

# EYEWITNESSES

*by Steven M. Cross*



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*A Collection of Passion Perspectives*

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**SYNOPSIS:** *Eyewitnesses*, a collection of monologues, presents the passion of Christ from twelve different perspectives. These monologues, which may be used as individual pieces or as part of an entire production, begin with Jesus the night of his betrayal and end years later with John, an exile waiting for a final revelation. Each monologue reveals the impact Jesus had on that character's life: Judas, who expected Jesus to deliver Israel from Roman rule; Pilate's wife, whose vivid nightmare compelled her to beg her husband for Jesus' life; Nicodemus, the Pharisee, who was so afraid of what others might say that he didn't dare visit Jesus in the daytime; Lazarus, who knew more than anyone else about the meaning of resurrection and who claimed Jesus as a dear friend; Mary, Lazarus's sister, who also understood the real truth of Jesus' kingdom; Mary Magdalene, who was cleansed of an evil spirit; Stephen, whose chance meeting with Jesus changed his life forever; the prostitute who learned what mercy was and showed her gratitude and devotion by wiping Jesus' feet with her hair; and of course those closest to Jesus, including Peter, John, and Mary, his mother. Let their voices echo through the years to remind listeners today of the passion of Christ.

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

*(1-5 females, 1-7 males)*

JESUS (m)

NICODEMUS (m)

PILATE'S WIFE (f)

LAZARUS (m)

JUDAS (m)

STEPHEN (m)

THE PROSTITUTE (f)

MARY, SISTER OF LAZARUS (f)

MARY MAGDALENE (f)

PETER (m)

MARY, MOTHER OF JESUS (f)

JOHN (m)

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## PRODUCTION NOTES

### Performance Considerations

The monologues may be performed on a completely or almost bare stage. There are a few of what I would call environmental set pieces, like places to sit, and then there are a few basic props, such as a scroll or a loaf of bread, but honestly not much more than that. There are also some lighting cues, but even those are optional. I wrote the monologues so that any kind of group with any size of budget could perform them. As far as costumes go, all of the dress would just need to resemble the first century in the Middle East, though the costumes of Nicodemus and Pilate's Wife would most likely be a little more elegant. I included specific costumes, set pieces, and props in each individual monologue.

### Scripture

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**JESUS**

**COSTUME:** Simple biblical attire of headpiece, robe, and sandals, adding a beard if the actor is clean-shaven.

**SET:** Garden of Gethsemane. The basic requirement is a large rock. You may set a few plants around if desired.



**AT START:** *JESUS sits with his back against a rock as the lights come up. He stares at the ground.*

**JESUS:** The embers of our campfire smolder and will soon die. I have seen that spark of light die out in humanity's eyes time and time again. In just one day I will join the legions of the innumerable dead. Still, I know that it only takes one breath to bring an ember back to flames. The night is chilly and damp. It is as if every bubble of air is wet with a tear. My disciples are asleep in the shadows. I wanted them to kneel with me by this rock while I prayed. They could not stay awake. They are human after all ... as am I.

*(He glances around him as if looking at the men.)* Sleep, my brothers ... my children, for the time will come when the only rest you'll get is when the embers in your own eyes die. *(To audience.)* It's sad. I had so much more to tell them, but I knew at this moment that I would be alone.

*(He stands and points to his right.)* John, the disciple whom I loved, sat to my right. John understands better than the others. He knows that above all, love is the most important commandment. Peter... *(He chuckles.)* Poor old Peter. Always confused, always misunderstanding. *(Pause.)* But Peter has the fire. Maybe more so than the others. It's true. Tonight his flames will be scattered, and they will flee from my face. But they will be regathered. Peter, you are so human. But you will be my champion, my rock. You will come to know my forgiveness. The guilt, the denials will taunt you from

the corners of your mind as wild beasts prowl just outside the light of the fire, but they will drive you to glory.

*(JESUS pauses and then sits.)* I can see Peter now. He's standing across the circle of flames. He rants about some little point I made in my teachings. Peter, Peter. You were so quick to spot the mote in your brother's eye, even though you had a beam in your own eye. But you will see. You will dream dreams, Peter, and when you die, you will see the same beam as I... All of us would sit around the campfire at night, our fish roasting on sticks, bread and wine tucked away nearby. Sometimes I would sit and explain my parables over and over again. So frustrating.

*(He laughs.)* It took me a year just to convince them I would not lead legions of angels into Jerusalem and slaughter all the Romans. *(Pause.)* Judas never understood that message. Sometimes we would just sit, almost silent under the heavens, with the stars winking down on us. I saw my Father's creation through different eyes—human eyes—and I was filled with awe. I knew my Father in a way I did not know him before. It is an incomprehensible thrill to know God's love as a human does.

*(JESUS glances up.)* It is cloudy tonight, and dark. The people of this land will know darkness ... but I'd rather not talk about that now. *(He motions to the shadows.)* I would like to talk to them again. Not of death or resurrection, but of the simple pleasures of life they so often overlook. They don't understand that the Father always gives us little pieces of himself: a rose in bloom, the sweetly sour taste of a wild grape, the smiling eyes of a child, friendship. People don't seem to notice these gifts. Soon my Father will give them his Son. How many will notice me?

*(He pauses, then suddenly kneels before the rock.)* My father, please do not let my death be in vain. Let your creation know it for what it is: the ultimate act of love. I give myself freely to you, Father, but please, please, let them know that it is this that sets them free. *(His head slumps down. Whispers.)* Amen. *(He stands again.)* Judas will come soon. Oh Judas, I would not want to be you when

your eyes open and you see. How often I would have taken you in my arms and hugged you close. How often I would have told you of the sweet love of the Father. But you would not hear.

Judas would sit just outside the campfire's light until the shadows swallowed him. He rarely spoke. He wanted something I would not give him—yet he never left me. He was always with us, taking care of the money. Yes, I knew he stole from us. I remember his rage when the young woman anointed me with perfume. I don't know if he ever really gave money to the poor or not. It doesn't matter. Judas never learned that money was just money, and you could not use it to buy yourself salvation. Judas will never know I forgive him for what he is about to do. He will force my hand and find it empty. What I have will not fill him, and he will not live long enough to see my body fill the empty tomb.

*(Pause.)* I hear soldiers in the distance. It is time.

## THE END

**NICODEMUS**

**COSTUME:** An ornate biblical costume consisting of an outer robe over another robe and a headpiece, along with sandals.

**SET:** Sanhedrin meeting room. The basic requirement is a throne-like chair.

**PROPS:** A scroll.



**AT START:** *The stage is empty. NICODEMUS sits on a throne-like chair. He is wearing a robe. He holds a scroll in his hand.*

**NICODEMUS:** I tried to warn him. Even telling him Herod wanted to kill him had no effect. He has always been an enigma—especially to me, for I have talked to him under cover of darkness. *(He stands, gently pulls off his outer robe, and sets the scroll on the chair.)* You should have seen them when he called Herod a fox. Anger flickered in their eyes as a viper's tongue flickers in the air.

*(He pauses for a second, looks thoughtful.)* But I also saw fear. I realized something: my fellow Pharisees feared Jesus. Instead of fervently praying he was the Messiah, they hoped he was not. They didn't care if they were under the thumb of Rome as long as they could use their power to keep their own people under their thumbs. Power. They ... we ... Pharisees love our places in the temple, we love the adoration and fear of the people, and we love breaking the backs of the poor with the weight of our laws.

*(He turns shamefully away and speaks quietly.)* No wonder Jesus called us hypocrites. No wonder he ate with sinners and not with us. We are far worse sinners than any tax collector or publican. Now he will be crucified—the fate reserved for the most despicable criminal. Yet no one can say what he did. Jesus does not deserve this. I know he has claimed to be the son of God. Is he? Many have asked, but I cannot say.

*(NICODEMUS turns around, picks up the scroll, and drops it to the ground. Then he sits back in his chair.)* He tried to make me understand one night after he first began his ministry. I remember it so well. The stars flickered in the sky, and the moon shone so brightly, I almost didn't go to him. I didn't want another Pharisee to see me in his company. I feared the opinion of man and didn't even consider God.

*(He groans and slips out of his chair and falls to his knees.)* I am such a sinner. Father, forgive me. *(He hangs his head silently for a few seconds before he looks back up. He sighs and stands.)* When I went to him, he was alone. I found him kneeling by the side of a fire with flames casting shadows that unnerved me. Just as I was about to cough to get his attention, he turned to me.

"Hello, Nicodemus," he said, and his eyes flickered as he stood. He scratched his beard thoughtfully. "Sit down. We will break bread."

"No," I said, too terrified at the idea of lingering there. I turned to foolish flattery. "Rabbi," I said, "we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him" (*John 3:2*).

Then he said something I have never understood. "No one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again" (*John 3:3*).

Ridiculous, I thought. How can an old man go into his mother's womb? (*NICODEMUS sits wearily down.*)

He looked at me and sighed, much as a patient teacher sighs at a slow student. He said more, but I forgot most of it until now. He said that God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only son and that whoever believed in him would not perish but have everlasting life (*John 3:16, author's paraphrase*). It maddened me that I could not understand, and it maddened me further that he knew I could not understand.

Now Jesus will die the most humiliating and painful death ever devised. What kind of twisted mind thought of crucifixion? I wonder if anyone will even bury the man. I'm sure he owns nothing but his sandals and his clothes—and guards have been known to gamble for those. I'm sure he doesn't even have a tomb. I don't care what the priests or Pharisees or Sadducees say. I will see to it that this teacher has a proper burial, even if I have to provide the myrrh and aloe myself. (*NICODEMUS stands and starts to walk away, but pauses and addresses the audience once more.*)

The teacher said he would rise from the dead after three days. I am old and tired. I have seen so much in my lifetime. My hopes often rose when I encountered a person I thought could be our Messiah. Many times I have wept in bitter disappointment. My heart and my hope no longer rise. (*He pauses.*) But if Jesus arose from the dead? Now, that would be a sign that even an old Jew like me could believe.

## THE END

**PILATE'S WIFE**

**COSTUME:** Regal robes and sandals.

**SET:** Inside the palace. Place a statue of a Roman god at Center Stage, along with a table and chair.

**PROPS:** Carafe with water or grape juice, goblet, and bread in a basket.

**SOUND EFFECT:** Murmuring, indistinct voices, some angry.



**AT START:** *PILATE'S WIFE enters from Upstage Center. She is middle-aged. She walks slowly, as if she has suffered much—eyes mostly down. She stops next to a statue of a Roman god to her right.*

**PILATE'S WIFE:** My husband insists he has to be cruel to rule. He says the Jews are a stiff-necked, rebellious people. What does he expect them to be? They are smashed under the Empire's iron fist until their culture and their religion are threatened with extinction. Caesar can abolish all forms of religion at any time. So far the Empire has considered them no more than pests, but who knows how long that will last?

Pilate is frightened because he knows the people look for a Messiah, a mighty warrior who will lead the Jews to victory over us. For someone who has little or no respect for their beliefs, my husband sure gets nervous when things like this happen. For the first time in my life, I can understand why.

*(She folds her hands and pauses, then closes her eyes and takes a deep breath.)* From his entrance into Jerusalem until now, I have been strangely disturbed by this man—if he is indeed only a man. Every Roman knows the gods sometimes appear in human form. In fact, Caesar himself has done everything but claim to be god incarnate. The people flocked around Jesus as sheep flock together and go to the butcher. Now this Jesus will meet his doom, and the

people are restless. This time of year is tense anyway. Jews are traveling en masse to Jerusalem for one of their holy days.

This day is celebrated as a memorial to their Moses who rescued his people from Egypt many years ago. Egypt is not Rome, but still, every year at this time, some rebel arises from the crowds. My husband has put his soldiers on high alert. The releasing of one Jewish prisoner relieves some of the stress, but this year...

*She walks a few steps and stares out. For the first time, we become aware of a murmuring in the air. Voices insistent but not clear—some angry tones. She turns back to the audience.*

I have prayed to Athena for wisdom. She has answered me with riddles. Dreams. I have heard this Jesus speaks in riddles too.

*(She walks to a table, pours herself a drink, and takes it—perhaps for courage.)* I dreamed it was midday. The earth shook under me as if in the throes of nausea. I ran outside as my castle fell around me. Indeed, the whole kingdom appeared as if it were collapsing. I heard a voice as loud as thunder. “My kingdom is not of this world!” It was his voice. As I fell on my knees in the street, the midday faded into darkness, as if someone had covered the top of a lamp until it slowly burned out. Utter blackness so thick it felt like grave clothes wrapped about me and settled over the world.

I saw streaks of light with faces that looked like men darting in and out of doorways. Then the wailing began—it sounded like the wails of the dead in the underworld. I had to leave the city.

*She drinks the rest of her drink and then pours another.*

If I didn't leave there, I would go mad! In the distance I saw one shaft of light beaming down from heaven. I staggered toward it. I don't know how long I walked, but I arrived at the bottom of a hill. A wooden post was driven into a hole. I trembled because I knew what it was: a tree of crucifixion. The post rose from the ground so high it disappeared into the black night. Somewhere far above, the light shone just like a star in the sky, but it was the only light.

When I looked up, one single drop of something wet dripped on my forehead. I wiped it away with my finger and saw the splatter was wine. I heard another drop, then several in quick succession. At my feet was a goblet (*She holds her cup up.*) exactly like this. I picked it up and sipped from it. At first it was sweet in my mouth. (*She stops and stares into the cup. It slowly drops from her hand and hits the floor. She jumps as if awakening from a nightmare.*)

Then as I swallowed, the wine turned to blood in my throat. I dropped the cup, and then his voice echoed from the light, "My blood," he said. I looked away. Beside the cup was some of the flat Jewish bread. Red streaks crisscrossed it until it looked like the back of some common criminal who had been flogged. The voice thundered once more, "My body." I screamed and ran away. His voice filled my head. "Better that he had not been born." It echoed and re-echoed, getting louder and louder. The same words over and over until I thought my head would burst.

Pilate woke me. I sat up. "Leave this man Jesus alone," I said. He looked at me, pain and indecision in his eyes. I told him I was troubled. He wavered. For a brief second I saw Pilate the man, not Pilate the ruler ... but then it was gone.

He said, "I have to be cruel to rule." I wept as he got up and left me. (*She goes to a chair and sits down.*)

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He is out there washing his hands. He says Jews put much pride in their hand washing. He offered to release Jesus, but the people wanted Barabbas. So Jesus will be crucified. This is the end. (*She picks up her cup and pours more into it. From a basket she pulls some bread and breaks it. She takes a bite of it, sips her wine and then looks up.*) Or maybe it's just another beginning.

*Lights dim and leave her in darkness.*

**THE END**

**LAZARUS**

**COSTUME:** Simple robe and headpiece with sandals.

**SET:** Inside the home of Lazarus. (Bare stage.)



**AT START:** *LAZARUS stands at Center Stage.*

**LAZARUS:** At first I couldn't understand why he cried when he saw my tomb. I mean, if he knew what he was going to do, why would he cry?

I heard a voice. "Lazarus, come forth!" The words throbbed in my body like the beating of drums—but that stench. I felt a soft breeze as fresh as spring, and then the smell disappeared.

Part of the shroud slipped from my face. A light glowed brighter than the sun, then winked out. The stone rolled away. Silhouetted against the opening of my tomb stood the Master. He reached out to me and we embraced. Tears rolled down his face. Jesus wept ... for me. That seems so long ago. (*LAZARUS sits on the stage floor.*)

Now it's his turn. The soldiers arrested him last night. He will be scourged and then crucified like a common murderer. (*He pauses.*) I died in my sleep. I almost wish I had stayed dead so I would not have to see this day, but I know I am here for a reason. Jesus said he would be raised from the dead. I will bear witness to this miracle as long as I retain my breath. That must be the reason for my second chance.

*LAZARUS stands and gazes at the stars.*

I now know why he wept. I mean, when he saw where they laid me to rest and then raised me from the dead, for that is the only time I have ever seen him weep. He wept for all of us: brother, sister, child. He wept because we all face the final journey. We die and then return to dust. He wept because it did not have to be that way. We could have spent our days in Eden, walking in the beauty and talking to the Father. My Lord will not weep in front of them. He will weep in private. His grief will pour out of him like blood from a wound. But even in the worst of times, some good may come. In his death, he will provide a pathway back into the garden.

*(LAZARUS sits back down.)* Let me tell you of the Jesus I knew. We would often sit at my table. If the Master had his own house, I never saw him go to it. We would eat the fresh bread my sisters made, and he would fall silent. I saw in his face the strain and the pain. His brow furrowed, his eyes bloodshot and tired. He carried the burden of the world on his shoulders. He says he will carry the burden of our sins, too. Sometimes his eyes seemed so far away, concentrating on something I could not see.

“Master, are you all right?” I would ask. He would blink as if waking from a dream and then look at me. For a single second I glimpsed his anguish, but then he would smile at me. It was a sad smile, but his eyes danced.

“I am fine,” he would always say.

“You cannot keep doing this,” I told him. “You will kill yourself.”

He would smile again. “I must do as my Father wishes. I do not have much time left here, Lazarus, but in heaven I will have eternity, and I will give it unto those who believe in me.”

*(LAZARUS stands and wipes his eyes.)* He told me not long before the Passover that he would die at this time, as a sacrificial offering for our sins to fulfill the Scriptures. I do not know how this all works, but I believe him. He is the doorway, and it is our belief in him that opens that doorway. Jesus. He is the kindest man I know. Wait—did I say man? He is more than a man ... but tomorrow, on the blackest day since Adam and Eve sinned, he will die like one. God forgive us all.

**THE END**

## JUDAS

**COSTUME:** Biblical robe and headpiece with sandals.

**SET:** Outdoors. Place an artificial tree on the stage.

**PROPS:** Moneybag with coins inside and a rope.



**AT START:** *When lights go up, JUDAS is standing under a tree on the stage. He is in his thirties.*

**JUDAS:** Thirty pieces of silver. It's a small fortune. *(He opens a moneybag, peers into it, and then drops it to the stage. It clangs.)* The price of one kiss. He should have fought them. Is he not greater than Elijah? Why didn't he call fire down from heaven? Or demand those legions of angels he talked about? *(Bitterly.)* Some Messiah.

*(JUDAS sits under the tree.)* I waited and I waited. He sat around and talked to people. What kind of Messiah is that? *(Shrugs.)* I couldn't understand his words anyway. What are words? Anyone can talk. My people needed action, not platitudes. *(He picks up the moneybag.)* This money means nothing to me. All I had to do when I wanted money was take it from the bag. Some people would call it stealing. I called it investing. Even he said we shouldn't bury our talents in the ground... When he refused to fight his captors, that's exactly what he did. I'm the only one who knew what to do with money. He let some cheap prostitute pour expensive oil over him—oil worth a fortune ...

*(He holds up the bag and stares at it.)* These thirty pieces of silver mean nothing to me. I had plenty. I just took it because it was part of my plan. All Jesus needed to do was call fire down. Just one bolt of lightning would've worked. When we came to Jerusalem, the people fell at his feet. It was the Passover celebration, the best time to rise against our oppressors. He had the people in his hands. He could have been another Moses. He said he was the Messiah.

(*JUDAS stands.*) You have to understand. We spent hundreds of years enslaved, ruled by one oppressor after another. Now, these Romans. We are God's people. We don't deserve this. He said he was the Messiah. I waited. Nothing happened.

This money ... it means nothing to me. I had to sound real to the priests, so I asked for money. I knew Jesus would conquer them if they tried to arrest him. Our own people—the priests. They called this blood money. They wouldn't even take it as an offering.

Jesus didn't even fight. He went like a lamb to be sacrificed. I just knew my idea was the right one. It was like God himself spoke to me. It started as a tiny mustard seed—he said a lot about mustard seeds—yet it grew in my mind. I would play a major part. I would put our Savior on center stage. His star—as bright as the one announcing his birth—would rise. It would signal the end of our captivity.

I have to explain the voice. It told me what to do. I just don't know anymore. It might have been a demon. The voice came clear in my mind. "You are the one," it said. "You know he is the Son of God. He is the Messiah, but he is like Moses—reluctant. Judas, you will be my burning bush. You will show him your love with a kiss. You will push him into his kingdom and your people into freedom."

In the garden, I kissed him on the cheek. "It is your time, teacher. Your time to shine. Your time to put these Roman dogs in their place," I whispered into his ear. My heart pounded so loudly I just knew they heard it. The teacher just shook his head at me. His eyes were filled with such sorrow ... I will never forget those eyes.

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*(JUDAS bows his head and whispers.)* When I looked at him, I couldn't speak. I felt so cold, so alone. Then they seized him. The weight of my sin nearly drove me to my knees. *(He falls to his knees.)* Lord, Jehovah, forgive me for this sin, if it can be forgiven! *(He picks up the moneybag and throws it. He falls face forward.)* My friend. My teacher. *(He sits up and pulls a rope from his robe.)* My Lord.

*Lights dim out.*

**THE END**

**STEPHEN**

**COSTUME:** Biblical robe and headpiece with sandals.

**SET:** Bare stage.



**AT START:** *STEPHEN is a teenager. He stands on the stage as the lights go up.*

**STEPHEN:** I first saw Jesus when my family went to a wedding in Cana. I was nine. I saw three big stone jars filled with water. Later, the same three jars were filled with wine. I told my father, but he only laughed at me. I looked into the eyes of Jesus that night and he smiled. My whole body warmed. I'd never felt anything like it before.

*(STEPHEN pauses.)* I saw him again two years ago. He sat under a tree by the lake. He talked to people about all kinds of things. I didn't really understand. His voice was soft and smooth, but all the members of the crowd listening heard him as if he stood right next to them and spoke to them personally.

He spoke for hours until he became hoarse. I wanted to move closer to see this man better, so I slipped away from my father who was deep into a discussion with my uncle about whether Jesus was the Messiah or not.

*STEPHEN pantomimes the following.*

I ran up to Jesus as he headed back for his boat. One of his men stopped me.

"The teacher is tired. Go away," he said.

"I need to see him," I said.

"I said, go away!"

Jesus heard his voice and turned back. "Let the little children come to me" (*Matthew 19:14*).

Several of us went to him; he put his hands on our heads and blessed us. When I knelt before him, he placed his hands on my head. He started to speak, then stopped. "Your name is Stephen?" He asked.

"Yes, Teacher."

"We will meet again. May God's spirit enter you."

I can't explain what happened next very well. My heart and my mind opened, and warmth and light filled me. I believe the Holy Spirit entered me. Suddenly, every word the teacher said made sense to me. My mouth dropped open. I stared at him.

"Remember this," Jesus said.

*(STEPHEN stops talking. He pauses and then sighs.)* I have remembered it. Yesterday, Jesus came back into Jerusalem in time for the Passover. The people greeted him as if he were a king, but I also knew he is not the kind of king the people want. His kingdom is a spiritual one I will not see before I die, but one day, I will live in it. I stood in the crowd as he passed by. When he came abreast of me, he stopped and put his hand on my shoulder. I know I was no one special because he greeted and touched many on his way through the crowd. But when he touched me, his warmth spread throughout my body, and suddenly the spirit took me to a bright throne covered with gold and jewels. Creatures hovered around the throne and a host of men and women and angels bowed before the throne singing, "Holy, Holy, holy, Lord God Almighty." Then Jesus stood before me in white robes.

“Stephen,” he said. “Stephen.” Just as suddenly I was back in Jerusalem. He said, “You are twelve. At twelve years old, I was teaching in the temple. You will also teach and preach the gospel I have given you. You will see visions and dream dreams.”

Then he touched my mouth, and it was as if I had swallowed a live coal. “You are my servant,” Jesus said.

“Yes, Master,” I said.

“Do not let death disturb you. Nothing can keep us apart.” Those were the last words I heard my Messiah say to me. I know he will rise in three days. As long as I have breath in my body and words in my mouth, I will proclaim him King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

*(STEPHEN pauses and takes a deep breath.)* As he died, Jesus said, “It is finished”—yet all who really know him, know that it has only begun.

*The lights fade to black.*

## THE END

**THE PROSTITUTE**

**COSTUME:** A long cloak with a hood and a veil (and a long, dark wig, unless actor has this type of hair) and sandals.

**SET:** Bare stage.

**PROPS:** Ornate jar, pitcher of water, and tarp to protect the floor.



**AT START:** *Lights come up on PROSTITUTE. She is beautiful with a dark complexion and long, dark hair. She walks DC with a jar in her hand.*

**PROSTITUTE:** He knew who and especially what I was all along, but he still let me touch him. Those hypocrites with him walk on the other side of the road when they see me in the daylight, but when we meet up at night, they are not so pious.

*She sits at the edge of the stage and chastely pulls her dress over her knees and to her ankles. She wraps a hood around her head and sets the jar at her side.*

One day I sat by the lake. Right before dawn, after another night of sin. This time it had been too much for me. I intended to walk into the water until it sucked me up. I was widowed young. I had no children. I was starving. A woman cannot survive in this city alone unless ... I was beautiful—at least outwardly. My heart and my soul were as black as the day Jesus died.

*(She stands.)* I heard voices in the gray dawn. A multitude of people walked toward me. *(She wraps a veil over her face.)* His disciples surrounded him. As they walked closer, I covered my face and backed away. I didn't want them to look at me the way they always did. Then something happened that I will never forget. The people followed him as he walked into the city. I lagged behind, listening to every word of his teaching. I wanted to approach him, but I felt so filthy with sin that I didn't dare. Jesus claimed to be the Son of God.

Surely if such a sinner as I approached the Son of God, I would be struck dead.

I stared into the skies. The rising sun painted the heavens in scarlet and purple—the colors of a harlot. My colors. *(She turns to the right and will not face the audience.)* The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They stood her before us all and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" *(John 8:4-5).*

*(Speaking fiercely.)* I wanted to say, "Where is the man? This woman could not commit adultery alone. He too should be stoned." *(She pauses and is humble again.)* But since I was a woman and a harlot, I could say nothing. Tears filled my eyes—the first I had shed since my husband died. Jesus said nothing, but then he bent over and drew in the dust with his finger. *(She demonstrates.)* They kept questioning. Finally he straightened and looked them in the eyes. He said, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to cast a stone at her." He bent over once more and began to write.

My mouth opened in surprise. I wanted to scream at the hypocrites who condemned her. I knew several were not without sin. I did not say a single word, however. One by one, they turned and walked away. Jesus straightened and looked around. The woman burst into tears. Jesus said, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

She could barely speak. "No one, sir."

Then he said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin" *(John 8:10-11).*

*(She sits down, as if she is exhausted. A few seconds of silence.)* I wept for hours. My life of sin had destroyed the light in my life and blackened me to the core. I was like rotten fruit, good only for worms. I don't know when I broke down completely, but I emptied myself of all tears and then prayed. God told me what to do. His voice did not come with thunder or in a hurricane or raging fire. It was still and soft, like a spring shower sprinkling blooming flowers. I went to him in the Pharisee's house. I wept at his feet because I had so little to offer him. *(She holds up the jar she has been carrying.)* Just a jar of perfume, my tears, and my kisses.

As I wet his feet with my tears and wiped those tears and the perfume with my hair, I heard one of them say, "If this man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman is touching him." Jesus turned to a man named Simon and said, "If two men owed money to a money lender, one five hundred denarii and the other fifty, and the money lender forgave them their debts, which one would love him more?" Simon said, "I suppose the one with the bigger debt" *(Luke 7:41-43, author's paraphrase).*

I knew the teacher was talking about me. My face burned with shame. He said more, but I could not listen. Then he touched my cheek and gently turned my face so I could look into his eyes. He said, "Your sins are forgiven" *(Luke 7:48).*

*(There is another silence, this one longer. She wipes her eyes.)* I didn't think I heard him correctly until the others complained, "Who is this that even forgives sin?" *(Luke 7:49).* He looked more deeply into my eyes as if he could see through them into my soul. I knew I had been cleansed. "Your faith has saved you," he said. "Go in peace" *(Luke 7:50).* Later, his disciples baptized me. *(She stands and pours water onto the floor.)* My life began anew .... But just three days ago, his life ended as the hypocrites rejoiced.

This morning the bright sun has swallowed the night, and the dawn streaked the heavens with red and blue. The three days are over. The other women say the tomb is empty, and he is risen from the grave. It is true. Our Savior lives! Death has been swallowed up by mercy!

*The lights turn red and blue, then fade into darkness.*

**THE END**

**MARY, SISTER OF LAZARUS**

**COSTUME:** Customary dress and head covering with sandals.

**SET:** Mary's home. Place a table at Downstage Center.



**AT START:** *MARY, SISTER OF LAZARUS, is middle-aged. She crosses to Downstage Center near a table.*

**MARY, SISTER OF LAZARUS:** They criticized me when I did it. Even my brother Lazarus gave me one of his “I can’t believe you are doing this” looks. Martha could only complain because I wasn’t helping her with the meal ... again. Judas accused me of wasting money. “This could be sold and the money given to the poor,” he said. Sure, just like the money the priests gave him for betraying Jesus. Just like the money he helped himself to from the bag. Just like ...

*(She pauses and tries to regain her train of thought.)* I could think of no other way to show my devotion to him. He raised my brother from the dead. He showed me what was really important ... he showed me life. My life is in him. His life is in the Father. Those who believe him have life eternal. Then he began to insist he would die. His disciples looked at him as if he lied. They would not accept it—Judas, especially. He expected a bloody revolution, a complete destruction of Roman rule, a new Israel.

I knew better. Don’t ask me how I knew. I just did. That day was the last day I would see him free. I spent all the money I’d saved—every last denarii—and bought anointing oil. The kind I bought is often used to anoint the dead. My heart brimmed with love for Jesus. I was so caught up in this love that I cried as I anointed him. The people at the table gasped when I let my hair down and used it to wipe his feet. I knew doing so was considered shameful, but love and grief moved me. I wanted Jesus to know I would follow him to death.

*(She pauses.)* And I knew if he said he would die, he would die. I just didn't know how soon. Passover night—the most meaningful celebration of my people, and also the most hopeful. Passover night—it recalls the time God redeemed us and looks forward to the time God redeems us again. Passover night—the celebration of our deliverance ... Judas delivered Jesus into their hands that night. They crucified Jesus—I witnessed his death. I don't care if they disapproved of my actions that night. I understand now what the Lord meant when he said I prepared his body for death. When they crucified the Lord, most of the disciples fled.

I saw his brother James and the other James, and John, the sons of Zebedee. His mother was there too, as well as some spectators. Mostly the mockers came. Some of the cruelest ones threw rocks at Jesus as he hung there. I couldn't understand why God didn't rain fire down from heaven. I still don't quite understand. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (*Luke 23:34, KJV*).

Even though his words calmed me, I could not look at him, so I turned away. I buried my face in my hands and cried. I don't know how long I sat there like that, but suddenly he spoke, his voice hoarse and ragged. "My God, my God! Why has thou forsaken me?" (*Matthew 27:46, KJV*). (*MARY collapses into her chair and buries her head in her hands.*)

Then I started to run away, but something made me stop to look at him. Miracles followed. I still could not tell you if they were real or not. Darkness fell over the land, just as in Egypt. Earthquakes shook the ground. Saints arose from their graves. But I didn't need a miracle to show me what I knew all along: that he was the Son of God.

Later peace fell over him, and all of us with him. He said, "It is finished." His head fell forward and his body sagged. During the hours of his agony, many came to believe. His last words sealed it. The priests would always say the same exact words when they finished making their sacrifices for the people's sins.

It all cleared for me. Jesus is the Passover Lamb. Through him we will be delivered from our sins. His blood, like the lamb's blood—on the door frames, like a cross. All this overwhelms my mind. It is sunrise, the first day of the week. Some of the women and I are going to his tomb. When he said he would rise from the dead, the scoffers mocked him and even the disciples didn't seem to believe. My brother is Lazarus. I did not mock. I will go to the tomb to see the Lamb of God.

**THE END**

**MARY MAGDALENE**

**COSTUME:** Customary dress and head covering with sandals.

**SET:** Bare stage.

**PROPS:** Large floor cushion, jar of water, and a cup.



**AT START:** *Lights come up on MARY MAGDALENE. She is a beautiful younger woman—in her thirties, perhaps. She places a pillow on the floor. In her hand is a jar containing water.*

**MARY MAGDALENE:** They say when he first saw me, I crawling on the ground like an animal. When they forced me to my feet, I spit in his face. I don't remember any of this. Then I cursed him several times, and a voice—not mine, but from me—said, “Son of God, leave us. Her sins have let us in.” Then he touched me. “She is still in here,” he said. “Come out of her.” My friends said his voice was like thunder. They heard snarls like wild beasts, felt a rush of heat as if someone had opened a furnace, and then I dropped to my knees in the dirt.

*(MARY MAGDALENE sits down on the pillow.)* What I remembered first was his face—especially his eyes full of wisdom and compassion, not judgment. I believed I stared into the face of eternity. Then I realized I was naked. *(She pulls her shawl and head covering closer around her and shivers.)* I tried to cover myself, but I could not. Jesus found a robe and put it over my shoulders.

“Mary Magdalene, your sins are forgiven. Cast aside all that is evil and follow me.”

His disciples looked at him as if he were insane. Then Jesus told a parable of a man whose demon was cast out but because the man did not keep his house clean, the demon gathered seven more demons and entered him again. The twelve did not understand him, but I did. I made my decision right there.

“My Lord, I will follow you.” I did, too, even when they arrested him, even when Peter—the rock—denied him, even when they spiked him to the tree, and even when he drew his last breath. When he died, it was mostly we women who were with him. I saw James and John, the sons of Zebedee, and James his brother from time to time, but we women were there when they pierced his side and the day turned into darkness and the ground shook.

A Roman soldier beheld the signs and wonders and said, “Surely this man was the Son of God” (*Mark 15:39*). It saddened me that it was not Peter who said it. We wept bitterly.

*(MARY MAGDALENE wipes away tears from her eyes. She regathers herself before she can go on.)* Our Lord was dead, and we had no idea where we could bury him. The King of Kings didn't even have a tomb to call his own. They would have tossed him into a common grave with thieves and murderers, but Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus the Pharisee got permission to take his body and place it inside a tomb. The Roman and Hebrew leaders rolled a huge stone in front of the tomb because they believed the disciples would try to steal his body. In truth, they were frightened because Jesus said he would rise from the dead.

*(MARY MAGDALENE is silent once more. What she says is more painful than she can bear, so she changes the subject.)* After Jesus was condemned, Judas hung himself, as though he regretted his actions. Judas the betrayer. His name will be remembered throughout history. People will curse him and spit on the ground with its mere mention. I should have known he was planning something. Before the last supper, I saw him huddled with some Jews. This was no common conversation. They whispered in tense, hurried tones.

I didn't know what they spoke of, but I didn't like their looks. When Judas suddenly looked at me, I saw a threat in his eyes.

I was afraid, and I hurried away and went to help the women prepare the Passover. When they came into the room, Judas glared at me. Again, those eyes. Judas had always been a thief and a radical, but I saw something different in his gaze. He didn't even look like the same person. His eyes were the color and shape of evil. The women said I looked that way before the teacher cast out the demons.

*(MARY MAGDALENE pours herself some water to drink.)* Judas had died. The disciples were meeting in secret for fear of the authorities. Jesus lay dead in a cave, and the Sabbath had ended. All of the followers met on that first day to decide what to do next. Some believed it was all over. With the Master dead, there could be no message. *(MARY stands and goes Downstage Center.)* They argued. Some said that God would not have allowed his son to be murdered. They said if he were the Messiah, he would have destroyed the Romans. Those closest to him reminded the others that Jesus said he would die, and his kingdom was not of this world.

I too remembered he said he would rise. Some of the women and I went to his tomb to prepare his body. We didn't talk, but we knew what we each thought. What would we find at the tomb? How would we move the stone? I was so afraid. Jesus cast out my demons. I wanted to believe he was more than a man—but if we found his body... *(Shakes head.)* I understood so little then. Not anymore.

They deny it to this day, but I know what happened. I saw. We did not find our Lord in the tomb. He had risen as he said! The authorities said the disciples stole his body, but I saw Jesus, and he lived. Already they persecute the believers, but they only make us stronger. If our Lord can be crucified, we can take up our crosses and follow him. The disciples will write his story and take it to the world. People are baptized daily. Miracles happen! I know if every single one of us is killed, it wouldn't matter. His message will not be stopped. His good news will be preached throughout the world.

Two thousand years from now—if there is still a world at all—his story will still be proclaimed. People might forget me, Mary Magdalene, but no one will forget the name of Jesus.

**THE END**



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