

THE CURSE AND THE CROWN

By Gleness McCourt

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THE STORY OF THE PLAY

Joel, bitter and cynical, is one of the Roman soldiers appointed to crucify Christ. He does not believe that this is the Messiah God has promised, in fact, he does not believe in anything good or worthwhile. He makes great sport in the making of a crown of thorns to be placed on Jesus' head. Everyone's efforts to make him change his mind are wasted, until after the Crucifixion, Jesus looks down on him and asks His Father to forgive him.

PLAYING TIME: About an hour.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 m, 2 w, 1 flex)

JOEL: A Roman soldier.

MARK: Joel's brother, early teens.

MOTHER-BETH: The widowed mother.

RUTH: In love with Joel.

ANGEL: To convince Joel of the necessity of the
Crucifixion.

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TIME: Act I - Day of the Crucifixion.
Act II - Day of the Resurrection.

SETTING: Garden of a Roman household.

ACT I

(AT RISE: JOEL is sitting on bench braiding thorn branches into a crown. Enter MARK, excited.)

MARK: Joel, come quickly! Pilate is going to let them crucify Jesus. You're a soldier. Won't you try to stop them? I don't want Jesus to die. He's my best friend. Hurry, Joel! Please hurry!

JOEL: *(Rises and puts arms across MARK'S shoulders.)* Easy, my brother, easy. I'm only a Roman soldier. I can't overrule Pilate. Besides, this man Jesus is a nobody. A carpenter's son, come up from Nazareth. You've seen men die before. Never a day passes but some slave or poor man is put to death. What's so special about Jesus?

MARK: You don't know Jesus like I do, Joel. If you did, you'd love Him too. You should have seen Him the day he drove the money changers from the temple. He was wonderful! He cracked a whip *(Gestures as if cracking whip.)* and those robbers fled like cowards. Then He upset the tables and seats of the men who sell pigeons. He said the temple was His Father's house, a place for prayer and that nobody should make it a den of thieves.

JOEL: Yes, Mark. But you say He called the temple His Father's house. It can't be. It's the house of God. His father is Joseph of Nazareth. He should not have tried to make people believe that He is the Son of God. That's why the priests are so angry. That's why they demand that Pilate put Him to death.

MARK: I believe Him, Joel! And His disciples say He is the Son of God, and that He was sent here to save the world from sin. Many people in Jerusalem believed last Sabbath that He was to be the King who had come to save us. They threw palm branches for Him to ride on. They waved to Him and called, "Hail him who comes in the name of the Lord." Now look what they are doing to Him!

JOEL: Mark, how well do you know Jesus? Have you been close to Him? Have you talked to Him?

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MARK: Yes, Joel. Many times. I have followed him about all this week. I've watched him heal the sick and make the blind see. He has the kindest eyes and the most gentle voice in all the world.

JOEL: You have let your heart run away with you, my little brother. You can't love all people or some day you're going to get hurt. You have to be hard-hearted. Now put this man out of your mind. He's cast a spell on you. I'm sorry but there's nothing I can do to stop the crucifixion.

(JOEL sits and works on the crown, MARK stares sadly out toward the palace. Finally he stoops watching Joel.)

MARK: Do you believe in angels, Joel?

JOEL: Don't be an idiot, Mark. There are no such things.

MARK: Well, I heard you say that Ruth Simeon was an angel without wings. If you believe there are angels without wings, then you must believe there are angels with wings. Anyway, I saw an honest-to-goodness angel. Really I did!

JOEL: *(Ruffs MARK'S hair.)* Mark, my brother, you let that imagination run wild. Look, there's Mother-Beth coming up the path. Run, help her with that load.

(Enter MOTHER-BETH carrying a basket of fruit on her head. MARK helps her lower it to the ground.)

MOTHER-BETH: Take the fruits into the house, Mark. *(MARK picks up the basket and exits SL. SHE sits on bench opposite JOEL and speaks to Joel.)* There 's such a crowd in the market place this morning. Everywhere there is a feeling of great excitement. I have a premonition as if something dreadful is about to happen. The young man called Jesus has been brought before Pilate for trial. They accuse Him of saying He is the Christ, the Son of God. He doesn't try to defend Himself, though. He won't even answer when He is questioned. Your beloved Ruth believes Him to be the long-awaited Messiah.

End of Freeview

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