

ENCOUNTERS BEFORE THE DAWN

by Keith Madsen



CHRISTIAN PUBLISHERS

Copyright Notice

CAUTION: Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that this Work is subject to a royalty. This Work is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America and all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations, whether through bilateral or multilateral treaties or otherwise, and including, but not limited to, all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention and the Berne Convention.

RIGHTS RESERVED: All rights to this Work are strictly reserved, including professional and amateur stage performance rights. Also reserved are: motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound recording, all forms of mechanical or electronic reproduction, such as CD-ROM, CD-I, DVD, information and storage retrieval systems and photocopying, and the rights of translation into non-English languages.

PERFORMANCE RIGHTS AND ROYALTY PAYMENTS: All amateur and stock performance rights to this Work are controlled exclusively by Christian Publishers. No amateur or stock production groups or individuals may perform this play without securing license and royalty arrangements in advance from Christian Publishers. Questions concerning other rights should be addressed to Christian Publishers. Royalty fees are subject to change without notice. Professional and stock fees will be set upon application in accordance with your producing circumstances. Any licensing requests and inquiries relating to amateur and stock (professional) performance rights should be addressed to Christian Publishers.

Royalty of the required amount must be paid, whether the play is presented for charity or profit and whether or not admission is charged.

AUTHOR CREDIT: All groups or individuals receiving permission to produce this play must give the author(s) credit in any and all advertisement and publicity relating to the production of this play. The author's billing must appear directly below the title on a separate line where no other written matter appears. The name of the author(s) must be at least 50% as large as the title of the play. No person or entity may receive larger or more prominent credit than that which is given to the author(s).

PUBLISHER CREDIT: Whenever this play is produced, all programs, advertisements, flyers or other printed material must include the following notice: ***Produced by special arrangement with Christian Publishers.***

COPYING: Any unauthorized copying of this Work or excerpts from this Work is strictly forbidden by law. No part of this Work may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, by any means now known or yet to be invented, including photocopying or scanning, without prior permission from Christian Publishers.

Encounters Before the Dawn

by KEITH MADSEN

A series of six two-person
playlets for Lent

PRODUCTION NOTES

This series centers around two-person encounters between biblical characters between the time of the Crucifixion of Christ and his Resurrection. It is entitled *Encounters Before the Dawn*, not because all of the encounters occur before the physical dawning of Easter, but because they all occur before the reality of Easter dawns on the characters. With the exception of the mother of Judas in the play, "Through a Mother's Eyes," all of the characters are biblical. (I believe we can assume, though, that Judas had a mother.) The stories, too, are based on biblical events — only the details are fictionalized.

All of these plays can be performed with a minimum of props. Simple robes will suffice as biblical costumes. The playing time is only about 5-7 minutes per script. This means they may easily be used in a worship service while still allowing time for a sermon.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1. The Powers That Be**
- 2. Payment Must Be Made**
- 3. This Cross Has Made Us Family**
- 4. Through a Mother's Eyes**
- 5. Right There in Front of Me**
- 6. When We Had No Hope**

The Powers that Be

*(An Encounter between Joseph of Arimathea
and the Centurion at the Cross)*

SCRIPTURES: Matthew 27:54; John 19:38

SCENE: Outside the tomb, where Jesus has just been buried.

There is a chair in the middle of the stage. For purposes of the play, this is a large rock, upon which one could sit. Joseph of Arimathea enters from Stage Left, which is the direction of the tomb.

JOSEPH: *(Looking back in the direction of the tomb)* **The tomb is sealed. Good . . . good . . . now perhaps my aching heart can be at rest.** *(Looks toward Center Stage.)* **Ah! A rock on which to sit and collect my thoughts.** *(He walks over and sits in the chair. He rests his chin in his hands, with his elbows on his knees. In walks a centurion from Stage Right. He is hesitant at first, not sure he wants to be seen by the meditative JOSEPH. After a few seconds of indecision, he decides to enter with a swagger. JOSEPH lifts his head and notices him.)*

CENTURION: Well, I guess that does it for that rabble-rouser. We sure put him where he belongs!

JOSEPH: We . . . ?

CENTURION: Yes, *we* — the powers that be — Rome, with its might that one should never challenge; and, of course, *(Motioning in JOSEPH's direction)* the Jewish leadership such as yourself who have wanted him out of the way for so long. *(Pauses, and for a moment lets uncertainty and even sadness show in his face. Then he seeks to regain his swagger, albeit only partially successfully.)* Yes, yes . . . we have done what must be done to maintain order. And those guards *(Points in the direction of the tomb),* I know them. They will do a fine job in seeing that he stays put. There will be no tomb-robbers claiming a resurrection while they are on guard, I'll tell you that!

1 **JOSEPH:** *(Looks in the direction of the tomb for a moment, then*
 2 *regains his meditative posture. He speaks as if to himself.)*

3 Powers that be . . . yes, I guess that is what I am.
 4 Somehow, though, I don't feel so powerful.

5 **CENTURION:** What was that?

6 **JOSEPH:** I said, I guess I don't feel so powerful.

7 **CENTURION:** I don't see why not! Why, of course, you must
 8 obey the laws of Rome. We all must. But hundreds and
 9 thousands of people look up to you. You are a member
 10 of the Council, aren't you? *(JOSEPH nods.)* Then you can
 11 put people in prison and even advise that their lives be
 12 ended. People who come to you know that their well-
 13 being is in your hands. Such is the life of power! It is a
 14 life envied by others. Take me for instance. I'm in
 15 command of a hundred soldiers. Those under my
 16 authority bribe me for favors. They know the power I
 17 have over them and . . . and they envy me. I am . . . I am
 18 a powerful man.

19 **JOSEPH:** *(Stands and walks over to the CENTURION.)* Has this
 20 power you speak of brought you peace in your soul?

21 **CENTURION:** *(Shuffles back and forth for a moment.)* Well . . . at
 22 least as much as most others I know . . .

23 **JOSEPH:** Has it brought peace to your soul?

24 **CENTURION:** No . . . no, I guess not.

25 **JOSEPH:** Has it freed you from the fears that imprison so
 26 many in this world? — the fear of death, for instance?

27 **CENTURION:** Many fear me! Why, I . . .

28 **JOSEPH:** Has it freed you from fear?

29 **CENTURION:** *(Sighs deeply.)* No, it has not. I know no one who
 30 is free from fear. *(Pauses)* Except for perhaps . . . *(Turns*
 31 *toward the tomb. JOSEPH notices the direction in which the*
 32 *CENTURION is looking. He nods in that direction.)*

33 **JOSEPH:** Did you know him?

34 **CENTURION:** *(Still looking toward the tomb)* No, no, I just
 35 helped to crucify him. But the way things happened then,

1 strange things ... I ... (*Looks over at JOSEPH.*) Uh ... did
2 you know him?

3 **JOSEPH:** (*Turns his back to the CENTURION and walks away a*
4 *few steps.*) I ... I was his follower. I have not really
5 admitted this before. Perhaps it is not too late ...

6 **CENTURION:** (*Steps toward JOSEPH.*) Then you were not one
7 of those who called for his death? I thought the
8 Council ...

9 **JOSEPH:** The Council called for his death, yes, but I opposed
10 the action. I opposed it with all the meager power I
11 had ... I opposed it as much as I could without revealing
12 my discipleship ... and endangering myself. (*Turns*
13 *toward the soldier.*) Have I endangered myself now?

14 **CENTURION:** No, no ... I ... you say you were his follower?

15 **JOSEPH:** Yes, yes, I was.

16 **CENTURION:** (*Walks in the direction of the tomb and looks that*
17 *way.*) Do you believe then that he was the Son of God?

18 **JOSEPH:** Yes, I do. It sounds strange, I know, since he is
19 dead, but ...

20 **CENTURION:** No, it is not strange. I saw the way he died.
21 (*Turns toward JOSEPH again.*) You are right about my
22 power — it's really no power at all. I've known that for
23 some time, although I have pretended otherwise. When
24 you have something other people want, well, you've got
25 to pretend that it really is all they think it to be.

26 **JOSEPH:** Yes, I know that, too! In my younger years it was
27 enough to be admired as a religious leader. I could believe
28 that the answers I gave so freely really were answers.
29 When the other men spoke of my wisdom, and the young
30 women stole admiring glances in my direction, I thought
31 I had it all. I didn't, though, and meeting Jesus helped
32 me know just how unhappy I had been. He saw the
33 confusion behind my wisdom and the weakness behind
34 my power. And the funny thing was that he loved me
35 anyway! I never felt so powerful and whole as I did when

1 I stood, weak-kneed in his presence!

2 **CENTURION:** (*Enthusiastically*) Then perhaps you can
3 understand how I felt at the cross! I saw this man dying.
4 Normally a man looks so defeated and weak, but not this
5 time. All I saw in his eyes was love and . . . and sorrow —
6 but not the sorrow of a broken man — more a sorrow
7 for . . . for *us* and all we were doing trying to prove how
8 powerful we are. But when I saw that love, I knew —
9 there was a man who could face anything. There was a
10 man who could *defeat* anything. And when the sky
11 darkened and the earth shook, I wasn't afraid! Rather I
12 felt an excitement and a wonder stirring in my soul, and
13 I heard a voice cry out, "Surely, this man was the Son of
14 God!" (*Pauses and looks into JOSEPH's eyes.*) And as I stood
15 there a moment longer I realized the voice had been mine!
16 (*JOSEPH firmly grasps his arm and smiles.*) But, anyway,
17 since then I haven't known what to do. I haven't known
18 whether I really believe my own words. Still, the
19 excitement remains in my heart, even when I try to shut
20 it out . . .

21 **JOSEPH:** (*Smiles at the CENTURION.*) Don't try to shut it out,
22 my friend! (*Walks away from the tomb entrance a few steps,*
23 *and then looks back.*) Because, as you say, we are the powers
24 that be, and if that means anything, perhaps it means we
25 can recognize the power that has always been — true
26 power, power that extends over death itself! (*Walks to*
27 *stage exit opposite tomb door, then turns and motions for the*
28 *CENTURION to follow.*) Come! Let us wait together as that
29 power is made manifest!

30 **CENTURION:** (*Glances back excitedly at the tomb.*) Yes! Yes! We
31 will wait together! (*Runs to join JOSEPH in exiting.*)
32
33
34
35

Payment Must be Made

(An Encounter between Peter and Judas)

SCRIPTURES: Matthew 26:69-75; 27:3-5

SCENE: The Upper Room, just after the Crucifixion of Christ. Judas is in the room alone, sitting and staring at a chair toward the center. The chair is at a table around which several other chairs are placed. The table still holds a few leftovers from the Last Supper: some dirty plates, some broken pieces of bread, a few chalices — and a long rope, curled up. Peter enters, at first hurriedly, but when he sees Judas, he slows down.

PETER: Judas?

JUDAS: *(Jumps up and turns around. Seeing PETER, he backs away slightly.)* Peter! What . . . what do you want?

PETER: *(Somberly)* It was you, wasn't it?

JUDAS: *(Looks down and away, then nods.)* Yes, yes, it was me. *(Laughs nervously.)* Not that it was any big mystery. He knew, he knew. *(Looks back at PETER.)* Did the others send you to find me — put a bounty on my head, maybe?

PETER: *(Turns toward audience and stares with a meditative stare.)* No, no, I had my own reasons to look for you.

JUDAS: What made you look here?

PETER: *(Turns back and looks at the now-empty chairs.)* It makes sense. I knew you'd feel alone. *(Pauses and looks down.)* Betrayal of a friend does that to a person. *(Pauses again, then looks around the room.)* Anyway, this is the last place we were all together — the last place things felt like they did before. It just made sense you would be here.

JUDAS: *(Sits back down and looks again at the chair where he had been looking when PETER came in.)* Yes . . . like things were before . . . I guess that's what brought me here. We were a team and we were going to change the world! He made us believe it could be so. And so long I believed . . . *(Turns*

1 and faces PETER.) But that's not how it is now, is it? I
2 destroyed it all, and you're here to make me pay, right?

3 **PETER:** We will all suffer from the Master's betrayal, Judas,
4 and, yes, I'm still very angry at you for what you did.
5 *(Pauses)* But that's not why I'm here. I guess you don't
6 know we have more in common than you realize. You
7 see . . . I betrayed him, too!

8 **JUDAS:** You what?

9 **PETER:** Three times I had the opportunity to stand by the
10 Master, to declare my loyalty, and three times I failed
11 him. When others asked . . . I said I didn't even know him!
12 The Master went to his death needing friends, but I was
13 nowhere to be found.

14 **JUDAS:** *(Somberly)* Oh . . .

15 **PETER:** *(Turning again to JUDAS)* So, I came to find someone
16 who might be . . . uh . . . feeling the same way I am now.

17 **JUDAS:** *(Looks back at center chair.)* Feeling the same way I
18 am, huh? *(Pauses, then becomes increasingly more agitated as*
19 *he speaks.)* Do you have a pain deep inside of you that just
20 won't go away? I don't mean something *like* a pain — I
21 mean a *real* pain like someone ran you through with his
22 sword? Do you?

23 **PETER:** I had such a pain at first. But then I cried and cried,
24 until it seemed like I couldn't any more. Now, it's more
25 like a numbness, a numbness which reaches to every part
26 of my body . . . to my soul.

27 **JUDAS:** *(Looking at PETER)* Numb? *(Laughs cynically.)* I'd pray
28 to God that he would be merciful and make me numb,
29 but why would he listen to me now? *(Pauses)* But is this
30 really why you've come, to talk about what it feels like
31 to fail a friend?

32 **PETER:** *(More agitated.)* Yes, but really more than that, much
33 more than that. You know I've always been a man of
34 action. If you damage your boat, you don't sit around
35 bemoaning your fate. You do what you have to do to fix

1 it, and you go on. That's the way I've always been. But
 2 now, now. . . I don't know . . . I don't know how to fix this!
 3 What do we do to fix this, Judas?

4 **JUDAS:** *(Shakes his head.)* What do we *do*? Now I really doubt
 5 that you could feel as I do! There's nothing to do. It's all
 6 over and done. I've turned on a friend. I've failed God.
 7 I'm only fit for the refuse heap!

8 **PETER:** But you can't talk that way, Judas! It's so unlike
 9 what he taught us. Even though what you've done — what
 10 we've both done — seems unforgiveable, there should be
 11 some way it could be made right. *(Meditatively)* Jesus is
 12 still Jesus, Judas. Jesus still loves you . . . and he still
 13 loves me.

14 **JUDAS:** *(Pauses, genuinely touched by PETER's words.)* Thank
 15 you, Peter, for those words. You may have denied Jesus
 16 once, but you haven't turned from me. In your kindness,
 17 you haven't turned from what Jesus taught, and somehow,
 18 even now, I know he sees that. But *(Looking down at the*
 19 *table and touching the rope)* I can't find the grace you speak
 20 of in my heart. There's only one way I can make things
 21 right — “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” — that's
 22 what the law says. Payment must be made.

23 **PETER:** Payment must be made? *(Turns from JUDAS and*
 24 *toward audience. As PETER says the next words, JUDAS picks*
 25 *up the rope, almost reverently, and slips out the door.)* Payment
 26 must be made! Yes, that's it! That sounds like what Jesus
 27 would have said. It's what he *did* say, back when we began
 28 to head for Jerusalem. He said he would have to suffer
 29 many things and die. I didn't understand then. I told him
 30 such would not be. But he got angry at me, and said, “Get
 31 behind me, Satan!” That hurt so badly when he said it!
 32 But now I understand what he was trying to teach us.
 33 Payment had to be made — and he had to make it. When
 34 you betray a friend, you really can't do anything to make
 35 it right. You can only accept what God has already done.

1 **He made the payment. And now he freely gives his for-**
2 **giveness — to me who denied him — and to you, Judas . . .**
3 *(Turns to where JUDAS had been.) Judas? (Walks over to the*
4 *table and puts his hand where the rope had been. He looks back*
5 *at the audience.) Oh, Judas, Judas! Now you not only betray*
6 **the Lord, but yourself as well!** *(Walks over near the exit, and*
7 *faces audience once more.) Jesus gave so much so freely — I*
8 **only wonder how many others will still insist on**
9 **punishing themselves?** *(Exits)*

This Cross Has Made Us Family

*(An Encounter between Mary, the Mother of Jesus
and John, the Son of Zebedee)*

SCRIPTURES: Mark 3:31-35; John 19:26-27

SCENE: John and Mary, the Mother of Jesus, come walking in arm in arm. In the center of the stage is a cross. It is the day after the Crucifixion of Jesus. The two walk over to the cross, stop, and look upward at it meditatively for a few moments.

VOICE: "Woman, behold your son! John, behold your mother!"
(JOHN and MARY look up at the cross a moment more, and then turn and walk toward the audience.)

JOHN: You know, Mary, when he said those words, I didn't know what to think at first. Oh, don't get me wrong, Mary, I've always been fond of you. You've always been so much gentler than my mother. But, then, that's just the point. I already had a mother. And with my own mother standing, well, not too far away, you've got to understand that I felt pretty awkward.

MARY: Awkward. I certainly know that feeling when it comes to my son — my son, Jesus, that is. I don't know what happened, exactly. We used to be so close. I remember when he was a young child. His eyes had such a sparkle. When he discovered something new, he'd always share it with me. He liked helping me around the house, too. Of course, when he got a little older he would spend more time helping his father with the carpentry work. That didn't bother me. I expected that. He needed to learn the trade. And he learned it so well. I don't know what I would have done without him when his father died. And now . . . I've lost him, too!

JOHN: *(Puts his arm around MARY and pulls her close to him.)* This has all been so hard on you, I know.

MARY: Yes, it has. *(Pauses)* Anyway, as I was saying, he grew up

1 so fast after his father died. He helped with all the things
 2 his father used to do. I was glad, then, that he grew up
 3 fast. Later it didn't seem so wonderful. More and more,
 4 his mind seemed to be on things away from home. There
 5 was a lot of . . . tension between us. (*Sighs, and then smiles*
 6 *at the understanding JOHN.*) I guess I always knew that
 7 one day he would be leaving home, but I didn't know how
 8 hard it would be. He would be gone for so long. And he
 9 didn't write often enough! Then I learned that some of
 10 the things he was teaching were making people angry.
 11 People talked about how much danger he was in. As his
 12 mother, it frightened me! So I got the family together and
 13 we went to talk to him. I wanted to convince him to come
 14 home where he could be . . . safe. I know, I probably
 15 shouldn't have interfered. But what he said then, that
 16 *really* made me feel awkward. He said, right in front of
 17 everybody, "Who is my mother, and who are my
 18 brothers?" And then he stretched out his hands toward
 19 you, John, and the others, and he said, "Here are my
 20 mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of
 21 my Father in heaven, is my brother, and sister and
 22 mother." Talk about "awkward"! I felt like falling into
 23 one of the cracks in the street. At the time it felt like he
 24 cared more about his cause than he did about his family.
 25 I didn't really understand that cause at the time. I can't
 26 say that I really understand it even now.

27 JOHN: I'm sure it was awkward for you, Mary, but I know
 28 he didn't mean to hurt you. He just had to break away.
 29 I'm sure he would've liked to stay home with you. But in
 30 order to accomplish his mission, he had to leave behind
 31 him the things that were safe and comfortable. It's easy
 32 to leave behind that which you no longer need or care
 33 about. It's much harder to leave behind what still gives
 34 you warmth and security. Maybe that's why he demanded
 35 that his disciples be courageous enough to leave behind

1 their fathers, mothers, sisters and brothers. Only
 2 then could he know if they were as dedicated to their
 3 mission as he was. It wasn't that he loved his cause more
 4 than he loved his family. He just knew that only through
 5 accomplishing his mission could he best love his family,
 6 and every other family as well.

7 MARY: Yes, I'm trying to understand that. But right now I
 8 think I would have traded it all, the angels and the star
 9 of long ago, and this mission you keep speaking of, just
 10 for the chance to have my Jesus as a normal son . . . a
 11 normal son who was still alive!

12 JOHN: *(Takes her hand and squeezes it. They look back at the cross*
 13 *in silence for a moment, and then face the audience again.)* I
 14 reacted differently to his words. I'd always felt so close
 15 to Jesus. It seemed to me that we were kindred spirits.
 16 We were both dreamers. It was never like that with James
 17 and me. Oh, James and I are brothers and I do love him.
 18 But we always fought so much. You know how brothers
 19 sometimes are!

20 MARY: *(Laughs)* I certainly do!

21 JOHN: It always seemed like James and I were competing.
 22 It was never like that with Jesus. I always felt he was
 23 more like what a real brother should be. When Jesus
 24 talked about us being his brother, sister and mother . . .
 25 well, it just confirmed what I was already feeling. I hope
 26 you don't still feel hurt by that.

27 MARY: Not any more, John . . . my son. As I said, there were
 28 times when I felt like Jesus no longer cared about his
 29 family. But when he called you to be like a son to me,
 30 then I knew. Not only did he love humanity in general,
 31 but he still loved me. He cared about my welfare and
 32 what would happen to me after he was gone. It was hard
 33 to say whether my tears at the time were because of his
 34 suffering, or because I knew that he cared . . . *(She*
 35 *puts an arm around JOHN and seeks to hold back her tears.)*

1 **John, I know how much you meant to him. You were like**
 2 **a brother to my Jesus. I'm proud to call you my son.**

3 **JOHN: In so short a time, I've come to prize our relationship**
 4 **too, Mary. Oh, I still love my mother, Salome. She has**
 5 **done so much for me, as did my father Zebedee. But Dad**
 6 **never really understood me. We were wealthy fishermen,**
 7 **and he couldn't understand why James and I would**
 8 **leave the business to follow some poor wandering rabbi.**
 9 **And Mom has always pushed me so hard. I still remember**
 10 **how she goaded James and me into trying to get Jesus to**
 11 **give us favored positions in his kingdom. Well, she meant**
 12 **well. But I am so much more myself with you, Mary. And**
 13 **we have our love for Jesus which binds us together.**

14 **MARY: Yes, it does. And I think that's why his words from**
 15 **this cross were so important, not just for us, but for others**
 16 **who might be like us. So many people are alone in this**
 17 **world, with nobody to care for them . . .**

18 **JOHN: . . . and others feel out of place in their own**
 19 **families . . .**

20 **MARY: Yes, they do. Especially in times like this, we all need**
 21 **the closeness of being a family. For some people, that**
 22 **family is formed by blood relationship, and that is a**
 23 **beautiful and precious thing. But for all of us . . . perhaps**
 24 **there can be a family formed by the blood shed on this**
 25 **cross (*Motions toward the cross*) and that is even more**
 26 **beautiful. For all who live with others . . .**

27 **JOHN: . . . and for all who live alone . . .**

28 **MARY: . . . we need the binding power of the love shown so**
 29 **clearly on this cross. Every person needs to know that**
 30 **he or she is cared about. Every person needs to know**
 31 **what we have found out . . . (*Joins hands with JOHN as they***
 32 ***look back up at the cross.*) . . . this cross has made us family!**
 33 **(*They stand looking meditatively at the cross for just a moment,***
 34 ***and then walk off hand in hand.*)**

35

Through a Mother's Eyes

*(An Encounter Between Mary the Mother of Jesus
and the Mother of Judas)*

SCRIPTURES: None specific.

SCENE: In Mary's home. A table is in the middle of the room, with a small carved piece of wood looking vaguely like a donkey as its centerpiece. There are also two chairs in the room. Mary is alone. She seems to be wandering around aimlessly, trying to clean the room, but having difficulty keeping her attention on the matter at hand. Then after a minute or so, she picks up the piece of carved wood, looks at it lovingly, and collapses in tears in a chair. A few seconds later a knock comes at the door. Mary goes to answer it, drying her eyes as she goes. She opens the door and pulls back in surprise. In walks Hannah, the mother of Judas.

MARY: Hannah! I . . .

HANNAH: Mary, I know this is awkward, but after all that has happened and . . . my son's role in it . . . well, I just had to come. Is it all right? May I stay and visit? It will only be a short while and then I'll go.

MARY: *(Looks around the room nervously.)* Well . . . everything is a mess and I really haven't been able to get it clean . . .

HANNAH: It's all right, really! *(Laughs nervously.)* I promise not to even notice.

MARY: *(Shrugs)* All right, then. Come in. John is gone, and I am all alone. *(The two of them walk over and sit down. They sit quietly for a moment, with heads down, not speaking. Then MARY lifts her head.)* I suppose I should offer you something. I am such a poor hostess! Would you like some water? I have some cakes . . .

HANNAH: No, no. Please don't go to any bother! *(Pauses)* Mary, I just want to say how sorry I am. When I heard it was my son who had turned against Jesus, I felt so ashamed! *(She gets up and walks toward the audience.)* If there

1 is any way I can make it up to you . . .

2 **MARY:** It's all right, Hannah. It's not your fault. You couldn't
3 have known . . .

4 **HANNAH:** (*Turns toward MARY again.*) But I feel it is my fault!
5 I should have raised him better . . . or . . . or . . . I should
6 have loved him more, and perhaps he wouldn't have
7 turned out to be such an angry young man. Now . . . now
8 it's too late. I've lost him! (*Begins to cry. MARY comes*
9 *tentatively and puts her arms around HANNAH.*)

10 **MARY:** No, no! It's not your fault, really!

11 **HANNAH:** Oh, Mary, you're so kind! But I probably shouldn't
12 have come to you. You have your own sorrow. And
13 maybe . . . maybe you can't really understand. Your Jesus
14 was always so good. You did a fine job with him! Judas —
15 the world never seemed to quite fit him. He was always
16 unhappy with it. Maybe it was because his father was
17 always unhappy with *him*. (*Pauses, then turns to MARY*
18 *pleadingly.*) But Mary, you have to understand that he
19 wasn't really a bad boy! There really was a lot of love in
20 him. (*Looking at audience once again, as if trying to visualize*
21 *the past.*) I remember once when he was only five. His
22 father had gotten very angry with me — unjustly, I might
23 add. I was crying and little Judas came up to me. He put
24 his hand in mine and said, "Don't cry, Mommy. When I
25 get big, I won't let anyone hurt you again!" (*Pauses*) From
26 that moment on, he always seemed to be trying to strike
27 back at the world.

28 **MARY:** (*Puts her arm around HANNAH for a moment, and then*
29 *pulls away. She walks over to the piece of roughly carved wood*
30 *and picks it up. She stares at it wistfully for a moment.*) It was
31 the first thing he ever made. He was five then, too. He
32 loved to help his father in the carpentry shop. He said it
33 was a donkey and he had made it for me. The dark stain
34 is his blood. He had cut his little finger . . . (*HANNAH*
35 *comes over to comfort her, but MARY waves her off. After a*

1 *moment to regain her composure, she continues her thought.)*
 2 **We were so close then. What happens between a mother**
 3 **and a son, Hannah? When he grew up, he wouldn't listen**
 4 **when I told him to be careful! He wouldn't listen!**

5 **HANNAH:** *(Shaking her head)* **They never do, Mary, they**
 6 **never do!** *(Both stand quietly for a moment, staring toward the*
 7 *far corners of the sanctuary, deep in thought. After a while*
 8 *HANNAH looks back at MARY.)* **Mary, in spite of what he**
 9 **did, I know my son thought the world of your Jesus. He**
 10 **was just so angry at the Romans that he couldn't see**
 11 **anything else. He wanted to get back at them, and he**
 12 **couldn't understand why Jesus wouldn't lead his**
 13 **revolution.**

14 **MARY:** *(Nodding)* **Yes, anger does that to a person. (Smiling)**
 15 **It's funny. A mother should teach her son. But my Jesus**
 16 **taught me so much about the futility of acting in**
 17 **vengeance and anger. He taught me a lot about**
 18 **everything. (Throws her arms up in the air.)** **How can you**
 19 **be a mother to someone who insists on teaching you?!**

20 **HANNAH:** *(Shakes her head again and smiles, then looks more*
 21 *sober.)* **Yes, Mary, your Jesus was a good man. It must be**
 22 **especially hard to lose a son who was so knowledgeable —**
 23 **so faultless.**

24 **MARY:** *(Takes HANNAH by the arm.)* **It hurts to lose *any* son,**
 25 **Hannah . . . because we mothers always know the good**
 26 **that was there. Through a mother's eyes one only sees**
 27 **the child . . .**

28 **HANNAH:** *(Smiles and embraces MARY. After a few seconds she*
 29 *pulls back and looks down meditatively for a moment, before*
 30 *looking back at MARY.)* **Mary, some say your son . . . some**
 31 **say he spoke of returning to life.**

32 **MARY:** *(Quietly)* **Yes, he did speak of such.**

33 **HANNAH:** **Do you . . . do you believe he will?**

34 **MARY:** *(Starts to pace back and forth, and then shakes her head.)*
 35

1 **No, no, it's too much to hope for. He spoke of it, yes, but**
 2 **my son was always saying things I didn't understand.**
 3 **Maybe he just meant he would rise to be with his Father**
 4 **in heaven, or maybe he really believed he would come**
 5 **back to life — but how can a mother hope for such a**
 6 **thing? To hope and then lose him again through a**
 7 **shattered hope — that would be unbearable!**

8 **HANNAH:** *(Gets up and quietly heads for the door. Then she turns*
 9 *back toward MARY.)* **I will hope for you, Mary. I will do it**
 10 **for you, one too sorrowful to hope. I will do it for my son,**
 11 **one too angry to hope. If my hope is crushed, then it is**
 12 **crushed — I have nothing more anyway. But if my hope**
 13 **is rewarded . . . then I will have helped bring back what**
 14 **my son took away.**

15 **MARY:** *(Lifts a hand toward HANNAH, as if trying to call her to*
 16 *stay, but HANNAH leaves. MARY walks slowly back and picks*
 17 *up the carved piece of wood. She stares at it silently for a moment.)*
 18 **You didn't stay a child, did you, my son? (Pauses) Well, if**
 19 **you do come back to life, perhaps then I can remember**
 20 **that. (Puts down wood and exits.)**

Right There in Front of Me

An Encounter Between Pilate and His Wife

SCRIPTURES: Matthew 27:19; John 18:37-38

SCENE: Pilate's home, Sunday morning about dawn. Pilate is sitting at a desk, doing some paper work. In walks his wife, Julia, stretching and yawning. Then she seems to remember something important that she had forgotten, and she hurries to the door opposite her entry (*Stage Left*) and looks out. She sighs deeply.

PILATE: You act disappointed. What were you expecting to see out there?

JULIA: (*Turns toward her husband.*) Oh, nothing . . . I guess. But things look so much the same today . . .

PILATE: (*Looks up at her in confusion.*) So? What's so bad about that? I like for everything out there to stay the same — that means predictability; it means all is under control; it means Rome is happy and I get to keep my job! (*Pauses, and returns to his paper work.*) Besides, why should it be any different?

JULIA: Oh, no reason, really. It's just that this is the morning of the third day after . . . after we crucified that man.

PILATE: (*Glances up again just briefly.*) Oh, so you heard the rumors of a so-called resurrection, too, did you? Well, don't hold your breath. That guy was a fairly decent fellow, but he wasn't God. The people who started those rumors were doubtlessly planning to steal his body from the grave and create a tumult over it. I prevented that by some well-placed guards. There will be no resurrections while I am governor.

JULIA: But what if it *did* happen . . . ?

PILATE: It won't!

JULIA: But what if it did?

PILATE: (*Stands and walks toward her.*) What if?! What if?!

1 While we're at it, what if the sky opened up, and gold
2 and silver started falling from the heavens all over
3 Jerusalem? We'd certainly need to raise taxes, wouldn't
4 we? Or what if we suddenly discovered that drinking
5 from the Jordan river would make us young again?
6 Wouldn't that be sweet revenge against everyone who
7 laughed when we were assigned to this disaster area?
8 We could put up large gates and only admit who we
9 wanted to! Or what if we found out that the Jews have
10 been right not to eat pork — because it poisons your
11 system and makes you die sooner? What then? We would
12 all die off and Jews would take over the world! What if?
13 What if Jesus did rise from the grave? Well, I doubt if he
14 would want to keep me as governor! Apart from that,
15 reality would be up for grabs!

16 JULIA: You are such a cynic!

17 PILATE: Well, it has served me well to be a cynic, and so a
18 cynic I will continue to be.

19 JULIA: Not me. I may not know what to believe, but I would
20 rather believe something than believe nothing.

21 PILATE: Then, believe what you see. Believe that it is better
22 to have food and money to buy nice things than to be
23 deprived of them. Believe that pleasing Rome makes for
24 a better life. Believe that staying away from religious
25 fanatics helps keep you out of dangerous arguments.

26 JULIA: But those beliefs are just more cynicism! What about
27 truth?

28 PILATE: Truth! Truth! You and that Galilean would have
29 had a lot to talk about. He spoke of truth, too. "For this
30 I came into the world, to testify to the truth." And I'll tell
31 you what I told him. What is truth? One man's truth is
32 another man's lie. The Gnostics say the truth is that the
33 physical is bad and the spiritual is good, and that only
34 a few know its secrets. The Hedonists say that physical
35 pleasure is good, and everyone can have it. Who is right?



CHRISTIAN PUBLISHERS

Thank you for reading this free excerpt from:

ENCOUNTERS BEFORE THE DAWN

by Keith Madsen.

*For performance rights and/or a complete copy of the script,
please contact us at:*

CHRISTIAN PUBLISHERS

P.O. Box 248 - Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52406

Toll Free: 1-844-841-6387 - Fax (319) 368-8011

customerservice@christianpub.com