Pontius Pilate Claudia Procula still sleeps on the couch in the dining-sitting room. Damaris enters hurriedly to awaken her mistress.

DAMARIS: *gently shaking Claudia's arm* Ma'am, I'm sorry, but please wake up!

CLAUDIA: *still half asleep* Pilate's here? What time of night is it?

DAMARIS: It's just getting daylight, Ma'am.

CLAUDIA: Pilate has come, hasn't he?

DAMARIS: No, Ma'am, that's just it. He can't come. There's a big commotion going on down at the fortress, and there's a centurion at the door to tell you something! He wouldn't say what!

CLAUDIA: *eagerly* Show him in! Quickly, Damaris. Quickly!

DAMARIS: He's the son of that senator from Rome.

Damaris ushers in Centurion Longinus, who is greatly excited.

LONGINUS: Madam Claudia, in the middle of the night, last night, the Jewish leaders dragged the Galilee prophet here to the fortress, to stand before your husband!

CLAUDIA: *with dismay* They brought him to Pilate? Why?

LONGINUS: They're demanding that Pontius Pilate condemn him to death!

CLAUDIA: *horrified* Oh! No! Not death!

LONGINUS: My father insisted that I come tell you. He said you needed to know.

CLAUDIA: Yes. And I must try to do something!

LONGINUS: I have to go, Ma'am. I'm on duty. *Starts to leave*

CLAUDIA: Just a minute! Wait just a minute, Centurion. *Turns to Damaris* Damaris, bring me a pen--and paper. Quickly!

Continues talking while Damaris gets pen and paper

I will tell my husband not to have anything to do with this just man from Galilee. Last night I suffered through a dreadful dream because of him.

I could hear a mob of people shouting, and I saw the bandit Barabbas and two wretched thieves. And an angel came, telling me about a tomb, sealed with a stone that she would roll away. Then she spoke of weeping and of joy.

Oh, Centurion Longinus, it was a most unusual dream.

Claudia quickly writes a note, rolls it up, and hands it to Longinus.

Just hand this note to Pontius Pilate and explain that it's from me.

LONGINUS: Yes, Ma'am. *Exits*

DAMARIS: Ma'am, do you want me to bring your breakfast, now?

CLAUDIA: Breakfast? No, no. Not now. Bring my cloak. And get yours. We're going down to the fortress!

Both grab on wraps, exeunt, hastily.

End of Scene 1

Scene 2. A few minutes later. At daybreak Friday in the courtyard of the Antonia Fortress. A large, restless, and angry crowd has assembled and is waiting for Pontius Pilate to appear. The governor's "praetorium," or portable judicial chair of the Roman governor, is vacant.

The chair is flanked by two Roman soldiers standing as guards. Centurion Longinus, the officer in charge, is there. A servant stands in the background.

Lying huddled on the pavement a short distance from the chair--each in fetters--are Barabbas and the Two Thieves. An armed guard, Soldier Felix, stands over them. Two wooden crosses have already been brought in for the thieves.

In the forefront of the crowd are the enemies of Jesus who were at the temple (ACT I, Sc. 1): 2nd Bystander, 3rd Bystander, Pharisee, Sadducee, and Scribe. Also, several False Witnesses--all loud-mouthed ruffians--sent by the Sanhedrin.

Senator Petronius stands at a distance but within view. When Claudia and Damaris arrive, they notice the senator and join him. At the same time, the crowd begins demanding to see Pontius Pilate.

SCRIBE: *loudly* Where's the great Roman governor?

2ND BYSTANDER: *more loudly* We want to see Pontius Pilate!

3RD BYSTANDER: Yeah! And we want to see the prisoner! That deceiver from Galilee!

SCRIBE: We've got rights! We demand to see the prisoner!

BARABBAS: *staggering to his feet and rattling his chains* I'm a prisoner! You wanna see me? An' here's two more!

SCRIBE: *in friendly tone* Not you, Barabbas! We'll take care of you later.

3RD BYSTANDER: Yeah, Barabbas! You'd better be quiet.

BARABBAS: Quiet, you say? Get these chains off my feet and I'll show you what quiet

is!

PHARISEE: *loudly* Centurion! What's keeping the governor? We're here to see justice done!

SADDUCEE: We've been up all night!

LONGINUS: *to the crowd* His Honor Governor Pontius Pilate is entering now. Please be silent.

Pilate strides in, takes his seat. Two soldiers escort the Christ Figure in to stand before Pilate. He is clad in a purple robe and wears a crown of thorns. His arms and hands are bound.

PONTIUS PILATE: *to the crowd* Behold, your prisoner! The one you call "King of the Jews."

SCRIBE: He's not our king!

2ND BYSTANDER: He deserves death!

PHARISEE: We want to see justice done!

PILATE: *ignoring shouts* I have questioned this man. And I find no fault in him.

SADDUCEE: *maliciously* He's guilty! If he wasn't guilty, we wouldn't have him here!

PILATE: Guilty of what? What evil has he done?

SCRIBE: He stirs up the people!

SADDUCEE: He is a deceiver!

3RD BYSTANDER: He's against paying taxes!

1ST FALSE WITNESS: Our council found him guilty of blasphemy!

2ND FALSE WITNESS: He's an enemy of the people!

3RD FALSE WITNESS. One day he says one thing. Next day, it's another. He claims to be the Son of God! He wants to be "King of the Jews!"

CROWD: *chanting* Death! Death! He deserves death!

PILATE. *to crowd* Quiet! Let's hear what the prisoner says about being a king. *Turns to Christ Figure* Jesus of Nazareth, are you the king of the Jews?

CHRIST FIGURE: My kingdom is not of this world.

PILATE: *impatiently* What kind of an answer is that! *Lowers voice* Try to defend yourself! Don't you know I have the power to release you or to crucify you! Speak up!

CHRIST FIGURE: *calmly* You would have no power at all against me, unless it were given from above. *Cf. John 19:11*

PILATE: *still speaking in low tones to Christ Figure* I don't know what you're talking about. You're like a lamb led to the slaughter. But I'll see what I can do.

Pilate turns to crowd

PILATE: *to crowd* I find no fault in this just man. Now, Citizens of Jerusalem, let me remind you of a custom that you may have forgotten. Each year at your Passover Festival, the Roman Governor proves his good will toward you by releasing a prisoner. This year, I will again set free the prisoner of your choice!

Now the question is this: shall I release this innocent man wearing a crown of thorns crammed on his head by some foolish young Soldiers?

Or, shall I release this notorious bandit Barabbas, lying here in chains which he deserves?

CROWD: *chanting loudly* Barabbas! Barabbas! Barabbas! We want Barabbas!

PILATE: Then what shall I do with this Jesus, called by many the Christ?

CROWD: *chanting, very loudly* CRUCIFY! CRUCIFY! CRUCIFY!

PONTIUS PILATE: *throwing up his hands* If you want him crucified, crucify him yourselves!

I am innocent of the blood of this just person!

I wash my hands of this whole affair! Bring some water out here!

Servant hurriedly brings Pilate a silver bowl of water, a towel.

As Pilate ceremoniously washes his hands, the 3RD FALSE WITNESS makes his way to Pilate and shakes a finger at him.

3RD FALSE WITNESS: Pontius Pilate, you know good and well that under Roman law, we Jews can't crucify anybody!

Furthermore, you should consider this: If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar!

Remember, he has tried to make himself king!

And we have no king but Caesar!

Pilate, furious over the position he is in, throws down his towel.

PILATE: Release Barabbas! Take this prisoner to be scourged! Thirty-nine lashes! That's the law! Centurion, are you listening?

LONGINUS: Yes, Sir, Your Honor! I'm listening!

PILATE: After the lashes, crucify the prisoner! This morning! With those two thieves!

The crowd breaks into an uproar, some shouting one thing, some another--all at the same time--as follows:

2nd Bystander: We won! We won! I can't believe it! Pontius Pilate fixed the king!

3rd Bystander: Yeaah! Hurrah for the Sanhedrin! We did it!

Pharisee: For once, we got justice done! I've been telling everybody Pontius Pilate is not so dumb!

Sadducee: I'll go tell the high priest! His plan worked!

Scribe: This is a great day! Our elders will be glad!

1st False Witness: Barabbas, you're a lucky scoundrel!

2nd False Witness: This Galilee fellow got what he deserves! Now I can get my pay from the high priest!

Felix releases Barabbas.

3RD FALSE WITNESS: Barabbas, come on with us. We'll help you celebrate!

The crowd carries off Barabbas as a hero, while he yells and waves his arms.

BARABBAS: I'm free! I'm free! I'm free!

Two soldiers lead Christ Figure away. Soldier Felix keeps thieves where they are.

Senator Petronius, Claudia, and Damaris still stand huddled together. Claudia weeps bitterly.

The Pharisee, Sadducee, and Scribe linger. Pontius Pilate remains seated, his guards still at his side.

Centurion Longinus steps aside to have a word with Felix.

PILATE: Centurion Longinus, come here!

LONGINUS: *coming to attention* Yes, Sir.

PILATE: I want a sign nailed up over that prisoner's head! *Cf. Matthew 27:37*

LONGINUS: Yes, Sir. I'll take care of it.

Sir, what do you want the sign to say?

PILATE: Just to make sure, I'll write it out.... Guard, get me some ink.

1ST GUARD: Yes, Sir. *Exits, returns immediately with pen, ink, and a piece of paper.*

Pilate takes his wife's note from the folds of his toga and prepares to write on the back of it.

PILATE: *to himself as he looks at the note* It's too bad I couldn't please Claudia Procula.

Poor woman. I'll never be able to explain it to her.

LONGINUS: I couldn't understand what you said, Sir.

PILATE: What I'm saying to you, Centurion, is this: I want the sign written in three languages: Hebrew, Latin, and Greek.

Takes pen from guard

I don't need that paper. I have this piece. Centurion, this is how the sign is to read:

JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS. *writes*

SCRIBE creeps close by

SCRIBE: Honorable Governor, don't write "King of the Jews."

Write that he said "I Am King of the Jews."

PILATE: What I have written, I have written. *Cf. John 19:22*

Hands paper to Longinus, strides out. Guards follow. Sadducee, Scribe, and Pharisee scurry off, muttering among themselves. Longinus steps over to Felix and the thieves.

LONGINUS: Felix, keep the thieves here until we get the third prisoner ready. We'll march them all to Golgotha at the same time.

FELIX: Golgotha?

LONGINUS: That hill called "The Place of the Skull."

FELIX: Oh, yes, Sir. Now I know where you're talking about. Some call it "Calvary."

Senator Petronius hurries over to speak to his son.

PETRONIUS: *calling* Son! Just a word with you.

LONGINUS: *with surprise* Father! I didn't know you were out here! I thought you were going to Jericho today.

PETRONIUS: I've put off the Jericho trip. I'm going to see poor Claudia Procula back to her quarters. She is so near collapse her maid asked me to help get her home.

LONGINUS: Yes, Sir. Do that. I'll see you tonight, or sometime. I just don't know when.

PETRONIUS: I understand, Son. *Longinus exits.* This is a black day. *Petronius returns to Claudia.*

DAMARIS: Ma'am, don't weep!

CLAUDIA: The dream-- *sobs* The dream is coming true!

DAMARIS: Don't think about your dream. Don't think about anything! Just quit weeping! It's not good for you. It's not your fault all this happened!

CLAUDIA: *sobbing* The angel-- The angel said-- She said I would weep. The old prophet said my tears would run down like a river! But I didn't know what they meant!

DAMARIS: *still trying to comfort Claudia* Ma'am, dry your eyes! You've wept enough.

CLAUDIA: *hysterically* Pilate condemned him! He paid no attention to my note!

DAMARIS: Maybe your husband didn't get the note. Maybe it got lost.

CLAUDIA: I'm sure he got it. That was my note he wrote that sign on just now. I recognized the paper. I must go speak to Pilate!

Petronius joins women.

DAMARIS: No, Ma'am. You mustn't try to do that. Come, you must go home.

CLAUDIA: Senator Petronius, what should I do? Do you think I should try to talk to my husband?

PETRONIUS: Perhaps. If that's what you want. I'm afraid, though, the outside doors of the fortress are locked now. I could go and inquire. That is, if--

There is loud noise and a commotion at the spot where Felix is holding the thieves. Three additional soldiers arrive, dragging with them the Christ Figure, who is staggering under a heavy cross. 2nd and 3rd Soldiers are obliged to support the Christ figure.

1ST SOLDIER: *calling* Felix, are you ready up there?

FELIX: Ready! Thieves! On your feet! Take up your crosses!

Thieves scramble to their feet, pick up crosses

1ST SOLDIER: Forward! March!

As the procession begins to move, numerous women and other people from Galilee and other places follow along. In the group is Simon of Cyrene. The women weep and wail. Petronius, Claudia and Damaris have to move aside to let the procession pass.

1ST SOLDIER: I said march! Not creep!

Christ Figure falls under the weight of his cross. Procession comes to a halt.

1ST SOLDIER: *now near the head of the column* What's wrong with that last prisoner back there?

2ND SOLDIER: They beat him nearly to death! That's what's wrong with him!

1ST SOLDIER: Make somebody else take his cross!

2ND SOLDIER: Who?

1ST SOLDIER: Anybody! We haven't got all day!

3RD SOLDIER *notices* SIMON of CYRENE, who is on the fringe of the crowd of followers.

3RD SOLDIER: There's a hefty looking fellow. You want us to grab him?

1ST SOLDIER: Yeah: And hurry up!

3RD SOLDIER: *grabbing the arm of Simon* Come on, Man, whoever you are! We've got a problem here, and you're just the one to solve it!

SIMON: *quite taken back* Me? I'm a stranger here! I'm from Cyrene, and I-- I--

3RD SOLDIER: Just pick up that cross and come on: Or you'll be a dead stranger from Cyrene!

Simon hesitates to take up the cross. 1st Soldier walks over to him, grabs him by the collar.

1ST SOLDIER: You see this wretched prisoner with the crown of thorns on his head?

SIMON: *terrified* I-- I-- I-- I see him!

1ST SOLDIER: Well, he's some sort of a king! What kind I don't know and don't care! But he's just had 39 lashes at the stake! So you are going to carry his cross: Understand?

SIMON: *half choking* Ye-- Ye-- Yes.

1st Soldier releases Simon, with a shove. Simon picks up cross.

FELIX: *to 1st Soldier.* Where's our Centurion?

1ST SOLDIER: He's getting a sign made. Said it was direct orders from the governor. *Raises voice* Forward! March!

The procession moves on, disappears--leaving Petronius, Claudia, and Damaris stunned.

CLAUDIA: *wailing* Ohh-h-h-- It's too late! Too late! Too late!

PETRONIUS: Come, Claudia child, It's best that you go home.

CLAUDIA: *sobbing* The Dream! Senator, what I dreamed is--

DAMARIS: *gently* Hush, hush, Ma'am. You're just beside yourself. Come, now let's go.

Damaris and Petronius guide Claudia off stage.

End of ACT III

ACT IV, Scene 1

Late Saturday afternoon. Centurion Longinus, Felix and 1st Soldier move briskly along the path leading to the tomb where Jesus the Christ is buried. The three are armed, carry shields.

FELIX: Centurion, Sir, you know what I think?

LONGINUS: What's that, Felix?

FELIX: I think the order for us soldiers to guard a tomb is the stupidest thing I ever heard of!

1ST SOLDIER. Me, too! Do those people who were hollering so loud yesterday to crucify that man think he's going to walk out of his grave?

LONGINUS: Well, Soldiers, this is a strange assignment. What happened was this: Friday afternoon, just before sundown, a Jewish leader--I believe he said his name was Joseph of Arimathea--came in and begged Pontius Pilate to let him take the man's body down and give it a proper burial.

Pontius Pilate turned around to me and said, "Is this 'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews' dead, already?"

I told him yes. So, he gave permission for the burial.

So, Joseph of Arimathea and another high-ranking ruler named Nicodemus bought fine linen--the finest I ever saw--and a lot of spices. You know the Jewish custom. They wrapped him in the linen with the burial spices and laid him in this new tomb we're going to. And they rolled a stone across the door.

A group of women from Galilee watched the burial, and I heard them say they'd come tomorrow and bring even more spices.

FELIX: Those women from Galilee were at the crucifixion?

1st SOLDIER: Yes. They stayed there all day. *Turns to Longinus* But, Sir, you were going to tell us why we have to guard the tomb.

LONGINUS: I'm getting to that. Just a couple of hours ago, a delegation of Jewish

leaders came to Pontius Pilate, demanding that the Roman Army post a guard at the tomb.

FELIX: Did they give any reason?

LONGINUS: Oh, yes. They had a reason. The high priest always has a reason for everything. *Changing his voice to imitate Jewish spokesman*

"Pontius Pilate, Sir," their spokesman said, "we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, 'After three days I will rise again.'

"So we want you to order a guard posted until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples will come at night, and steal him away, and say to the people, 'He is risen from the dead!' It would be a big mistake to let that happen!"

Of course, the governor gave in. So here we are.

FELIX: Sir, do you know exactly where the tomb is?

LONGINUS: Of course, Felix. You see that garden-like area in front of us?

FELIX: Yes, Sir.

LONGINUS: It's in there. It's just an ordinary tomb, with a big stone sealing the door.

Three reach garden area

1ST SOLDIER: I see it. I guess. Is that it, Sir? *Points to large stone partially hidden by shrubs.*

LONGINUS: Yes, that's it. Now both of you listen while I give you instructions. I came with you so everything will go right. You are to stand guard here, all night one on the right side of the tomb, the other on the left.

Soldiers assume posts

Keep alert. I don't need to remind you that if a Roman soldier goes to sleep on his watch, the punishment is death!

FELIX: Yes, Sir. We know.

1ST SOLDIER: We won't go to sleep, Sir. Not us. If I see Felix nodding, I'll jab him in the ribs.

Makes pretense of using his spear on his companion

FELIX: You're the one who's going to get it in the ribs!

LONGINUS: Cut out the nonsense! I'd be much surprised if you see or hear anybody coming through here tonight. But be watchful. Those women from Galilee might come with the spices, but I doubt it. Your relief will arrive at dawn. Then you can go back to your barracks and sleep all day.

BOTH SOLDIERS: Yes, Sir.

LONGINUS: I'll see you at daybreak.

SOLDIERS: Yes, Sir.

Longinus exits

End of Scene 1, Begin Scene 2

Scene 2. Immediately following Scene 1. There is no break. The two soldiers guarding the tomb begin talking to each other.

1ST SOLDIER: If you ask me, Felix, this assignment is a snap. Nothing to it.

FELIX: You're saying that now. But just you wait 'till about midnight. We're going to be plenty sleepy.

1ST SOLDIER: Maybe you. Not me.

Short silence

1ST SOLDIER: Say, Felix, what did you think about that earthquake yesterday?

FELIX: It scared me to death! And I don't scare easy.

1ST SOLDIER: It made me have the strangest feeling. Sort of weird--if you know what I mean.

FELIX: Yeah. Eerie. Yesterday was a wild day.

1ST SOLDIER: Those thieves we crucified were fighting mad, naturally. But the man from Galilee was calm as could be.

FELIX: Yeah! I couldn't get over the fact he wasn't mad at us soldiers. In fact, he said a sort of prayer for us.

1ST SOLDIER: I didn't hear that. What did he say?

FELIX: I guess he was talking to his God. Anyway, he said:

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Long silence

1ST SOLDIER: Felix, we've been standing here a long time. Do you think is might be nearly daylight?

FELIX: It won't be much longer. Can't be.

1ST SOLDIER: Felix, something's wrong! I feel the ground shaking! No, it's not the ground shaking! It's me shaking!

I-- I-- I see-- Oh! Felix, let's-- 1ST SOLDIER *tries to run away. Felix also tries to flee.*

Both keel over in a swoon, falling some distance from the door of the tomb.

The ANGEL OF THE LORD appears at the tomb. She disregards the soldiers, slowly rolls the stone from the tomb, and disappears into another part of the garden.

The CHRIST FIGURE emerges from the tomb, walks away going in the opposite direction from the angel.

Seconds later, Centurion Longinus and the 2nd and 3rd Soldiers enter from right stage and three women from Galilee approach the garden from left stage. Both groups are talking while they are still off stage.

2ND SOLDIER: Centurion, Sir, I never have stood guard at a tomb before.

3RD SOLDIER: Me neither, Sir. What do we do?

Soldiers come into view

LONGINIUS: Quiet, just a minute. I thought I heard somebody talking.

Group halts, women come into view

MARY MAGDALENE: It's still so dark I can't half see. Salome, are you sure we took the right path?

SALOME: Yes, I'm sure. I remember these olive trees.

JOANNA: I surely hope we can roll away that huge stone.

LONGINUS: *whispering* That's those women from Galilee, with the burial spices. We don't want to frighten them, so let's wait here.

Soldiers remain partially hidden by shrubs

SALOME: I had forgotten about that stone. Maybe we-- Look!

MARY MAGDALENE: It's already rolled away!

JOANNA: That's good.

2ND SOLDIER: *whispering* I can see the tomb, but where's old Felix and his buddy? I don't see them anywhere!

3RD SOLDIER: *whispering* Sir, where you guess they are?

LONGINUS: *under his breath* If those two guards have deserted their post, so help me, I'll--

ANGEL appears. The women, greatly frightened, back away huddling together. The terror-stricken 2nd and 3rd Soldiers flee. After a bit, while the Angel speaks to the women, Longinus moves cautiously toward the tomb.

ANGEL: Women of Galilee, fear not. I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified.

SALOME: Ye-- Ye-- Yes. We brought more spices.

ANGEL: He is not here; for he is risen! As he said! Come; see the place where the Lord lay.

Women cautiously look into the door of the tomb.

MARY MAGDALENE: *with amazement* He is not there!

ANGEL: Go quickly and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead!

MARY MAGDALENE: *joyfully* We will! Oh, we will! We'll tell everybody!

ANGEL: Say to his disciples that "he goeth before you into Galilee; There shall ye see him." Lo, I have told you.

Angel disappears Amazed women stand, looking at each other.

MARY MAGDALENE: What must we do?

SALOME: Let's go!

JOANNA: The angel said, "Go quickly!" So let's hurry!

As the joyful women are leaving the garden, the CHRIST FIGURE meets them. Cf. Matthew 28:9, 10

CHRIST FIGURE: Peace be with you!

Startled, the women kneel at the feet of Christ to worship him.

ALL WOMEN: *not quite in unison* Oh, Master! Master!

CHRIST FIGURE: Do not be afraid. Go tell my disciples they are to go back to Galilee, and there they will see me.

Christ Figure leaves the kneeling women, exits from the garden. The elated women hurry away.

Longinus, speaking to himself as he walks, comes to the door of the tomb.

LONGINUS: *marveling* Oh, what I have seen! What I have seen! Now I know the truth.

The man we crucified is the Son of God. And he lives!

It's-- It's-- It's a thing too wonderful for me.

I'll go tell Madam Claudia Procula! Pontius Pilate won't care. But she will.

And my father! I'll tell my father. He will be glad.

As Longinus is leaving the garden, he stumbles on Felix and the 1st Soldier, both still in something of a coma. Longinus is greatly surprised.

LONGINUS: My word! Felix! Wake up! Both of you! Wake up! I told you soldiers to keep alert! And here you are sound asleep! Wake up! Get up!

When soldiers do not move, Longinus examines both, carefully
 These men are not asleep! They're unconscious!

Longinus kneels, lifts Felix up into a sitting position, slaps his cheeks
 Felix! What's happened to you? Come to your senses, soldier!

Slowly, both soldiers regain consciousness.

FELIX: Oh, Sir! I know what you're thinking! But we didn't go to sleep. Honest, we didn't!

1ST SOLDIER: No, Sir! We sure didn't, Sir.

LONGINUS: What happened?

FELIX: I don't know, Sir, what happened. Just before daylight I was looking at my buddy here and I saw him sort of keel over. Then I saw an angel!

And I couldn't stand up any more. I just fell to the ground. Like I was dead, or something!

Soldiers scramble to their feet

LONGINUS: Let's get on back to the Antonia Fortress. A wonderful, wonderful thing has happened.

1ST SOLDIER: What about the tomb, Sir? We're not going to guard it anymore?

LONGINUS: The tomb is empty. Jesus of Nazareth is alive!

1ST SOLDIER: Alive? That's impossible!

FELIX: Sir, you can't mean that he--

LONGINUS: I saw him! I heard him speak! Soldiers, Jesus called the Christ, is the Son of God.

FELIX: That's what you said Friday, while he was still hanging on the cross.

LONGINUS: Yes. I thought it then. I know it now.

Just a few minutes ago Jesus sent a message to his disciples, telling them to go to Galilee, and there they will see him.

Now, one way or another, I'm going to Galilee, too. For I want to see him again. I know my father will go with me.

And Madam Claudia Procula will want to go.

FELIX: Sir, let us go to Galilee, too.

LONGINUS: Very well. I'll make the arrangements.

The three exeunt

End of Scene 2

Scene 3

Scene 3. Some 40 days later. On a hillside in Galilee. The disciples of the CHRIST and many of his followers--including women and children--have assembled.

Standing slightly apart from the people of Galilee are Madam Claudia Procula, Senator Petronius, Centurion Longinus, the Soldier Felix, and three other soldiers.

The Christ Figure stands in the center, speaking to them all.

CHRIST FIGURE: "All power is given to me in heaven and in earth. But you are to wait for the promise of the Father, which is the Spirit.

"For John the Baptist truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the

Holy Spirit....

"You shall receive power ... and you shall be witnesses unto me ... unto the uttermost part of the earth....

"Go therefore, and teach all nations ... preach the gospel to every creature.... Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, of the Holy Spirit.

"Teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the world."

Christ Figure vanishes. Crowd individuals look toward the sky. Angel of the Lord walks into their midst.

ANGEL: "...Men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?

"This same Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven shall so come (again) in like manner as ye have seen him go...."

Angel leaves. Crowd slowly disperses.

END OF PLAY

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