

ACT I

Scene 1

SETTING: A ROMAN dungeon, a single cell. Circa 80 A.D.

AT RISE: The lights slowly rise off to one side of the stage, revealing a Roman soldier. His name is CIPRIAN. He is a centurion, a distinguished man. He holds letters in his hand.

CIPRIAN

I have an enemy. He is a criminal. Any good citizen would want his capture. I am, and I do...and I shall capture him. But how? He is old and fat, he is young and slender... no one's sure. He's dark, he's light, a dwarf, a giant... no one knows. Only rumors with these people. Rumors and superstitions. Some say he can change people.

(As he speaks, he grows more agitated.)

(A woman's voice is heard slowly rising in the shadows, a hum that builds into a soft song under Ciprian's words.)

CIPRIAN (cont'd)

He's only one man, yet he is more dangerous than an army. He spreads ideas, lies. He's against anything good, against peace, against what is right. Against order and law. How do you stop such evil? How do you fight such insanity? They say he does not fear torture or death.

(The GIRL'S VOICE grows louder. Words are faintly audible: "Sing Alleluia to the Lord...")

CIPRIAN (cont'd)

Imagine! Not afraid of death! And yet, he is intelligent, a philosopher, that much we know. He argues as well as some men fight. He twists his words with logic and spells... to influence people. Oh, these people are a menace. Some say they sacrifice children to their god. Children! How do you fight an idea? How do you catch it, stop it, kill it? We need names. We know his. He is called Justinian.

(Act Two excerpt. PHILIUS is an evil Roman politician)

PHILIUS

He doesn't look like much, does he? Well, you are still stubborn. You still wish to hold back Rome. If you thought the Centurion cruel, you will find me crueler. I served in Palestine. I was at the destruction of Jerusalem. I have dealt with your kind before. Now I'm going to teach the Centurion how to deal with you. Learn, Ciprian, that this man is a plague more dangerous than a slave revolt. He pollutes the very fiber of Rome. He is worse than a legion of barbarians. Why? Because he carries ideas, dangerous ideas.

CIPRIAN

Yes, Prefect.

PHILIUS

His ideas could destroy the foundation of our empire--they have already proven costly. The Jews refused to pay taxes; we destroyed them. A slave who believes in an afterlife or that the Emperor is no god soon grows slack. He doesn't work with as much fear of death. That costs Rome money. Every soldier that we must take from Gaul to root out a Christian costs money. It all comes down to money. I traveled here to see you. That cost. It cost a lot.

MARIAM

(Angry) You steal our property. Doesn't that pay for something?

PHILIUS

Who is she?

MARIAM

My name is Mariam.

JUSTINIAN

(Under his breath) Not now, Mariam!

CIPRIAN

Another Christian of no importance.

PHILIUS

Does he care for her?

CIPRIAN

No. He cares only for himself and his God.

PHILIUS

You underestimate him, Ciprian. I think he does care for her.

(Pause)

Kill her.

JUSTINIAN

You worship whores!

PHILIUS

What?

JUSTINIAN

You worship whores! The sculptures of goddesses... the artists use whores as their models. That means you worship whores.

PHILIUS

Blasphemy! Strike him!

(CIPRIAN strikes JUSTINIAN)

JUSTINIAN

If the Emperor is a god, why did the last one die, as this one will? Why are there always civil wars? Surely your Emperor god could fling some fire bolts--out his ass!

(CIPRIAN strikes JUSTINIAN again)

JUSTINIAN (Continued)

Striking an unarmed man! Is this your precious honor, Centurion?

(CIPRIAN starts to strike JUSTINIAN again)

PHILIUS

Stop, Ciprian.

(To JUSTINIAN)

We want the names of the leaders in this village, and we want you to publicly recant.

(He looks at MARIAM)

We want you to curse the name of Christ.

JUSTINIAN

I'll never recant! I'm God's wheat to grind your fruit, or something like that...

CIPRIAN

Sir?

PHILIUS

No, not him. Give me your dagger, Ciprian.

(CIPRIAN hesitates)

Ciprian! Your dagger!

(CIPRIAN hands the dagger to PHILIUS)

She's not very pretty. Rather plain. But a scar across her face will add a little character. Shall I cut her, Justinian?

MARIAM

If you do, every wound shall cry out my Lord's name!

PHILIUS

Oh! Very poetic. I love poetry.

(PHILIUS draws his knife closer to MARIAM'S face
and is about to cut her)

CIPRIAN

This isn't necessary, Prefect. I'll torture him. I'll have the names.

PHILIUS

(Still holding the knife to MARIAM)
Are you growing slack, Centurion? Are you growing easy on these things? Are you growing...disloyal, perhaps?

CIPRIAN

I only wish to serve Rome.

PHILIUS

I'll show you how to get names!

JUSTINIAN

Prefect! Wait! You're a businessman. I'll give you all the names you want!

PHILIUS

You're in no position to bargain, Justinian. The names. Now!

JUSTINIAN

Damn you! I'll die before I'll tell you!

PHILIUS

Then die.

JUSTINIAN

I ask for just one thing. Please, Prefect.

(Beat)

Her freedom. And you can have the names.

PHILIUS

What?

JUSTINIAN

Her freedom. That way you'll know I'm speaking the truth. If I'm wrong, then I'll still be here for you to do with what you please.