

THE BEAUTIFUL GARDEN

A Holy Week Play in One Act

by

Jewell Ellen Smith

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All scripture quotations are from the King James Version. First performed at Ft. Rucker, Alabama, in 1970.

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DESCRIPTION OF PLAY, WITH SUGGESTIONS FOR SPECIAL EFFECTS:

Theme: The Easter season is more than an occasion for pink rabbits and egg hunts and the wearing of new clothes.

For each individual it can become a glorious festival of rejoicing in the Christian Faith and Hope. It is a time to consider being steadfast, a time for meeting God in "A Beautiful Garden" of prayer.

Type: Mini-operetta form. Dialogue. Still scenes that come to life. Singing.

Length of Play: 18 to 20 minutes.

Time and Place: The present, at an imaginary U. S. Army post, Ft. Rueben.

Bible Time and Place: Jerusalem, when Jesus Christ was crucified.

Number of Characters: 14 to 16 persons, most of whom must have good singing voices. All except Christ Figure can be women.

Characters (in the order of their appearance):

Ft. Rueben Altar Guild Committee: Sue, Eunice, Alice

Hidden soloist

Biblical persons:

Women of Galilee: Salome, Mary Magdalene, The Other Mary, Joanna, three to five other women.

The Centurion

First and Second Angels

The Christ Figure

Scenes and Sub-scenes:

Scene I: Sue's quarters at Ft. Rueben, three weeks before Easter. The Altar Guild Committee meets to plan a religious program. The committee visualizes the following scenes:

Sub-Scene A: The place called Golgotha. Certain women of Galilee "behold from afar off."

Sub-Scene B: At the door of the empty sepulcher. Two angels sit at doorway. Women of Galilee bring spices to anoint Christ's body.

Sub-Scene C (Same as B): In the Garden, near the tomb, Mary Magdalene meets the Risen Lord!

Scene II (Same as I): Altar Guild Committee continues planning program.

Sub-Scene D: The Beautiful Garden. Entire Cast (except Christ Figure) sings "The Beautiful Garden of Prayer."

Costumes:

Ft. Rueben Army wives wear conventional street frocks.

Women of Galilee wear flowing Biblical costumes (with head shawls) in pastel shades as follows:

Salome: yellow

Mary Magdalene: old rose

The Other Mary: blue

Joanna: lavender

Other women: pink, light green, orange, deep blue, tan

Roman Centurion: Roman soldier's uniform--helmet, shield, etc.

Angels: shining white, with wings (white tissue paper cut in strips and pasted on wings gives nice feathery effect)

Christ Figure: full white robe. Headdress, with halo--so fixed that audience does not see his face.

Scenery and Special Effects:

Public address system, with three microphones

Piano or organ placed out of sight.

Two spotlights.

Small table, three chairs, with a few living room accessories.

For Biblical scenes:

Three life-size crosses, bare. Center cross larger, with sign at top "The King of the Jews." Elevate the crosses so that women in foreground can kneel and stand, "beholding afar off." Place crosses on right side of stage.

For Door of Tomb: Simulate open tomb, with large rock rolled to one side.

Have inconspicuous benches for angels. Place tomb on right of stage.

Use shrubs and greenery to give garden setting. Use spotlights on angels--midway in scene.

Beautiful garden: Use same greenery as above (Remove tomb). Add perfusion of flowers. Make white picket fence, with flower covered, arched gateway in center.

Hymns Included in Play: All are well known, and are included at the end of the play with permissions of the publishers, or are in the public domain.

"Lord, I Want to Be a Christian"--solo

"Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?"--solo

"Christ the Lord is Risen Today"--group singing

"In the Garden" by C. Austin Miles--Mary Magdalene's solo

"The Beautiful Garden of Prayer" by Elanor Schroll and J. H. Fillmore--sung by entire cast except Christ Figure.

SCRIPT

SCENE I

Living room of Sue's quarters at Ft. Rueben. Use left front stage, area out in front of curtain. Or, the living room can be set up at floor level. As scene opens, the Ft. Rueben Altar Guild Committee is meeting with Sue to plan a religious program, to be presented during Holy Week. Sue and Eunice chat as they wait for Alice to arrive.

SUE: I wonder what's keeping Alice? *Looks at wristwatch.* It's nearly 9:30! I'd hope we could get this Easter program planned in a hurry, because my next-door neighbor and I are going to the North Gate Shopping Center at noon--soon as we get our kids on the kindergarten bus.

EUNICE: What're you going to buy?

SUE: Oh, I'm going to get little Eddie the biggest stuffed pink rabbit I can find. And I'm going to buy myself a whole new outfit! Just for Easter!--I told Ed, I said, "I'm not walking into that Chapel on Easter Sunday morning if I can't look like something!" And he said, "Oh, you'll look like something, all right! Like a zombie!"--I could've killed him!--You know, Eunice, I've got five wigs and Ed doesn't like a single one of 'em. I may just buy me another wig today. *Strokes wig she's wearing. Adjusts it.*

EUNICE: I wish Alice would come on, too. When I joined the Altar Guild, I had no idea I'd ever be asked to help plan the annual program for Holy Week.

SUE: Me neither. Here, have another sip of coffee. *Pours coffee.*

EUNICE: Easter is so early this year, and my in-laws are coming. I've got to get started getting everything ready. I should have already put in the order for my mother-in-law's corsage for Easter morning. I hope the florist will have gardenias. My mother-in-law just loves 'em!

SUE: Well me, I'm going to have an orchid Easter morning--or nothing! What're you going to feed your company?

EUNICE: Ham, I guess. Easter wouldn't be Easter without baked ham. -- I heard that the P. X. is already out of egg coloring. Did you--

Editor's note: "P. X." is the Post Exchange, general store on military posts. Other terms such as "the store" may be substituted.

SUE: Egg coloring! Yikes! *Jumps up* I clear forgot! Little Eddy's kindergarten teacher called me way last week to get me to help with the children's egg hunt. If I don't write that down on my calendar this very minute, it'll never cross my mind again! *Writes on calendar* I'm supposed to dye two dozen eggs and help select the prizes. I declare, at Easter time there's so much to do, you hate to see it coming. *Gets up again to put away calendar. Sees Alice approaching.* Here's Alice now!--Come on in, Alice. Here, sit in this chair. And lem'me pour you some coffee.

EUNICE: Hi, Alice! We were just saying we hoped you'd soon come. Let's plan this program for the Altar Guild ladies and get it over with.

ALICE: *Putting down booklets, papers, Bible, taking coffee cup.* Yes, I'm anxious about it. I hope you two have some good ideas. *Looks at Sue*

SUE: Don't look at me! I wouldn't know where to start, working out a Holy Week program. All I know about Easter is that you can run yourself ragged, trying to buy new clothes and dye eggs and round up the candy and rabbits and stuff the children have to have.--What kind of program does the Altar Guild want us to come up with?

ALICE: Anything we want. Of course it ought to pertain to Holy Week, especially Good Friday--you know. Naturally, it ought to be based on the Bible.

SUE: Let's see?--Maybe we could ask one of the chaplains to give a talk. But, no, that'd be just another sermon. In one ear, out the other! *Makes gesture, pointing to one ear, then the other.*

EUNICE: How about a panel discussion? Or maybe a review of some real good religious book? Ah, one year we had a skit on the women of the Bible.

SUE: Yeah, I remember that! And Gladys Seldon didn't want to play the part of Eve because she thought she would have to walk out on stage with nothing on but fig leaves! *The three laugh.*

ALICE: What do you think of having a sort of pageant, and show what the women of Galilee, who were friends of Jesus, did when He was crucified?

SUE: Sounds great. What did they do? I'm ashamed to admit it, but I don't know what they did. Fact is, I never thought about it before.

EUNICE: Don't feel bad. I'm a little hazy on that, myself. About all I know is that Mary Magdalene was the first person to see the risen Lord--Alice, let us look in your Bible a minute. *Takes Bible, turns to New Testament, as others wait.*

ALICE: Well, we'd have to look up all the Scripture passages and see exactly what Jesus' friends did do. We would want our pageant to be authentic. I know that one of the Gospel writers tells that a good many women of Galilee watched the crucifixion.

EUNICE: Yes, right here, it tells that. And here's another verse. *Points out passage.* It says that Mary Magdalene and some of the others watched to see where Jesus was buried, and two days later they went back to the Tomb to take spices to anoint the body of Christ. *Hands Bible back to Alice.*

ALICE: Maybe a pageant about the women of Galilee would be real good. It might help everybody who saw it to be a better Christian, in her heart.--How does that old spiritual go? Sings phrase without music "Lord, I want to be a Christian in my heart ... in my heart." I can hear it. My mother used to sing that old song. *Soloist, behind curtain, sings "Lord, I want to be a Christian."*

ALICE: Oh, let's do work up a short pageant! Let's plan it, right now! Imagine that this living room wall over here is a curtain *Waves hand towards stage* and there's a stage.--We could set up three crosses for the first stage. Then, for--

SUE: Sure! We could arrange it so that as somebody reads out of the Bible, each scene would come to life, so to speak. *Curtain opens on Golgotha sub-scene. Alice begins reading.*

SUB-SCENE A: The place called Golgotha

Group of Biblical women are facing crosses. Some are standing, heads bowed. Some kneel. All are sorrowful, cast down. Roman Centurion stands between women and the crosses. All remain motionless as Scripture is read. And, until hidden soloist sings two verses of "Were you there?" At the end of the second verse, weeping women start leaving slowly. Four of them stop to talk--Soloist saves third verse until curtain closes.

ALICE: *Reading Luke 23: 38, 44-49.* "And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.... And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour.

"And the sun was darkened. And the veil of the temple was rent in the midst. And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father into thy hands I commend my spirit; and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.

"Now when the Centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was the Son of God.

"And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned. And all his acquaintances, and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things." *Soloist sings the two verses.*

SALOME: Oh, what can we do? They have crucified our Lord.

MARY MAGDALENE: Joseph, a rich man from Arimathea, plans to ask Pilate for our Lord's body. And he's going to place him in his own new tomb, dug out of the rock.

THE OTHER MARY: I heard that Nicodemus, the ruler who once came to Jesus at night and in secret, is going to help.

JOANNA: I was told that Nicodemus has already bought the burial spices--at least a hundred pounds, a mixture of myrrh and aloes.

SALOME: That will not be enough. We should prepare some more. I do wish tomorrow were not the Sabbath. We can do nothing on the Sabbath.

MARY MAGDALENE: Come, let us go and watch to see where they laid him; then, after the Sabbath is passed, we women of Galilee can take extra spices and ointments to the tomb.

THE OTHER MARY: *As the four go off-stage, to the left* The tomb of Joseph of Arimathea is in the garden, close by here.

Curtain

Soloist sings final verse of "Were you there," i.e. "...when they laid him in the tomb."

SUB-SCENE B: At the Door of the Empty Sepulcher

Curtain opens to show two angels sitting on either side of entrance to tomb. Scene is dimly lighted. Salome, Joanna, the Other Mary, and possibly three other women enter from left. Mary Magdalene is not in group.

SALOME: It is so dark I can hardly see the path.

JOANNA: Did not Mary Magdalene come with us?

SALOME: No. Mary Magdalene is so grieved. She said that she would like to walk here alone, later, at the rising of the Sun.

THE OTHER MARY: Who shall roll us away the stone from the sepulcher? It will be a very great stone, I'm sure.-- Oh, look!

Spotlight on Angels. Women step back in fear.

1ST ANGEL: Do not be afraid. Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified?

THE OTHER MARY: Yes. He was our Lord. We have brought burial ointments.

2ND ANGEL: Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here. He is risen!

ALL WOMEN: Risen? *Women murmur among themselves.*

SALOME: How can that be?

JOANNA: I cannot believe--

THE OTHER MARY: *Stooping closer to First Angel, and speaking to him.* He is truly risen from the dead?

1ST ANGEL: Do you not remember what he said? He spoke to you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, "The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again."

ALL WOMEN: Yes, now we remember his words!

2ND ANGEL: Go tell his disciples.

SALOME: Let us go tell the world! Christ our Lord is risen!

Women and Angels sing, "Christ the Lord is Risen Today." Women leave stage, going back to left. Angels remain seated. Curtain remains open.

SUB-SCENE C: In the Garden

Same as above. Mary Magdalene enters in hurriedly from right. Oblivious to the Angels, she runs to look into door of tomb. Turning, she weeps and wipes her eyes.

MARY MAGDALENE: *To herself* Oh! They have taken away my Lord.

2ND ANGEL: Woman, why weepest thou?

MARY MAGDALENE: He is not here! They have taken him away.

Mary Magdalene sees Christ figure entering from far left. She believes him to be the gardener. He turns so that his face is not visible to audience.

MARY MAGDALENE: *Still talking with Angels* Perhaps the gardener coming yonder knows where they have placed him. *Crosses stage toward Christ figure.*

Sir, if thou hast borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him.

CHRIST FIGURE: Mary!

MARY MAGDALENE: Master! *Falls at his feet. Stretches out arms toward CHRIST FIGURE.*

CHRIST FIGURE: Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father; but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God and your God.

Mary Magdalene rises, clasps hands together and moves in awe and wonder--to front center stage. Curtains slowly close behind.

MARY MAGDALENE: I have seen the risen Lord! I came to the garden alone, and He was here!

Mary Magdalene sings: "In the Garden." She quietly leaves stage.

SCENE II: Same as Scene I. Altar guild continues program plans.

EUNICE: Why, Alice, that would be a proper program for Holy Week! Let's stage it! We can get all the parts assigned and start rehearsing next week. *Gets up.* You and I had better go now. Sue, here, has to go shopping.

SUE: No, no. You all don't leave yet. *Eunice sits back down.* That shopping trip can wait. I've just been sitting here, doing some serious thinking:

Easter is more than colored eggs and bunny rabbits and baked ham--and buying new clothes--and wearing corsages.

Easter is that time each spring when we remember Jesus on the Cross. In the tomb. And then resurrected.

We can make Easter the most glorious and joyous time of the year, for it is indeed our CELEBRATION that we have the Christian faith and the hope of eternal life.

I don't think there's anything wrong with coloring eggs and having egg hunts. Or, with the wearing of new dresses and lovely flowers. That's all, all right, in its place. These are in a sense symbols of new life, as is the coming of spring.

Our care should be that we do not allow the trivial things, which are here today and faded and forgotten tomorrow, to overshadow and sometimes to crowd out the true purpose of observing Easter. And that purpose is to rejoice in Christ, and to offer glory and praise to God for his Son, who gives us new, everlasting life--through the Cross.

ALICE: Oh, Sue, you are so right! And, can't we learn a lesson from the women of Galilee? They grieved and they wept and they were afraid. But they didn't panic, or run, or quit thinking of Jesus when all seemed lost, when even the Sun refused to shine. They stood firm. We can stand firm. Be steadfast.

SUE and EUNICE: We surely can.

ALICE: Had either of you ever considered that it was the Women of Galilee and their going to the tomb before the rising of the Sun that even today influences Christians all over the world to assemble out of doors to hold sunrise services on Easter morning?

EUNICE: I had never thought of that! And you know these women never dreamed that their getting up early to take the spices would lead to thousands and thousands of Easter Sunrise Services, in years to come.

Those women of Galilee were just doing what they could. They made and carried out their plans to prepare burial spices for their Master. It occurs to me that we, too, can make and carry out plans to do something for God.

We can literally, and figuratively, prepare and bear in our hands those sweet things in life that are for Christ. *Gestures with hands.*

ALICE: *Rises* Girls, I tell you what! Let's add one more scene to the Holy Week pageant we're going to stage.

Let's show that, in prayer, every woman can be a Mary Magdalene--any day--and especially at Easter time.

Any person can slip quietly away, forget the outward preparations for the Easter season, and find God in "A Beautiful Garden of Prayer."

SUB-SCENE D: The Beautiful Garden

Curtain opens on garden scene. Three Guild women move up on stage and walk through garden gate. They are joined by all the cast, except CHRIST FIGURE.

Entire Cast sings: "The Beautiful Garden of Prayer."

Curtain
THE END

Lord, I Want to Be a Christian

Negro spiritual

I WANT TO BE A CHRISTIAN: Irregular
Negro melody

1. Lord, I want to be a Chris-tian In my heart, in my heart,
2. Lord, I want to be more lov-ing In my heart, in my heart,
3. Lord, I want to be more ho-ly In my heart, in my heart,
4. Lord, I want to be like Je-sus In my heart, in my heart,

Lord, I want to be a Chris-tian In my heart.
Lord, I want to be more lov-ing In my heart.
Lord, I want to be more ho-ly In my heart.
Lord, I want to be like Je-sus In my heart.

In my heart,..... In my heart,.....
In my heart, In my heart,

Lord, I want to be a Chris-tian In my heart.
Lord, I want to be more lov-ing In my heart.
Lord, I want to be more ho-ly In my heart.
Lord, I want to be like Je-sus In my heart. A-MEN.

Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?

Negro spiritual

WERE YOU THERE: Irregular
Negro melody

1. Were you there when they cru - ci - fied my Lord? Were you
2. Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree? Were you
3. Were you there when they laid Him in the tomb? Were you

there when they cru - ci - fied my Lord?
there when they nailed Him to the tree? Oh!
there when they laid Him in the tomb?

Some-times it caus - es me to trem - ble, trem - ble, trem - ble.

Were you there when they cru - ci - fied my Lord?
Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree?
Were you there when they laid Him in the tomb? A - MEN.

Christ the Lord Is Risen Today!

GLANFAIR 2.2.7.7 with allelous

Charles Wesley 1790; alt.

Robert Williams, 1817
Harm. David Evans, 1927

1. "Christ the Lord is risen to-day!"
2. Love's re-deem-ing work is done, Al - le - lu - ia!
3. Lives a - gain our glo - rious King.
4. Hail, the Lord of earth and heaven!

All cre - a - tion, join to say:
Fought the fight, the bat - tle won; Al - le - lu - ia!
Where, O death, is now your sting?
Praise to You by both be given.

Raise your joys and tri - umphs high;
Death in vain for - bids Him rise; Al - le - lu - ia!
Je - sus died, our souls to save;
Ev - ery knee to You shall bow.

Sing, O heavens, and earth re - ply.
Christ has o - pened par a - dise. Al - le - lu - ia!
Where your vic - tu - ry, O grave?
Ris - en Christ, tri - um - phant now.

In the Garden

C. A. M.

C. AUSTIN MILES

1. I come to the gar-den a - lone, While the dew is still on the
2. He speaks, and the sound of His voice Is so sweet the birds hush their
3. I'd stay in the gar-den with Him Though the night a-round me be

ros - es, And the voice I hear, Fall - ing on my ear, The
sing - ing, And the mel - o - dy That He gave to me, With -
fall - ing, But He bids me go; Thro' the voice of woe His

CHORUS

Son of God dis - clos - es.
in my heart is ring - ing. And He walks with me, and He
voice to me is call - ing.

talks with me, And He tells me I am His own; And the

joy we share as we tar - ry there, None oth - er has ev - er known.

The Beautiful Garden Of Prayer

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ELEANOR ALLEN SCHWOLE

J. H. HILLMORE

1. There's a gar - den where Je - sus is wait - ing, There's a place that is
2. There's a gar - den where Je - sus is wait - ing, And I go with my
3. There's a gar - den where Je - sus is wait - ing, And He bids you to

won - drous - ly fair; For it glows with the light of His pres - ence, 'Tis the
bur - den and care, Just to learn from His lips words of com - fort, In the
come meet Him there; Just to bow and re - ceive a new bless - ing, In the

REFRAIN

beau - ti - ful gar - den of pray'r. O the beau - ti - ful gar - den, the

garden of pray'r, O the beau - ti - ful gar - den of pray'r; There my Sav - ior a -

waits, and He o - pens the gates To the beau - ti - ful gar - den of pray'r.

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