

THE LONGEST NIGHT

by Audrey Surma



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The Longest Night

A small-cast play for
Maundy Thursday

by
Audrey Surma

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

My sincere thanks to Mr. Charles Ludwig, whose book, *AT THE TOMB* (Warner Press, 1991), inspired this play.

To all my friends in the Writers' Roundtable who constantly support me in my writing efforts.

And a special thanks to my husband, John, who patiently allows me time away from him to write.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

JOHN

MARY, MOTHER OF JESUS

MARY MAGDALENE

PRODUCTION NOTES

It is suggested that this play be performed on Maundy Thursday or Good Friday evening. It could be followed by a message of hope for the Resurrection from the pastor and Communion.

Consider the emotions of Mary, the mother of Jesus, as she sees her son die. Although she had been told how special he would be, at this terrible moment it must have been almost unbearable.

The crown of thorns used could be an eight-inch grapevine wreath available at craft stores. Small portions could be removed and sharpened to represent the thorns and glued to the wreath. A drop or two of red nail polish added to the tips of the thorns could simulate the blood.

Stage directions are given in the script. License may be taken to suit your presentation setting.

PROPS

Long banquet table(s) covered with white cloth; benches (as long as tables); one chair (in the center); remnants of loaf of bread; common cup for wine; candlestick; crown of thorns.

COSTUMES

Simple flowing biblical robes; beard for John.

1 **SETTING:** On darkened stage a long table, covered by a white cloth,
 2 faces the audience. Remnants of a loaf of bread and chalice are
 3 on top. Benches are behind the table with a single chair in the
 4 center.

5 **OPTIONAL:** Soloist sings first two verses of "Were You There?"

6
 7 *(Lights come up slightly as a man and woman — John and Mary,*
 8 *the mother of Jesus — enter. The man carries a lighted candle.*
 9 *The woman stumbles, but the man catches her.)*

10 **MARY:** What will I do now? Who will take care of me?

11 **JOHN:** *(Stroking the woman's back)* There, there, Mary. You
 12 heard him. You belong to me now. I will look after you.

13 **MARY:** *(Nods.)* I know, I know, but did you see his face? He
 14 was in such agony.

15 **JOHN:** Yes, I saw. He was a brave man.

16 **MARY:** And did you see the faces of those around? They
 17 enjoyed his suffering. *(Begins to weep.)*

18 **JOHN:** Come, sit down. It's been a long night. You're
 19 exhausted. Perhaps you should eat something.

20 **MARY:** *(Looking about the room)* This is the place? This is the
 21 place where he...?

22 **JOHN:** Yes, Mary, this is it, where we ate the Passover meal
 23 together for the last time.

24 **MARY:** *(Walks over to the center chair.)* And this is where he
 25 sat?

26 **JOHN:** *(Nods.)* Mary, please come sit down. *(Guides MARY*
 27 *toward end of bench but she turns away, continuing to walk*
 28 *aimlessly about the stage.)*

29 **MARY:** I always thought of Passover as a happy time.

30 **JOHN:** I know. It was... before.

31 **MARY:** Even as a child, my mother let me help prepare the
 32 paschal lamb and the unleavened bread.

33 **JOHN:** To celebrate the flight from Egypt and the passing
 34 over of the death angel.

35 **MARY:** Yes, but why did this one have to be so different,

- 1 **John?**
- 2 **JOHN:** I've wondered that myself, Mary, but it is as our
- 3 **Father** willed it.
- 4 **MARY:** Did my son know this would be his last Passover, do
- 5 you think?
- 6 **JOHN:** I'm sure he did. He had been preparing us for
- 7 months, but I didn't understand until last night.
- 8 **MARY:** Last night was different?
- 9 **JOHN:** Yes.
- 10 **MARY:** How?
- 11 **JOHN:** He broke the bread, blessed it and then he said, "This
- 12 is my body which was broken for you."
- 13 **MARY:** He knew.
- 14 **JOHN:** *(Nods.)* He knew. And then he took the cup, blessed it
- 15 and said, "This is my blood, shed for you, for the
- 16 forgiveness of sin."
- 17 **MARY:** But, John, this didn't have to happen, did it? You
- 18 could have stopped it... *(She pauses, searching his face.)*
- 19 **JOHN:** But how, Mary?
- 20 **MARY:** Tell me what happened in the garden.
- 21 **JOHN:** *(Sadly)* You don't want to hear.
- 22 **MARY:** But I do. Please tell me.
- 23 **JOHN:** We went to Gethsemane... *(He pauses and looks into*
- 24 *space as he remembers.)*
- 25 **MARY:** Why? It's so dark there at night.
- 26 **JOHN:** We had been there before. He taught us there. But
- 27 this time Jesus wanted to go... to pray.
- 28 **MARY:** And?
- 29 **JOHN:** We went a little way into the garden. He stopped and
- 30 asked us to watch and pray while he went deeper into
- 31 the darkness.
- 32 **MARY:** Alone?
- 33 **JOHN:** Yes. He told us to wait.
- 34 **MARY:** You, James and Simon? Where were the others?
- 35 **JOHN:** They had gone home.

- 1 **MARY:** So he went alone into the darkness... to pray.
- 2 **JOHN:** Yes. We waited and waited. The night was so still. You
- 3 couldn't even hear a bird or a cricket chirping.
- 4 **MARY:** Then what happened?
- 5 **JOHN:** He came back several times, but we had fallen asleep.
- 6 **MARY:** *(Shocked)* You fell asleep?
- 7 **JOHN:** *(Turns away, embarrassed.)* Yes. It had been a long day.
- 8 He seemed to have so much to tell us, but we were
- 9 exhausted.
- 10 **MARY:** What did he say?
- 11 **JOHN:** I expected him to be angry when he came back the
- 12 last time because we'd all fallen asleep again, but he
- 13 merely told us the time had come.
- 14 **MARY:** The time had come... for what?
- 15 **JOHN:** *(Turns back to face her.)* Well, right then we heard a
- 16 crowd of men approaching. There were soldiers... and
- 17 Judas.
- 18 **MARY:** Judas was with the soldiers?
- 19 **JOHN:** Yes. He came up to Jesus and kissed him. And
- 20 immediately the soldiers grabbed Jesus.
- 21 **MARY:** But didn't you try to stop them?
- 22 **JOHN:** We couldn't. Jesus ordered us not to. Peter tried. He
- 23 drew out his sword...
- 24 **MARY:** *(Surprised)* Peter had a sword? You are not violent
- 25 men!
- 26 **JOHN:** I know, but Peter felt he needed it to defend Jesus.
- 27 He struck one of those with the soldiers and cut off his
- 28 ear.
- 29 **MARY:** Oh!
- 30 **JOHN:** Yes, but Jesus put it back... just like that. He healed
- 31 the ear. He cautioned us that those who live by the
- 32 sword will die by the sword.
- 33 **MARY:** Yes, he would. He hated any kind of human
- 34 suffering... except his own. Then what happened?
- 35 **JOHN:** They took him away. You know the rest.

- 1 **MARY:** *(Begins to weep again, then looks accusingly at JOHN.)* You
2 let them take him. You! His friends!
- 3 **JOHN:** *(Turning and walking a little way)* Yes. There were many
4 of them and so few of us. I should have tried harder, but
5 Jesus just looked at me and shook his head. He seemed
6 to be warning me to do nothing.
- 7 **MARY:** I can't believe it. He's gone. My son. My son is dead.
8 Surely there must have been another way... *(Sits.)* I
9 remember the first time Joseph and I took Jesus to the
10 temple. He was just a tiny baby. And the time...
- 11 **JOHN:** *(Goes to her.)* Mary, don't...
- 12 **MARY:** *(Continues)* And the time we left him at the temple. He
13 was so insistent that he must be about his Father's
14 work. This is God's will?
- 15 **JOHN:** Mary, please...
- 16 **MARY:** And now he is dead, soon to lie in a cold tomb.
- 17 **JOHN:** But he promised... *(Suddenly MARY MAGDALENE runs*
18 *onto stage.)*
- 19 **MAGDALENE:** Mary, Mary, I just saw some soldiers. They
20 were headed toward the hill. Someone said they've been
21 told to guard the tomb.
- 22 **MARY:** *(Excited, starts to rise.)* Maybe they will steal his body.
23 Oh John, what can we do?
- 24 **JOHN:** Nothing for now. I'll go and see what's happening.
25 Will you be all right? *(Both women nod and JOHN exits.*
26 *MARY MAGDALENE sits beside MARY to comfort her as she*
27 *begins to weep again. They sit quietly for a moment.)*
- 28 **MAGDALENE:** Mary, do you remember what he said?
- 29 **MARY:** About what?
- 30 **MAGDALENE:** He said he would rise on the third day.
31 Remember?
- 32 **MARY:** But you saw him, Mary. He is dead.
- 33 **MAGDALENE:** Do you suppose he was speaking in a
34 parable? He told so many stories. I don't know what to
35 believe.

- 1 **MARY:** So much was promised in the beginning. The angel
2 spoke to me. He spoke to Joseph. I never thought it
3 would end like this. (*JOHN comes back into room. He is*
4 *holding something behind his back. MARY MAGDALENE*
5 *risers and moves to her right.*)
- 6 **MAGDALENE:** What did you find out, John?
- 7 **JOHN:** It's true. They posted two guards beside the tomb
8 and rolled a huge stone at the opening. At least his body
9 will be safe.
- 10 **MARY:** (*Starts to rise.*) We must go there and anoint him.
- 11 **JOHN:** (*Restrains her.*) Not tonight, Mary. It's already the
12 Sabbath. We must wait. Tomorrow you can go and do
13 whatever you must.
- 14 **MARY:** (*Seeing JOHN's hand behind his back*) What are you
15 hiding, John?
- 16 **JOHN:** Nothing. It's nothing. Really!
- 17 **MARY:** It is. Show me. Show me, John! (*JOHN brings his hands*
18 *to the front to reveal the crown of thorns.*)
- 19 **JOHN:** I found it on the ground. It must have fallen from his
20 head when they took him away.
- 21 **MARY:** Let me see it.
- 22 **JOHN:** No, Mary, you musn't. There's blood...
- 23 **MARY:** I don't care. I want it. (*JOHN reluctantly hands the*
24 *crown to her. MARY fingers the thorns, wiping the blood away*
25 *and drying her hands on her robe. She clutches the crown to her*
26 *breast.*) Oh, my son. My son... (*She pauses, then cries out.*)
27 Joseph, my husband, if only you were here...
- 28 **MAGDALENE:** (*Goes to MARY, puts her arm around her.*) Come.
29 Tomorrow we'll go together and prepare his body.
30 (*MARY slowly leaves the stage as MAGDALENE turns back to*
31 *JOHN.*) But, John, what do you think?
- 32 **JOHN:** What do you mean?
- 33 **MAGDALENE:** Will he rise again? Can he rise again?
- 34 **JOHN:** He said he would. We've got to believe it. (*Lights go*
35 *down as they exit the stage. Optional: Soloist sings fourth verse*



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