

**“The First Witnesses”**

1)

**Scene 1 – Palm Sunday**

*A group of women gather. James and John enter*

John            Well, he’s going

Mary            Going where?

John            Into the city

Joanna          What?

Mary            He must be mad

James           He says it’s his destiny, somehow as if it was meant to be

Magdalen        Oh God...why?

James           The people want it, Magdalen...everybody wants to see him

Magdalen        Oh no...

John            Peter’s up for it

Joanna          Peter’s up for anything

Mary            Joanna!

Joanna          Sorry..but you know what he’s like...he winds me up sometimes

John            Well, the Master says it has to be, so that’s it

Lydia            Are you all going?

James           Oh yes...Andrew and Matthew have gone ahead to sort a few things out

Magdalen        Do you think he’ll be all right?

John            I don’t know, Magdalen...I hope so...it’s a bit of a tricky situation there at the moment...lots of hotheads all round the place claiming to be the Messiah...it’s made the Romans jittery

Joanna          So they should be...they shouldn’t be here in the first place

Mary            Joanna!

Joanna          Well, it’s our country...they shouldn’t be here...someone should tell them to clear off

- Mary Don't mind Joanna, John...the subtleties of politics are a bit lost on her
- Joanna There's nothing subtle about it at all...they shouldn't be here...they've come and taken our land, occupied our country...they should clear off...someone should make them...perhaps the Master will get rid of them
- Mary What?
- Joanna Well, if you say the people are all on his side, they all want him, they think he's some sort of Saviour...perhaps they'll make him king and get rid of the Romans
- Magdalen I wish
- Joanna Well, why not?
- John It's not as easy as that...I wish it were
- Joanna What do you mean it's not easy? Haven't you people been listening to him while you've been wandering around with him? Haven't you heard what he's been saying? Haven't you understood, or are you just too thick to get it?
- Mary Joanna!
- Rachel They're not thick, they're just men
- Joanna Look, all he's been saying about the kingdom coming, about people rising up, this is it, isn't it? It's all about taking power off the Romans and sending them scuttling back to Rome. It's people power
- Rachel Not over that army it isn't...they'd crush us in an afternoon
- Lydia But not him, not the Master...he's got God on his side...he couldn't possibly do all those things, you know healing people, healing people, if he hadn't got God on his side. That's why he's so special to us
- Magdalen Yes, he's so special isn't he...he gave me back my dignity...my self-respect...my life
- John Yes, he did
- Magdalen I was lost, completely lost until I met him
- James I think many of us were
- Lydia Do you think he'll be all right?
- James All right?
- Lydia They won't harm him will they?

- James Harm him....they want to honour him not harm him
- Magdalen Yes, but you know what you were saying about the Romans being jittery..I mean, they wouldn't let the Master come into Jerusalem with a large crowd of people calling his name...they couldn't let that happen, could they? It would be...you know a bit of a threat
- James Don't be ridiculous
- Rachel So what happens next? He goes in there. Loads of people follow him and then what?
- John Then what?
- Rachel Yes, what happens after that?
- John Well, we spend a few days there for the festival and come back home to Galilee
- Joanna I don't think so
- John Why not?
- Joanna You don't seriously think that they're all going to follow him and then let him go home after a few days, do you?
- Mary I'm afraid for him
- John Afraid?
- Mary Yes, in case they might do something to him, you know hurt him
- James Why would anyone want to hurt him, Mary? All he's done is good
- Mary I know, but, he has been quite outspoken hasn't he? And it's not the Romans we need to worry about but the chief priests. They're vicious and they're angry. He's a threat to them, their power, and influence. They won't take that lying down
- John No...that's true all right
- Mary I think there could be big trouble. I don't think he should go
- James Well, he says he's going and that's it
- Enter Andrew and Matthew with palms*
- Matthew Hey, you should see the crowds...it's incredible
- John What?
- Andrew They're all shouting his name and putting palm branches on the ground; it's bedlam over there

- Magdalen Why?
- Matthew I don't know; all I know is they're shouting, "Hosanna to the king of kings" and cheering and waving at him
- Magdalen Oh no!
- Andrew What do you mean 'Oh no'?
- Magdalen If they're calling him that name, then they'll want to make him king or something, use him as a pawn to get at the Romans...that's bad...that's really bad
- John Do you think so?
- Magdalen I know it..I can feel it in here...this is not going to be good
- Matthew But they're cheering him
- Andrew They're shouting his name
- Mary You don't think the chief priests are going to stand for that do you?
- James Well, if it gets at the Romans, they will..they'll love that
- Mary But it's not about the Romans is it? It's about power, religious power. If this crowd is calling him the king, that puts him above the priests, that gives him more influence than them....they won't tolerate that
- Joanna And this crowd's fickle...they can change their allegiance in a moment if it suits them...they could be cheering him today...and jeering him next week if things don't go their way
- Magdalen If the priests lean on them and the Romans make it difficult for them, they'll soon change their tune and disown him quick as a flash
- Joanna And that, gentlemen, is the subtleties of politics of which we women are well aware
- Matthew Look, we're going after him...are you coming?
- Andrew Hurry, you'll miss the parade...the triumphant entrance...he's sitting astride a donkey and they're all waving these palms at him...so are you coming or what?
- Joanna You go....go....we'll come along later
- John Are you sure you'll be all right?
- Joanna Yes, we'll be all right; we're always all right...we have to be
- John OK, but keep out of the crowds if you're scared

Magdalen      We're not scared, John, and certainly not for ourselves...we're just worried, for him and for what they might do to him

*The men leave and we hear a crowd shouting "Hosanna". The women get together in a huddle and then leave.*

### **Scene 2 – Thursday - Gethsemane**

*The disciples enter and lie down. Presently they get up and cower in a corner. Very slowly they run away, leaving Peter alone. The women enter, looking desolate. It is some time before they speak*

Mary            This is awful

Magdalen      I knew something like this might happen

Joanna         It was so sudden; one minute he was in the garden with the men, the next he's arrested and taken away

Mary            Lydia

Magdalen      Not just because of Judas...I told you, I was afraid this would happen. I mean they took him to Caiaphas and his cronies. He never said a word when they were taunting him...not a word...It got Caiaphas so frustrated that he ripped his own clothes

Joanna         They want an end of him, Magdalen

Mary            An end?

Joanna         Yes, an end. Mark my words before the day is out they'll have executed him like a common criminal

Rachel         You mean...crucify him?

Joanna         Yes

Mary            They can't do that to the Master

Joanna         They can do that to anyone they like if they get the Romans to agree

Magdalen      They've brought him to Pilate and all he wants is a quiet life...he'll give in to them if it means a bit of peace

Mary            But they can't do that

Magdalen      They can and they will, if they get a chance...you see

Mary            But that's terrible....can't we do anything?

Joanna         No, Mary, nothing at all...we're helpless

Magdalen Well, I'm going..at least if he can see us in the crowd he'll know he's not entirely friendless

Mary That's just what you said, Joanna...about the crowd being fickle and changing their allegiance...I knew it would be difficult...I even thought they might throw him out of the city....but this...? Never

Magdalen Come on, let's not abandon him like the men...nobody will harm us

*Peter enters alone. He is obviously in the palace of the high priest. A girl enters and sees him*

Girl Hey you! Yes you! You're one of them as well. You're one of his friends

Peter Me, not me. I do not know the man

Girl Yes, you do! I've seen you with him

Peter I'm sorry, you must be mistaken. I do not know the man

Girl Don't lie to me. You're one of them; you've even got the same accent as he has

Peter I don't know what you're talking about. I do not know the man! I do not know the man!

*A cock crows and Peter leaves in despair*

### **Scene 3      Good Friday**

*The women are looking at Jesus dying. They are overcome with grief*

Magdalen Oh, Jesus, what have they done to you?

Mary Look at him, look at him – this is terrible

Joanna I knew they'd do this to him; I just knew it

Lydia His skin is all torn and bleeding

Rachel They've put thorns in a crown on his head

Lydia I can't bear to watch

Magdalen We must watch – we're his friends. We can't abandon him now

Mary But we can't do anything to help him

Magdalen We can stay here – he might just catch a glimpse of us and he'll know we are near to him

Joanna            God, look, look they're nailing him to the cross – they never do that

Lydia             They must really hate him you know, really hate him

Rachel            But why? He's done nothing to them

Joanna            Jesus! Jesus! We love you; we're here with you

Magdalen        Hush, Joanna; you're making a spectacle

Joanna            I don't care. He's got to know that we love him

Rachel            How long does it take...you know to die...when you're on a cross

Magdalen        It can take hours...but hopefully not long for him. He needs it to be over

Joanna            Look, the crowd's dispersing; they've had their sport and can't be bothered hanging about. Let's go and be with him, be near him

Magdalen        Yes, there's his mother. Let's not leave her on her own

Mary              It's quiet now, after all the shouting...eerily quiet. Dear God, let it be over soon

*They exit*

**Scene 4        Early Easter Sunday morning**

James            I still don't believe all this is happening; it's like a bad dream.

Andrew          It's not a dream, James, it has happened.

John              It was so good, being together, with him; it made you feel alive, like something really special had happened to you. Now it's all over.

James            Why did he have to leave us? Why did he let them do that to him? He didn't have to.

Matthew         Look, it's not him who left us, we left him. We were scared; we let him down; we deserted him.

Peter             I can never forgive myself, never. I'll never be able to live with myself after what I've done.

Matthew         Me neither.

Peter             I'm the one who promised, no swore, I would never deny him. You know me, always the proud one, always have to be right. "though all these others deny you, I will never deny you," I said, "never", "never". Now look at me, not once, but three times in the same night.

Andrew          Don't blame yourself, brother. We're all ashamed; we've all failed him.

- Peter            If we only had a second chance, to do it again, a second chance, so that we could make it right, and stay with him, no matter what would happen to us. How could we have done that, just left him, denied him after all that time together; how could we?
- Thomas          Well we did, and that's the end of it, the end of it all as far as I'm concerned.
- Matthew        John went back, though, didn't you, John?
- John            I just wanted to say "sorry", you know for abandoning him like we did; I wanted to be with him at the end. It was awful, truly awful. He didn't deserve it; he didn't deserve to die, not like that, like a common criminal. He'd done nothing wrong.
- Matthew        He wasn't supposed to go and die on us; he was supposed to save us. He promised us and we trusted him. I've never trusted anyone like that in my life.
- John            But he was supposed to die, Matthew; that's what he said all along, that he would have to die, and we didn't believe him; we didn't understand what he was really saying to us.
- Andrew        Well I blame Judas, if you ask me; if it wasn't for Judas, none of this would have happened. Jesus would still be here, and we wouldn't be in this state.
- Peter            Don't blame Judas, James; it wasn't his fault.
- Andrew        Wasn't his fault? Course it was his fault. He betrayed us; he betrayed Jesus - brought the soldiers right up to him.
- Matthew        They would have found him anyway; they were looking hard enough. Perhaps Judas thought he'd be safe if he was taken into custody, away from the mob.
- James          Anyway, Judas has paid the price now, so don't be blaming him. We're all to blame. We only want to blame Judas because we're feeling guilty.
- Andrew        What can we do now? We can't stay cooped up in this room for ever.
- Peter            I suppose we'll just have to go back, back home, eventually. They've probably forgotten what we look like. My wife told me I was stupid in the first place just coming after him and leaving her, but you couldn't do anything else, could you?
- John            No, you couldn't. We all felt it. That attraction, that need to follow him wherever he went, even to the end, to the end.
- James          Well, the end has come, now, so there's nothing else to do except go back.
- Matthew        I can hardly go back to being a tax collector now, can I?
- James          No Matthew, you'll have to come with us; we'll find you a job, if there are any jobs left for us. The boats will still be there, but someone's probably been fishing our waters while we've been away.

- Andrew We'll have to go back. There's nothing else to do now.
- Thomas Well, he's gone, and that's the end of it as far as I'm concerned; it's all come to nothing - three years of a complete waste of time.
- Andrew Don't say that, Thomas, think of all the good he did, all the people he healed, all those he told about God and his love. That wasn't a waste.
- Thomas Well, I'm going home. I don't see the point of hanging around here. It was all a big mistake if you ask me, trusting him, just one big mistake.
- John Don't talk like that, Thomas, you make us all out to be fools.
- Thomas Well we were, weren't we? And now we know it, but we don't want to admit it. I'm not making a fool of myself any more; I'm going home, to try to start again.
- James Please don't go, Thomas, not yet, please.
- Thomas Look, I've really got to get out of here; I need to get away. I'll come back in a day or two to see if you're all right. Will you still be here?
- Peter Probably, I don't know.
- Thomas Well, I'll see you, then.... Look, for what it's worth, thanks.
- Thomas exits*
- James What do you think we should do, Peter?
- Peter It's silly sitting around here frightened to go out; it's early Sunday morning - it's been three days now. Maybe that lot out there will have forgotten about us by now, and we could slip away without being noticed
- John Maybe we should stay just a bit longer, you know, just in case.
- James Just in case what?
- John You know, what he said, about rising from the dead after three days
- James Rising from the dead, that's crazy.
- John He did say it, didn't he, and let's face it, everything else he said came true.
- Andrew Don't be stupid. Whoever heard of anyone rising from the dead?
- John What about Lazarus? He did, didn't he?
- Andrew Lazarus wasn't really dead at all.

James Yes he was, Andrew. He was all bound up in the tomb and Martha didn't want Jesus to go in because he might smell.

John Perhaps we should wait a bit longer; there can be no harm in it, can there? Who is to say what might happen?

Peter If we only had a second chance; everyone should have a second chance when they've made a mess of things, to put it right, to do it again. If only...

John If only.....

*They exit*

*Three women, Magdalen, Joanna and Mary enter talking.*

Joanna Why are we doing this? It's dangerous

Magdalen We must, we must; we owe him

Mary Well I'm worried; what if we get arrested?

Magdalen They won't do anything to us; we're only stupid women; what do we know?

Joanna All the same, I'm afraid

Magdalen Look, we owe him a decent burial. They rushed it the other night because it was the eve of the sabbath, and we couldn't do it yesterday. He's lying in that tomb unwashed and unanointed, like a common criminal. After all he's done for us, all he's given us, can we not do one last thing for him?

Mary You're right, Magdalen. My James deserted him - so did all the men. Fine 'disciples' they were.

Joanna Men; they're all alike - all talk and no action. As soon as there's trouble, they're nowhere to be seen.

Mary But how will we get in? Who'll roll away the stone for us?

Magdalen It's probably still guarded - we'll ask one of them, if they're not still asleep!

Joanna Won't they mind? They're not supposed to let anyone near it

Magdalen I told you, we're only women wanting to one last decent thing for a friend; they won't refuse us that

Joanna I've got the ointment; it's the best money could buy; still, he's worth it

Magdalen No one has ever made me feel like he did; he made me feel alive, free, forgiven

Joanna           It was wonderful, wasn't it? Seeing all those people made well

Mary             And seeing those Pharisees lost for words; he really showed them up for what they are - hypocrites

Joanna           They got him in the end, though, didn't they? I'd begun to hope, you know - hope that there would be a better life for us than this. He made me believe it, and now it's all gone again.

Magdalen        Come on; it's no use crying over what we've lost - we've got a job to do

*They walk around the church and slowly approach the sanctuary*

Mary             This is the place, isn't it? I recognise the garden

Magdalen        Yes, but wait, there's no guards, and the stone, it's been rolled away

Joanna           Who could possibly be strong enough to do that?

*They go in; Magdalen picks up the cloths*

Magdalen        He's not here; he's not here. There's no one here, only these cloths. Who's stolen him? Who's stolen him?

Mary             We must find him; we must. So that he can have his final rest

Magdalen        Let's go to Peter and the others; they'll know what to do

*They run down the aisle, as Peter and a few disciples enter stage right. They sit, looking downcast and ashamed. The women are running up the central aisle, shouting*

Magdalen        Peter, Peter; it's empty; the tomb's empty!

Peter            What are you saying, woman?

Magdalen        They've taken his body out of the tomb and we don't know where they have put him

Peter            They? Who?

Joanna           We don't know; we just went to the tomb to anoint his body, and when we got there - no guards, no stone; we went in and it was empty

James           Peter, don't listen to them; they're hysterical; they're imagining it

Mary             Imagining it, eh, James? Well we didn't imagine you lot running away like rats into a hole when he was arrested. We stayed with him, while you cowards hid

Joanna           Call yourselves men? You're a disgrace, that's what you are, and then you've got the cheek to accuse us of being hysterical

John I don't suppose it could be true, what he said - couldn't be true, could it? No of course it couldn't

Peter What couldn't be true, John?

John You know what he said about 'rising', from the dead

James Don't be ridiculous

Peter 'The Son of Man is destined to suffer grievously, to be put to death and to rise on the third day' - today's the third day. I'm going

James Going?

Peter To the tomb, to see for myself

*He runs off*

James Wait, I'll come with you

John And me

*They follow. Magdalen follows slowly and eventually takes up a position some way from the tomb. The disciples eventually get to the tomb and Peter goes in, and picks up the cloths*

Peter It's true; it must be true. If they stole the body, they'd have taken the cloths as well; he was wrapped up tight in them; why bother to take them off if they were moving him? He's done it, just like he said he would, risen from the dead. This is our second chance...a second chance

John Yes

James Yes

Peter Come on, let's tell the others

*They rush off and Magdalen slowly approaches the tomb. She picks up the cloths, hugs them and starts to cry; in a moment, she has clearly seen Jesus*

Magdalen Sir, if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, then I will go and remove him....

*She recognizes him and falls on her knees*

Master!

*She gets up, turns and faces the audience and shouts*

Magdalen     Peter! He's alive; I've seen him; he's alive

*She rushes off, and the play ends*

**END**