

Darkness

A Good Friday Play

by
Terrell Anthony

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STORY OF THE PLAY

It is night of Jesus' crucifixion. His followers (the audience) are in hiding from the authorities. They came to Jerusalem to hail Jesus. Now, they're confused and frightened. They have become strangers in Jerusalem, the followers ... of a dead man. As the audience sits in the dark, they meet Mary Magdalene, a beggar boy, Nicodemus, Simon the Cyrene, and a James the disciple. Each of the characters has a unique perspective on Jesus that's reassuring but challenging.

"Darkness" is U-3 — unique, unorthodox, and urgent.

Unique. It's a Good Friday play, designed to heighten the meaningfulness of Easter.

Unorthodox. It's designed to require little rehearsal as possible. The characters have little interaction with each other, requiring less full-cast rehearsals.

Urgent. The audience members are treated as if they're the hiding Jesus followers. Jewish leaders are hunting them. They are in danger and told to get away as the play closes.

This play is designed to give new meaning to how dark and desperate it seemed on crucifixion night before the world was changed by a resurrection.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(3 m, 1 w, 1 flexible)

NARRATOR: Has one line that can be prerecorded or delivered by any cast or crew member.

MARY MAGDALENE: A late thirtyish woman dressed darkly and non-descriptively in an outfit that covers her entire body, including a black veil that covers much of her head and face.

BEGGAR: A teenage boy or girl dressed darkly in tattered dirty clothing, face smeared with grime and barefooted. If cast as a female change the pronouns, as necessary.

PHARISEE: Although he doesn't identify himself, this Pharisee is Nicodemus, famed in Biblical accounts for approaching Jesus in secret with questions that led to Jesus' using the imagery of "being born again." Dressed darkly and nondescriptly, the Pharisee wears a head covering befitting his vocation.

VOICE: Has one line that can be delivered by anyone offstage.

SIMON THE CYRENE: Dressed darkly and simply but distinctively enough to look foreign.

DISCIPLE: Although this disciple does not identify himself, he is most likely James. Dressed darkly and non-descriptively with a shawl covering some of his head and shoulders.

Production notes at the end of the script help actors better understand each of their characters.

MUSIC

The music is your choice. The listed songs are only suggestions:

"What Wondrous Love Is This?"

"I Have Decided to Follow Jesus"

"Were You There?"

"How Can I Keep From Singing?" this is sung by Mary Magdalene, James, and Simon.

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(AT RISE: NARRATOR enters stage left and moves to downstage center. MUSIC under "What Wondrous Love Is This?")

NARRATOR: This is the night of Jesus' crucifixion. You're strangers in Jerusalem, hiding from the authorities, the followers ... of a dead man. *(Exits.)*

(MUSIC up. "What Wondrous Love Is This?")

MARY MAGDALENE: *(Calls from off stage.)* Hello?! ... Hello?!... *(Enters from upstage center. She's been crying and slumps as she walks downstage and stops, half-heartedly looking out toward the audience.)* Who's there? I... *(Moves farther downstage.)* Is that you?... *(Pushing back her veil, she looks out at all of them, hardly believing what she sees.)* Can it really be you?... *(Her eyes squeeze shut, feeling relief for the first time during this day. She exhales heavily.)* Oh! You're such a welcomed sight. Praise be... *(Takes a couple of steps one way and then back in the other direction.)* And is it possible you're all here? I cannot believe it. I'm seeing every last one of you. Praise be the heavens! What a relief. I've been so worried about you with all that's happened during this... this nightmare... *(Stops, resisting the anger she feels welling up.)*

You were right to get away, sisters and brothers, and to stay together. The world has gone mad. Hate has spun it out of control... *(Her expression hardens as she looks away. Exhaling long and slow, she looks back out to the audience.)* He's gone. He's dead. Our beloved Rabbi has been murdered in the worst of ways. I saw it. I saw it all... *(Looks away, haunted.)* The things they did to Him, one cruelty after another. I would not have believed if I hadn't seen Him... *(Falters.)* Seen Him stripped, battered, whipped, spit on, nailed, thorns pressed into His head, speared in the side.

MARY MAGDALENE: *(Cont'd.)* Our Jesus was hardly recognizable when hung up on that cross to die—slowly... *(Her eyes squeeze shut, as if trying to exorcise the memory.)*

But He didn't just hang there. Jesus kept on caring—for all of us watching in horror...for the thieves hanging on each side of Him, even for those who did this to Him. He forgave them. He forgave us. He never stopped caring. He loved us to the end... *(Looks away, feeling the weight of her sorrow as new memories soften her expression.)*

A Rabbi like none other—that was him. Never was a man so gentle, so full of compassion and tenderness. To be touched by Him was an experience you could never forget... *(Looks to audience, her sad eyes suddenly animated.)* You know. Every one of you knows what it's like, knows what it means, knows how it changes you. I can still feel Him—His hand on mine, His arms around me. Oh, to be embraced by Jesus. Everything stopped. Nothing else mattered. The weight of being me lifted... *(Her face lifts upward as her eyes gently close.)* And when He looked at me. No one saw me like Jesus. He took me in. He knew. Somehow, He knew me better than I knew myself, from that very first day... *(Pauses, remembering. A weary smile.)*

Jesus spoke to my heart, not just my head. It frightened me. What I'd become was in danger. I wanted to run, to get away, but His words held onto me. They pierced me. I couldn't move. I felt something I hadn't for such a long time: peace. And in the blink of an eye, my life changed. No longer was I a prisoner, an outcast, that possessed woman to be mocked and despised. Suddenly, I was me, the one I'd never known, set free by a man who dared to love me, touch me, accept me. Oh, it tasted so sweet, that freedom, because our Rabbi, who freed so many, healed me... *(Pauses. Her expression hardens.)*

His gentleness was so strong, his strength so gentle. He was beautiful—a loving prophet, a faithful healer, a Messiah beyond our dreams. So, how? How has it come to this? How could those vipers wrap around Him?

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MARY MAGDALENE: *(Cont'd.)* How could He be humiliated? How could one so powerful be crucified?! *(In agony, she reaches upward as if challenging the heavens. For a moment, she looks as if she may scream, but then she droops, her face pitching downward as she mutters in disbelief.)*

He let it happen. He didn't resist. He could have silenced them with his wisdom, called on thousands to rally around Him. Jesus could have set Jerusalem on fire with the fury of the forgotten, the abused, the outcasts. He could have turned the streets red with blood. They knew it. We knew it. But no, He surrendered to them—quietly. *(Her words trail off in resignation before she takes a deep breath, gathers herself and peers back at them.)* And now, you must hold on to each other. Stay together while I find the eleven... *(Grimaces.)* Yes, eleven. Our Rabbi has been betrayed, and now they look for all of us, hoping to be rid of all but the memory of Him... Wait here until I return.

(MARY pushes her veil back into place, pivots and rushes upstage, exiting upstage center. MUSIC up as she exits, "What Wondrous Love Is This?" Music suddenly stops as door slams. BEGGAR enters through back house door, breathlessly running to top of aisle.)

BEGGAR: *(To self.)* No, not this way. This is better... *(Runs behind audience to other aisle, down to midpoint in the aisle, stops and looks back, as if being chased. He looks ahead and hurries down the aisle and on to the stage. Jabbing a hand in a bag he clutches, he hurriedly pulls out a large portion of bread. His eyes dart all around him as he sits center stage. Unaware of the audience, he begins jamming the bread hungrily into his mouth. He's ravenous, not so much eating the bread as devouring it. Crumbs spray in all direction, his grunting sounds testimony to the desperation in his hunger. His eyes inadvertently glance above him to suddenly see someone in the audience. Startled and wide-eyed, he lurches backward, kicking his feet up as if to thwart an attack.)*

End of Freeview

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