

TRIAL BY NIGHT

By
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Radius

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TRIAL BY NIGHT

CAST

CAIAPHAS	The Chief Priest
PHINEAS **	Members of the Sanhedrin
TERTULLUS (A Lawyer) **	
JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA	
HULDAH**	
JUDAS ISCARIOT	A Disciple of Jesus
PONTIUS PILATE	Roman Governor of Judea
CLAUDIA PROCULA	His wife
QUINTUS	His ADC
CENTURIAN	
FEMALE ATTENDANT	Non-speaking

** These parts could be played as women

The play runs without an interval, ideally in a church, with no scenery and a few props. The language is modern and, therefore, so should be the dress of the players.

SCENE 1: THE HOUSE OF CAIAPHAS

Late on Thursday afternoon. Joyful noise of large crowd cheering and shouting. Stage lights up on some members of the Sanhedrin; one or two watch the crowd outside through a 'window'; Phineas scans a Newspaper, two more whisper together.

CAIAPHAS *[At his desk, with papers]* What is going on out there?
Someone go and see will you.

[Exit Huldah]

I can't hear myself think. And close that window. *[They do so. Noise level reduced]* That's better. This is all this man's doing *[gesturing at reports on his desk]* - we should have dealt with him before. Now the city's full and his supporters are here from Galilee.

PHINEAS Not just from Galilee. It's much wider than that.

TERTULLUS It's not going to be so easy to deal with him now, just at the Passover. We've left it a bit late.

JOSEPH That's right. All Jerusalem is worked up. If we take action now we risk a riot.

PHINEAS He leaves the city at night. So do his followers. If we knew where they go, we could quietly take them all out. Do we know their moves, and their schedule?

CAIAPHAS No! We can't risk taking them out like that. No, it's got to be legal. I spoke to the King about it - he's very keen on that. He's prepared to leave the case to us, and not interfere himself but we've got to tread pretty carefully. Actually, I slightly got the impression he'd like to meet him. Perhaps see a miracle! Herod is a pushover- much too credulous. We've got to keep him out of it, but he's insisting we go the legal route. Who was looking into that - the legal case?

TERTULLUS *[Taking papers from a briefcase]* I have prepared this report. Here are the statements he's made - or people say he has made. On their own they're not that damning. And witnesses don't always agree. I think he almost deliberately confuses things so you can't be sure of his meaning.

CAIAPHAS Rubbish. I'm told he tells the simplest stories - people sowing seed, running a vineyard, stuff like that. And of course that's why they listen – he's a good story-teller by all accounts.

JOSEPH He's not that simple. He managed to tie the Temple Rabbis in knots. And the stories themselves may be simple, but you have to tease out the meaning. The meaning behind them. And it's not always the meaning you think –

PHINEAS And then there's the miracles. A lot of ...

JOSEPH They're a problem – people have seen him do strange things – even bring a dead man back to life in one case, though I didn't see that myself – but eventually, you have to ask yourself, could he be who he says he is?

CAIAPHAS Don't you start. You know he's upsetting the political balance. While the Romans are here we have to work with them. They've given us a good deal of freedom in running things - we don't want to jeopardise that. It's bad enough that Herod and the Governor are not even on speaking terms right now.

PHINEAS Has it got that bad?

CAIAPHAS It's worse. They ... well, I won't go into it now. Get on with your report.

TERTULLUS *[Leafing through pages]* I do have a witness who will say he threatened to pull down the Temple, and build it again in three days.

JOSEPH He didn't say that. He meant the body - you know, the human body, not the Temple. I was there. He said ...

TERTULLUS There you are, for every statement there's a counter-statement. This case could come badly unstuck.

PHINEAS We need to know his movements and take him out quietly.

CAIAPHAS No. I've already told you. It's got to be done properly and legally. And quickly, before the Passover if possible.

TERTULLUS That leaves one day And even if we get the witnesses to agree, we have to get Pilate to act.

CAIAPHAS Pilate is vulnerable. He's not completely trusted in Rome. We won the last battle with him over the images on the coins - that's what caused the fall-out with Herod.

TERTULLUS Well, it is absolutely certain he called himself King of the Jews. That *must* be treason against Rome. The Governor would have to act on that.

JOSEPH You'll have to prove it first.

[The room has darkened. Caiaphas turns on the lights and picks up Tertullus's report]

PHINEAS I don't see how it can be done in the time. If that lot out there see it happening they could start a riot, try to rescue him ...

CAIAPHAS We can get away with it providing we act quickly, and finish it before the news spreads. That means arresting him tonight.

TERTULLUS But we don't know where he'll be.

[Re-enter Huldah]

CAIAPHAS Huldah, what's the latest?

HULDAH Well it's like we thought. The man Jesus. He's been preaching. And they're all talking about his latest miracle; apparently hundreds saw it. They are hailing him as the Son of God. Do you know, he came riding into town on an ass, bold as anything. You wonder how he's got the nerve. They believe everything he tells them.

CAIAPHAS Some do. It's all conjuring tricks. He preaches well, I grant him that, but it's sacrilegious and more to the point it's treasonable. We need to stop this now.

HULDAH Well we might just be lucky. While I was out a man came to me, one of his followers, one of the disciples. Asked to speak to me on the quiet. I had a chat with him: I think he could be helpful.

CAIAPHAS

Where is he?

HULDAH

In the Guardroom, with the soldiers.

CAIAPHAS

Have him brought in.

[Exit Huldah]

If we can make the arrest outside the town and try him tonight, a lot of the city won't even know. And the Passover will be a distraction. By the time it's over, he'll be forgotten. It's quietened down out there now.

HULDAH

[Returning with Judas] Yes. It's nearly dark. They're going home for supper, so that's it for today. People are drifting away. This is the fellow - name's Judas.

CAIAPHAS

Why have you come to us?

JUDAS

I can help you. I need paying for it though. I'm not doing it for nothing. I know his plans for tonight, where he's going to be and when. It's a quiet garden, no crowds, you can pick him up. That's what you want isn't it, to get him out of the way?

TERTULLUS

Won't there be people with him? How will we know him?

JUDAS

I'll tell you where he'll be. You can't miss him. There will be some of the others with him but you can lift them as well.