

TRILOGY

by Renae Meredith



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Trilogy

by RENAE MEREDITH

A Tenebrae service for three voices

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CAST

NARRATOR or PASTOR: He invites the congregation into this observation of the suffering and death of Jesus. He also reads the Gethsemane narrative as a means of setting the scene for the events of the drama.

MARY MAGDALENE: A follower of Christ. She was possessed by seven demons before the Lord healed her. Since then she has followed him, helping to meet his needs while he and the disciples minister. (*Luke 8:1-3*) Mary is emotional, but her emotion is tempered with the sense of shock she feels as the events unfold.

PETER: One of Jesus' first disciples. The night before, Peter told Jesus he would follow him anywhere, even unto death. Jesus responded by telling him that before the cock crows Peter would deny him three times. (*Luke 22:33, 34*) Peter is bitter. He feels cheated. His point of view is best described as self-involved.

CENTURION: Assigned to execution detail on this day, he expects to oversee the execution of Barabbas, a known insurrectionist and murderer. (*Luke 23:19*) Instead of executing a criminal, the Centurion is witness to the passion and death of the Lord. (*Luke 23:47; Mark 15:39*) Our impartial witness, his calm but strong testimony gives weight to the events. His declaration at Golgotha provides a powerful conclusion.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Trilogy is a Tenebrae service interweaving the stories of three witnesses to the passion of Christ.

Off-stage, to one side, is a candelabra holding seven candles. They are lit. The Narrator stands next to them, snuffing them out with a candle extinguisher as he reads the Gethsemane narrative. The readers should be dressed in biblical costumes. Nothing fancy or flashy for Mary or Peter. A full centurion's costume is effective for the Centurion. The stage can be set simply or with scenery. The Centurion has a sword and/or a spear, and a rough-looking mallet with a rubber head. The stage should be large enough to allow each character ample space in which to move around. The readers' script stands may be placed in front of them as they speak, or behind them to be used mainly for review between lines. It is important to learn the parts as thoroughly as possible. The scripts should do no more than prompt the readers.

If possible, spotlights could be used to light each character as he or she speaks, but this needs to be very well-rehearsed. If there is not enough rehearsal time, delete the spotlights. Mistakes or lag time in the lighting would severely detract from the dramatic tension building in the play.

At the beginning of the drama, each of the characters is in his or her own setting. They do not interact until the action moves to Golgotha, where the Centurion and Mary are standing at the foot of the cross. Peter's setting during the Golgotha section is far off from the others. He views the action from much farther away.

The lighting is subdued as the congregation enters. A projected slide may be used to welcome and invite the congregation to enter in an attitude of reflection and contemplation. If no slide is used, a written program may be substituted. An instrumentalist plays prelude music appropriate to the evening. The service should begin with the Narrator or Pastor inviting the congregation to join in this time set aside for the observance of the suffering and death of Jesus. After this invitation and a prayer of invocation, the choir or congregation sings a hymn appropriate to the evening. As the hymn draws to a close, the Narrator takes his place next to the candelabra and begins the Gethsemane narrative.

Part I The Gethsemane Narrative

NARRATOR: (*Lights only on him. The stage remains dark.*) They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch." (*Extinguishes one candle.*) Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. "Abba, Father," he said. "Everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." (*Extinguishes another candle.*) Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Simon," he said to Peter, "are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak." (*Extinguishes third candle.*) Once more he went away and prayed the same thing. When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him. (*Extinguishes fourth candle.*) Returning the third time, he said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. (*Extinguishes fifth candle.*) Look. the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!" (Mark 14:32-42) (*Lights fade. NARRATOR extinguishes the sixth candle. The seventh, or Tenebrae candle, will remain lit throughout the service. Just as the sixth candle is extinguished, the readers take their places on the stage. MARY kneels Downstage Center. PETER stands with his back turned, Upstage Right. The CENTURION is Stage Left, profile to the audience, in the at-ease position described below.*)

Part II

TRILOGY

(The NARRATOR exits just after extinguishing the sixth candle. When MARY, PETER and the CENTURION are in position, the lights come up gradually. At the beginning of the piece, the lights should be at the most at only about 70-80%. As the piece goes on, the lights should go up to 100% where indicated, then down to 40-50% at the time of the Crucifixion.)

MARY: *(Kneeling, head bowed. Her head comes up as she begins.)* Life has stopped for me this morning. In truth, I had only just begun to live. Now they've taken him, and my life with him. He gave me life. *(Standing)* Before I knew him, I was dead. My existence was defined by pain, misery, sin. He touched me and brought me to life. Now I am defined by him. His touch, his words, his love. Now they've arrested him.

PETER: *(On MARY's right. His back is to the audience. As MARY's lines end, he turns quickly and begins bitterly.)* Three years! Three wasted years! How could I have been such a fool? Life was good. I had a family. Andrew and I were making a good living. I left it all. Now it's gone. Why? What am I supposed to do now? Somebody tell me.

CENTURION: *(Standing to MARY's left. He begins in the at-ease position, head erect, arms behind his back. As PETER's lines end, he turns to face the audience.)* I'm just a soldier. A simple man. Orders, commands, fighting, marching. This is my life. I've been a good son to the empire, and how am I rewarded? Posted to this desolate rock on a road to nowhere. I command one hundred men. I train fighters. Whom did I offend to be given execution detail? Report to the Praetorium, they say. From whom do these orders come? That's what I'd like to know.

MARY: Even after the arrest, there was still a glimmer of hope. "He's innocent," I wanted to shout. "You have the wrong man!" How can anyone believe that my gentle Master is

1 guilty of anything? But when I saw where they were taking
2 him, all hope died, and my spirit began to die with it.

3 **PETER:** *(In anger)* The High Priest's house! I know it well. It's
4 a tomb housing the bones of dead and decaying men.
5 Another disciple and I stand in the courtyard. We strain
6 to hear even a word of what's going on inside. Jesus, tell
7 them. Show them who you are and bring the judgment of
8 God down on them! Don't let them do this to us!

9 **CENTURION:** *(With derision)* Barabbas. There's a name for you!
10 Today's execution slate includes this name. This is why I
11 was chosen. The gods favor me today. Barabbas and his
12 kind killed twenty of my brothers in arms. There was
13 never a man more in need of execution than this man.
14 This dog. It will be a pleasure to drive the spikes through
15 his hands and feet. *(Stares at his hands with a smile.)*
16 Perhaps my hands won't be as careful as they usually are
17 when I drive the spikes today.

18 **MARY:** I see Peter over in the shadows. He looks like he's
19 trying to hide. Surely he wouldn't hide from our Master.
20 Why doesn't he do something? Peter, why don't you testify
21 on his behalf? As I move closer I hear someone say, "You
22 also were with the Nazarene, Jesus."

23 **PETER:** *(Reacting not to MARY, but to the unseen "someone")* I don't
24 know what you're talking about. *(Pause)* No! *(Pause)* I
25 swear by all that's holy, I don't know this man you're
26 talking about!

27 **CENTURION:** The cock crows. One, twice. *(PETER reacts*
28 *strongly.)* Before this day is out that scoundrel, Barabbas,
29 will be hanging on my cross.

30 **MARY:** *(Shouting)* No! Peter! Peter the Bold, some of us called
31 him. Peter the Deserter is more like it.

32 **PETER:** My Lord! Oh, what have I done? *(Puts hands over his*
33 *face, turns away.)*

34 **CENTURION:** I took prisoner Barabbas his breakfast. He
35 threw it back in my face. Fine, he can fast his last day.

1 Makes no difference to me. He certainly won't get
2 anything as he hangs on the cross for days on end.

3 MARY: I can hear them. They are shouting at him. Taunting
4 him, beating him. I hear *them* clearly, but one voice I do
5 not hear. The voice I long to hear is silent. Jesus, call on
6 God. He could send his angels to your rescue. You said so.

7 PETER: How could I have been so stupid? He said I would do
8 this. What have I done? Why is this happening to me?
9 Before the cock crows, Peter. You'll betray me, Peter. You
10 will all desert me. No! Stop! Make it stop!

11 CENTURION: Orders. Gotta report to the High Priest's house.
12 The Sanhedrin has a prisoner for us. An insurrectionist.
13 Don't know what we'll do with him. Cells are bursting at
14 the seams as it is.

15 MARY: Oh, Lord. Your face. It's bloody! What have they done to
16 you? Where are you taking him? Haven't you done
17 enough? Please, let me cleanse his wounds. Peter, come
18 and help me. Peter...Peter? (*As she finishes she is looking*
19 *toward Stage Right in the direction of, but not right at, PETER.*)

20 PETER: I hear Mary's voice. She calls me. But I am running.
21 Running away. Oh, Lord. What have I done? I have to get
22 out of here. If he sees me, he'll know what I've done. Hide.
23 I have to hide.

24 CENTURION: What is this? Who is this bloody mess? Can this
25 be the insurrectionist? Why, he's nothing but a Galilean
26 rabbi. I've seen him around the city all week. He was
27 really sticking it to the old beards, but he's harmless
28 enough. Well, if a mistake's been made, Pilate'll soon have
29 it straightened out.

30 MARY: I followed them. I stayed back, but I followed. I
31 couldn't get close enough to touch him. It's dawn by now.
32 A cold, gray dawn. I am so cold. My hands tremble with
33 the cold. My heart is cold, so cold.

34 PETER: Now I hide. I wait. I gave up all I had for this kingdom
35 of his. Where is it? Why did he call me? He knew I would

1 fail. How could he do this to me?

2 **CENTURION:** Pilate has asked for prisoner Barabbas. I
3 should assign others to take him, but I don't want to
4 take a chance on losing him now, so close to the end.
5 My men and I are exhausted. They've bounced the
6 new prisoner back and forth all morning. First to
7 Pilate, then to Herod, then back to Pilate again. No
8 one thinks about the soldiers. Every time we leave
9 the Praetorium, we take our lives in our hands. All
10 morning the crowd around the place has gotten
11 bigger, uglier. I'd better send to the garrison for
12 reinforcements. I'll be relieved when my work this
13 day is done and Barabbas hangs safely on his tree.

14 **MARY:** The crush of people. The crowd is incredible.
15 Where is my Lord? What could they be doing to him?
16 There! There he is!

17 **PETER:** What is that roar? Is it thunder? No. It's voices.
18 They're yelling something. What are they saying?
19 *(Pause)* Barabbas?

20 **CENTURION:** *(Following hard on PETER's last line)* No!
21 Inside I groan. But on the outside I remain still, as I
22 train all my men to do. This cannot be. Pilate would
23 free a terrorist? That skulking hyena! How barbaric
24 can these Hebrews be? They call themselves a
25 religious people, yet they would crucify this humble
26 teacher. I think I'm going to be sick.

27 **MARY:** *(Beginning quietly, getting louder each time to end in a*
28 *shout)* No. No! Nooo!

29 **PETER:** *No! (Yelling and pointing at the audience)* You can't
30 do this. You people cried, "Hosanna! Blessed is he
31 who comes in the name of the Lord" (John 12:13a) just
32 five days ago. How can you betray him like this? *(He's*
33 *slow to realize what he's saying.)* How can you call him
34 King one day and deny him...now?

35 **CENTURION:** Crucify him? Do they know what they



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