**The freedom fighter**

*This is a monologue which could be split into four parts where asterisked. It should be delivered in a common accent – it has been written as Cockney, but adapt as suits you. Dysmas, the narrator, is a Zealot, fighting to free Judah from Roman rule until he is captured and sentenced to death alongside his commander Barabbas (charismatic, ruthless and popular, think Gerry Adams) and colleague Gestas (hard man and bully, think Ian Mitchell from East Enders). Dysmas is the sap who does what he’s told, who drifted into the wrong gang and hasn’t got the guts to stand up to anyone, until part 3.*

Free Judaea! Kick out the Romans! ‘ow long, o Lord, ‘ow long? Will you rescue us today?

Jesus is expected in Jerusalem. ‘e claims to be the Messiah, the promised saviour, but ‘e don’t seem to have no weapons nor military experience. What are ‘is plans? ‘e ’an’t even told ‘is disciples, accordin’ to Simon, our man on the inside.

We’re ready. Caches of arms ’idden around the city, 300 men ready to rise up. The crowds are floodin’ in for the festival – they’ll back us when they’re sure we’re winnin’. But Jesus? The Boss ain’t sure about ‘im.

We’ll know shortly. The Boss got ‘im a message with a challenge. “If you come in war, ride the ‘orse. If you’re too chicken, choose the donkey.”

Listen! A cheerin’ crowd. See, they’re reinforcin’ the guards on the Roman fort. The showdown must come soon. If ‘e draws the soldiers out of the fort, our men can smash ‘em in the streets. We’re lookin’ down on the gate. The Boss ’as ‘is ‘orn by ‘is side, ready to sound the assault.

The cheers are getting’ louder. They’re climbin’ up the ’ill to the gate. We’ll see ‘em any minute. I see people wavin’ palm branches. Where is ‘e? ‘ow is ‘e armed?

I don’t believe it! ‘e’s sittin’ on a donkey! Like a lamb to the slaughter! God ’elp ‘im when the Romans get ‘im.

The guards have seen ‘im. They’re chucklin’ with relief. Challengin’ ‘im to a fight. Guffaws.

‘e’s flunked it! ‘e’s turned left towards the temple. Didn’t even look at the guards. The Boss has dropped ‘is ‘orn in disgust. All our preparations are for naught. The men will stay around for the festival, ready to exploit any trouble. But the big ’ope is gone – for now.

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Rats! Aargh! Cold. Damp. Dark. ’ungry. I’m afraid. But I wouldn’t admit it to the others.

After the body blow of the donkey-rider, we walked out the door ‘n straight into a Roman patrol. The Boss was carryin’ ‘is ‘orn, so they slammed ‘im up against a wall, ‘n a search soon found our daggers. ‘ow could we have been so careless? Now we’re on death row, waitin’ for the Romans to give the crowd some entertainment for the festival.

I’m afraid. Of the pain. Of lettin’ the side down. Of gaspin’ for breath. Of dyin’. Of the judgment to come. I’ve not been a good man. Done the Boss’s dirty work. Knee-cappin’. Extortion. Execution. ‘n now it’s my turn.

Gestas? For all ‘is bluster, I bet ‘e’s afraid too. But ‘e won’t show it. ‘e’ll go down screamin’ ‘n cursin’.

The Boss is different. There’s a smile on ‘is face. Thinks ‘e’s immortal. Like a cat with nine lives. “I’ll be out ‘n free,” ‘e says, “just you wait ‘n see. The Romans will let one prisoner free. ‘n ’oo will the crowds call for? ’oo’s a true patriot? Barabbas. ’oo else? My men will swing the crowds.”

‘e was right too. “Show ‘em ‘ow to die, like real men,” ‘e says, grinnin’, as they let ‘im go. Fools. ‘e’ll make ‘em pay for it.

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*(Loud scream, then pause, then a moan and another pause)* I couldn’t ‘elp it. The pain as they drove the nails in. I’m getting’ there. At least they didn’t stretch me tight as a drum, like Gestas. ‘e fought ‘em all the way. It took four of ‘em to ’old ‘im down even though ‘e was tied to the cross. ‘e’s still screamin’ abuse at ‘em.

Just before we were brought up ’ere, they threw another prisoner into our cell. ‘e’d been beaten black ‘n blue ‘n could ’ardly stand. It was some time before I realised ’e was the donkey-rider. God didn’t ‘elp ‘im when the Romans got ‘im. When they nailed ‘im, ’e didn’t even scream – just asked God to forgive ‘em. Amazin’.

So ‘ere we are, strung up on the ’ill for all to see our agony. The Boss is ‘ere to see us off, banterin’ with Gestas who’s playin’ to the crowds. ‘e tried jokin’ with me, but I’m not joinin’ in. It’s no joke dyin’ like this, ‘n it’s OK for ‘im crowin’ about being freed.

The donkey-rider’s getting’ it in the neck. There’s priests ‘ere tauntin’ ‘im, cheering as ‘e gasps for breath, bowin’ down ‘n ’ailin’ the “king”. They really ’ate ‘im. I bet they stitched ‘im up. I wonder why? Jealous of ‘is popularity, I dare say. I expect ‘e showed ‘em up. Cowards ‘n bigots. ‘e’s showin’ ‘em now what bravery is.

“‘e saved others, but ‘e can’t save ‘isself,” they’re sayin’. “If you’re really the Son of God, come down ‘n show us!” they cry. What a shock they’d get if ‘e did! Now Gestas is joinin’ in: “Save yourself ‘n us!” ‘e screams. Kick a man when ‘e’s down. I see red.

“Shut your face, Gestas,” I say. “We’re getting’ what we deserve, but this man’s done nothin’ wrong.” ‘n I turn to ‘im, ‘n I say, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” I don’t know why, but it seems to me that ‘e is a king, ‘n the sort of king I’d want to serve. ‘n ‘e turns to me, ‘n ‘e smiles. In ‘is agony, ‘e smiles. ‘n it sends goose-bumps all over me. ‘n ‘e says to me, “Dysmas, I promise you, today, you will be with me in paradise.”

‘n the sky turns black like it was night, as if the ‘eavens are angry, ‘n the priests slink away, ‘n the soldiers shiver like it were cold. ‘n Jesus is slippin’ away, as ‘e’s too weak to ’old ‘isself up, ‘n ‘e cries out, “It’s finished”, ‘n ‘e’s gone. ‘n the chief soldier falls on ‘is knees ‘n ’e says under ‘is breath, “Truly this man was the Son of God.”

‘n now it’s getting’ towards evenin’, ‘n I’m getting tired, ‘n I see the soldiers coming towards us with ’ammers to break our knees, so as we won’t last long. ‘n I shut my eyes, ‘n I say to myself, again ‘n again, “Paradise. Paradise. Paradise. Today.” ‘n it’s nearly over.……

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I’m dreamin’, ‘n I’m rushin’ through the night sky, ‘n there’s a light, ‘n I’m ‘eadin’ towards the light, ‘n it gets brighter ‘n brighter until I can’t see the darkness no more. ‘n the light takes shape like a ’uge man in a white robe, ‘n I come to a ’alt before ‘im, ‘n ‘e’s lookin’ at me like ‘e’s never seen tattoos before. ‘n I says to ‘im, “Scuse me, mister, but is this paradise?” ‘n ‘e smiles, ‘n ‘e says, “It is.” ‘n ‘e asks my name, ‘n ‘e looks in a book, ‘n ‘e says, “The King asked me to bring you straight through.” ‘n ‘e leads me through a door that I ’adn’t seen before, ‘n I come into a ’all of light, ‘n there’s a king of light sittin’ on a throne, ‘n I see the eyes of the donkey-rider lookin’ at me, ‘n I fall at ‘is feet, ‘n I say “Your Majesty!” ‘n ‘e reaches out ‘is ’and ‘n pulls me to ‘is feet, ‘n ‘e ’ugs me, ‘n ’e says, “Welcome, Dysmas!” ‘n ’e turns to the gatekeeper, ‘n ‘e says to ‘im, “Gabriel, this is the man who cheered my ‘eart when I most needed it. For ‘e believed in me when I was ’angin’ on the cross, ‘n I knew at that moment that it was worth it, ‘n ‘e stayed with me till the end.”