

DENIED, BETRAYED

by Angela Joyce



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CAST OF CHARACTERS

JUDAS ISCARIOT

SIMON PETER

WOMAN

FIRST MAIDEN

SECOND MAIDEN

PRODUCTION NOTES

This drama, adapted from the gospels of Mark, Luke, and John in the New International Version of the Bible, may be presented as a Readers Theatre or in traditional play form, but is more effective as a combination of the two. It works well for Judas and Peter to stand at lecterns with their scripts available but inconspicuous, as nonprofessional actors may find this less threatening. Because the Maidens have limited stage time, their lines should be memorized.

Costumes can vary from the director's notion of biblical attire to a more "symbolic" form of dress, which may give it a more contemporary appeal. For example, it may be effective to dress Judas in black and Peter in earth tones, to immediately distinguish the difference between them. As for the women, the Maidens should wear muted, even faded colors, as if firelight were shining on them. The Woman, however, may wear a more ornate costume, such as a flowing gown, because each gospel writer had a different conception of who she was. She should have long hair.

Very few props are needed; in actuality, only a jar. Spotlights may be utilized for dramatic effect, but are not a necessity. The delivery by the performers is more important than the setup.

1 *(JUDAS and PETER each stand at lecterns. Throughout the*
 2 *reading they are never aware of each other's presence. The*
 3 *WOMAN and the MAIDENS enter either from the choir loft or the*
 4 *sacristy at the appropriate times.)*

5 **JUDAS:** The night he was betrayed...

6 **PETER:** The night he was betrayed — and denied.

7 **JUDAS:** Betrayed by me, Judas Iscariot, his own disciple.

8 **PETER:** Denied by me, Simon Peter, "The Rock," his follower
 9 ...his friend.

10 **JUDAS:** Jesus Christ.

11 **PETER:** The Messiah.

12 **JUDAS:** Of Nazareth.

13 **PETER:** The only Son of our heavenly Father.

14 **JUDAS:** Come to save his people.

15 **PETER:** Come for our salvation.

16 **JUDAS:** Come down to earth, only to be...

17 **PETER:** Denied.

18 **JUDAS:** Betrayed.

19 **JUDAS and PETER:** *(Together)* And crucified.

20 **JUDAS:** In the centuries to come, will anyone ever think of me
 21 as anything but Judas Iscariot, the betrayer of their Lord,
 22 Jesus Christ? I wonder if, when they remember the
 23 miracles — the feeding of the five thousand, the water
 24 turning to wine at the wedding feast, the raising of
 25 Lazarus from the dead — I wonder, when they
 26 reconstruct all this in their minds, if I will be anywhere
 27 in the picture. I was there. I saw it all — every miracle,
 28 every sign, every amazing proof that Jesus of Nazareth
 29 was indeed the long-awaited Messiah, the Light of the
 30 World. Like the rest, I left everything behind to follow
 31 him...then, on his last night on earth, I betrayed him. And
 32 that is all I am remembered for.

33 **PETER:** There probably isn't a Christian anywhere who
 34 doesn't know about me, Simon Peter, the disciple who did
 35 all the foolish things, like trying to walk on water, and

1 falling asleep in the Garden of Gethsemane, and cutting
 2 off that slave's ear. And yet, it was I to whom Jesus said,
 3 "Feed my sheep" three times...though it was I who denied
 4 him on his last night...also three times.

5 **JUDAS:** Really, I never thought to betray him until just before
 6 the beginning of the Passover. Until then, the idea had
 7 never occurred to me, though I was not the "model
 8 disciple" by any stretch of the imagination. None of us
 9 were perfect — not James, nor Andrew, not even John,
 10 who seemed to be his favorite, and certainly not Peter.
 11 My own little personality flaw was that I kept
 12 "accidentally" misplacing the contents of our money box
 13 — I was the treasurer, if you remember. Yes, I was a thief.
 14 I knew very well that I was breaking the eighth
 15 commandment. How could I not know, considering the
 16 company I kept? But, like I said, none of us were perfect!
 17 Yet, to *betray* him...I never considered taking my sin to
 18 the extreme. Somehow, though, it just seemed to
 19 happen...sort of naturally...inevitably. One night we were
 20 all feasting at the house of Simon the Leper when
 21 something rather unusual happened with one of the
 22 guests, and from that moment on, I began to devise a
 23 scheme to betray my teacher.

24 **PETER:** At least I was able to keep quiet in the home of Simon
 25 the Leper, by some miracle. Judas was really the one who
 26 came off looking like a fool. Before the feast, while Jesus
 27 was sitting at the table with us disciples, a woman who
 28 had recently joined us entered the room quite abruptly.
 29 She said nothing to the host, nor to anyone else there, but
 30 went straight to Jesus (*Enter WOMAN with jar; as the*
 31 *reading continues, she pantomimes PETER's narrative to the*
 32 *unseen Jesus*) and knelt down before him. I noticed that in
 33 her hands she held a jar of some very expensive perfume,
 34 and I wondered what she was going to do with it.
 35 Suddenly, she began to weep as if her heart would break,

1 and to my astonishment, she poured the entire jar of
 2 perfume over his feet, wiping them with her long hair,
 3 and crying all the while. This raised an immediate cry of
 4 protest from Judas Iscariot, our treasurer, who said that
 5 this woman ought not to have wasted such costly
 6 ointment, but should have sold it and given the money to
 7 the poor. Yes, and she should have entrusted that money
 8 to *him*, for we learned later that often the money we
 9 intended for charity ended up in our good treasurer's
 10 own pocket. But Jesus replied, "Leave her alone; this
 11 woman has done a beautiful thing for preparing my body
 12 for burial. For you will always have the poor with you,
 13 but you will not always have me. I tell you, wherever the
 14 gospel is preached in all the world, what she has done
 15 will be told in memory of her." (*WOMAN exits quietly.*)

16 **JUDAS:** When the feast was over, I immediately went to the
 17 chief priests, who had long been plotting against my
 18 teacher, and I asked them, "How much will you pay me to
 19 deliver Jesus of Nazareth into your hands?" They gave
 20 me thirty pieces of silver.

21 **PETER:** The night of the Passover came soon after the
 22 incident with the woman at Simon's house. After we had
 23 sacrificed the lambs, John and I asked Jesus where he
 24 wanted to go to eat the traditional Passover supper. He
 25 told us to go into Jerusalem. "As you are walking along,"
 26 he said, "you will see a man coming toward you carrying
 27 a pot of water. Follow him. At the house he enters, tell the
 28 man in charge, 'Our Master sent us; his time has come.' He
 29 will take you upstairs to a large room which is all set up.
 30 Prepare our supper there." In the evening, Jesus arrived
 31 with the other disciples, and as we were sitting around
 32 the table eating, Jesus said, "One of you will betray me."
 33 Sorrow chilled my heart—sorrow and a cold, deadly
 34 fear. Suppose it was I? In anguish, I burst out, "Lord, am
 35 I the one?" But...I was not.

JUDAS: And when, at the Passover supper, Jesus announced that one of us would betray him, the others at the table burst into a cacophony of panic, crying, "Who is it, Lord? Is it me? Am I the one?" His calm voice rose over the chaos, just as it had when he calmed the sea that one stormy day, as he replied, "It is the one I served first. For I must die just as it was prophesied, but woe to the man by whom I am betrayed. Far better for that one if he had never been born." Though I admit his words struck a pang of fear to my heart, I, too, nonetheless inquired of him, "Rabbi, am I the one?" He answered "Yes. Go and do it quickly." And so I went.

PETER: It was Judas Iscariot. After he left the table, a shocked silence fell over the room. We all looked helplessly at Jesus, none of us knowing what to say or do next. Jesus gazed back at us with so much tenderness in his eyes, and then he took a small loaf of bread, blessed it and, breaking it into pieces, gave us each a bit of it. "Take this and eat it," he told us, "for this is my body." Then he took a cup of wine, gave thanks for it, and gave it to us, saying, "Each of you drink of the cup, for this is my blood, sealing the New Covenant. It is poured out to forgive the sins of multitudes." I felt my eyes sting and my throat constrict as he continued, "I tell you, I will not drink this wine again until the day I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

We sang a hymn after that and went out to the Mount of Olives, where Jesus told us that we would all desert him, as sheep scattering away from their shepherd. I was appalled at this, and exclaimed, "Master, I will never desert you, no matter what the others do!"

But Jesus said, "Peter, before the rooster crows tomorrow morning, you will have denied me three times."

"No!" I exploded, tears of frustration again threatening to spill forth. "No, even if I have to die with you, I will

1 *never deny you!"* And the others took up my cry, asserting
2 that they would never do such a thing.

3 **JUDAS:** I went again to the chief priests to tell them that
4 everything was going as planned, and that the time had
5 come to arrest him. They said, "We must do it in a place
6 free of crowds, somewhere dark and secluded where it
7 will be easy to capture him."

8 I told them, "Then we must do it *now*, to make certain
9 of that."

10 "You know exactly where he is?" they asked.

11 "I do," I said. "I know very well."

12 **PETER:** Then Jesus instructed his disciples to wait, and he
13 took James and John and me with him into an olive grove
14 called the Garden of Gethsemane. "My soul is crushed by
15 sorrow, even to the point of death," he told us. In the
16 darkness I could see the luminous, horrified eyes of
17 young John, and I heard James draw in a shuddering
18 breath as Jesus walked a bit ahead of us and fell to the
19 ground. He told us to stay with him, so we sat down
20 together, and Jesus began to pray. "Father, Father!" he
21 cried, "Everything is possible for you; take away this cup
22 from me! Yet I want your will, and not mine."

23 He went on like that for some time, and it wasn't long
24 before the three of us had dropped off to sleep, one by
25 one, like candles being snuffed out. The other two
26 managed to wake up just as he returned to us, but I
27 wasn't so fortunate, and he rebuked me. "Simon!" he said.
28 "Are you asleep? You could not watch with me even one
29 hour? Watch with me and pray, lest the Tempter
30 overpower you. For though the spirit is willing enough,
31 the flesh is weak."

32 Then he went away and prayed again, repeating his
33 cries to the Father. When next he returned, he once more
34 found us sleeping. This time I awoke and gasped in
35 horror, for there were beads of crimson oozing from the

1 pores of his face — in his agony, he had been sweating
 2 drops of blood. I was speechless. And then Jesus looked
 3 beyond me and told me to get up. The betrayer had come.
 4 **JUDAS:** I told the chief priests, “You will know which one to
 5 arrest when I go over and greet him. Then you can take
 6 him easily.” And so I walked up to Jesus and kissed him
 7 in a great show of friendliness. “Master!” I exclaimed in
 8 my most jovial manner.

9 Jesus turned to the mob I had with me and said gently,
 10 “Whom do you seek?”

11 “Jesus of Nazareth,” they snarled in reply.

12 “I am he,” Jesus said, and at that statement we were all
 13 knocked flat on our backs. Once more he asked them,
 14 “Whom are you searching for?”

15 Again they replied, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Then they all
 16 made a rush at him and seized him roughly. Peter leapt
 17 forward and slashed off the ear of the high priest’s slave,
 18 and then he and all the disciples fled. I lingered a
 19 moment, watching them scatter like frightened sheep.
 20 And then I felt a heavy, leaden fear creep over my heart,
 21 squeezing like a clammy, inexorable hand at the very core
 22 of my being — for I had done it. I had betrayed my Master,
 23 my teacher, my...friend. It was I, Judas Iscariot, one of
 24 the twelve disciples, who had delivered Jesus Christ into
 25 the hands of his executioners. It was I. Jesus turned once
 26 as they were leading him away, and my eyes were
 27 irresistibly drawn to his, and that brief glance struck me
 28 to the bone as if it were a dagger. I felt utter remorse,
 29 shame, and panic flood my senses, and I turned, like the
 30 others, and fled.

31 **PETER:** When the angry mob seized my teacher, I acted on my
 32 first wild instinct — I sprang forward and hacked off the
 33 ear of one of them with my sword. The man screamed in
 34 agony — a terrible sound, but in my frenzied state, it
 35 pleased me. It was the sound of my own soul in that



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