

Iscariot

by

Michael Hendy

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The Religious Drama Society of Great Britain
Email: sales@radiusdrama.org.uk web: www.radiusdrama.org.uk



ISCARIOT

At the start of His ministry, did Jesus call Judas to follow Him knowing that the man called Iscariot would be His betrayer? If not, at what point did Judas, consciously or otherwise, take on the function of villain-of-the-piece? And if he was preordained to play this role in the divine scheme of things, can he be blamed, let alone condemned, for his action?

I cannot remember when these questions first came to nag at me, but writing the play provided a disciplined context in which to express my feelings about them.

The play takes place in a sort of limbo, outside our own temporal world but with its own time scale, during which any of us may have to wait for a verdict on what we have done or failed to do in this life. In the case of Judas Iscariot, the Jury - which is the audience has to reach its own conclusion, which may or may not accord with the divine judgement. The more resulting discussion and soul searching there is, the more satisfied this writer will be.

Michael Hendy

LIST OF CHARACTERS

Clerk for the Defence

He is a young man, newly qualified in legal matters, with an enquiring mind and a lot to learn; his acquaintance with the Prosecution Counsel's so-called Secretary may have originated in their student days.

Judas Iscariot

A contemporary of the Master, Jesus of Nazareth, he is in his early thirties; smart in appearance, he has had a respectable upbringing and some professional training.

Witness

This Chorus or wandering minstrel serves as a link between the audience and the characters of the main action; when required, he adopts roles in this action, influencing it according to the wishes of his own master, whose identity gradually becomes clearer.

Prosecutor's Secretary

She is better qualified than her job description suggests and is clever enough to play along with the image which her boss and her male opposite number on the Defence side have of her.

Prosecution Counsel

In late middle age, he has fixed attitudes to the law and those who break it, as he has to members of the opposite sex; he is not likely to change now.

Defence Counsel

The lady is an experienced and highly professional lawyer who maintains the required detachment over the guilt or otherwise of the client she is currently representing.

The location is in and around the Chambers of the Defence Partnership and the Chief Prosecutor's Office.

Costumes should be timeless rather than biblical.

Running time: approximately one hour.

ISCARIOT

In the Defence Lawyer's office. Judas sits waiting for someone's attention but is resigned to the lack of it. Finally, the Clerk approaches.

Clerk Mr Iscariot?

Judas *(standing)* Yes.

Clerk Sorry to keep you waiting. Have you been here long?

Judas I've lost count.

Clerk People round here have no sense of time.

Judas Do you have the file?

Clerk I'm sorry?

Judas Of my case. They said they would send it over.

Clerk Did they? It should be on its way then.

Judas In the DPS office they said they would dispatch it immediately.

Clerk I'm afraid the Divine Prosecution Service is a law unto itself.

Judas Will you be dealing with my case?

Clerk Not necessarily. I mean, I shall be taking a close interest in it. Assisting with it, in so far as my position allows. *(responding to Judas' questioning look)* I'm only a junior. A trainee.

Judas Ah!

Clerk I'm a very fast learner. So they tell me.

Judas What am I to be charged with?

Clerk The Senior Partner will be leading for you in court. She will decide what your plea should be, after discussion with yourself, naturally.

Judas Naturally. Did you say 'she'?

Clerk We are strictly non-discriminatory in these chambers. Now can I take down your details, Mr . . . Iscariot. First name?

Judas Judas. J-U . . .

Clerk Jew. Dass. Yes. Address?

Judas No fixed abode now, I suppose.

Clerk Yes, it would be. Age irrelevant too, I assume.

Judas I was a young man when I left. Comparatively.

Clerk Like your victim. With a lot to live for.

Judas When is the trial?

Clerk I really can't say. Is it important?

Judas Time was very important to me once. In the past.

Clerk Your family was from Kerioth, in Judah.

Judas Hence the name.

Clerk I beg your pardon.

Judas Iscariot means 'from Kerioth'. It's a corruption, by the people in the north who couldn't pronounce it correctly. They were difficult to understand too.

Clerk Who were?

Judas Northerners. The savages of Samaria and Galileans. Ignorant fishermen, most of them.

Clerk Ah!

Judas What's that supposed to mean?

Clerk You didn't get on very well with your . . . colleagues, then?

Judas My job was to take care of the money, to see to the practical side of things. When the mission got under way, we needed more than fish to live on.

Clerk Shall I put you down as responsible for supplies?

Judas Put down what you like. Only the Master knew why he had called each of us.

Clerk Why did he call you?

Judas I thought it was because I was different from the others. The Master seemed to respect knowledge and skill. He made you feel your own abilities were important to him.

Clerk Ah!

Judas What have you written down for that part?

Clerk Nothing yet. I'll have to think about it.

Judas A dangerous thing, thinking.

(The Witness, strumming a guitar, enters from the front)

(Singing)

Judas the Jew from Judah

Judas Iscariot

Was called to follow the Master

For reasons he knew not.

Unlike those from Galilee

A fisher of men he was not to be;

His other talents, the Master knew

**When he said: I can
count on you I know I
can count on you I'm
sure I will count on
you.**

(The Witness moves to the side where there is a guitar case or box containing the props he will need later).