

WHOSE KINGDOM RULES?

Exploring the events of Good Friday from within Pilate's residence!

By DAVID NUNN

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'Outstanding!

Brings the hearers into the heart of the passion. Unforgettable in it's impact!

MICHAEL BAUGHEN (former Bishop of Chester)

'...a profound silence prevailed in the audience.

It spoke eloquently of the play's power and impact on all who witnessed it!

JANET WATTS (Reviewer The Guardian and The Observer)

CAST

PILATE (P)

DRUSUS - friend of Pilate (D)

LUCIUS - Pilate's attendant (L)

CHIEF PRIEST (CP)

PILATE'S WIFE (PW)

SERVANT (S)

JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA (J)

FRIEND of Chief Priest (F)

MESSENGER (M)

ACTS

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- 2 EARLY MORNING – Lucius, Pilate, Chief Priest, Servant
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ACT 1 - NOCTURNAL VISIT OF THE CHIEF PRIEST

Pilate and his wife are seated in their residence. Lucius enters.

L Your Excellency, you have a special visitor! Drusus from Rome *(He ushers Drusus in)*

P Drusus, my old friend! What a surprise! It's been a long time!

D Well, well, well! Pontius Pilate, the Governor of Judea!

P You haven't met my wife, have you?

D No indeed I haven't.

P Claudia, this is Drusus – a very old friend.

PW Welcome Drusus. My husband's often mentioned you.

D The old rogue!

P Come on, Drusus. What brings you here?

D Ah yes. I'm afraid I've come to warn you.

P Warn me! What about?

D The Emperor is displeased about reports of your Governorship.

P Ha! Those wretched Jews! Up to their old tricks again. It's that business at Caesarea, I suppose.

D Yes. A stadium full of Jews demanding you remove those images of the Emperor. What possessed you to put them here – in Jerusalem? This is their Holy City! You knew it was against their law – bound to inflame them.

P I intended to show them who's boss round here.

D Well THEY certainly showed YOU! You surround them with troops and threaten them with death! And what do THEY do? Bare their necks and tell you they'd rather die than break their religious laws.

P Don't remind me.

D So you climb down, remove the images, and they go home laughing! It's no wonder the Emperor's displeased!

P So, so he's heard all about it, eh?

D Yes. AND the rumpus over the water supply.

P Oh no! Not that as well! I build them a pipeline to bring in fresh water to the city and all I get is flack.

D Well what do you expect! You took the money for it from their Temple treasury without asking!

P Well - I had to get it from somewhere.

D I tell you Pilate, it's not looking good in Rome. One more slip and you're out! You'd better be very careful. Well, I've said my bit. I'll be off.

P Well good-bye Drusus. I suppose you meant well. My attendant Lucius will show you out.

L This way, sire.

P *(as he leaves)* Thanks.

Lucius shows Drusus out, then returns

P *(Longingly)* Oh to be back in Rome – this is an accursed place! And so cold too.

L You're in Jerusalem sire – only to be expected at this time of year.

PW Darling, you look worn out - let's get some sleep! It's so late.

P Nearly midnight I should think – you're quite right, let's be going. *(A knock)* Oh no - this is intolerable! Whoever's that - at this hour?

L I'll go and see sire! *(He goes out)*

P *(to wife)* You'd better get to bed darling – I'll join you later.

PW Well don't be too long. *(They embrace, she leaves)*

L *(Lucius returns)* The Chief Priest is seeking an audience, sire!

P The Chief Priest!

L Yes sire!

P At this hour – impossible!

L He's here in person, sire. He seems most insistent to talk with you.

P These wretched Jews! Am I to have no peace from them – even at midnight!

L You can scarcely refuse to see HIM, sire. Even at midnight!

P *(Angrily)* Hmm. You're right – they'll stir up even more trouble if I don't! Get him in!

Lucius goes to door and ushers Chief Priest in.

L My Lord Caiaphas – the Governor will see you now.

L *(To Pilate)* The Chief Priest, sire!

P Well! And what do you want – at this hour indeed!

CP Your Excellency, I'm most grateful for your attention. I wouldn't have troubled you were it not that I have a very pressing matter to discuss with you.

P *(Sarcastically)* Really! And it couldn't wait till morning, I suppose.

CP Oh no sire! The fact is we have just arrested a most notorious villain and have found him worthy of a death sentence. We would like to have him dead and buried by the start of our Jewish Sabbath tomorrow at sunset.

P Poor wretch! Whatever has he done?

CP Oh that needn't bother you sire. There's no need for you to involve yourself. We've examined this case carefully. All we require is your seal on your order for his execution.

P And that couldn't wait till next week?

CP Oh no sire! If we delay his execution his supporters would have a chance to riot. We need him dead by sundown tomorrow.

P Chance of another riot, eh? Well, we can't have that. And that's all you want? No need for me to examine the case myself?

CP Oh no sire! We really wouldn't dream of troubling you.

P Hmm

CP But we do need to bring him at first light if he's to be dead and buried by the Sabbath.

P *(Irritably)* Oh, anything for a peaceful life. All right, first thing tomorrow morning.

CP My most humble thanks sire. We are exceedingly indebted to you. Peace be with you.

P Peace be with you. Farewell. *(CP starts to leave)* Oh, by the way, he has a name, I presume.

CP A name sire?

P Yes, this poor wretch – he has a name.

CP Ah yes sire. His name is Jesus, sire – he's from that miserable little town of Nazareth sire. Good night sire.

P *(Watching him leave – puzzled and thoughtful)* Good night. *(pause)* Hmm.

PW *(Coming in)* Darling, whatever's been keeping you – you've been ages. Who was it?

P Oh – it's just the Chief Priest.

PW The Chief Priest! At THIS hour! Whatever does he want?

P Oh it really needn't bother us – it's nothing important.

PW Nothing important! The Chief Priest calls in person at midnight and you say it's nothing important!

P *(Irritably)* Oh love, just lay off – I'm exhausted!

PW But what did he want?

P Oh it's nothing. He just wanted my seal on a death sentence tomorrow morning, that's all.

PW The Chief Priest came in person to ask for that – at MIDNIGHT!

P *(Crossly)* Yes.

PW And you say it's not important!

P *(Angrily)* YES. He told me there's no need for me to examine the case – it's all fixed.

PW Well it sounds mighty strange to me. They must be up to something.

P Oh - does it matter?

PW Well who is it?

P Who's what?

PW The accused – what has he done?

P I really have no idea, love. Will you give it a break!

PW But what's his name?

P Oh, he's called Jesus.

PW Jesus! There are lots of people with that name. Where does he come from?

P Oh - Nazareth, I think he said. Yes, Jesus of Nazareth.

PW Jesus of Nazareth! Oh my God! *(She rushes out in great distress. Pilate follows her in concern.)*

ACT 2 - EARLY MORNING

Lucius enters and knocks on Pilate's door – Pilate comes out

P Quiet you fool – you'll wake the wife!

L Sorry to disturb you sire, but they're here.

P Who're here?

L The Chief Priests sire – and their prisoner.

P Ah, yes of course – I'd forgotten. A bad night.

L They're waiting for you outside, sire.

P Better get on with it then, I suppose.

L Yes, sire.

L goes to fetch him then returns

L The Chief Priest, sire!

CP Ah, your Excellency! So good of you to attend to this matter. *(He unrolls a scroll)*
If you could just put your seal here. The details are all completed.

P No need for me to examine the prisoner then?

CP Oh no sire! We've attended to the whole matter. The crucifixion can then proceed without delay.

P But what has he done?

CP Oh that needn't concern you sire? If you could just put your seal here. We've found the prisoner guilty – there's no problem.

P And that's all you want? Hmm. Might as well be getting on with it I suppose. *(He rises from his chair)* *(To Lucius)* Lucius - my seal please.

L I have it in readiness, sire.

P Right – just hold that end for me *(He unrolls the scroll and prepares to seal it)*

S *(Rushing in)* Sire, I'm sorry to disturb you but I have an urgent message from your wife.

P My wife!

S Yes sire, she was most insistent that you have this immediately.

P I do wish my wife wouldn't bother me at such a time as this!

S She was extremely agitated sire!

P Hmm. Better have a look at it I suppose. *(He puts down the seal)* Let's see what we have here. *(He examines the note)* 'Have nothing to do with that innocent man. I've suffered much over him in a dream.'

CP If you would just seal it here, sire, we won't need to detain you. The man is guilty.

P *(Still puzzling over the note – he didn't hear)* What's that?

CP The man is guilty, sire.

P *(To himself)* That innocent man.

CP He's guilty, sire.

P *(To himself – still looking at note)* 'Have nothing to do with that innocent man' Hmm. *(To CP)* What charges do you bring against this man?

CP Your Excellency, if he wasn't an evildoer, we wouldn't have handed him over. Your seal here please.

P *(Crossly)* Take him yourself and judge him by your own law.

CP *(Crossly)* It's not lawful for us to put anyone to death. He's guilty.

P Guilty, eh! I'm going to examine him myself – out of my way! *(He storms out – slamming door behind him)*

ACT 3 – WASHING HANDS

Pilate comes in (from stage left) drying his hands. His wife enters from stage right.

PW Whatever's been going on love? All that shouting and shrieking – it woke me up. I hope you got my note.

P Yes - I got it all right.

PW So everything's all right. Thank God for that!

P *(Takes a deep breath and breaths out noisily)*

PW What's the matter? Everything is all right, isn't it. You have freed Jesus, haven't you.

P *(To himself)* Those swine – those filthy rotten swine! It's they who should be crucified!

PW Whatever do you mean? What's happened? Jesus *is* safe isn't he?

P I only wish he was!

PW WHAT! He's not still in their hands is he?

P He'd be better off if he was.

PW Whatever do you mean?

P Love, I'm afraid he's in Roman hands now. He'll have been crucified within the hour.

PW Oh my God! My God! What have you done?

P *(Wringing his hands in anguish)* I only wish I knew.

PW Oh! My dream! Those voices! 'Suffered under Pontius Pilate, suffered under Pontius Pilate! They've been ringing in my head all night. And then others, booming back, 'Crucified, dead and buried!' 'Crucified, dead and buried!' It was awful! They echoed from all round the world – through the whole of time. Whatever have you done?

P I did everything I could – everything I could think of to release him. It was all so obviously a put up job. But you heard their racket – there'd have been a riot if I hadn't given in.

PW Given in! What about Roman justice?

P *(He's furious)* Don't mention it! I told them three times I could find no fault in him, but they just wouldn't let up. I even sent him over to Herod to decide, but he just sent him back.

PW And you've just condemned him to the cross.

P I did everything I could to prevent it – they wanted the usual Passover release so I offered them Jesus or that ghastly Barabbas.

PW What! That murderous thug who's been terrorizing the city?

P Yes – and you know what? They chose HIM! They chose Barabbas! It was beyond belief! But what could I do?

PW I know what you did – you gave in.

P No! No! I kept trying to release Jesus – I even had him flogged – scourged.

PW You did WHAT!

P I had him flogged.

PW Flogged! You kept telling them that he was innocent!

P Yes – but I thought that would satisfy them.

PW And it didn't! What price Roman justice now!

P It's worse than that. You don't understand. He terrified me!

PW Who terrified you?

P Jesus – he terrified me.

PW HE - terrified YOU!

P Yes. He just took everything that everyone was throwing at him. He never said a word – no threats, no cursing. He must have been in utter agony, but he just stood there, propped up between the guards. He just seemed to be from another world. And then he spoke.

PW What, he actually spoke to you!

P Yes. He said I'd have no power over him unless it had been given me from above. He said his Kingdom was not of this world.

PW Oh my husband! What have you done!

P And those eyes! Those eyes! So full of grief. But it almost seemed as if he was grieving over the crowd, grieving over ME! Not about himself. It was awful.

PW Oh God have mercy!

P And I tried again – I told them he'd done nothing deserving death.

PW Why couldn't you stay strong – you are the governor – you have all the might of Rome behind you!

P Love, I couldn't – they threatened me. Said if I let him go, I was no friend of Caesar. I just couldn't risk it – *you* heard what Drusus said last night. One more bad report and it's the end of us both. Anyway, there'd have been a total riot if I'd delayed, and that would have been even worse.

PW So you gave in! You gave them what they wanted.

P It wasn't what I wanted – that's why I washed my hands in front of them. 'I'm innocent of this man's blood,' I told them, 'see to it yourselves.'

PW Innocent! Oh my Jesus! What has my husband done to you! (*They start to go out sadly together*)

ACT 4 - THE TITLE FOR THE CROSS

As they're leaving a servant comes rushing in.

S Your Excellency, your Excellency! *(Pilate stops, his wife goes out)*

P *(Crossly)* What is it now?

S Sorry to trouble you sir, but they need the crime.

P The crime – what crime?

S The crime of Jesus – for the board for the cross.

P Crime! *(He seems dazed)* What crime!

S They need to know right now sire. They need it for the placard for the crucifixion procession.

P *(Dazed)* The placard!

S Yes sire – they're about to leave right now. They've already got the cross on Jesus. *(Pilate collapses in a chair)* Are you feeling all right, sire?

P All right? *(To himself)* Those scheming, scheming Jews! *(He breathes out heavily)*

S Are you all right, sire?

P No I'm not! *(Another pause while he thinks)* The title, eh? *(He brightens)* Ah, yes! Of course! *(He rises from his chair)* The title for the cross is: 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.'

S *(Puzzled)* Sire?

P Have you got that?

S Yes sire. 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.'

P Yes! And I should like to be there to see their faces when they read it.

S *(Puzzled)* Yes sire. Thank you sire. *(He goes out)* *(Pilate waits briefly, then leaves opposite side)*

ACT 5 - THE PRIESTS' REACTION

Later that day. Lucius enters and knocks on Pilate's door. P opens it.

P *(Crossly)* What is it now – am I to have no peace today?

L Sorry to bother you sire, but it's the Chief Priest!

P The WHAT!

L The Chief Priest sire. He's most INSISTENT on seeing you!

P The Chief Priest! No! This is intolerable – unbelievable! Certainly not!

L I told him you weren't available, sire, but he said if he didn't see you there'd be even more trouble.

P Who does that man think he is! I'll show him this time! He comes here at his peril! You'd better get him in.

L Yes sire! *(He goes out, returning shortly with the Chief Priest)*

L The Chief Priest sire!

P Ha! So we meet again! And what trouble have you for me this time?

CP Your Excellency – there's been a most terrible mistake!

P You don't need to tell me that!

CP I refer to the title for the cross. Your soldiers must have misread your instruction.

P Really? How come?

CP They've written, 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews'. It should of course read, "He SAID 'I am the King of the Jews'.

P Is that so?

CP Indeed so, Excellency! We really cannot have 'The King of the Jews' hanging on a cross outside the city.

P I should think not!

CP So, I must insist you change it immediately!

P *(Rising from his chair)* You do, do you?

CP Emphatically so!

P Well let me tell you, I chose that wording MYSELF. And WHAT I HAVE WRITTEN, I HAVE WRITTEN! Lucius! Get this man out of my sight!

L Yes Excellency! *(To CP)* This way, if you please, sire. *(He pushes the protesting CP out:*

CP This is outrageous! How dare you behave like this. I'm the Chief Priest!

ACT 6 - BREAK THEIR LEGS!

Pilate is seated – Lucius brings in food

P Ah Lucius! Have you seen my wife?

L She went out in a hurry this morning sire – she was looking dreadful.

P Did she tell you where she was going?

L She was determined to follow the crowd to the crucifixion site. It's at Golgotha today.

P Oh no – that'll be the end of her! She couldn't face that.

L I know sire. I tried to warn her, but she was insistent. She seems to be taking things very personally.

P That's just about the last straw – I really can't take any more from anyone. To think of my wife out there in that terrible darkness.

L I've never known such darkness sire. Everyone's saying it's because Jesus is dying.

P Are they now? Well - they may well be right!

Servant enters

S Sorry to trouble you Excellency, but the Chief Priest is wishing to see you!

P Oh no! Not again! I don't believe it!

S He's most insistent sire!

P Is he ever not! Better hear what he has to say this time, I suppose.

S Yes sire. *(He goes out and returns with the CP)* The Chief Priest, sire

P Ha! So what is it this time!

CP Your Excellency! As you know, our very special Sabbath commences at sundown. We really cannot have the bodies on the crosses then. So I must ask you to have their legs broken to hasten their deaths. They must be taken down before sunset.

P *(Sarcastically)* Is that all?

CP Oh, I scarcely think we will need to trouble you again after that, Excellency.

P No more requests after that, eh. Well that be a relief! All right, I'll send a message to the centurion in charge.

CP Thank you, Excellency. Peace be with you! *(He leaves)*

P *(To himself)* Peace with me! There's not much chance of that! *(He exits other side with servant and Lucius)*

ACT 7 – JOSEPH'S VISIT

An hour later. Lucius enters and starts to clear the table. Servant enters.

S I say Lucius, you won't believe it, but I've got someone else from the Jewish Court wanting to see Pilate.

L Oh no! You're joking!

S No, he's waiting outside – you'd better tell Pilate!

L Tell Pilate! I don't know if I dare. He's in a terrible state! I've never seen him like it.

S I think you've got to – we can't turn a visitor away without telling him.

L But if he sees another of those Priests today, I think he'll explode.

S I think you'll find this one rather different – in fact he seems very nervous.

L Nervous! Well that would make a change! What's he got to be nervous about – except the Governor's temper?

S Why not have him in and find out first – then we can see if we should tell Pilate?

L A good idea – did he tell you his name?

S Yes, he said he was Joseph of Arimathea.

L Joseph of Arimathea! Why he's one of the richest men in town!

S Is he now? Well, he seems very nervous.

L Go on – get him in! Let's see what it's all about this time.

S goes to door and ushers in Joseph

S Will you step this way please. This is Lucius, the Governor's personal attendant.

J *(bowing)* Peace be with you!

L Peace be with you. Well, well – Joseph of Arimathea! What brings you here?

J Sire, I need to speak with the Governor urgently!

L I'm not sure he'll see you. He's had a very stressful day.

J I beg you to ask him, sire. It's of the utmost importance.

L Can I ask what it's about?

J I'm afraid not, sire. It's exceedingly personal – I must speak with Pilate in person.

L Hmm. Well I don't know if he'll see you. But I will ask.

J I'm exceedingly grateful, sire.

L to S Quintus, show Joseph to the anteroom. I'll see Pilate.

S Right – will you step this way please. *(They go out)*

L knocks on Pilate's door – a pause, Pilate appears.

P *(Crossly)* Well, what is it now!

L Sorry to trouble you sire, but Joseph of Arimathea is here to see you!

P Joseph of Arimathea! The richest man in town! Whatever does he want?

L He wouldn't say, sire. But he was adamant he wished to speak with you.

P Fool! Why didn't you find out? *(He starts to exit, then stops)* Hey, wait a minute – he's one of the Sanhedrin! The very Jewish Court that sentenced Jesus to death. I've had more than enough of that mob today.

L I think you'll find him rather different, sire. In fact, he seems very nervous!

P You bet he's nervous! Well I might even enjoy this, I suppose. Hmm. Let's have him in!

L Yes sire. *(He exits and returns with Joseph)*

J Your Excellency!

P Well, well! Joseph of Arimathea! And what can I do for you!

J I wish your permission to take down the body of Jesus, sire!

P Do what! Whatever for? To further humiliate it? Can't you lot let the man rest, once he's dead?

J No sire, it's to give him a proper burial – in my own new tomb.

P In your own new tomb! I've heard about that! You've only just completed it – just about the finest in Jerusalem.

J Yes sire. I have the spices and linen shroud in readiness.

P Spices, shroud – the finest tomb in the city! I don't get it – it sounds as if you want to give Jesus a burial fit for a king!

J You could say that sire.

P I don't get it! You're a member of the Sanhedrin, who sentenced Jesus to death. How come now you want to give him a king's burial? What are you playing at?

J You must understand sire, that last night's decision was against my wishes.

P You mean you didn't agree with them?

J Yes sire.

P Well, why didn't you object?

J Well, to tell you the truth, sire, I was afraid. I'm sorry to say I was silent.

P Afraid! Afraid of what?

J Of what they might say, sire, or even do. I had too much to lose.

P So how come your request now? They'll all find out about that!

J True, sire! But the moment Jesus died, somehow it didn't seem to matter anymore.

P Not matter!

J No. It's as though the moment he died, I started coming to life – properly - for the very first time.

P Hmm. Well - this is quite beyond me.

J I need to act immediately, sire. Before his body is thrown in the common grave.

P Hmm. Yes, I see what you mean. Well, I'll check with the centurion to confirm he's dead. And once you have his go ahead you can have him.

J I'm exceedingly grateful, sire.

P But I should warn you. Removing a body from a cross is a messy business. You'll find you're covered with the blood of Jesus before the day's out.

J I'm well aware of that sire - it will be an honour, sire. Peace be with you. *(L shows him out)*

P *(Watches him go thoughtfully)* Peace be with you, Joseph. *(Pause – he is puzzled)* An honour eh? *(Pause – then very thoughtfully)* An honour! *(He exits)*

ACT 8 – EVENTS AT GOLGOTHA

L re-enters followed shortly by PW

PW Lucius! Who was that just leaving?

L My lady! Is that you? Your husband's been very worried about you. (*A pause while he looks at her closely*) Are you all right? You look dreadful! Here, sit down! (*He gets a chair*)

PW (*Breaths out heavily*) Thanks Lucius. This has been the most dreadful day of my life.

L Would it help to tell me?

PW Oh - dear Lucius – such a faithful friend!

L So you went to Golgotha?

PW Golgotha. Yes. Oh Lucius, it was terrible, terrible!

L You were very brave to go – a crucifixion is no place for a woman.

PW Oh Lucius, even before they set out from here, Jesus could scarcely stand. The scourging had torn his flesh to shreds.

L I know, my lady. I saw it all from the window.

PW And then with that cross beam on his shoulders – he had a terrible fall. They had to compel someone else to carry the cross after that. He just couldn't go on.

L And then?

PW There was such a crowd, all the way. Such hatred – so many spitting and jeering. But others were weeping and wailing – their love was amazing!

L From the noise here it sounded as if the whole city had turned out!

PW I wouldn't be surprised. And to think it's less than a week since Jesus was greeted so warmly!

L Go on.

PW Well, they got to Golgotha. Oh it was terrible, it was terrible! (*She collapses, sobbing*)

L consoles her

L Just take your time – just take your time.

PW They crucified him – crucified him. Oh Lucius! He never said a word! He cried out in agony, yes, but he never said a word. The other two were screaming and cursing. But *he* never said a word. Until...

L Until?

PW Until that awful moment when the cross was raised – and it fell with a great thud into its deep hole. And then...

L And then?

PW There was a great cry! The Chief Priests jeered, the passers by mocked, the criminals cursed him, the soldiers couldn't care less. It was as though the sins of the whole world were being hurled at him – as though he'd taken the world of our sins onto himself. As though he was carrying them on that cross. And when the hubbub died down a bit, that's when he spoke. Oh, it was unbelievable, unbelievable!

L Well, what did he say?

PW He said, 'Father, forgive them – they don't know what they're doing.'

L (*Astounded!*) No! Beyond belief!

PW Yes! They were all on at him. The mockery was terrible. They were all on at him to save himself. 'Save yourself! Save yourself!' The whole gang; the priests, the soldiers, the passers by, the criminals. (*She breaks down, weeping*)

L Take it easy, my lady!

PW The Priests, they'd insisted he should be put between the criminals – there was one on each side. And that is when it happened.

L What?

PW One of the criminals. He'd been cursing and swearing at Jesus like the rest of them. But after a bit, he changed. I think it might have been that title on the cross, 'The King of the Jews'. He turned to Jesus and he said, 'Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom.'

L (*Amazed*) He said THAT!

PW Yes! It was as though he'd just realized what was really going on! All the hatred of the world was being hurled at Jesus – and it was as though he was just absorbing it all. Never a threat, never a word of self-pity. He was conquering evil before their very eyes, and that criminal saw it. That title was true!

L And then?

PW And then Jesus spoke. Oh, it was incredible!

L What did he say?

PW He said, 'I tell you the truth – today you will be with me in paradise.'

L Incredible! And then?

- PW Well by that time Jesus' mother and her closest friends had been permitted to get within speaking distance – how could they bear to be so close! It must have been terrible! And then when Jesus saw them there, with his closest disciple, he committed his mother into the care of that disciple. Imagine it! He was making provision for his own mother while hanging in agony on a cross!
- L Astounding! And what then?
- PW Well it all happened so gradually that no one noticed at first. But it was getting darker and darker. Just think, it was midday – and by now it was so dark you could scarcely make out the crosses at all. It was blacker than night – a really terrifying darkness, one that you could feel.
- L I know – we experienced it here. *(He gets up)*
- PW There was no joking now – no mockery – nothing! In fact everyone was terrified. They were so silent you could hear your own breathing. And it just went on and on – this darkness. And then suddenly, and without warning, the loudest and most terrible cry you could ever imagine! 'My God, my God! Why have you forsaken me?' It was Jesus.
- L He said that!
- PW Yes! Well by now it was just beginning to lighten. Some of the bystanders thought he was calling out for Elijah.
- L Why Elijah?
- PW Well, Jews believe that in times of need their great prophet will come to rescue the righteous.
- L Ah!
- PW Well suddenly, they didn't find it funny any more. No one was jeering now. In fact everyone was terrified. They'd all taunted Jesus to save himself. So what if Elijah DID come to save him? Where would that leave them? On a collision course with God's judgment! 'Wait,' they said, 'let's see if Elijah *will* come and save him!'
- L *(Urgently)* Go on!
- PW Jesus gave another great cry! How he had the strength to do so I just don't know. 'It is finished!' The very words the Chief Priest would be saying over in the great Temple when the very last lamb had been sacrificed for Passover. 'It is finished - the sacrifice is complete.'
- L And then.
- PW And then Jesus just bowed his head, and said, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' And it seemed he just dismissed his spirit.
- L You mean, he died?
- PW Yes. Yes - but it was at the time of HIS choosing.

L Astounding!

PW Wait, you haven't heard it all. At the moment of his death, the earth shook – the rocks spilt. The sound was deafening! It was as though the very earth shuddered in horror at what had taken place. Even the centurion was shaken – I'll never forget what he said.

L What was it?

PW He said, 'Truly this was the Son of God.' Oh Lucius! *(She collapses, sobbing, in his arms)*

L puts his arm around her - they go out together.

ACT 9 – GUARD THAT TOMB!

Next day. Pilate enters and sits down. Lucius enters.

L Good morning, sire! I trust you slept well.

P I've had a dreadful night. I just can't get yesterday's events out of my mind. And my wife is almost beside herself with grief. Still, it's all over now. We shan't be hearing any more of Jesus of Nazareth – and no more visits from the Chief Priest either!

L Ah, there I'm sorry to disappoint you, sire. In fact the Chief Priest is outside, waiting for you, right now.

P You are definitely joking! And a joke in very bad taste too!

L No sire! He's here again!

P No! This is intolerable! Is there to be no end to all this business? What on earth does he want now!

L Only one way to find out, sire!

P Right! Get him in! And I'll see that this visit really is his last!

L Yes sire! *(He goes to fetch him)* Do step this way please.

L *(Re-entering with the CP)* The Chief Priest, Sire.

P Well – I can't imagine what's the matter this time!

CP It concerns Jesus of Nazareth, sire. We remember how that imposter said that after three days he would rise again. It's quite obvious what will happen. His disciples will steal his body and then tell people that he's been raised from the dead. Now we wouldn't want that to happen, would we sire? That really would get the city stirred up.

P *(Coldly)* Go on!

- CP So - order the tomb to be sealed until the third day. No tampering with it under pain of death. That should stop any further trouble.
- P *(Sarcastically)* Any further trouble! *(Furiously)* Oh, take your guard! Make that tomb as secure as you know how! And leave me – I would be - alone!
- CP Thank you sire – peace be with you, sire! This really is the end, sire! *(He goes out)*
- P *(To Lucius)* The end! Or is it just the beginning! *(They go out)*

ACT 10 – HE’S GONE!

The High Priest’s house. The Chief Priest and friend enter from rear of audience and approach stage.

- F You’re looking very smug, Caiaphas! What news now?
- CP Everything has proceeded splendidly! Good old blackmail – poor old Pilate’s had to give way every time.
- F You’ve certainly given him a tough time since Friday. Fancy even demanding a guard for the tomb!
- CP Essential, my dear boy! Essential! We can’t have rumours of a resurrection – even if it IS false!
- F Well, you’ve certainly fixed it! Apart from the fact that the body of Jesus is now resting in the finest tomb in the city! A disgraceful act on Joseph’s part.
- CP Oh, we’ll see about him later. But at least no one can disturb that body. A death sentence for them if they try - and a death sentence for the guards if they fail.
- F A very neat bit of work, Caiaphas! A very neat bit of work! You’ve certainly got Jesus of Nazareth properly dead and buried!
- M *(Rushing in, in great agitation)* My Lord Caiaphas! My Lord Caiaphas!
- CP Pull yourself together, man! What’s the matter with you?
- M It’s Jesus, sir! Jesus of Nazareth. He’s... *(pause)* He’s... *(pause)* He’s GONE!
(They freeze)

CURTAIN

*For further details about the play, suggested introductions and concluding remarks,
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