

Longinus
A Passion Play
in Three Acts

By
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THE CAST

Longinus, a centurion, in charge of the garrison in Jerusalem. He is level-headed, decent, and fair; willing to believe in the gods if enough evidence presents itself.

Marcus, a Roman soldier of the plebeian (common) class. He is a very devout pagan, and a man of sound common sense.

Secundus, a Roman soldier of the patrician (noble) class. He is a very complex person, whose brother, mutilated by a Jew during a battle, has soured him on all Jews.

Joab, a Jewish recruit into the Roman army. He had been a follower of Jesus, but left him when Jesus seemed to be committing blasphemy by claiming to be God. He is “a true Israelite, without guile.”

Chorus, which may be made up of several people (men and possibly women—but at least three men, who are to appear in Act II briefly as soldiers), and may be costumed as contemporaneous with the play, or perhaps with costumes indicating the whole of history up to the present.

Author's Note:

This play is about faith. To create dramatic tension, it contains an anti-Semite, who makes various disparaging remarks about Jews, motivation for which is given in the course of the play. I want it clearly understood that I do not share his sentiments, and they do not express what the play is about. In fact, based on the theme of the play, the Jew is its most noble character.

OPENING CHORUS

The stage is dark. The CHORUS, consisting of persons dressed in costumes representing all ages and all religious types, nuns, priests, lay people, rabbis, ministers, etc. are standing on both sides of the acting area. As they begin to speak, lights come up showing them.

Chorus

We waited, in the darkness and the chill.
We waited, and it was night.
For us, it has been night forever:
a block of darkness—solid, frozen,
and we, encased inside it, waiting.
In the beginning, the earth was waste and void,
and in the middle, the earth is waste and void.
And in the end?
Well, we wait,
and darkness is upon the face of the deep.

Not long ago--
a week, two thousand years, not long,
we thought the light had come at last.
We praised it;
we waved palms before it—
and then we noticed that it rode upon a donkey.

Opening Chorus

That was his hour, the hour upon an ass,
and now that sun has set.
If that was light, we do not comprehend it;
light for us must be solemn, lofty,
conforming to the noble darkness in our souls.
Give us a darkened light, and we will grasp it.

But he taught us, nonetheless, and now we know.
We learned from him not to trust in stories;
legends visible mock the sword that issues from their mouths.
He taught us that a legend is no more than symbol,
Telling in pictures the power within ourselves.
And now we look no more to hope, but action,
and wait no longer but create the world
unto the image and likeness of mankind.
The myth has lost its grip and shown our strength.
Now is the hour of man, and the power of darkness.

The lights fade on the CHORUS

ACT ONE

The lights come up on a room in the High Priest's palace. It is a bare room, for the military garrison, with hooks for military cloaks, and some armor lying about. There is one table in it.

LONGINUS is discovered in the room, shining his armor. MARCUS enters and salutes.

Longinus: Well?

Marcus: We took the main one, at least, sir; and that was the one you said you wanted.

Longinus: What? Five of you and half of the high-priest's retinue, and you only got one?

Marcus: Yes, sir.

Longinus: Why?

Marcus: Well you see, sir, you gave orders not to fight if it could be avoided. And you did say that the one that Galilean was to show us was the only really important one.

Longinus: I knew I should have put Secundus in command. How many were there with him?

Marcus: I don't know. Ten or a dozen.

Longinus: A dozen! Look, Marcus, I realize that you can't expect much from the lower orders of society, but a soldier in command needs a minimum of common sense. You had enough men to surround them three times!

Marcus: Yes, sir.

Longinus: Well why didn't you?

Marcus: Well, you know sir, that I wasn't really in command; I could only give orders to the Romans. That Malakai had the impression that he was in charge because they'd asked for us, and you did tell him when we met here for him to lead me there.

Longinus: I meant for him to show you where to find him, not to take over command! What do the high priest's slaves know about police work?

Marcus: I know, sir, but that was the way he took it, and I didn't think it was worth a fight.

Longinus: Well all right, but you'd think even he'd have known enough to surround them.

Marcus: Well, it turned out that it was in a walled garden, and we all had to go in at the gate. And then he told us all to stay together, in case we got attacked.

Longinus: Attacked! Great Pollux! —I knew I shouldn't have agreed to this insane raid in the first place! But tell me, just for my information. There you are, all in front of the gate, armed for attack. Now if

you had to go in by the gate, they had to go out by it. What did you do? Just give them safe-conduct passes through you?

Marcus: No, sir . . . but . . . you see, what happened was that . . . that he told us to let them go, and we did.

Longinus: What! He was the one who told me he wanted that man and all the followers he could get! Marcus, I can't excuse this. If you don't know enough to take over when someone else loses his head—

Marcus: But it wasn't him, sir.

Longinus: What wasn't him?

Marcus: I mean, the one who told us to let them go. It was the other one.

Longinus: I don't understand. There was another one?

Marcus: I mean the other one—the one we captured.

Longinus: The one you captured! You mean to tell me that the man you captured just told you to let his followers go, and you let them go? Just like that?

Marcus: Yes, sir. I know how it sounds, but—

Longinus: But it seemed like a good idea at the time.

Marcus: But really, sir, if you'd been there—

Longinus: Spare me the explanation, Marcus. The reason I wasn't there was because I had more important things to do here, arranging

to see that there isn't going to be any uproar we can't handle during this festival that's coming up tomorrow. I assumed that I could send a subordinate on a simple mission like this without having it completely botched. It didn't occur to any of you, did it, that if you let his followers go, they'd get reinforcements and come back to free their chief? You're lucky you got back here alive!

Marcus: But we knew that wouldn't happen, sir. A couple of them started to fight, and for a minute it looked as if there might be trouble, and we wouldn't be able to take him without some serious bloodshed. One of the men even cut off an ear of one of the high priest's slaves. But then he said he didn't want any fighting, and—

Longinus: “He” is still this one you captured, I presume. And so everybody put down their swords, of course. He's certainly persuasive, isn't he? But what'd the slave do? Just stand there and bleed politely to death?

Marcus: No, sir.

Longinus: And what about the other slaves, what were they doing? Standing around admiring this new fashion?

Marcus: No, sir.

Longinus: Well, what happened? You've got me interested now—which was what you were trying to do.

Marcus: No, sir. . . . Um . . . He picked up his ear and put it back on.

Longinus: Who? The slave? Put back his ear? Really, Mar—

Marcus: No, sir. the man.

Longinus: Meaning, as always, the man you captured.

Marcus: Yes, sir.

Longinus: I see. That *would* make a difference, wouldn't it? So everything was all right then, and then he told you to let his followers go, and you let them go.

Marcus: Yes, sir.

Longinus: It was polite of him not to tell you to let him go too. Or did he?

Marcus: No, sir. He let us take him.

Longinus: He let you take him. [*Flares up in rage*] He *let* you take him! [*Gets a grip on himself*] . . . Well. Marcus, do you honestly expect me to believe that a man who could put back an ear that's been cut off and force you just by saying it to let his people alone would just stand there and allow himself to be captured?

Marcus: No, sir.

Longinus: Well that's a help. Because I don't, you know. It's a good thing for you that I'm not the one who wanted those people, or you'd be rowing a galley tomorrow. What got into you, Marcus? I thought you were one of my best men! It doesn't matter whether it was important or not; when Rome gets involved in something like this, it gives us a bad name.

—Now get out of here while I decide what to do with you—no, wait. Send in Secundus. I want to get some notion of what really went on out there. . . . And while you're at it, you'd better try to repair

some of the damage you've done. Put a couple of extra men at the gate, and notify reinforcements to be ready in case they try to storm the place. —I hope it's not too late already. Take a look out in the courtyard to see if you can spot anyone that was there in the garden; they may have sent a spy here to see what happens before they try anything. —But be careful about it; the last thing we want to do if we can help it is get everyone stirred up. You got that?

Marcus: Yes, sir. [*Salutes and leaves. LONGINUS resumes polishing his armor.*]

Enter SECUNDUS

Secundus: Well, Longinus! It's been quite an evening! I was going to come in anyway to thank you for sending me, but poor Marcus says you want to see me. I can imagine what about.

Longinus: Secundus, what in the name of high Olympus has been going on? I thought that Marcus was as level-headed a man as we had. Up to now the only fault I could find with him was his lack of imagination!

Secundus: I thought as much. You know, all the way back I was contemplating that little scene between the two of you. Evidently he was too honest to try to weasel out of it.

Longinus: It sounded like something straight out of a farce by Plautus!

Secundus: Well, but don't be hard on him, Longinus; he's had a trying night. I myself don't know what I would have done after we fell down on the ground in front of that man.

Longinus: You mean there's *more*?

Secundus: Oh, didn't he mention that? Well, I suppose he wouldn't, if he could've helped it; it doesn't sit well in the Roman breast to admit these things. I was pretty impressed myself.

Longinus: And when did *this* happen? And how?

Secundus: Right at the beginning. That little filth of a Jew—the spy, you know—decided he had to be dramatic about it and told us the head man would be the one he kissed—or maybe that's one of their customs, or something. Anyway, he went up and kissed this guy, and of course, with us there, he saw right through it, and stepped forward and asked who we were looking for. Then that Malakai—by the way, Longinus, if you ever send anybody out with Jews again, make it *very* clear that we're the ones who give the orders. If I'd been in Marcus's place, there'd be three or four Jews without heads right now—and at least two of them would've been on our side. He handled things very well considering it was their party, and he didn't have a centurion's rank to pull on them.

Longinus: All right all right, I've learned my lesson. So Malakai did what?

Longinus: He got all pompous and intoned, “We want Jesus of Nazareth.” And then this Jesus said, “That is the one I am,” and there was something about the way he said “I am” that—I don't know—we all just fell back two paces and prostrated ourselves. Just as if it were Caesar himself. When we got up, I saw Marcus clutch at his neck, and for a minute I thought something had happened to him; but he was only grabbing hold of that medallion he always wears. I've never been able to figure out why he thinks he's safer with it in his hand than just hanging around his neck—but then, if you're going to have those

things at all, you can't expect much in the way of rationality.

Longinus: But what made you do it?

Secundus: Don't ask *me*. As I said, I was something about the way he talked. But we—at least I—didn't feel any force or anything; I just did it. I suppose it was the same for everyone else. We didn't talk about it, as you may imagine. Of course, these Easterners have all sorts of mysterious powers, in spite of the fact that they can't learn to live like human beings. And then there was the little incident of the ear. Did Marcus tell you about that? He was *really* impressed when that happened. I thought he was going to faint.

Longinus: Did that man really put somebody's ear back on?

Secundus: Well that, of course, depends on whether the ear was ever really cut off in the first place. It certainly *looked* like it; you could even see it lying on the ground—or so you thought. But one of his henchmen did the hacking off, and once you've had magic tricks played on you, you get suspicious about things like that. I must say, though, that however he managed it, it was very neatly done; even the swordstroke was such a masterpiece of ineptitude that it must have taken a lot of practice. Of course, the problem was that after the worshiping trick, it was an anticlimax—to me, anyway, though it seems to have worked for poor Marcus. But by that time, I was prepared, and realized it must be an illusion, even though to this minute I couldn't tell you how he did it. But that worship business—that was perfect. No big buildup, nothing; he just said in a perfectly natural tone, “That is the one I am,” and down we went.

—You know, it's a shame in a way those Jews have got hold of him; they hate him. With a little coaching on how to get a better sense of timing, he could be a sensation in Rome.

Longinus: Yes, but what about this thing of telling you to let his followers go free? That's what really worries me about all this.

Secundus: Ah, yes, that. Well, I'm not proud of myself for that. Here I was, convinced that I had him figured out, and he says, "If I'm the one you're looking for, then let these men go." And we did—no questions asked. It didn't occur to anybody what we'd done until we were almost at the gate here. I tell you, it was a fascinating night.

—But I don't think you have to worry about them. They were all set to fight, but as soon as the ear episode was over, and they saw that he actually intended to let himself be taken, you could see the blood drain from their faces, and the fear light up in their eyes. No, unless I miss my guess—and I won't—they're too interested in their own unwashed hides to risk them in the lair of the eagle—do eagles have lairs? Nest? No. Den? What do eagles have? Aeries! Aeries, of course. I must be losing my grip.

Longinus: Shut up, and let me think. . . . You say he intended to let himself be taken?

Secundus: Oh, yes, it was obvious. I mean, he could've just said, "Let me pass," and we'd never even have seen him leave.

Believe me, it was an interesting experience, and I wouldn't have missed it for a month's furlough; but that doesn't mean it didn't have its spooky moments. Looking at things like this happening on a stage is one thing, but being right in the middle of it is something else entirely. While it's happening, you're actually wondering if this is some kind of a god you're dealing with; and if he wants you to do something, you'll just do it.

No, he let himself be taken; but he didn't want the others to be; and that's just the way it turned out. So don't blame Marcus; you wouldn't have done any better yourself. Considering that he believes in gods and things, he handled himself in a way that'd make any

commander proud.

Longinus: All right, I'll see. You're probably right. . . . Hm. . . . If what you say is true, it's easy to see why they want him; a man like that can be dangerous. But why do you suppose he let you capture him?

Secundus: I don't know, really. Maybe he wants to have a showdown in the council, and this is his way of getting in; they're all set to try him in extraordinary session. He may be planning to—I don't know, claim he's their god or something—then when they get all excited vanish in a puff of smoke.

I hope that's it. It'd be worth it to see their faces when it happens, the way they look down their misshapen noses at everyone.

Longinus: [*tapping his fingers on the table, pondering.*] Let's see. . . . Suppose he does that and gets away. With all the crowds in Jerusalem now, we don't want him getting captured with our help and then escaping. . . . And even if they set him free themselves, he probably ought to be kept out of circulation for a couple of days until everybody goes home.

But how? . . .

Well, presuming that he is mortal man, then if he pulls some stunt like making himself invisible, I imagine you'd still be able to feel him. . . . But we can't get into the courtroom.

Secundus: No, we pollute it, of all things!

Longinus: Well, we could station someone outside the door—no, that probably wouldn't work, because of the surprise when it suddenly opened, if you couldn't see anyone coming through. No, if we send one of our men and tell him to try to grab an invisible man coming through the door—no, it'd never work.

Have we got any of our men that're Jews here tonight?

Secundus: It seems to me I did notice a strange odor under one of the helmets. The name's Joab, I think.

Longinus: Joab? Good. Did he go out to that place with you?

Secundus: I believe he did. I try not to notice these things, but they force themselves on one's attention somehow.

Longinus: Then he knows what to expect. Go find him and tell him to get in there quietly and stand by the door, and if that man pulls a vanishing act, he's to block the door and grab hold of anything he can feel and hang on for dear life. It's good he's the one; I don't think he's too superstitious to handle it.

Secundus: You never know with a Jew; but it can't be helped, I suppose. He'll be out there by the fire, or I miss my guess.

[He goes out. LONGINUS resumes his work, thoughtfully.]

Enter MARCUS. *[He salutes.]*

Longinus: Yes?

Marcus: Secundus told me to report to you that he sent Joab into the council chamber, and that he was taking my place in the courtyard.

Longinus: Oh? Why is that?

Marcus: There's a bare possibility that one of them might have been out there. He left, but I sent a man after him to see where he went, and Secundus thought he'd look around a little and see if he recognized anyone else.

Longinus: Why did you let him go this time?

Marcus: There wasn't any real reason to suspect him, sir. I thought he looked a little like the one that cut off the ear, but really, all Jews look the same to me, and you know how it is when you're trying to recognize somebody you only saw once and in the dark. But one of the women made as if she recognized him too, and so I figured that there might be something in it. But—well, she was a woman.

Longinus: Don't belittle women when it comes to noticing things.

Marcus: No, sir. I tried to find out when he came in, but nobody had been paying any particular attention. He might have been one of a pair that came in a little after we did, which is suspicious; but the guard at the gate—the Jew, I mean—was a friend of the other one, so even if it was him, it's probably nothing. But nobody else came in later that wasn't known—they say, anyway. I suppose they haven't got any spies in the high priest's retinue, or that Judas or whoever he was—the one that took us out—would've told us. So I thought the woman was just trying to attract attention.

Longinus: It's possible. Still, I'd have checked a little more before I just let him go.

Marcus: Yes, sir. I had one of them ask if she saw him in the garden, and he acted as if he didn't know what she was talking about.

Longinus: He would, of course.

Marcus: That's what I thought; but some of the others heard her, and they began pestering him, and he kept saying he didn't know anything about it. But he could see me looking at him, and he got more and more nervous.

Longinus: That's suspicious.

Marcus: Yes, sir, but it could just as easily have been that he was afraid of getting himself into a mess.

Longinus: You shouldn't have been looking at him.

Marcus: Well, it'd have been worse if I wasn't, because by the time he noticed me, everybody was looking at him.

Longinus: All right. You did say you had him followed, though.

Marcus: Yes, sir. But if he was a spy, he was the wrong one to pick for it. By the time he left he was crying.

Longinus: Crying, was he? Just because of what they were saying, or had he heard anything about the trial?

Marcus: I don't think so. No; I don't think the trial had even begun by that time. And anyway, nobody out there knew what was going on inside. No, he was just scared.

Longinus: All right. You probably handled it as well as it could have been handled. Probably. [*Enter JOAB*] It doesn't sound like—Yes, Joab.

Joab: [*Salutes.*] There was no problem at the trial, sir.

Longinus: What? Is it over already?

Joab: Yes, sir. They were still calling witnesses when I went in, and it looked like it might be going to last a long time; but then the high priest tricked him into condemning himself out of his own mouth, and

it was all over.

Longinus: He didn't try anything funny?

Joab: No, sir. He didn't even say anything except that one thing they condemned him for—that I heard, anyway.

Longinus: Where've they got him now? Maybe he means to make his escape now that he's been condemned.

Joab: He's locked up in that place beside the council chamber, sir. There's no chance he'll be able to escape. He's tied up and blindfolded too, and they started slapping him and asking him to prophesy who hit him, and things like that. If he was going to try anything, he'd have done it then—and by now I imagine he isn't in much of any condition to do anything at all.

Longinus: What's the matter, Joab?

Joab: Nothing, sir.

Marcus: You look as if you're sorry for him.

Joab: Oh, well it's just that they didn't need to mess him up that way.

Marcus: Say, what was his name, anyway? Jesus of Nazareth, wasn't it?

Joab: What of it?

Marcus: Didn't you tell me once that you'd been a follower of somebody and then got disgusted with him and joined us? It wouldn't by any chance have been this Jesus of Nazareth, now, would it? I

thought that name rang a bell.

Joab: Well, so what if I was his follower once? I'm not one now, and I haven't been for a long time.

Longinus: So you were his follower. Tell me, what are they trying to do? Take over or something?

Joab: Oh, no, sir. It's just a religious thing.

Longinus: Is he dangerous?

Joab: You mean to Rome? He isn't dangerous at all. He's just a fool. But he's a decent man, and even though they were right to find him guilty, they didn't have to go and whack him around and spit on him when he's tied up.

Longinus: He's a decent man, and yet they were right to find him guilty.

Joab: Well, he violated our law. He *thinks* he's doing the right thing, but he broke the law. It's a shame in a way; for a while I even thought he was a prophet.

Marcus: What's a prophet? You mean a soothsayer?

Joab: A man who speaks for God. A man who speaks with God's voice.

Marcus: We have those, too.

Joab: Not like ours, you don't.

Marcus: Well let me tell you—

Longinus: All right, you two, all right. Joab, I'm not interested in your religion; all I want to be sure of is the answer to two questions: Did he ever say anything that could be interpreted as subversive? And will his followers try to fight to get him freed? The second question is the most important one at the moment.

Joab: I don't think so. Most of the ones I knew are still with him. Of course, I wasn't very close to his Emissaries—that's what he called them—

Longinus: Emissaries? You mean like a King has?

Joab: Well yeah, but I think it was more of a joke than anything else. See, in our religion we have this thing about a King who's supposed to come and—

Longinus: Skip the religious stuff, Joab. So you weren't close to what we can call the inner circle. So what?

Joab: Well, what I was trying to say is that nobody recognized me there in the garden. But the point is that they aren't the fighting kind; just fishermen and people like that. Actually, a lot of his followers are women.

Marcus: This King's emissaries are fishermen? Some King.

Joab: Like I said, it was probably a joke.

Longinus: Anyhow, there wasn't any problem in letting them go. I mean, they won't try to get reinforcements and start a fight.

Joab: As far as I know, there's nowhere for them to go *to* for reinforcements. There were only twelve of those Emissaries that he had

always with him—the ones that were there in the garden—and everybody else just gathered around or went away depending on whether something interesting was going on.

Longinus: All right, then. [*To MARCUS*] Marcus, I think you can call off that extra guard. The men'll need their sleep for tomorrow, when there might really be trouble.

Marcus: Yes, sir. [*Salutes and leaves.*]

Longinus: And you don't think Rome would be interested in him either. He didn't innocently say things that could get the people into a revolt against us, for instance.

Joab: Oh, no, he was just the opposite. He believed we could give to Caesar what was Caesar's if Rome allowed us to worship the way we believe. That was why I became his follower, in fact. So many of us are so interested in getting free of Rome that we've forgotten the spiritual side of worship, and—

Longinus: Spare me the religion, Joab.

Joab: But that's just it, sir; he was nothing *but* religious. Why, I was there once when they tried actually to *make* him king, and he just slipped away the way he sometimes does.

Longinus: It almost sounds as if he's on our side. . . . I wonder if that's why he was captured. I don't trust those priests.

Joab: No, sir, nothing like that. Like I said, he violated our law.

Longinus: Well, anyway, we won't have to bother with it.

Joab: Well actually, sir, we will. He got the death penalty, and we'll have to take him to the governor to have him executed.

Longinus: The death penalty! That's pretty serious. What'd he do? Violate the Temple, or something?

Joab: No, sir. It's just that he thinks he's God.

[The lights go out in the acting area, and come up on the CHORUS]

CHORUS

He thinks he's God.
Prophesy to us, O Christ!
You who would destroy the Temple—
leave not a stone upon a stone—
Its stones will crush you!
Abraham will crush you; Moses will crush you.
The Samson who would pull down the Law
fulfills the law that crashes on his head!

Before Abraham was, you are, you say:
Ancient of days, riding on the clouds.
But Abraham is dead; and you will die,
and where then are all your words of eternal life?
You thought you were God, above the Law;
the Law will make you know you are but man.

And we will help the Law. Give us some words:
Prophesy to us, O Christ!
Tell us who slapped you, spat on you,
kicked omnipotence into senselessness.
We know who did it, if you do not:
We did. Each of us. All mankind.
Judge us. Condemn us all together, if you dare!

[*To the audience.*] And you—Are you a Galilean also?
Did I see you in the garden, sleeping?

Or in a corner of the church, shaking hands?
Come out here by the fire, and warm yourself;
bask in the glow of the world, and let us see your face.

Now, look into our eyes, and tell us:
He thinks he's God. What do you say of him?
Elijah? Moses? A philosopher?
Look into the flames again, and see him there.
They show him as another Socrates. And thou?
Ask not for whom the cock crows; it crows for thee.

ACT TWO

[The lights go out on the CHORUS and come up on the next scene, a room in the Praetorium, the governor's fortress. There is a low wall, about waist high, extending from the wings of stage right about a third of the way into the room. The wall has two military cloaks draped over it.]

SECUNDUS is discovered bent over behind the wall, apparently taking someone's pulse. He has a cat-o-nine-tails in his hand.]

Secundus: No, I guess you're still alive, my friend, after all. For a minute there, I thought you'd cheated us; but it looks like you'll be around for a while to remember the garden last night. A pity we have to let you go. Still, it has its compensations; they can give you the death penalty, but they can't do anything about it—and I imagine that gives your priests ecstasies of satisfaction. *[Enter LONGINUS. SECUNDUS continues, without seeing him]* Yes, and they'll be doubly overjoyed when they see you back out there preaching, or whatever it is you do. . . . Not right away, though; you'll spend a week or two contemplating our hospitality.

Longinus: What's going on?

Secundus: *[Straightening up, picking up a rag to wipe his face, hanging up the whip, and putting on one of the cloaks.]* Oh, nothing much. He's taking a little rest right now, after our conversation. He didn't have much sleep last night, and I was just letting him know he wasn't the

only one. How's the crowd behaving?

Longinus: Ugly. they can't make up their minds whether they want us to let him go or put him to death. Frankly, I wish the Governor had picked another time for a showdown between us and their Law. But I suppose he has his reasons.

Secundus: Of course he does. That's exactly what they were figuring: that on a festival like this, he'd be too scared to do anything but just what they wanted. Let them get away with this, and they'll push us around every time the rabble collect in this filthy hole they call a city.

Longinus: I suppose. . . . But it's a tricky business. I guess that's why he didn't just let him go, even though he thought he was innocent. He wants to show that we do respect their Law, but they can't use it to just get us to do whatever they please. If he goes too far either way, there's going to be a bloodbath. I just hope we've got the men for it.

Secundus: Look at you! *Worried* about a little thing like a bloodbath, when all our men are itching for a good wash!

You know, Longinus, you asked me once why I wasn't at least a centurion, if I'm of Patrician rank. Well this is why. Here you are, figuring out ways of using the army to keep the peace, and all I have to do is exercise my arm a little every now and then [*He looks at the whip.*] and contemplate the pleasure of taking auspices out of Hebrew guts—and if I die doing it, I die happy. And you probably won't even get a chance to fight; and if we should happen to lose—which we won't, the odds are only three hundred to one or so against us—you wouldn't live any longer than anybody else, or die as quick.

Longinus: Well, somebody has to do it.

Secundus: Oh, don't get me wrong; I admit it, and I admire your

sense of responsibility. I really do. I just don't share it. But I have brains enough to know that if Rome were peopled by men like me, there wouldn't *be* a Rome. Luckily for us, though, your type is still plentiful, and the rest of us can take paid vacations in exotic places like Judea, and learn to appreciate how lucky we are when we get back under the shadow of the coliseum.

Longinus: [*Pacing back and forth, thinking, not paying attention.*] Well, I guess I've done everything that could be done. There's men stationed all through the crowd; and if they start anything, we can cut it into six sectors in a matter of minutes, and force them out through different gates, and then they'll be no problem.

Now.

What about him? [*Indicating what is behind the wall.*]

Secundus: Oh, he's all right. I just got a little carried away there for a few minutes, that's all. Since we don't have to stop at forty lashes minus one because we're not Jews—for which I thank all the gods there are, or I would if there were any—I tend to lose count once I've established my rhythm.

Longinus: [*Looking behind the wall*] Great Pollux! You didn't leave much of him!

Secundus: Well, he was a little special, you know. It was the first time in my life I was ever intimidated by a Jew, and I wanted to teach him a little respect for his betters.

Longinus: That episode last night must have left quite an impression on you.

Secundus: I can joke about it; but just between you and me, I did *not* enjoy it.

Longinus: I didn't realize that, or I'd never have let you do the whipping. It's not good for a man to feel one way or the other about someone he's torturing.

Secundus: Oh, I don't know. It took a weight off my mind.

Longinus: Yes, and put it on *his* back.

Secundus: Oh, come on now. I didn't draw all that much blood.

Longinus: I'd hate to see what you call "much," then. I hope he'll be able to stand up when we send him out of here, and stay alive long enough for everybody to get out of this town before he dies. I never saw anything like it; they're all wild about him, but half of them want his head and the other half are all ready to dress him in purple.

Secundus: Don't worry; he'll be all right. You know me; I wouldn't kill a man and spoil his appreciation of my handiwork. Anyway, maybe when we let him go, half of them will begin killing the other half, and we'll have our little bloodbath without any trouble on our part. We can just lend a helping hand here and there when things begin to get slack.

Longinus: What've you got against the Jews anyway, Secundus?

Secundus: You mean apart from their appearance, their manners, their stupidity, and their self-righteousness?

Longinus: You know what I mean. You don't have the normal Roman attitude toward them.

Secundus: More's the pity. But you see, the rest of you Romans haven't been as well educated as I have. I got a beautiful lesson on the Jewish character the very first month I got here. I never told you I had

a brother, did I?

Longinus: A brother? No.

Secundus: Well I do—that is, I did, but I don't talk about him much, because it's hard for me to keep from being serious when I do, and I lose my character as the devil-may-care adventurer that I've so carefully cultivated. But you asked for it.

He was a good kid, a couple of years younger than I, and he had one of those Roman senses of responsibility. In fact, if he'd been alive long enough, I'd be talking to him today instead of you—or maybe he'd be up there on the balcony listening to the priests and giving orders to all of us.

But anyway.

The only reason I joined the army was to make sure he didn't make too much of a hero of himself; I could kid him out of doing stupid things. Anyhow, the first thing that happened when we got over here was that battle on the Plain of Megiddo. He was a centurion, and was right in front—which is another reason that being a centurion doesn't appeal much to me—and he was one of the first ones to get it. No problem with that; glory and all that sort of thing, which was what he was looking for. It happens to the best of us.

But then when it was all over and we were picking up the dead and wounded, I found his body. Some one of those beloved Jews had stopped everything in the middle of the fight and taken time to decorate his body all over with a dagger.

Now that wasn't necessary at all. War is war, and to whoever can get them belong the spoils—and he did have a handsome set of armor, which was missing, of course. And that I can understand too.

But not the other thing; that was taking the heat of battle just a little too seriously for my taste. So I decided that if they liked the Romans all that much, who was I to deprive them of the pleasure of my company?

Longinus: I see. . . . That explains why you're still here.

Secundus: That, and the fact that I thought it might be interesting if I could track down the armor. I did find the shield in a little shop about a year ago; and in my quiet way I made sure that nobody found the pieces of the shopkeeper. But he didn't remember who he got it from, in spite of the fact that I was a little persistent on that point.

Longinus: I can imagine.

Secundus: I hope not. You aren't that depraved yet. I still keep looking for the greaves and the helmet, of course, and maybe some day I'll find them.

And meantime, I get a chance every so often[*With a glance behind the wall*] to lend a Jew or two a helping hand.

Longinus: Well, I appreciate your point of view; but I think that for your sake you'll get a few less chances while I'm in command.

Secundus: I had a feeling I should have kept my mouth shut. Well, I suppose I'll just have to make the most of what comes my way.

Longinus: I mean it, Secundus. I've seen hate like yours eat people up until they do all kinds of crazy things. We lose good soldiers that way. Soldiers have to think.

Secundus: Ah, Longinus, but you've never seen hatred when its refined and exquisite the way mine is. If I were to let it eat me up, then they'd win a victory over me, wouldn't they? So in general I just cultivate an air of having them beneath my notice; but when an opportunity offers, I'm ready.

I have two minds; the deep one nobody sees, and the charming,

sophisticated self you've all come to know and love.

Longinus: Well, have it your way, then.

[*MARCUS enters, unnoticed, during the following speech.*]

Secundus: Oh, I will, never fear. Even if I wanted to change, I couldn't; the image of my brother would haunt me. No, I'm afraid that the day I'll be able to see anything good in any Jew will be the day my brother gets up from his grave and kneels to one of them.

Longinus: [*Seeing MARCUS*] What is it, Marcus?

Marcus: A message, sir, for the governor from his wife.

Longinus: I suppose he ought to see it. I'll take it up; hand it to me.

Marcus: She didn't write anything, sir. She just said to tell him to have nothing to do with that Nazarene. He's innocent, she said, and she had a frightening dream about him.

Longinus: That's it?

Marcus: Yes, sir. She seemed very concerned about the dream part.

Longinus: All right. I suppose he should be told. What a life! Now we make policy by women's dreams! [*He leaves.*]

Secundus: How's it going outside? You hear anything?

Marcus: They're getting pretty excited about this guy. I could hardly shoulder my way through to get here.

Secundus: Say, Marcus, will you do me a favor?

Marcus: Depends on what it is.

Secundus: I really hate to deprive you of the pleasure, but if there's a fight and Longinus sends you out, will you trade places with me for a while? I have a feeling he's going to keep me in here, and I need some action.

Marcus: Okay, if you want.

Secundus: Thanks. I'll be back before he notices. You won't get into trouble.

Marcus: Why would I get into trouble for something like that?

Secundus: You won't, so never mind why.

Marcus: All right. It won't be long before it starts. The high priest's got all his men down there trying to make everybody yell for his head. Where is he, by the way?

Secundus: [*Points behind the wall.*] Down there. [*as if talking about a baby making.*] Oh, will you look at that; he looks as if he's about to come to.

Marcus: [*Looks, and shakes his head.*] Hmh! If they could see their king now!

Secundus: Their king?

Marcus: Oh, didn't you know? Half of them out there claim he's a descendant of their kings or something, and they want him released so

he can take over. They would've got what they wanted, too, except that the Governor had him whipped first; and so the high priests's men say that this means that the Governor really thinks he's guilty. It's a mess.

—But after what you've done to him, he won't be taking over anything for a good long while.

Secundus: Well, I try to do my duty with a will. But I had no idea I was performing such a noble service for a king! The King of the Jews! My, my! I wish I'd known! An honor like this comes once in a lifetime, and calls for more imagination than my humble efforts up to now. . . . But we can't really whip him any more; it'd kill him, and we wouldn't want to kill the King of the Jews! No, not kill him.

Still, it'd be a shame to let him go out there incognito; we ought to do something to show his loyal subjects that we have a due and fitting respect for his august majesty. . . .

I think, Marcus, I feel an idea beginning to blossom! This is too good a chance to pass up!

[*He goes to the wings, and calls.*] Hey, in there! Hey, listen, you guys! Come out here a minute!

[*Enter members of the CHORUS, dressed as Roman soldiers. As they enter, they make various remarks, such as "What's up?" "What do you want?" "What's going on?" etc.*]

Secundus: Listen. You may not be aware of it, but we've been favored with a visit from royalty! The people out there are calling this magnificent specimen of humanity down here the King of the Jews! [*Various expressions from the men, such as, "Who, him?" "What are you talking about?" etc.*] Isn't that amazing? And he never breathed a word to let us know! [*More expressions. "The King of the Jews? Really?" "What's it all about?" "Who is this guy?"*]

See, he's just beginning to wake up from the royal nap. Isn't that

sweet? [*More remarks.*] Easy, now; we don't want to startle him out of his slumbers with our rowdy noise; he won't be used to low company, and we want to show him that Rome knows how to treat a king. [*"What are you talking about?" "What do you mean, 'low company'?" etc.*]

Listen up, now. See, when I heard the news about what we've got here the thought occurred to me that the reason we don't know he's a king is that he doesn't have a crown. [*He goes over to a pile of thornsticks and begins weaving them.*] Now that's a shame—I mean, how's anybody to know a man's a king if he doesn't have a crown? And I don't know where he lives, so I couldn't go home and get the one he forgot, so I looked around to see if I could find a substitute.

—Get the idea? [*Expressions like "Yeab!" "I see!," etc.*]

First Soldier: There's a broken piece of wall out back that'd be perfect for a throne. I sat on it once, and Man! [*He walks around holding his posterior. Everyone laughs.*]

Second Soldier: [*Picking up a stick*] Here's a scepter. Maybe we could use it as a fan, too, in case his head gets hot. [*Demonstrates by hitting himself on the head. More laughter.*]

Secundus: Now that's what I call imagination. Let's get going. [*A couple of them go behind the wall and reach down start to drag the hidden body offstage.*]

Marcus: Just a second! Just a second! Be sure you don't kill him, because the Governor wants him released, and I can tell you that if he dies, we'll all be in deep trouble!

Secundus: Now don't you worry your little head, Marcus. We're only going to pay our respects, that's all. Why, he'll probably still be able

even to stand up afterwards, won't he, fellas? And he'll wear his crown proudly for the rest of his life!

[Making various remarks, they go out, including MARCUS. SECUNDUS is about to follow when he notices the cloak draped over the wall.]

Secundus: No, wait! . . . What's a king, after all, without a royal robe?

[He takes the cloak and leaves. There is a silence for a few seconds.]

Chorus Offstage

Hail, King of the Jews!
Hail, greater than Caesar!
Your reign extends from sun to sun
and even to the spheres of heaven!
We praise you, we bless you,
we worship you, we glorify you!
We give you thanks for your great glory.

See how we worship the King of Kings!
See how mankind acknowledges its subjection!
See how we wipe his blood upon our hands
and smear it on the face of the Lord's Anointed!
Let it be proclaimed forever
as a memorial to our piety!
Shout it from the housetops,
Declare it from the highest mountain
That we Gentiles are the first to call him King!

[LONGINUS enters at this point, says "Secundus?" and looks around,

then offstage, and says "Oh, no!" as the CHORUS continues uninterrupted]

King over all of us, King of the world,
King of the heroes, King of the gods!
And this is our worship, this is our tribute.
Thus do we and all our children treat our Lord;
thus do we do to the God who dwells among us!

Longinus: Stop! That's enough! The Governor wants that man up on the balcony to show the people! Secundus, I could kill you! This is your doing! All right, *you* take him up, then—take him up like that, and if the Governor asks how he got in that condition, you will tell him you did it and take the consequences! And if you start a riot when they see him in that clown's costume, all our blood is on your head! Now get him out of there!

[Shuffling noises offstage, but not talking. LONGINUS leans on the wall with his head in his hands for a few minutes. Enter JOAB, without a cloak.]

Joab: Oh. Excuse me, sir.

Longinus: *[Irritably]* Yes? What is it now?

Joab: Nothing, sir. I was just looking for something.

Longinus: Where's your cloak, soldier?

Joab: That's what I was looking for, sir.

Longinus: Didn't you hang it in the cloak room?

Joab: Well, sir, I was just going down to the bin to get the wood out for the crosses, and I thought I'd only be gone a couple of minutes, and—

Longinus: And rather than go all the way up to the cloak room, you just threw it down somewhere, and now you can't find it. How many times do I have to tell you men that leaving your things scattered all over the place not only makes the barracks look like a stable for camels, but things get stolen that way. You'll probably find your cloak in some shop in the Valley of Hinnom, and it'll take you half a month's pay to get it back again.

—Oh, what's the use? . . . But I want you in a cloak tomorrow when we go out on review—if there is a tomorrow.

Joab: Yes, sir. It was my fault, sir.

Longinus: There are reasons for our regulations, Joab.

Joab: I know, sir.

Longinus: Well, let that—oh, forget it. What I need is some sleep. If you're lucky it may be still around. Where do you think you left it?

Joab: I thought it'd be right here, sir. I could swear I took it off in this room; I was here when Demetrius asked me to see about the wood.

Longinus: Well, it looks hopeless; it's not here now. But I'll keep an eye open, and if I happen to see it, I'll let you know. Nobody can leave here today, so it's probably still here someplace.

Joab: Yes, sir. [*He starts to leave.*]

Longinus: Joab?

Joab: Yes, sir?

Longinus: How many crucifixions are scheduled for today?

Joab: Three, sir. There's that Cappadocian we caught in the barracks, and that thief the Pharisees handed over to us, and then there's Barabbas.

Longinus: Barabbas? Oh, him. I suppose I'll have to start thinking about *that* now. If we've got an insurgent to crucify, it's going to be a problem getting him through the crowd up to Golgotha. We ought to have the crucifixions right here.

Joab: That'd be worse, sir.

Longinus: Oh, I know, I know. I don't have anything against your religion, Joab, but it causes us a lot of trouble.

Joab: Some of us appreciate that and respect you for it, sir. We've been occupied by somebody or other for the past couple of hundred years, and you're the first to let us worship according to our consciences.

Longinus: That's the Roman way, Joab; and that's why we have empire over the whole world. We realize how important religion is to a people, and as long as it doesn't threaten us, we let them keep it. But it's not just a practical matter; it's part of our character.

Joab: That's partly why I'm here, sir.

Longinus: I know; that's what you said when we accepted you—and

I think you really are loyal. I think it's a good thing, too, to have a few volunteers from the country in the army—when you can find them. Of course, it's dangerous, and we have to keep an eye on you people.

Joab: I understand, sir.

Longinus: But it shows we're not complete monsters. I think we have a civilizing influence.

Joab: Yes, sir.

Longinus: You have your doubts, do you? Well, based on what's been going on here today, I can see why you would. You know, one of the reasons I think you're loyal is that you're so transparent; if ever a face was a mirror of a soul, yours is, in spite of that beard—or you're the best actor this side of Athens.

Joab: Thank you, sir.

Longinus: For what? For calling you guileless, or such a good actor? Forget it. You're a good man, Joab.

Joab: I try to be, sir.

Longinus: [*With mock anger*] Then don't go leaving your things around, you hear?

Joab: Yes, sir.

Longinus: Now get out of here, and find that cloak of yours.

Joab: Yes, sir [*Again turns to leave.*]

Longinus: Joab?

Joab: Yes, sir?

Longinus: I shouldn't say this, but I'm going to anyway; I've been kind of working up to it, and I'm not going to let the opportunity slip by. Joab, I want to apologize to you on behalf of the Romans, but for myself too.

Joab: Apologize, sir?

Longinus: I saw how you felt about that man we captured last night. And I was present when the Governor questioned him this morning, and I think I know why you felt that way. He's a very impressive man, Joab; calm and dignified, even though he knew his life was at stake.

I saw his monomania, too, I think, that in other circumstances would have made him the subject of a great tragedy. The Governor had heard that he was supposed to be a King, and he asked him about it; and he answered that he was a King, but not in this world. Of course, it was a mistake to say even that much, because the Governor was trying to free him and he did claim to be a King of some sort, which made it complicated. You could see he realized that it might get him killed, but like all you Jews, he stuck up for what he believed was the truth. He was very noble about it, and respectful of the Governor; but he was willing to die for what he believed.

Joab: He was a great man in many ways, sir—in practically every way but that one. If only he could forget about that!

Longinus: But he never will, Joab; it's the fatal flaw. But it may not be fatal yet, though. The Governor sent him down here to be whipped because he made that statement, but he plans to let him go.

Joab: I know.

Longinus: Well, here's what I want to apologize for. When he was sent down, he was my responsibility, and I'd never have let this happen to him if I'd known what was going on—but I should have known what was going on; I should have suspected that it might happen.

Joab: What? did they kill him?

Longinus: No. . . . I don't know but what it might have been better all round if they had, now. No, but they got wind that he was supposed to be a King, and they made a crown and dressed him up like a—Wait a minute! You say you left your cloak in here?

Joab: Yes, sir.

Longinus: I know where it is. You'll get it back.

Joab: You mean—Who did it? I'll kill him!

Longinus: You will do nothing of the kind! You will do nothing whatever! I'll take care of it! I want no fighting among my men, especially now! You swear to me by that god of yours that you'll take no vengeance on anybody for what's been done here today.

Joab: But—

Longinus: Either that, or you're out of the army, as of this instant! I'm not going to be worried about this; I've got enough on my mind as it is.

Joab: [*After a pause*] All right. I swear by the Lord God Almighty that I won't take vengeance on anyone for anything that's done today.

Longinus: No, no. Not just by any god; I want the one you believe in. Put his name in.

Joab: But he hasn't got a name, sir. That is, he has one, but we never pronounce it.

Longinus: Say it! [*SECUNDUS enters toward the end of the following speech.*]

Joab: Sir, you could cut out my tongue! I swore by the Lord God, and that's the only god there is. I'm not trying to—

Secundus: Well, Longinus, it worked out better than we could have dared to hope. As soon as they saw their King, they all publicly admitted that they had no King but Caesar, and now—

Longinus: Secundus!

Secundus: What?

Longinus: [*To JOAB*] I'll take your word for it, Joab; but if you're lying and anything happens, you die—and not only you, but I'll decimate your people!

—[*To SECUNDUS*] Now you. I don't know why I didn't let him kill you, as you so richly deserve! I could kill you myself! Listen to me. You will give this man back his cloak, and by tomorrow you will see to it that it doesn't have the slightest bloodstain or mark on it, or you will buy him a brand-new one of the first and finest quality. I intend to inspect that cloak tomorrow, and if there's the slightest defect in it, whether by your antics today or for any other reason, you'll find yourself back there [*points behind the wall*] and I'll hand Joab the whip myself!

Joab: Sir, I couldn't do it, sir! I swore—

Longinus: [*To JOAB*] You can shut up and you can take orders! [*To SECUNDUS*] If you have no consideration for the Jews, the least you could do would be to use your common sense! It's only your damn-fool luck that kept that little game of yours from causing a riot and getting half of us killed—and on top of that to use *his* cloak! If I hadn't been here, you'd be dead now, and our own men would be fighting each other!

Secundus: Longinus, I didn't—

Longinus: Sir!

Secundus: Sir.

Longinus: What I get for making friends! Keep your excuses. I'm not going to let this go, Secundus, but I'm not going to decide anything now, until I calm down. . . . And after what I just told you before!

[*Calms himself.*] Well.

All right, now what are we supposed to do with that guy?

Secundus: He's supposed to take Barabbas's place—sir—to be crucified this noon.

Longinus: What? Then what do we do with Barabbas?

Secundus: They're letting him go now.

Longinus: Letting him go!

Secundus: It's their festival, and the people asked for him.

Longinus: And after we spent three months tracking him down!

Secundus: Governor's orders, sir. He wasn't too happy about it either.

Longinus: All right. What's the crowd doing?

Secundus: Milling around and yelling. They don't know what to make of it.

Longinus: They're not the only ones. Anyway, it's a break for us. Still, I'd better go out on that crucifixion detail myself; it might be tricky. I'll put Demetrius in charge of the garrison here, and station men all through the crowd on the route. But I want to keep an eye on you two for a while too. You'll come out with me.

—Joab, did you say that one of the prisoners was a Cappadocian?

Joab: Yes, sir.

Longinus: Well, ordinarily, I'd let you have him; but I'm not going to give Secundus the satisfaction of crucifying a Jew today of all days, and so you'll take the Cappadocian, Secundus. And you can demonstrate your loyalty to Rome, Joab, by taking that other man—not the King, he's mine. And if you two can behave halfway decently to each other, we might be able to salvage something from this miserable day.

Joab and Secundus: Yes, sir.

Longinus: I think I'll put Marcus as a general guard to come along with us; he'll know what we're dealing with.

—All right, we have work to do. Where is the King?

[*The lights go out on the acting area.*]

CHORUS

Where is the King?
We have no King but Caesar!
Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's
and to Caesar the things that are God's.
No man can serve two masters;
if he loves the one, he will hate the other.
If we serve the one, we will crucify the other.

Follow your heart; lay up your treasures:
treasures of gold and ivory, incense and myrrh,
treasures of silver and diamonds, silk and polyester,
computers and space probes, nuclear weapons and pearls,
and glorious tracts of unspoiled wilderness.

By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down.
Yea, we wept, when we remembered—Babylon.
Weep for yourselves and for your children,
poor orphans in an affluent society,
eaten by the worm that dieth not:
the worm of greed, the worm of AIDS,
the worm of equality and justice.
Oh, had we but known the things that are for our peace!

* * * * *

[*An intermission, if there is one, should occur here.*]

* * * * *

Let him carry the cross; we will look on
Don't force it on our backs; the burden is his,
and we want leisure to contemplate the mystery.
Can he save others, who could not save himself?
If this is how he leads us, where is our fulfillment?
Let him unbolt his arms and stretch them down to us
if he would draw all things unto himself.

We would believe, we are not stubborn;
but give us grounds for faith, not this!
We would believe, we are eager to believe.
We believe already in science, in democracy,
We will accept the truth of transcendental meditation,
transcendental flying objects, and the classless state.
Anything remotely self-assertive we will believe in;
anything that promises progress and advance.
But not this.

Not useless suffering, passive non-resistance.
Not disgrace.
Not degradation of human dignity.
Not abandonment.
Not, O Lord,
failure.

[The lights go out on the CHORUS.]

ACT THREE

[The lights come up on the acting area, which is the hill of crucifixion. There is a rock, as high as a man, stage L, with a spotlight off R, throwing the shadow of a cross on it. A bucket of common wine with a sponge beside it is to one side of the rock.]

During this act, the lights gradually dim until only the spot with the cross is still on; and as the act reaches its climax, even it dims out, and the stage is in total darkness for a few seconds.

MARCUS, SECUNDUS, and JOAB are discovered sitting in front of the rock. LONGINUS is seated stage R, staring off into the distance.

There is a long pause. MARCUS picks up a stick, breaks it in two, idly tries to fit the pieces together, and throws it away. He sighs.

Secundus: This is the worst part, waiting after it's all over. When they're finally up there, there's no more drama in it; even the rabble lose interest after an hour or so. Look. Half of them have gone away already.

[Pause.]

Joab: I'm thirsty. Where's the wine? *[He gets up, goes over to the bucket, and takes a drink from the ladle.]* Yechh! It's even worse than usual from being in the sun. *[He puts it behind the rock after taking another mouthful.]*

Secundus: I'm sorry we can't accommodate you, my Jewish friend; but

you have to make allowances for the Roman military. But remind me the next time we come out, and I'll see if I can't requisition a bottle of Old Falernian for you. [*JOAB looks at him as if he is going to spit his mouthful of wine over him, remembers his vow, swallows and sits down again. SECUNDUS sees his inner struggle and grins. Then he smiles pleasantly as JOAB sits down.*]

[*Pause.*]

Secundus: How long do we have to stay here, Marcus?

Marcus: Until everybody leaves, or until we get orders, or until night. Or until they die.

Secundus: I've seen that take four days. Oh, well.

Joab: It'll have to be before night. They won't be allowed to hang there on a cross during this Sabbath, because it's a feast.

Secundus: Ah, yes. Thank you, friend Jew; I'd forgotten about the taboos of your precious religion.

Well, at least we can beguile away the idle hours by contemplating breaking their legs and watching them choke to death as they drop and try to hold themselves up just by their arms.

—But what's the matter with Longinus? I can see that he might be a little miffed at some of us, but a fit of sulks doesn't exactly fit his character.

Marcus: He does what he does.

Secundus: True. Somehow, it's a trifle hard to imagine him doing what he's not doing. Still, whatever he's doing or not doing at the moment, it doesn't exactly advertise the solidarity and camaraderie of

the Roman soldiery; and if he's going to do it, then maybe he should be persuaded to do it in a less public place. [*He goes over to LONGINUS*] Longinus, Sir? [*No answer. Alarmed.*] Longinus, are you all right?

Longinus: [*With a start*] What?

Secundus: Are you all right?

Longinus: It's getting dark. Look.

Secundus: Dark! Are you out of your mind? There's not a cloud in the sky!

Longinus: Oh, yes it is; I've been watching it. Look over there. An hour ago, you could see the roofs of Bethlehem off in the distance; and now you can't.

Secundus: Is *that* all? It's haze, my lad. The exhalation of mother earth at this fertile season which heralds in the burgeoning of grain—or whatever burgeons in this multiply cursed land. I imagine something must burgeon here; thistles, maybe. They say donkeys thrive on thistles. You scared me for a minute.

Longinus: It's not haze, Secundus.

Secundus: Longinus, it's probably not my place to reopen a friendship that I lost temporarily by an excess—I'll admit it—of my over-exuberant nature, but you need to be spoken to. You really do. If it makes you mad, then even that's better than this. No one expects anybody to go into transports of joy on an occasion like this, but there's such a thing as decorum. Keep on this way, and you'll give crucifixion a bad name.

Now come on over with the rest of us, and act like a human being.

Longinus: [*Pulls himself together.*] You're right. [*They go back and sit down.*]

[*Pause.*]

Secundus: Well, at least now we're all moping together.

[*Pause.*]

Longinus: You know what he said to me?

Marcus: Who?

Longinus: My man. The King. You know what he said?

Marcus: He said something?

Longinus: I was hammering the nail through his left wrist, and he looked straight into my eyes, and said, "Father, forgive them; they don't know what they're doing."

Secundus: So? What of that?

Longinus: What of that! When was the last time you got forgiven by somebody you were nailing to a cross?

Marcus: That *is* strange, when you think about it.

Secundus: Listen to them! You knew he was a fanatic. He'd probably worked himself into a state where he couldn't even feel it. I've seen men walk on live coals and sing.

Longinus: Oh, he felt it all right.

Secundus: Then he was probably trying to make you feel guilty and stop. It's a novel approach, I must admit, but from the look of things, it almost worked. I'll have to remember it if they ever try to crucify me.

Longinus: With one hand already nailed down?

Secundus: I told you he had a bad sense of timing. Now with me, as soon as the nail touches the delicate flesh of the first wrist, I'll look soulfully into the executioner's eye, and say, "Dear chap, I forgive you. It's not your fault that I'm as innocent as the merest turtle-dove, or as the butterfly winging its way from rose to tulip." And then, as the tears start forth in his eyes, I'll continue, "Nay, sir, do your duty. Men step unthinkingly upon the lilies of the field, and little wit what damage they do to their proud beauty. Men uproot the young sapling even before its prime—I seem to be burgeoning again.

Longinus: [*Laughs.*] By Pollux, I believe you would! The day you don't turn everything into a joke will be the day they cut out your tongue!

Marcus: Well that's what I'd do to him if he pulled something like that on me.

Secundus: Remind me to have someone else assigned to me on that happy occasion, then. Someone who reads the odes of Catullus in his spare moments.

Joab: I know who I'll ask to be assigned.

Longinus: [*Warningly*] Joab.

Joab: Yes, sir. You didn't say I couldn't think.

[*Pause.*]

Secundus: Well, I tried.

[*Pause.*]

Longinus: Joab?

Joab: Yes, sir?

Longinus: Joab, who is this god of yours?

Joab: Not him, sir, if that's what's bothering you.

Longinus: How do you know? How do you know what the gods are like?

Secundus: In the name of sanity, Longinus! Just because you crucified a crazy man—

Longinus: That's what I'm trying to find out. That all I crucified was a crazy man.

Secundus: First he's the King of the Jews, and now he's a god! I wish I had on my side whoever's responsible for his reputation! Listen, Longinus. Suppose there are such things as gods. Are they rational or not?

Longinus: How should I know? I'm no god.

Secundus: And neither is anybody else. All I'm asking is for you to

use your head. A soldier has to think.

Longinus: All right, yes; the gods are rational.

Secundus: Then can you give me one good reason—one bad reason, anything with the slightest breath of reason in it—why a god would allow himself to be crucified?

Longinus: No.

Secundus: Well, then.

Longinus: But just because I can't give you a reason, it doesn't mean there isn't one.

Secundus: What're we going to *do* with him? The King has addled his brain! Even the Jew here has more sense than to believe this!

Longinus: Oh, yes? Well, look up at the sun! [*They look at the spot making the shadow of the cross.*]

Secundus: So? There it is, right where it's supposed to be.

Longinus: And have you ever been able to look directly at it before, in broad daylight?

Marcus: [*Horrorstruck*] He's right! There's something really strange going on! The sun's losing its light!

Secundus: Will you stop that! It's just a haze!

Longinus: Secundus, when there's a haze, the sky turns white, not deep blue like it is now.

Marcus: What have you done, sir?

Longinus: I wish I knew, Marcus. I wish I knew!

Secundus: Will you *stop* that! Anybody who could turn off the sun wouldn't be up there on that cross! What is this? You're going insane because of some freak of this crazy climate!

Joab: I never saw anything like this before.

Secundus: Thanks, friend; I needed that little bit of help; trust a Jew.
—Wait a minute. I know what's happening. You people with your hanging gods have even kept me from thinking. It's an eclipse of the sun, that's what it is.

Longinus: No it's not. I saw an eclipse of the sun once, Secundus, and when that happens you can see the shadow of the moon pass in front of the sun. You can see the whole disk today.

Secundus: Then it's some different form of eclipse.

Longinus: Forget it, Secundus, it's not an eclipse. If the moon gets in the way of the sun, it has to be new moon; the moon has to be dark.

Secundus: So it's the new moon.

Longinus: It's two days before the Kalends of April, Secundus. The moon is full.

Joab: He's right. Our festival is on the full moon.

Secundus: Oh, all right all right, it's not an eclipse. But it's something.

Longinus: It's certainly something.

Joab: No, but I agree with him, sir. It can't be connected with that Nazarene; it has to be a natural thing.

Longinus: You don't believe your god can take away the sun's light?

Joab: Our God can do everything! He created the sun!

Longinus: Then what makes you think he can't have a child?

Joab: Sir, you don't understand. Our God isn't like Jupiter, running around the world looking for pretty girls he can lay. There's no god but our God, and he's a spirit, not an overgrown man. Unless you want to say we're all his children, because he made us; but that doesn't make us any more than what we are already.

But he *couldn't* have a real son that's a man, because then the man would *be* God, and how can a man be a spirit? It's impossible, sir; it's unthinkable. Our God is like nothing on this earth; why, we're even forbidden to have pictures of him, because he wants us to know he can't be like anything we could imagine.

And that's why I quit being a follower of Jesus, and that's why he deserved to die, in spite of the beauty of so much of what he taught. As soon as he began hinting that he was the Son of God, it was all over; he showed himself to be just another deluded fool, and anybody who'd follow him would have to be willing to degrade God Almighty to just another dweller on Olympus!

Marcus: Oh? Well, you can tell your god that whether he lives on Olympus or anywhere else, he's no match for Jupiter Capitolinus, and we proved it last night! As soon as I got Jupiter out to look at him, we were in charge again.

Joab: But that's just it! He's no match for anything, because he isn't a god at all!

—This is silly. There aren't any gods except the Lord.

Secundus: There aren't any gods at all.

Marcus: Oh, really? I can take that kind of talk from him, because he doesn't know any better. But you're a Roman.

Secundus: And therefore, I do know better. There aren't any gods, Marcus; I'm sorry—not his, and not Jupiter Capitolinus either. If you want to personify nature, who am I to stop you? But we've outgrown that sort of thing.

Marcus: Well so I heard, but I never really believed it until now! And it's you decadent patricians that are undermining Rome, and bringing the wrath of the gods on us! You destroyed the republic first, and now—

Secundus: And now we have the Empire. Quite a comedown. Now there isn't a land on earth that doesn't bow down to Rome.

Marcus: And who did it? Mars and Jupiter Capitolinus!

Secundus: Come on, now, Marcus, you can't have it both ways. You can't have our atheism bringing the wrath of the gods down on us, and then turn around and explain Rome's triumph by the favor of the same gods.

Marcus: Why not? They do it in spite of people like you!

Secundus: We seem fated to get into religious discussions today. All right, have it your way, Marcus; far be it from me to argue with you.

All I know is that the Jewish god is not making it dark.

Longinus: And all I know is that it's getting darker and darker!

Secundus: Well anyway, what are *you* worried about? Even if he does have some kind of sun-snuffer up there on the cross, you're safe. He forgave you, didn't he?

Longinus: [*With sudden relief*] That's true; I didn't know what I was doing. [*Anxious again*] Or did I? Did I suspect, even then?

Secundus: Great Pollux, Longinus! If he's a god, he certainly knew whether you knew what you were doing or not, and so you're forgiven. And if he isn't, then you're just spooking yourself into a frenzy for nothing. This whatever it is will pass, and the sun will come out, and you'll laugh about it. "Perhaps some day it will please you to remember these things." Good old Vergil; he's got a line for everything.

Longinus: [*Pulling himself together*] I suppose you're right.

Secundus: Of course I'm right. When have I ever been anything *but* right?

—So anyway what do we do now? That little aberration of yours did have the virtue of helping pass the time. But we've got three hours left—well, maybe not. Marcus says we can go back as soon as it's dark, and the way things are going that only leaves a couple of minutes.

Marcus: It's not funny, Secundus.

Secundus: Well, what are we supposed to do? Just sit here and fret? Whether it's funny or not, there's nothing we can do about it, so let's find something to take our minds off it. Somebody else take over;

another ten minutes and I'll have run out of ideas.

Marcus: What's bad about that? It was your big idea that got us into this mess in the first place.

Secundus: What do you mean by that?

Marcus: If you hadn't've played that king trick, they probably would've let him go.

Secundus: Now wait a minute, don't go blaming me! Who was the one that hammered the crown down on his head, if it comes to that?

Marcus: It was still *your* idea.

Longinus: All right all right, you two. If it's any comfort to you, Marcus, he said, "Father, forgive *them*." You didn't know what you were doing any more than I did.

Marcus: I don't need his forgiveness [*He puts his hand up to his medallion.*]

Longinus: Then stop worrying about it.

Marcus: I'm not worrying.

Longinus: All right, forget it.

Joab: We have to divide up their clothes sometime. Why not now? There's nothing else to do.

Longinus: That sounds sensible, for a change. Let's go get their clothes and we'll see what we can do. [*All, except MARCUS, go off and*

each returns with a small bundle of clothes.] All right, just toss them down here in one pile.

Joab: Let's see. a tunic brings about as much as a pair of sandals, and—

Secundus: Leave it to a Jew to know the price of everything.

Joab: All right, then, *you* figure out how to divide three men's clothes among four people!

Secundus: My dear Jewish friend, I was only stating a fact. You're being most helpful, in fact, and—as far as we know—just.

Longinus: All *right* Secundus! Why don't you go ahead, Joab?

Joab: Well, I guess I'll just parcel them out. A pair of sandals for you, one for you, one for me, and a tunic for Marcus. A tunic for you, a tunic for you, two undergarments for me, an undergarment and—let's see—the one belt for Marcus.

—Now. What do we do with this? [*He holds up a robe.*]

Marcus: Split it on the seams. We can sell it for cloth.

Joab: But then it's practically worthless. Besides, it hasn't got any seams. It's a fairly good one, too; it should bring a denarius or so.

Marcus: Then what're we going to do? There's only one.

Secundus: Let's roll dice to see who gets it. Who's got dice?

Marcus: Here. I get to go first because they're my dice. First pair wins. [*Rolls.*] Five and two.

Secundus: Give them to me; that's no way to do it, Marcus; you've got to talk to them and coddle them; be *kind* to them. What do you think they are, just pieces of ivory? Why, they're the mainstay and support of the whole Roman army, and they deserve respect, not just to be chucked down as if they were stones to be spurned under foot.

This is how it's done. [*He blows on his hands with the dice inside.*] Now, my pretty ones, my darlings, my loves, pregnant with twins. Show these unbelievers who their father is! [*Rolls.*]

—A curse on the bitches, with their bastard three and four! May they never roll a pair again!—until my turn comes round again, of course.

Go ahead, Jew. If they do anything for you, I'll disown dice for the rest of my life.

Joab: [*Rolls.*] Four and two.

Secundus: Good Roman dice! You know who your masters are! Longinus, my friend, not that I wish you ill, but business is business, they say, and dice are business multiplied by twelve.

Longinus: That's all right. You three play.

Secundus: *Now* what? A Roman soldier having scruples about a friendly game of dice?

Joab: It's *his* robe.

Secundus: Oh, no! Here we go again.

Longinus: Go ahead, you three. I don't want it.

Marcus: *Oh*, no! We all play, or I quit!

Secundus: Stop being infantile, Longinus.

Longinus: [*Looks at the dice with distaste, then reconsiders.*] Oh, all right; anything to keep the peace. [*Rolls.*]

Marcus: [*With horror*] Two! The eyes of Cerberus!

[*A brief silence. All look at LONGINUS.*]

Secundus: Well, it's yours, Longinus. [*Holds out robe to him.*]

Longinus: No! I don't want it! I won't touch it!

Secundus: Now don't go telling me you believe in omens!

Longinus: Keep it! I didn't want to play for it in the first place!

[*SECUNDUS makes a move to take back the robe, then suddenly flings it at LONGINUS, who screams and backs away brushing it from him as it hits him. The robe falls at his feet.*]

Secundus: There! Are you dead? Panicking like an idiot! If you held onto his flesh and drove the nails into his wrists, and your hands didn't burn off, what can the touch of his clothes do to you?

And all because of a stupid and inane superstition! You're as bad as the man who throws a two and claims there's a curse on him, and then when he throws a twelve on the next roll says that it's the calve's knuckle he carries that did it. You've got your religions all mixed up, Longinus. If that man is the Jewish god, then it'd be a little inconsistent for him to be staring up at you from the Roman hades through a pair of dice—especially when he can see you perfectly well from where he is.

Longinus: You can talk! Look how dark it is! [*Only the spot with the shadow of the cross is on by this time, and it is dimming fast.*]

Marcus: O Jupiter [*clutching medallion*] Father of the gods, eternal son of Neptune, remember your favor to the Roman people, and save us!

Secundus: Now you've got *him* going! What am I going to *do* with you two?

Marcus: O Jupiter, Protector of the Roman people, conqueror of the Titans, look down upon us from high Olympus, and preserve us!

Secundus: I can't take this! The whole thing is turning into a farce!

Joab: He's right; all this is foolish. Even if the Roman gods existed, they can't have anything to do with this. And my God's law says that he has to die for blasphemy. We've been doing his will. Why would he be punishing us for doing his will?

Longinus: You're so certain your God can't have a son! What do you know of your God?

Joab: A lot more than you do!

Longinus: Well I know little enough not to put restrictions on the immortals! God of the Hebrews, have mercy on us! He begged you to forgive us!

Secundus: They're hopeless! Hopeless!

Marcus: O Jupiter, Father of the gods, eternal son of Neptune, have pity on us, and vanquish this Hebrew god!

Secundus: I give up—and the only one here whose head isn't on backwards is a Jew!

—Well, I guess I'll just sit here and twiddle my thumbs while they rant—or no! By the grace of whatever gods there are or are not, Longinus, the reinforcements you ordered are arriving in the nick of time to save my sanity! At least I'll be able to talk to somebody!

Longinus: Reinforcements? I didn't order any reinforcements.

Secundus: Maybe it's just a message. It's too much to hope that he'll tell us the Governor says we can go back.

Marcus: Where? I don't see anybody.

Secundus: Are you blind as well as mad? *[Points offstage]* Right there, down the road.

Marcus: There's nobody down the road.

Secundus: What? You *are* out of your mind!

Longinus: There isn't anybody, Secundus. Do you see anyone, Joab?

Joab: No, sir.

Secundus: Stop that! What are you trying to do? Make me as crazy as the rest of you? He's right over there, with all his gear on except the . . . shield. . . . You can even . . . see his . . . face.

[Silence. All look at SECUNDUS as he watches an imaginary figure pass downstage and go off to the source of the spot, which is now quite dim.]

Longinus: What is it, Secundus?

Secundus: My brother. My *brother!* [*In horror*] He went over and he's kneeling in front of the King!

[*Pause.*]

—You don't see him, at all?

All, severally: No.

[*Pause.*]

Secundus: He's gone.

Longinus: Listen! He said something! What did he say?

Marcus: He said he was thirsty. I'll get him some wine.

Longinus: No you don't! He's my man! But how can I get it up to him? I know! Where's my spear? I'll put the sponge on the end of it, and give it to him that way!

Secundus: Longinus! Don't!

Longinus: You stay away from me! I'm the one who's going to give him his drink! Wait, King, I'm coming! Tell your Father to turn on the sun! [*Rushes off with the bucket, sponge, and spear.*]

Secundus: [*to himself*] Oh, please no! Oh please!

[*(Pause. Enter LONGINUS.)*]

Longinus: He'll remember that! He's good. I heard him say to the other thief there that they'd be together today in paradise. He won't forget me!

Marcus: If he remembers, why is it still so dark? O Jupiter, King of all the gods—

Longinus: Shut up, Marcus! He may not like that!

Joab: You're all fools! Fools!

Longinus: Is your God a god of mercy, Joab?

Joab: Fools!

Secundus: Longinus, I hate to say this.

Longinus: What? He was thirsty and I gave him something to drink.

Secundus: You killed him, Longinus.

Longinus: I gave him a drink, that's all! I gave him a drink!

Secundus: Longinus, you know as well as I do that everyone hanging on a cross gets crazy with thirst, but if you give anyone a drink after he's been in that position a while, he chokes to death.

Longinus: Oh, no. —Oh, no! Oh, No! Oh, no! Oh, No!

Secundus: [*softly*] Have mercy on us.

Marcus: Well, you've done it now, sir! There's only one hope left! O great Jupiter, I vow to have your statue cast in purest gold and hanging

forever about my neck! Destroy this god of theirs, and bring us back our sun!

Voice from offstage: It is over!

[A loud scream. The CHORUS joins in the scream and turns it into a prolonged wail. The spot goes completely off, and for a few seconds a spot in the shape of a cross takes its place. LONGINUS rushes up so that it falls across his face.]

Longinus: I knew it! I knew it! He really was the Son of God!

Secundus: Look out! The rock!

[Sound of earthquake and thunder. Complete darkness, during which the rock splits in two. The sound subsides into silence. Then the lights go on as at the beginning, revealing all four lying on the ground or crouching, covering their heads. They remain so for a short time.]

Joab: *[getting up]* It was an earthquake. An earthquake, that's all. It's all over. *[The others get up, severally.]*

Secundus: An earthquake!

Marcus: The mighty Jupiter has saved us! It was a fierce struggle, but he won! I never doubted he would! O great Jupiter, you will have the most beautiful medal the hands of a craftsman can fashion, and it will never leave me! Your mercy knows no bounds!

Secundus: An earthquake!

Joab: I told you the Lord had nothing to do with it.

Secundus: You know, that's right. You were the only one who kept his head through this whole debacle. Even I lost my senses for a while. [*grudgingly*] I suppose I have to hand it to you, Jew.

[The two face each other, each beginning to think that the other might not be totally repulsive. There is, however, still no love lost between them. Finally, SECUNDUS reaches out his hand to shake JOAB's. He looks at it as if he is going to spit on it, then looks into SECUNDUS's face, and shakes the hand. While this is going on, LONGINUS gets up. He had fallen on the robe, and now has it, absently, in his hand. He is obviously dazed. He goes downstage, looks out at the spot that throws the shadow of the cross on him, silently says to himself, with the back of his fist up to his forehead, "What have I done? What have I done?" The lights fade as he does so.]

During this time, the CHORUS (or perhaps a recording) begins Victoria's motet, and finishes it in darkness. It would be preferable if the sound could come from speakers placed above and behind the audience, so that it seems to fill the auditorium.]

TEORNO *Very slow* 931 *and*

O Do-mi-ne Je-su Chri-ste, a-do-ra
O Do-mi-ne Je-su Chri-ste, a-do-ra

Te in cruce vul-ne-ra sum. De-pre-ca-te, da
Te in cruce vul-ne-ra sum. De-pre-ca-te, da

Te in cruce vul-ne-ra sum. De-pre-ca-te, da
Te in cruce vul-ne-ra sum. De-pre-ca-te, da

pre-ca-te ut tu-a vul-ne-ra sint vi-va me
pre-ca-te ut tu-a vul-ne-ra sint vi-

pre-ca-te ut tu-a vul-ne-ra sint vi-

te me a
te me a

te me a