In The Shadow of the Cross

Characters:

Two thieves -
Ebenezer
Josiah
2 Centurions
(crowd?)

Eb: It's market day in Jerusalem! I love it! - the buzz - the excitement - the sounds - the sights - the smells - *(takes a long breath, and coughs, splutters)* well, maybe not! Anyway, what's an odd pong between friends? Mind you, when the crowd starts piling in - in the noon-day sun, it can get a bit much.... especially in the area I work - the armpit area!

My best income is made on market day - hot bodies, crowds shouting, sellers selling - haggle haggle haggle.*(describes a transaction taking place)* One of those! fifteen shekels! no - not the right colour! ten shekels! maybe... not the best quality! Five shekels! Perhaps ...not the right material! Two shekels! Well, okay then! *(stealing their coin bag*) It's a steal at the price!

(*apologetically to audience)* It's dirty work, but someone has to lighten their burden! And I'm the one to do it. But it's not like it used to be - oh no! In Roman Palestine thieves don't want to 'hang around'. Take Simeon, for example, my late colleague - so late that he's now up on the crosses outside the city gates, permanently hanging around! *(shudders)* Urgh! Nasty way to go!

(Josiah runs on and bumps into Ebenezer)

Jo: Oh - you gave me a scare!

Eb: Sorry - *(greeting)* What's pickin'?

Jo: Well - for market day - I'd say it's pretty poor. Just a loin cloth or two, a few earrings, one nose ring - I was pretty picky about that one!

Eb: Urgh!

Jo: ....two shekels, a rabbit - ow! I must file down its claws, he could damage my inside pocket irreversibly - and a cow!

Eb: *(looking around)* Where's the cow?

Jo: He ran away.

Eb: Oh.

Jo: How's yours been - busy day?

Eb: Ooooh - not so bad. A couple of shekels, a centurion's skirt, a bag of gold and a holiday for two in Skegness.

Jo: Well! Not a bad day's pickings!

Eb: Could be better.

Jo: Could be Blackpool.

Eb: Where is everybody?

Jo: Well - I was working down by the Triumphal gate you know - I'd got my eye on this nice little donkey colt, just standing there. I was already to pounce when up comes these two big fellas - never seen them before round these parts...

Eb: Smells very fishy.

Jo: Cod.

Eb: *(looking round worriedly)* Don't blaspheme! Stoning always brings me out in cuts and bruises.

Jo: No - **cod**. They smelled of cod - I think they were fishermen. Anyway, there I was with one eye on the colt, and another on the owner -

Eb: I hate it when my eyes do that.

Jo: - and up they comes and off with it!

Eb: *(aghast!)* Off with it?!

Jo: Off with is. Never a 'by your leave' - just "The Master has need of it".

Eb: The Master?

Jo: And the man just looks and smiles.

Eb: Smiles, eh? “The master has need of it” *(writing it down)* Must remember that one.

Jo: Anyway - they had a cow an’ all - so while he was standing smiling - I nicked it quick. No hangin’ around. *(wink)*

Eb: *(sigh)* Poor Simeon. So what happened to the donkey?

Jo: Well, I followed them for a bit to see if I could get in on their game -

Eb: Yeah.

Jo: And suddenly - there’s this big rush of people all shouting and waving.

Eb: Waving - who to?

Jo: I don’t know. I was under this date tree, trying to avoid getting me and the cow trapped in the crowds and...

Eb: Yes?

Jo: I got whacked in the face with a palm branch!

Eb: No?!

Jo: As I’m standing here now! That’s when I lost the cow. When I woke up, she’d scarpered.

Eb: Yes - they do that.

Jo: Anyway - I sez to the one wot whacked me - ‘ere what’s going on? And he says that the Messiah was riding into Jerusalem for the Passover, said he was going to save us.

Eb: Save us? From the Romans?

Jo: Must be! What else is there to save us from?

Eb: Well there’s a terrible amount of pick-pocketting in Jerusalem now - you can’t go anywhere but someone’s got there before you!

Jo: Yeah - especially on market days.

Eb: So did you get to see him? This great Messiah ? How exciting -

Jo: Everyone waving palm leaves

Eb: Red carpet treatment?

Jo: Cloaks thrown down

Eb: Great white stallion?

Jo: Tiny little colt

Eb: Dressed in a shining uniform?

Jo: In a simple white tunic

Eb: A great golden crown?

Jo: bareheaded and humble

Eb: enjoying the adoration?

Jo: weeping for Jerusalem

Eb: The Promised Messiah?

Jp: Our Saviour.

Eb: I wish I'd been there to see it.

Jo: You wouldn't have liked it.

Eb: Whyever not?

Jo: He came in from outside the walls -

Eb: So?

Jo: Golgotha?

Eb: Oh.

Jo: Past the crosses - you couldn't have missed seeing Simeon - crucified there as an example for all. A reminder of our great sin for all to see and be shown the choice between life and death.

Eb: Poor Simeon.

Jo: I think He looked up.

Eb: Who?

Jo: The Master. I'm sure He looked up at the crosses. *(thoughtfully)* Everyone was shouting, waving, laughing, calling Him King and Saviour - and He looked at the cross, at Simeon, and it looked like love.

Eb: No-one looks at the crosses if you can help it. It's bad enough they're there - on the hill. Everything's in the shadow of the cross.

THOUGHTFUL PAUSE

Eb: Well - my pockets are full and I don't think we should be 'hanging around' here any more. Someone's bound to call a Centurion -

(Enter two Centurions)

Centurion: Someone looking for us?

Eb: Wouldn't you know it - don't see one for ages and then two come together. Drop the bunny and run!

(Ebenezer runs but is stopped)

Centurion: Now who have we got here? Ebenezer and Josiah! I don't think you'll be going anywhere! I warned you last time about our zero-tolerance policy - none of your namby-pamby 'off with your hands' like your Arab neighbours. No! We sponsor your local carpentry business with the genuine wood and nails job.
(Dragging them off)
Get on! Get on with you! Friday's your lucky day - you get to meet your Lord!

(seriously) That's two, just room for one more.