

**A Soldier's Tale**

by

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DRAFT NO. 1

16<sup>th</sup> March 2006

Milton,  
Cambridge

**Summary:**

This play shows the events of Easter as seen by one of the soldiers, whom we've called Antoninus. The basic idea is the soldier tells his story whilst the cast mime what is happening. There are of course two Antoninuses: the Narrator and the one doing the miming.

The use of music in the resurrection sequences is very important. We used the Overture to the Karelia Suite by Sibelius, but other pieces could be used if they begin quietly and then break into a strident march. It is important to get the timing right.

This is an excellent piece for Easter Sunday morning, which is when we performed it.

**CAST LIST****Essential**

ANTONINUS (NARRATOR)  
ANTONINUS (ACTOR)  
CENTURION  
CAIAPHAS  
JUDAS  
JESUS  
PETER  
JOHN  
PILATE  
ANGEL  
MARY MAGDALENE  
MARY  
JOANNA  
CLEOPAS  
FRIEND OF CLEOPAS

**Non-Essential**

DISCIPLES  
SOLDIERS  
CROWD  
SLAVES

**Props:** At least two bags of money, Roman helmet, Roman Sword, stone.

**Costumes:** Try and be authentic as possible. Angels are always tricky. Ours tend to wear a surplice and dark glasses.

**Setting:** The settings were quite a challenge given the number of scenes and diverse locations, but we managed this in a small (180 seater) mediaeval parish church. You will need

to vary the stage directions depending on where you are performing the piece to make best use of what you have available. Please E-mail me at:

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if you want more details on what we actually did.

## **SCENE 1. THE TEMPLE**

### **THE NARRATOR (A ROMAN SOLDIER) TELLS HIS STORY FROM THE PULPIT.**

#### **ANTONINUS**

I want to tell you about the strangest weekend I ever had and how I earned a fortune in a single day. My name is Antoninus by the way, Sergeant Antoninus of the 12<sup>th</sup> Legion based in Jerusalem. Let me see, how did it start? I remember. I was with my commander and we were visiting the chief Jew, a priest named Caiaphas. It was a Thursday; there had been big trouble earlier in the week and Caiaphas was really nervous – and taking it out on my commander.

### **CAIAPHAS AND CENTURION ARGUE AS THEY ENTER FOLLOWED BY ANTONINUS II.**

Anyway I was told to guard Caiaphas and keep an eye on things.

#### **SERGEANT LEAVES**

Well, I'd just settled in, when this slimy toe-rag of a man called Judas Iscariot came in.

#### **JUDAS ENTERS**

Shifty looking character, so I watched him *very carefully*.

#### **ANTONIUS DRAWS HIS SWORD**

This Judas claimed he can hand over the rebel leader to Caiaphas – which was strange because I'd captured Barabbas myself the week before.

After a bit I realised Judas really meant a religious leader called Jesus –and the nasty little vermin was actually part of his inner circle and was going to betray him. I was just about to kill Judas for his total lack of honour....

#### **ANTONINUS RAISES HIS SWORD**

... when Caiaphas gives him a pile of cash and makes him swear any number of promises – Caiaphas is clearly out for blood.

**CAIAPHAS GIVES A MONEY BAG TO JUDAS. JUDAS LEAVES**

“Who is this Jesus?” I ask myself, “who can inspire such hatred. What exactly has he done?”

**CAIAPHAS LEAVES. ANTONINUS IS ALONE ON STAGE.**

**SCENE 2. THE GARDEN**

**ANTONINUS**

I hoped I'd seen the last of Judas. Betrayal and backstabbing are not things I approve of, but the little toad was back late that same evening.

**JUDAS ENTERS. HE WANTS ANTONINUS TO GO WITH HIM.**

Apparently Jesus is in some garden on a hillside overlooking Jerusalem – we're to go there at once. He only has eleven followers with him so there won't be much trouble. I point out that it's night and Jesus will be able to see our torches as soon as we leave the city; he'll be long gone by the time we reach the garden. But Judas is insistent. I'd rather hurt him than humour him, but orders is orders, so off we go.

**JUDAS AND ANTONIUS HEAD OFF ROUND THE CHURCH.**

**JESUS AND THE DISCIPLES (YAWNING) COME ONTO THE STAGE.  
JESUS KNEELS IN PRAYER. THE DISCIPLES TRY TO JOIN HIM BUT  
FALL ASLEEP SNORING NOISILY.**

**JUDAS AND ANTONINUS ARRIVE. JESUS WAKES THE DISCIPLES AND  
GREETES JUDAS.**

Would you believe it? When we got to the garden Jesus was still there. It was like he was expecting us. Anyway Judas greeted him.

**JUDAS AND JESUS SHAKE HANDS**

That was our signal to move in.

**ANTONIUS ARRESTS JESUS.**

Two of Jesus' men were prepared to make a fight of it. But Jesus was having none of it.

**PETER AND JOHN GET OUT THEIR SWORDS BUT JESUS STOPS THEM.**

## **JESUS**

Enough!!

## **ANTONINUS**

I swear he could have got away even then if he had wanted.

### **THE DISCIPLES RUN AWAY, INCLUDING JUDAS. JESUS IS LED AWAY TO CAIAPHAS WHO APPEARS ON THE EDGE OF THE STAGE. CAIAPHAS TAKES JESUS AWAY.**

We took Jesus to the High Priest's house, where we handed him over. Half the important Jews were there. They were going to have a trial in secret. They were going to frame Jesus; set him up. I was outraged. "We Romans would never condemn an innocent man," I said to myself. I didn't realise how wrong I was.

I wish now that I'd arrested the whole gang of priests myself on a conspiracy charge. It's funny what you think of when it's too late.

Anyway I got relieved and returned to barracks to get some sleep.

## **ANTONINUS LEAVES THE STAGE**

### **SCENE 3. THE CRUCIFIXION**

## **ANTONINUS**

Next day I was on duty at Governor Pilate's palace.

### **PILATE ENTERS FOLLOWS BY ANTONINUS.**

I was trying to forget about Jesus, when suddenly Caiaphas appears outside with him. He only wants Pilate to authorise the death penalty. Making a whole racket they were, enough to wake the dead. For a moment I thought Pilate would send us soldiers out into the crowd. It wouldn't have been the first time he'd done that. At the time I was glad he didn't; roughing up civilians was not why I joined the army. Now? Now I wish anything rather than what actually happened.

You see Pilate was a coward, afraid for his position. He didn't want trouble.

### **PILATE WASHES HIS HANDS.**

He washed his hands of the whole affair and condemned Jesus to death – as if washing his hands made him innocent.

### **EVERYONE LEAVES**

None of us is innocent. None of us. ( PAUSE). I don't want to talk about what happened next. It's not that I hadn't seen it all before. When you're a professional soldier, death walks beside you every day. This time it was different. This time it was a brave man, an innocent man, executed by cowards. I should have done something. I should have...

### **JESUS STANDS IN THE CENTRE OF THE STAGE. ANTONINUS TAKES JESUS HANDS AND STRETCHES THEM OUT AS IF CRUCIFYING HIM AND MIMES BANGING IN NAILS.**

None of us are innocent... and certainly not me. You see I was the one who whipped him when he was tied to the lashing post. I was the one who made the crown from a thorn bush and pressed it into his head. I was the one who mocked him and despised him for his weakness. I was the one who led him out and tied him to the cross.

### **ANTONINUS WALKS OFF LEAVING JESUS ARMS OUTSTRETCHED**

I was the one who banged the nails in for a bit of extra sport....extra pain... And, if you are honest, you did it with me.

And what did Jesus do? He forgave me. He forgave us.

### **JESUS BOWS HIS HEAD**

And then he died.

### **SOUND EFFECT: THUNDER OR SIMILAR.**

### **FREEZE. JESUS WALKS OFF.**

## **SCENE 4. THE RESURRECTION**

**START WITH TOMB IN CENTRE OF STAGE**

### **ANTONINUS**

Saturday was terrible. I tried to forget what had happened. But then I only go and get ordered to guard Jesus' tomb.

**ANTONINUS ENTERS AND PLACES STONE IN SUITABLE LOCATION.**

Seems Caiaphas thought someone was going to steal the body. As if! The stone in front of the tomb was so heavy that the four of us guards working together couldn't move it.

**BEGIN SIBELIUS - KARELIA SUITE OVERTURE (THE NEXT SPEECH SHOULD BE TIMED SO THAT THE MARCH SECTION OF THE MUSIC BEGINS WITH THE ANGEL MOVING THE STONE)**

Anyway, things were pretty quiet through the day. It was like a great hush had fallen on the world. It continued though the night. There's not been such a trouble free night in Jerusalem before or since...Then it happened. It was my turn on watch. The sky in the east was just beginning to lighten. There was no clue, no warning. Suddenly there was a brilliant flash of light.

**AN ANGEL APPEARS. ANTONINUS FAINTS.**

I didn't see what happened next, but apparently it was quite something.

**THE ANGEL PUSHES THE STONE AND IT ROLLS AWAY.**

**THREE WOMEN WITH JARS APPEAR, SEE THE ANGEL, WHO EXPLAINS SOMETHING TO THEM. THE WOMEN DROP THEIR JARS AND RUN OFF. ONE RETURNS AND MEETS JESUS. SHE THEN RUNS OFF.**

**DISCIPLES TURN UP AND INSPECT THE TOMB. THEY THEN RUN OFF. THE ANGEL IS SATISFIED AND LEAVES.**

**TWO OTHER DISCIPLES WALK ACROSS IN FRONT OF THE STAGE. JESUS MEETS THEM AND TALKS TO THEM FROM THEIR BIBLE. THEY STOP AT THEIR DESTINATION WHERE JESUS BREAKS BREAD. THEY RUN BACK THE WAY THEY HAVE COME.**

**FADE MUSIC.**



## **ANTONINUS**

When I finally came to...

### **ANTONINUS WAKES.**

... and saw what had happened. I thought I was done for. My commander would think I had fallen asleep, and sleeping on duty is punishable by death. I remember thinking, God is only punishing me for what I did to Jesus, it's only reasonable. I hadn't yet understood that Jesus had really forgiven me... really forgiven. Anyway, I got out my sword to do the deed myself, when Caiaphas arrived.

### **CAIAPHAS ARRIVES AND GIVES ANTONINUS A BAG OF MONEY**

He gave me a bag of money, more money than I've ever had in my life. He told me that if anyone should ask, that Jesus' disciples came and stole the body!

### **CAIAPHAS DEPARTS. ANTONINUS SCRATCHES HIS HEAD.**

I was to say that the disciples came and stole the body. I ask you, they would have had to have got past me to do that! So that was the strangest weekend of my life and how I earned a fortune in a single day. I've still got the money here,...

### **NARRATOR GETS OUT BAG AND JINGLES IT**

... all of it. I've never spent a single coin, much though I've been tempted. You see, I never actually earned the money. I never did as Caiaphas ordered. I've always told people exactly what I've just told you; what really happened, not some rubbish about the disciples stealing the body. And I've been telling people my story ever since.

### **JESUS COMES AND PUTS HIS ARM AROUND ANTONINUS' SHOULDERS. ANTONINUS THROWS DOWN HIS HELMET AND SWORD. THEY LEAVE AS FRIENDS.**

For I have seen the Lord. Jesus is alive!