

Two Thieves



*Matthew 27:34-44; Mark
15:23-30; Luke 23:35-43;
John 19:18*

Year C Christ the King

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Parts by scene

■ = large part ▲ = medium sized part ● = small part

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
▲	Gestas - Thief who goes through this play in an almost constant state of distress, especially in the scenes set in the present	▲	▲	▲	▲	●	■	▲
▲	Dysmas - The thief who was the leader of the two. Throughout this play, he's the calmer, more thoughtful one.	▲	■	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲

Scene 1

Dysmas , Gestas

{Two friends, Gestas and Dysmas, find themselves together in a mysterious place that causes Gestas a great deal of distress, but doesn't bother Dysmas at all.}

Gestas *[in pain]* Help! Oh, God, someone help me! Help!

Dysmas *[in calm amazement]* You're here! But where are you? Gestas! It's me, Dysmas!

Gestas *[in a panic]* Dysmas! I can't see you!

Dysmas I can't see you, either, but I can hear you.

Gestas *[despairingly]* We're both here. Oh, God!

Dysmas *[calmly]* Yes, we're here together, but where is here? And how did we get here?

Gestas I don't know! I...I can't remember a thing! I've lost my memory! Oh, God!

Dysmas *[reassuringly]* We haven't lost every memory. You do know who you are, right?

Gestas *[slightly calmer now, laboring to think]* Yes. I remember my name, but...that's it.

Dysmas But you also remember who I am.

Gestas Yes! Yes, I do!

Dysmas Okay. Well, I remember both our names, too. And I know somehow that we're friends. Don't you?

Gestas Yes! We're friends!

Dysmas Okay, let's start from that. Can you remember anything else about me?

Gestas Of course not! Didn't you hear me? I just got done telling you I don't - wait...Yes! Yes! I do remember something else. You're...you're my partner! We're partners!

Scene 2

Dysmas , Gestas

{A flashback to earlier in their lives. The two of them crouch behind a large rock alongside a road.}

Dysmas Ready, partner?

Gestas As ever! But I don't see why we couldn't have hit that last guy.

Dysmas Too risky.

Gestas He was all alone, and there was nobody else on the road within sight!

Dysmas Men traveling alone might fight back.

Gestas So? We could have taken him easily!

Dysmas True, but why take even that small chance? If we're going to make a living at this, we have to be hyper cautious. We'll need to succeed again and again, but one slip-up and it'll be all over for us. We both know what the Romans do to thieves.

Gestas Okay, then you tell me: what kind of target are we looking for?

Dysmas Someone mostly alone, except that maybe they have someone to protect. Someone that shifts the equation in favor of playing it safe.

- Gestas** Well what about that guy with his kid? When I pointed him out, you just shook your head.
- Dysmas** *[after a pause]* Kids...might make someone even more unpredictable. Like a lioness protecting its cubs.
- Gestas** *[out of patience]* Then what's left? Cripples hobbling along on their crutches? We're going to miss out on every chance, the way you want to play it! *[nastily]* Maybe you just don't have the stomach for this.
- Dysmas** *[good naturedly]* Hey, wasn't it me who had to talk *you* into this? Don't worry. Before I even mentioned the idea to you, I spent two weeks observing this road. Every single day without fail, at least one possible target walked by. And one day there was in fact a traveler on crutches!
- Gestas** You mean we might have to wait here all day?
- Dysmas** *[laughing]* Don't worry! Sometimes they came early in the day. And besides, haven't our families been complaining that we don't know how to do a good day's work? There are plenty of people who have to work longer and harder for less than we're going to make, and some of those jobs are probably just as risky.
- Gestas** All right, all right. So what are we looking for?
- Dysmas** It could be various things: injured people like you said, women (even in groups), the elderly... *[brightening]* or...that! A man with his wife.
- Gestas** Isn't that the lion and cub thing all over?
- Dysmas** No, I think it'll be different with a loved one who's an adult. And the wife could even help prevent the man from doing something foolish.
- Gestas** Okay, you're the boss.
- Dysmas** Ready? As soon as they pass that bush. And...Now!

Scene 3

Dysmas , Gestas

{Back to the present.}

Gestas My God, we're thieves!

Dysmas *[stunned]* So it seems.

Gestas How did we become thieves? I am *not* a criminal! *[suddenly grasping that part of the memory]* You pulled me into it! You were clearly the leader of our little "partnership"! You even said you had to talk me into it!

Dysmas I'm afraid I did. I do remember it that way. If it was me who corrupted you, I am so sorry! I can't imagine why I would have turned to crime myself. Were we poor? Did we have no choice?

Gestas *[mockingly]* "Were we poor?" "Did we have no choice?" That's so like you, always looking for excuses!

Dysmas Is it?

Gestas I'm sick of it!

Dysmas Are you remembering more about who we are?

Gestas I'm remembering more about *you*. You're a terrible friend! *[laboring in thought]* You...did something terrible. You betrayed me. Somehow.

Dysmas I think you're right! I get that feeling, too. I did something. I'm somehow responsible for us being here. But where is here? Are we in prison? Did we get caught?

Gestas I bet we got caught. After all your precautions, we still got caught! And it was your fault! I feel it in my bones! I knew I shouldn't have followed you into this! I had...I had prospects. I'm sure I did! I didn't have to follow you into this hellhole!

Dysmas *[still trying to remember]* I think we did. We got caught. We had just robbed an old man, and...and...

Scene 4

Dysmas , Gestas

{Flashback: Gestas and Dysmas stand on the road with a dead man at their feet.}

Gestas You killed him! Oh my God, you killed him!

Dysmas *[in a panic]* I didn't mean to! He tried to grab my sword! I just pushed him away!

Gestas We've got to get out of here! *[a pause to see that his friend is not following him]* Come on! Let's move it!

Dysmas *[paralyzed by existential terror]* How did it come to this?

Gestas *[rifling through the old man's bag]* He had a bundle! No wonder he tried to protect it. Come on, we can coast for a month on this haul!

Dysmas *[still caught his psychological paralysis]* I suppose I chose it when I chose this life. I chose it! I'm responsible!

Gestas Fine! You're responsible. Now let's get going!

Dysmas *[noticing his friend for the first time]* Gestas! You've got to get out of here!

Gestas Yes, and you're coming with me! Come on! On your feet! We're getting out of here.

Dysmas I...can't.

Gestas What in damnation are you talking about? Are you hurt? Come on, I'll carry you!

Dysmas *[lost in himself again]* How did it come to this? How did I do this thing?

Gestas My God, it's the police. The police are coming from both directions! Come on! *[seeing his friend won't move]* All right. *[drawing his sword]* We'll fight for it, then!

Scene 5

Dysmas , Gestas

{Back to the present.}

Gestas My God, you got me caught! I shouldn't have stayed! I should have left you to hang alone!

Dysmas You should have. I'm so sorry! I...I felt like my life had already ended. I felt like I had nothing to run for. I'm so sorry I got you caught!

Gestas A lot of good that does me now!

Dysmas I just don't understand this place...Where are we?

Gestas *[derisively]* You don't know? You don't feel it?

Dysmas So we were caught. Is this prison? It doesn't seem real.

Gestas *[sarcastically]* No, it doesn't exactly, does it?

Dysmas Maybe we'll be acquitted. Somehow I feel like we're going to be acquitted.

Gestas Are you nuts? "We both know what the Romans do to thieves." And murderers, I might add.

Dysmas Yes, we know. They crucify them.

Scene 6

Dysmas , Gestas

{Flashback: The two thieves hang on crosses. Between them hangs Jesus.}

Gestas *[cursing at the crowd]* Damn you and your families and homes and pious lives! You're all criminals like me! Your wealth is built on thieving. I'm not the thief; you are! You deserve to die, and someday, you'll get yours!

Dysmas *[weakly]* Gestas, try to save your strength.

Gestas Why? So the dying will go on longer? *[to the Roman soldiers]* Curse you and your false gods! May you rot in Hell for what you're doing!

Dysmas They're doing their jobs. We're criminals. We were caught. We killed a man!

Gestas *You* killed a man! *You* pulled me into crime! And if I hadn't stuck by you on the road, I'd be free now! Free of you and alive!

Dysmas I'm sorry. I'm sorry, old friend. We're both paying the price. For my sins.

Gestas *[a little mollified by the apology]* I wonder whose price this guy's paying?

Dysmas I heard the guards. I know him. Of him. I heard him once. He's Jesus of Nazareth.

Gestas *[suddenly angry again]* You mean the guy who thought he was the Messiah? I can't believe this! *[mockingly to Jesus]* Hey, you! If you're the Messiah, why don't you wave your magic wand and get us out of this? Hell, why don't you wish us up a million gold coins while you're at it? *[waiting for an answer]* What's the matter, lash got your tongue?

Dysmas Take it easy. Just trying to make a living. Like us. Broke no laws. Hurt no one.

Gestas I don't care. He's a thief just the same! He got people to give him money by pretending to be the Messiah. How's that any better than highway robbery? It's worse! Because he got to pretend he was all pious and holy while he was at it! *[to Jesus]* Hey! Why don't you call down a army of angels to rescue us? Oh, you can't? Why not? Because you're a fake!

Dysmas No. Not a fake. Not...in his mind. I heard him once. He really believes.

Gestas Oh, great! Then he's just a nutcase. *[to the heavens]* God! Why do I have to die next to this spineless, murdering, betraying ex-friend - and a nutcase? *[voice fading slowly as he weakens]* Oh God! Oh God, I'm going to die! I'm going to be thrown out with the trash! The rats are going to gnaw my bones!

Dysmas *[to Jesus]* Listen. You did good work. Your words - the ones I heard - were wise. Thoughtful. Maybe I wouldn't be here. If I heard more. I'm sure...I'm sure the angels are coming. To rescue you. When you come into your kingdom, remember me.

Scene 7

Dysmas , Gestas

- Dysmas** That's it! That's how we came here! Of all the lucky chances: to be nailed to a cross - next to *him*.
- Gestas** What are you talking about, "lucky"? How are we lucky to be here? And what does that loon have to do with it?
- Dysmas** Don't you see? I asked him to remember me! And he did! This is no prison! Don't you remember what he answered? This is Paradise!
- Gestas** Paradise! You're crazy! You're just saying it to torment me! This, Paradise? You're crazier than he was!
- Dysmas** *[suddenly realizing something]* Wait a minute. *Where do you think we are? Where do you think you are?*
- Gestas** Stop it! Just stop it! You've been sent to torment me, haven't you? That's all you are. Well it won't work! You won't trick me again! I followed you once, but never again! You're probably not even dead! You probably cut a deal with the cops. *[his voice fading away]* You gave me up to save your own stinking hide! I'll get you for that if it's the last thing I do. Oh God! Oh God!
- Dysmas** Gestas! Can you hear me? Gestas! *[waits for a reply but gets none, then shouts to the heavens in distress]* Why me? Why me and not him? I got him into it! I killed the old man! I got him caught! It's not fair! I didn't even really believe you were the Messiah! I was just humoring you! I was just being kind! *Why am I saved and my friend damned?*

You can read my thoughts about this play and respond with your own at
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