

TABLE FOR THIRTEEN

A one-act play

by

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ISBN: 978-1-910028-05-6

The Playwrights Publishing Co

TABLE FOR THIRTEEN

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Cast

Waiter.....an outsider

Cook.....a local

Radio Announcer.....voice only required

FROM THE AUTHOR

This play takes a look at the events of the Last Supper from the standpoint of a cook and a waiter. Now here we have two characters that fail to appear in any of the Gospel accounts even though logic would appear to dictate that if a meal was served then someone must have cooked it. And before any meal is consumed somebody has to serve the diners. Right from the start I made a conscious decision to set this play in a recognizable present rather than attempt an authentic recreation of first century Palestine. My aim here was to make the story as accessible as possible to a modern audience. And since the situation then – a country unstable and full of conflict. A land occupied, or at least controlled by a foreign power with its inhabitants all yearning for some kind of deliverance was not so far removed from many present day examples. Our tale takes

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place in just such a country with the occupying force,(who of course stand in for the Romans), referred to simply as “Peace Keepers”. Our two protagonists, the cook and the waiter, represent a local man and an outsider. The cook is clearly a religious man well informed with the traditions and aspirations of his people, but also as we shall see something of an outcast. The waiter an outsider, is quite prepared to tolerate his colleagues “Holy Joe” ways, “provided he doesn’t try and push them down his throat”, he represents an outsider’s point of view. The actions of this play take place late one night in a restaurant dining room.

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(The curtains open to reveal a long table set with thirteen chairs, these have been pulled away from the table and now stand in various positions now that their users have all got up and left. The remains of a meal are still in evidence as are numerous opened bottles of wine. Some of the wine glasses are overturned, some still contain wine. From off stage the waiter's voice can be heard calling out to the departing guests and as he finishes the sound of a street door closing. The waiter now appears stage left.)

Waiter

(Off stage) Good night, good night, thank you sir, please come again, mind how you go!

(Street door closes, waiter enters, he looks down at his right hand and the tips – or lack of them. He slides this into his pocket with a cross/disappointed air saying to himself)

Cheapskates!

(He begins to remove and stack chairs starting with those facing the audience. He calls off stage right.)

Come on and help me with this lot. If we both get stuck in we can get away before curfew.

(The cook enters and joins in. They start to stack and remove plates. There is the sound of a siren from far outside, both men glance at their watches.)

Cook

Blast! They brought it forward again.

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- Waiter** What do you expect, a city full of pilgrims, everyone on edge, Peace Keeper checkpoints everywhere.
- Cook** We've got our passes.
- Waiter** Fat lot of use they are. You can take your chances out there, as for me I'm stopping right here. (*Selects a chair and sits.*)
- Cook** (*Sitting down in one of the chairs*) Best make ourselves at home then.
- Waiter** That's the spirit, (*Takes up an opened bottle and pours two glasses*) Here you are sir a very fine vintage – on the house.
- Cook** (*Suddenly changing tone.*) What were they like – that last lot – you know, table for thirteen?
- Waiter** I was wondering when you were going to ask me that one. I'm surprised you got any cooking done tonight the amount of time you spent peering out here.
- Cook** I didn't think you noticed me.
- Waiter** Listen sunshine I am the waiter. I hear all and see all. And you know what.

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- Cook** What?
- Waiter** Nobody ever notices me!
- Cook** *(Becoming more anxious)* So what were they like?
- Waiter** Well they were some of your lot.
- Cook** My lot!
- Waiter** You know, Holy Joes
- Cook** Look just because you don't share my beliefs you don't have to take the Mick!
- Waiter** Calm down.
- Cook** Just because you don't believe in anything.
- Waiter** And that is just where you're wrong. I believe in everything and I believe in nothing it's a perfect combination!
- Cook** Oh yeah! - Perfect for a cynic!
- Waiter** Come on don't take it like that. Look we're stuck here all night, we can't get home, so I'll make you a deal. You can talk your "Holy Joe" stuff – just so long as

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you don't try and ram it down my throat. And I'll tell you all you want to know.

Cook Agreed!

Waiter Bad time of year this – wasn't there a riot in that temple place of yours just the other day?

Cook *(Getting cross again)* That was no riot!

Waiter Well what would you call it if some crazy guy and his mates went in and trashed the place?

Cook *(Calming down again)* Look let me try and explain. Have you ever been inside the Great Temple?

Waiter Yeah, went there once when I first came here – impressive I suppose, if you like that sort of thing.

Cook Well us “Holy Joes” as you call us, go there all the time, to pray, to give offerings and to make sacrifices.

Waiter Never could see the point in those sorts of things.

Cook Look going to temple is part of our religion – but we're not allowed to take any Peace Keepers coins inside.

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- Waiter** So?
- Cook** We go to make sacrifices, a dove, a lamb, or if your wealthy an oxen. You can buy doves in the Temple courtyard.
- Waiter** Now there's a thing – shop and pray.
- Cook** *(Ignores Waiter's "joke" and carries on.)* You have to use special coins so we exchange them in the courtyard too. Those temple money - changers are on the make, every time they change your cash they take a cut for themselves.
- Waiter** And your priests?
- Cook** Turn a blind eye they do. The dove sellers are no better they just rip people off.
- Waiter** So that business in the Temple was some kind of a protest – and I thought all you lot just followed along with whatever your priests told you.
- Cook** There, now that's something new you've learnt today isn't it.
- Waiter** But I still can't see why you aren't allowed to use any Peace Keeper money. They take that stuff all over town. We even get paid with it!

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- Cook** Show me one of the coins. (*Waiter produces one from his pocket and holds it out*) Whose picture is that on the back?
- Waiter** Why that's their Emperor, worship him like a god they do.
- Cook** (*Becoming angry*) There's only one God and we worship him. Anything else is just blasphemy!
- Waiter** Here you'd better not let any Peace Keepers hear you talking like that!
- Cook** Sod um all! Listen we had a great country here when that lot were still hitting each other over the head with rocks!
- Waiter** Oh here we go again, "The land god gave you!"
- Cook** And so he did!
- Waiter** And what a gift that turned out to be! Invaded, occupied, and now there are foreign troops on every street corner just to stop you lot from killing each other. Please remind me never to accept any gifts from your god!

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- Cook** But it didn't used to be that way. Our forefathers and God, we made a covenant. We were to worship him and him alone. And in return he promised us this land and his protection.
- Waiter** Well you certainly screwed that one up! But this was your god – if you believe in gods that is. Why didn't he put things right?
- Cook** Over the years he sent us messengers – prophets – they tried to put us right.
- Waiter** Didn't have much luck did they?
- Cook** Then finally there was a prophecy.
- Waiter** Oh well of course there's always a prophecy.
- Cook** *(Taking no notice)* Our God would send us a Messiah. He would lead his people and bring us back to him.
- Waiter** So what became of this “Messiah” of yours – or are you still waiting?
- Cook** Oh he arrived all right, I saw his birth.
- Waiter** Now this I have to hear.

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Cook It must have been thirty years ago now. I was only a lad then, had my first job, working with some shepherds way out in the sticks.

Waiter What you a country boy – but you're a cook!

Cook So how do you think shepherds get fed? Nip into the local takeaway!

Waiter OK, OK, I get it.

Cook Huge flock it was, right out in the wilds, owned by the Temple we were.

Waiter “Holy Shepherds” That sounds a cushy number.

Cook Well you're wrong there. That was one of the worst jobs going!

Waiter Why?