

Arc of Darkness

By Audra Call Moss

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STORY OF THE PLAY

This powerful “what might have happened” drama takes place during the last weeks in the life of Christ. Pilate appoints Claudia to spy on the activities of the magician Joshua ben Jusef (Jesus) in order to determine the danger of rioting. While Jesus never appears in the play, He evokes changes in the characters: the guilt-ridden Claudia finds the ability to forgive and the meaning of charity; Pilate moves from indifference to questioning; and Yarma, the maid, from haughtiness to humility; Caiphas, the High Priest, from self righteousness to fear; and Hakamin, the deformed Hebrew gardener, from resentment to acceptance, even to the point of giving his life.

SETTING

The Time: Early spring, 29 A.D.

The Place: The palace and private garden of Pontius Pilate, in Jerusalem.

This marble wing of the palace has a dining room and portico on the lower level. From the portico we step into a "private" garden that occupies most of the stage area. Steps up center left lead from the garden to the narrow balcony which serves Pilate and Claudia's bedchamber. Yarma's bedroom is behind, and not visible to the audience. To the extreme right of their bedchamber is a portion of Pilate's counsel room which we see through a scrim. The garden is beautiful, with flowerbeds, shrubs, a fountain, a statue, and a bench. A weaving loom under a grape arbor is stage left. A small tamarisk tree stands beside the private gate up left center. Up center the limbs from a linden tree overhang the sturdy six-foot wall that encloses the palace garden. A large metal-bar gate is down right, and serves to admit guests who enter the private garden through a small covered archway behind the gate. It also admits military and business associates who seek consultation with Pilate in his counsel room. To enter this private counsel room, they must walk off stage center right, through a more public garden.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(9-10 m, 3 w, extras)

TYRIUS: Hard, cold Roman guard; stationed at palace gate; 35.
PONTIUS PITATE: Efficient, stern, well-built, Governor of Jerusalem, 45.
CLAUDIA: Beautiful brunette; individualistic, artistic wife of Pilate; 38.
ASHERAH: Outspoken pagan-Samaritan; has persistent cough, slovenly pronunciation; shows evidence of a hard life; 65.
CAIPHAS: Confident, beady-eyed, shrewd, calculating, miserly Jewish high priest; 60.
HAKAMIN: Sincere, friendly middle-class Jewish gardener; sun-baked skin; because of childhood accident he has a hump on his back and drags his right leg; 15.
YARMA: Charming, quick-tempered companion and personal maid to Claudia; 33.
IONO: Handsome, vain, egotistical, ambitious centurion; 37. *(May double with Melando, Guirio or Shammai.)*
DORMENIUS: Loyal, cautious tribune; administrative assistant to Pilate; 50.
MALCHUS: Efficient, self-controlled, loyal tribune; military assistant to Pilate; 34.
MELANDO: Capable and trusted palace guard; 36.
GUIRIO: Nearsighted, slightly plump palace guard; 47.
SHAMMAI: Cocky, ambitious, vain Pharisee; 53.
EXTRAS: Vendors, scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, priests, sympathizers with Joshua Ben Jusef, villagers.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

Scene 1: Early morning.
Scene 2: Evening of the same day.

ACT II

Scene 1: Mid-afternoon, four weeks later.
Scene 2: Evening, three days later.

ACT III

Scene 1: Before dawn, the following morning.
Scene 2: Mid-morning, the same day.
Scene 3: Toward evening, the same day.

ACT I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: Dawn begins to light the stage. TYRIUS, on guard, walks from the gate to down right, and off. PILATE appears on the balcony, donning his headgear and sword belt. CLAUDIA follows him, wearing a filmy sleeping gown. Her hair is tousled. They embrace. He goes down the stairs, picks a climbing rose and tosses it to her. He leaves center right. Claudia sits on the balcony railing, smelling the rose and her look of contentment changes to one of worry and torment. Slowly she pulls the pedals off the rose.)

CLAUDIA: ...I tell him... I tell him not... I tell him... I tell him not...

(CLAUDIA discards the rose and quickly gets a robe from her room, goes quietly down the stairs, opens the gate and starts up the runway through the center of the audience. TYRIUS re-enters, sees her, clears his throat and walks noisily across front stage. Claudia stands still. VENDORS appear.)

CLAUDIA: I know, Tyrius...I know. But the vendors are going to the markets--I will go no further.

(VENDORS come down runway, selling vegetables, fruits, baskets, paintings, wine, water, cloth, bread, oil. She buys fruit, basket, and cloth, re-enters the gate TYRIUS holds open for her, and goes into the dining room. With the increased light of dawn, Tyrius now notices ASHERAH, asleep behind a big rock, left stage, in front of the palace wall. He awakens her roughly, with his foot.)

TYRIUS: On your feet, pig!

ASHERAH: Who calls me pig? You--you swine:

(TYRIUS whacks her with the flat side of his sword; ASHERAH falls face down in the dirt.)

TYRIUS: A little respect!

ASHERAH: *(Spitting the dirt from her mouth.)* ...For the spawn of rats?

TYRIUS: Get your filthy rump out of here!

ASHERAH: I told you--I must see the powerful one!

TYRIUS: You will never get to see him. And my favorite sport is running withered old women through—

(TYRIUS lunges at her and screams. ASHERAH yells and stumbles down left in fright, leaving her shawl. He laughs, picks up the shawl with the end of his sword.)

TYRIUS: Take this dirty rag with you.

(As ASHERAH puts shawl over her shoulders, she notices CAIPHAS coming down the runway and throws herself across his path.)

ASHERAH: Shalom. I beg you--get me audience with the Governor. My son is—

CAIPHAS: *(Pushing past her.)* Take it to the Sanhedrin. I have business with Pilate.

ASHERAH: *(Grabbing his robe to detain him.)* But Pilate is the only one with the power to—

CAIPHAS: You dare touch the robes of the Holy Priesthood?

(CAIPHAS swings around quickly, knocking ASHERAH free, and she falls, her head hitting the big rock. She lies unconscious. Caiphas does not notice. CLAUDIA appears in private garden. At the gate.)

CAIPHAS: The High Priest to see Pilate.

TYRIUS: Your complaint this time?

CAIPHAS: The temple tribute has again been robbed.

TYRIUS: *(Opening the gate.)* Is that all?

CAIPHAS: And during the night two daughters and six sons of Judah were ill-used by your venomous soldiers!

TYRIUS: How do you know they were Romans?

(CLAUDIA appears at the gate and listens. CAIPHAS stands with his back to the gate.)

CAIPHAS: Witnesses! After the evil-minded had tired of their savagery, the youths were left by the funeral pits. Two of them identified the soldiers...we have them prisoners.

CLAUDIA: You dare to hold a Roman prisoner, Caiphas?

CAIPHAS: *(Crossing arms over chest and with a slight nod of his head.)* Shalom, my lady... I did not see you.

CLAUDIA: Obviously. Now about the prisoners—

CAIPHAS: Only a short imprisonment. They will be turned loose and stoned at sundown.

CLAUDIA: *(Opening the gate wider and coming through, laughing.)* Did you hear that, Tyrius? Jews stoning Romans.

CAIPHAS: That is the punishment according to our law.

CLAUDIA: *(Turning on CAIPHAS.)* They are Roman citizens, and a Roman court will decide their guilt!

CAIPHAS: And if the situations were reversed? If the guilty were Jews? Would they be turned over to the Sanhedrin, or crucified according to your law?

CLAUDIA: As long as you pay your taxes and keep peace, Pilate does not interfere with your Sanhedrin.

(HAKAMIN enters down left, sees ASHERAH, kneels, wipes blood from her forehead, gives her a drink from his water bag.)

CLAUDIA: But your judgments are to be with your own people. Pilate will never allow you to pass sentence on a Roman!

CAIPHAS: You forget that I represent two million Jews over whom Pilate must keep peace!

CLAUDIA: And you forget Pilate is Rome!

(CLAUDIA plops the remainder of her apple into CAIPHAS' open mouth, turns briskly and goes into dining room.)

End of Freeview

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