

KINGDOM COME

A One Act Play

By

Noel Harrower

Characters

(In order of Appearance.)

German Police Sergeant
Police Constable Draper
Police Woman Collins
Councillor Arbuthnot
Helen Waters
Mary Barratt

The action takes place on a summer night in the City of Nottingham in Nazi occupied England a few years ago.

KINGDOM COME

Scene: A police station or holding bay for prisoners in Nottingham. There are two doors, one to stage right leading to a reception area and one to the left leading to an inner passage. There is a TV monitor screen on the desk with its back to the audience. A sergeant sits writing beside it. He wears a swastika armband. A large Nazi flag hangs on the wall behind him. A young police man enters from reception, also wearing the armband. He brings in a newspaper.

P.C. Hail Fuhrer. (He raises his arm in salute)

Sgt. Hail Fuhrer.

P.C. You sent for the Evening Post, Sgt.

Sgt. Oh, yes, thank you. I wanted to see what the tabloid press was saying about these events in the square today. Ah – “Messiah arrested.” That will be good for their sales. (Looks up and peers at P.C.) Do I know you?

P.C. Constable Draper, Sgt. I’ve just been attached to this holding bay by the Central Police Station.

Sgt. Have you? I wish they’d tell me these things. How long have you been in the force?

P.C. Two years, Sgt.

Sgt. Where’ve you served?

P.C. Edwards Lane and the Central Station, Sgt.

Sgt. And for how long have you been assigned here?

P.C. They did’nt say, Sgt.

Sgt. You come at an auspicious time, Draper. Welcome to the team.

P.C. Thank you Sgt.

Sgt. Oh and send in W.P.C. Collins. (He turns to read the paper.)

(After a pause, she enters.)

W.P.C. Hail Fuhrer.

Sgt. Hail Fuhrer. Looks as if we’re in for a long night. I’ve just had a call to say that huge crowd in the Old Market Square is still standing there waiting.

W.P.C. It's uncanny. I'd say there were about thousand people there at six o' clock when I got off the bus. Some of them were singing hymns, some were chanting, and some were speaking in tongues. One lot by the lions was shouting "Shoot the imposter!" but a bigger group by the fountains were all on knees crying to their God to send them a miracle.

Sgt There've being people joining them all evening - about another thousand according to our men in the square – but they've all gone silent now. They say they'll stay all night and wait for the dawn. (He shrugs) They'll have a weary time, standing like statues or lying down and trying to sleep in Slab Square.

W.P.C. Will we try to disperse them?

Sgt That's up to the Super - but I don't think so. More trouble than it's worth. They'll go home once he's been shot. Bring me another black coffee.

W.P.C. (As she obeys.) Have you spoken to him, sarge?

Sgt Not my business to fraternize with condemned men.

W.P.C. (Puzzled) He's so quiet and gentle, but he's got authority in his eyes.

Sgt. (Angered) Authority, that lunatic. Are you a police officer or are'nt you? We are the authority! He's our prisoner and we hold him until dawn when the military will take him. That all we know and all we need to know. Understand?

W.P.C. Yes, Sarge.

Sgt. Once we hand him over, he's not our responsibility.

W.P.C. That's true, but in a sense, it seems to me that what's happening is everyone's responsibility. Of course, we must do our duty, I know that but is'nt there something else?

Sgt. Yes, there's something else all right. There's the Fuhrer – Hanz Vogel. Your duty is to obey me, mine is to obey to Super. He has to answer to the Town Commandant and so on up the line. It's our superiors who do they thinking.

W.P.C. (Sitting down) Yes, sarge.

Sgt. You English are always pondering. That's you're weakness. You burden yourselves with worries that do not concern you. You make life so complicated for yourselves. Look at those stupid crowds out there. (He points to the video)

It's really none of their business and they do not know what they believe. First they call him a saviour – then a prophet sent by God, some of them expect him to be a freedom fighter and lead a magic army against the guardians, some of them say “No, he will never do that. He is a man of peace.” And all the time he talks to them in riddles, telling stories. If he is a saviour, why didn't he save them? If he is an insurgent, why didn't he insurg? No he is a dreamer, that is all, and they fall for him, those stupid people. They make a god of him, talk of the second coming, and still they do nothing but argue and question and ponder! No wonder they lost the war They have no discipline!

W.P.C. Pardon me, but I think you're generalizing, sarge. All those people out there are not the same. The man has his followers and his enemies in that crowd.

Sgt. They all look the same to me. Rent-a-crowd – one minute they love him, the next they hate him. We've photographed them and I have studied their faces on this video screen. Besides we have records on many of them. It's true that some that stay firmly in one camp, but I tell you that the majority out there tonight are chaff on a summer breeze. They have no discipline. I despise such people!

W.P.C. And do you despise him?

Sgt. Do not ask me such questions? He is a prisoner. I do not look at him.

W.P.C. That's strange – after you've spent time studying all those photographs.

(The telephone rings and the sergeant answers it.)

Sgt Holding bay one, yes constable. Three people you say - one man and two women. What sort of man? Oh, well. I'll see him then. Keep the women waiting. (To W.P.C.) Go to the reception area and bring in Councillor Arbuthnott.

(The W.P.C. goes and the Sergeant resumes his writing. Knock.
W.P.C. shows Councillor Arbuthnot in and retires.)

(Cllr Giving a miniscule gesture of the hand, so as not to give offence.)

Sgt. I'm told you want to see me, Councillor.

Cllr It is a family request I bring, but I have the necessary authorization.

(He hands papers over to the Sgt.)

Sgt. (Surprised) So – you have permission to take the body away after execution for a family burial. This is most irregular. How did you get this approval?

Cllr. It came through the Lord Mayor. I passed the family request to him and he referred it to the Town Commandant. He sent for me, and gave me this certificate telling me to bring it straight to you.

Sgt. Are you a member of the condemned man’s family?

Cllr I’m his uncle - his mother’s brother.

Sgt (Cynical laugh) So you are Joseph of Aramathea, in the guise of a Nottingham City Councillor and with the special privileges that go with your rank.

Cllr It seems like it.

Sgt. Well, it’s very unusual. I will have to ring the Commandant’s office. It could spell trouble by creating a precedent. (He telephones.) Hail Fuhrer. This is Sgt Heinkl here at No 1 Police Holding Station. I have a Cllr Aspinall here with a special request for the body of the criminal Joshua Barratt who is to be shot at 0700 hours tomorrow morning. Cllr Aspinall has a certificate with your office stamp on it issued today. (Pause) It is in order then. Very well, that’s all I want to know. (To Cllr) It seems the have the ear of the Commandant. Very well, I will inform the Captain of the firing squad.

Cllr. Thank you. Will it be in order for me to collect the body from the yard outside?

Sgt I take it you have a suitable conveyance?

Cllr Yes.

Sgt It must be a closed vehicle with no windows. A van would be best. Where are you taking the body?

Cllr For a private funeral, and the resting place will be in a family grave.

Sgt There will no public ceremony and no statement to the press. That is most important.

Cllr That’s our intention.

Sgt And if there is any breach of those intentions, Councillor, you will be charged with a public order offence. You understand.

Cllr Perfectly.

Sgt. Very well, tell your driver to come through the archway from High Pavement at 7.30. precisely.

Cllr I am the driver. I'll do that.

Sgt. And rest assured, we will give you the right body. They shoot three men tomorrow. There are also two members of the so called "liberation army."

Cllr. Thank you. There is another thing. I don't know if the guard outside told you that I have two ladies with me, my sister and the prisoner's fiancé. They're requesting to be able to see Joshua. I believe that's permissible on the last night.

Sgt. Permissible, as long as the Duty Officer agrees.

Cllr And do you agree, Sergeant?

Sgt. Does the Commandant know of this further request?

Cllr. He does.

Sgt. And what did he say about it?

Cllr. He said it would be in order, subject to your approval.

Sgt. Very well, but they must see him singly for no more than five minutes each.

Cllr Oh, I didn't know there would be a restriction of that kind.

Sgt. Well, now you do. Who wishes to see him first?

Cllr. His mother, I suppose.

Sgt. What is her name? It must be entered in the book.

Cllr. Miriam Barratt.

(The Sergeant rings a bell and writes the name in a book. The W.P.C. returns.)

Sgt. Please show Councillor Aspinall into the waiting area and escort the older visitor to the prisoner's cell. They have five minutes. Stay and time them. Oh, and send the younger visitor here to see me.

W.P.C. Yes, sergeant.

(They depart. The sergeant continues writing in the book. The W.P.C. returns with the fiance. She is plainly very distressed but facing it bravely.)

Sgt. Name, please?

Helen. Helen Waters.

Sgt. And you wish to see the prisoner?

Helen I do.

Sgt. You are his fiancé, I believe.

Helen Yes.

Sgt. Then I am sorry to blight your hopes. We have our orders. But you can see him for five minutes. I will enter your name. (He does so.)
How long have you known the prisoner?

Helen Two years.

Sgt. He is a remarkable man, there's no denying. Are you one of his "disciples"?

Helen You could say that.

Sgt. I have read in the papers that he rescued you from a life of depravity. You were a prostitute, I believe.

Helen No, that's not true. The papers always exaggerate these things. But to be honest I did lead a loose life before I met Josh. When I met him everything changed.

Sgt. Because he demanded it?

Helen Because I wanted to change myself. Why are you asking me these personal questions?

Sgt. Put it down to curiosity.

Helen I could say that it's none of your business.

Sgt. You could – but you don't. Do you believe Joshua Barratt is the re-incarnation of Jesus Christ?

Helen I really don't know. It's all so strange. Everything he does is guided through deep prayer – so that we never know what each day holds for us. He is simply trying to live the way our Master taught us.

Sgt. It must be very hard to be engaged to such a man.

Helen Hard – but wonderful.

Sgt. It gives you a buzz – all this publicity and adulation.

Helen No, that's terrifying, but there's no escape. Do you believe in God, sergeant?

Sgt. Not any longer. I did when I was a child. I used to go to the Lutheran Church with my mother. She was a pious woman, but after I joined the Vogel Youth I put away childish things. Then I entered the army and the police. I have seen so much of the underbelly of life that I came to understand that if there is a God of Love, he must be very inefficient. And as He is supposed to be all powerful, I conclude that he is a figment of imagination.

Helen And are you happy?

Sgt. Now whose asking the personal questions? I get satisfaction from doing my duty.

Helen Like tonight? It seems to me that the police force is just a treadmill in the great machine of state which turns round and round, without vision, without hope.

Sgt. (Reflectively) We had great hope when we were boys in the Vogel Youth. We shared a dream that the Fatherland would stretch from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean.

Helen And has your dream been realised?

Sgt. Dreams seldom are. But what about you – with your blind Christian faith?

Helen We're not blind. We're inspired.

Sgt And see where it has led you?

Helen God's miracles in this world are usually performed through believers. We don't know our destiny. We simply know that God works through his servants. God has no hands, and we are starting to build His Kingdom.

(The Sgt. stares at her as if strangely unnerved by her calm assurance.)

Sgt. (Abruptly) Miriam Barratt's time is up. (He rings the bell)

(Enter P.C. Draper.)

The prisoner's interview time is over-running. Take this young woman to Barratt's cell. She has five minutes with him. And tell Councillor Aspinall to come and see me.

P.C. Yes, Sgt.

(They go out. The Sergeant rises and paces around the room in an agitated fashion. Councillor Aspinall returns.)

Sgt. (Composing himself, with some difficulty.) Well, Councillor, I suppose you will wait for the ladies, so why not have a cup of coffee with me.

(He assents. The sergeant pours out two cups of coffee.)

A bad business this, but to a police officer, it is all in the line of duty. I trust you understand. Tell me, the prisoner, your nephew, how would you describe him? Come, sir, you are a City Councillor – a man of the world Do you believe he is the Son of God?

Cllr I believe we are all children of God, sergeant, even you – if I may say so.

Sgt. Do you now, but there are children and children, surely. This nephew of yours who attracts such crowds of followers - this fiery prophet, who claims to be a healer and some say performs miracles - this man who denounces the leaders of the church as not being true Christians and hiding behind their pompous ceremonies - this man who consorts with criminals and prostitutes – do you think he is the incarnation of Jesus Christ, Councillor?

Cllr He has never made that claim. It's true that the tabloid press have spread stories of this kind – but he has no pretention. He preaches Christ as our model, that we should truly love our neighbours as ourselves.

Sgt. Even the Germans.

Cllr Even the Germans.

Sgt. When did he start this mission of his?

Cllr. Three years ago.

Sgt. Three years you say. (The sergeant looks uneasy.) How did it begin?

Cllr. One Sunday. He was invited to speak in church on behalf of the Youth Fellowship, and he was quite carried away. He asked the congregation a simple question. How do you think we would all behave if Jesus Christ came back today? He did not answer the question directly, but he indicated how difficult it could be for us all. And then, there was a second question – ask yourselves – do you really want him to come back – in your hearts? Then he stepped down from the pulpit, leaving the question hanging in air, and we all left the church quietly pondering.

Sgt. The only church I ever attended was a disciplined one. The young people all knew their places and how to behave. No youth would have dared to behave like that.

Cllr. What a shame. We encourage our young people to think for themselves. It's good to be challenged sometimes.

Sgt. Do your youth have no respect for their elders?

Cllr. Sometimes, but we old folk have to earn our respect, and the young can often open our eyes to things that we don't see.

Sgt. And how did this mission continue?

Cllr. One or two of the young people had been very moved by what he had said and sought him out. They started meeting at each others houses and decided to really try to live the life Christ taught. They had some open air meetings on the Trent Embankment, revivalist in style, but there was a deep message every week. I went to one or two myself, but kept in the background. They were mainly young people there – ones you would never see in church – but the atmosphere was pure and loving.

Sgt. When did he start denouncing the church hierarchy?

Cllr. He did not denounce them, but he told them the truth -that it was a scandal that the church had kept silent about the disappearances. I was a youth at the time, but I knew how my father felt. The choice people had to make was between speaking out and endangering their own families, or keeping quiet and helping in small ways. That's the path the church took, but Joshua said they had been wrong and were still wrong over things today. That's what upset them.

Sgt. Really. Well there is much I'd like to ask you, and the visits are still in progress. Perhaps it would be more comfortable in my office.

(Sgt rings the bell. W.P.C. enters with the mother.)

I am going into my office with Cllr. Arbuthnot. (To W.P.C.) You will take over at the desk. Call me if I am needed. (To Miriam.) Sit down, here, Mrs Barratt. You can wait here for the other woman and then go home with your brother.

(The Sergeant ushers Cllr Arbuthnot out through the inner door. Miriam is in a daze, but she watches them go out apprehensively and then covers her eyes with her hands. The W.P.C. looks at her in a kindly way and then walks over to sit at the desk.)

W.P.C. Would you like a drink of something?

M. No thank you. I'm all right.

W.P.C. I'm sorry, I had to stay with you in the cell. I would have preferred to leave you alone together, but I have my orders.

M. Of course, I understand.

W.P.C. You're very brave. (Pause) Well, I need a drink – even if you don't.

(She pours out a coffee.) Are you sure?

M. Perhaps, I will. (She covers her face again.)

(The W.P.C. takes her a drink and sits beside her.)

W.P.C. Tell me about him - if it helps. Of course, it's none of my business but I went to one of his open meetings on the embankment two years ago. That was before I joined the police. He was very impressive – in fact, I thought quite wonderful, once he got going.

M. (Reflectively) I can't say I ever really understood him, not after the big mission started – he was so involved in it that I didn't see much of him any more – all that travelling about to different towns, Sheffield, Leicester, Birmingham - and such crowds following him – and the reporters. He never liked the press stories – and those newspaper men _ ringing and knocking on my door wanting my story. I kept wondering how it would all end, but I never expected this – not in my worst nightmares. Why are they going to shoot him? - he has'nt committed any crime!

W.P.C. Don't ask me that question, please. I really don't know – I'm not expected to understand these things. I not expected to have an opinion.

M. But you do.

- W.P.C. Oh yes, I do.
- M. It was when he spoke out against the church leaders and said they should have defended the British Jews and the others who were taken away - that's when all the trouble started. I don't know why he raked all that up. It happened 40 years ago - that dreadful night when they were rounded up. My father deplored it, but if he'd spoken out the whole family would have been in peril. My mother pleaded with him to keep quiet for the sake of the children and he did – and the next year they came for the black people and the next year for the Indians. It was dreadful – but all that was in Adolf Hitler's time – I was a child. Why did Joshua have to rake up things that happened before he was born? And everything is so much better now under the new Fuhrer. Things had quietened down now. We were all beginning to relax and accept things. I think that's what Joshua could not bear.
- W.P.C. I can imagine.
- M. He was always compassionate. When he was twelve he made a friend of a Down's Syndrome lad. I was pleased about that. But after his mission started and he began bringing street beggars home for meals – it all became too much for me. I could'nt cope. Many of them were drug takers. He was helping them to a better life – but it was destroying mine and that of the family. More and more came – I told him to stop – he said he could'nt – so he left and moved into a squat and took them with him. He said there should'nt be any empty houses – not as long as there are any homeless people. He thought the whole church would support him – but it did'nt.
- W.P.C. I remember reading about that in the papers. He did get some support though One man offered his home as a refuge and then the idea spread.
- M. But only a minority of the Christians gave their support. Most of them walked away from the challenge. He stood on a soapbox in the Market Square and called the church leaders hypocrites, and then the papers whipped it all up by naming him the Nottingham Messiah!
- W.P.C. That was about the time I joined the police force. The police did'nt really want to be involved you know, but the authorities had to do something. There were all those big meetings and they thought there'd be riots.
- M. That's ridiculous. Joshua was always so gentle. Animals came to him instinctively, even the birds, why he used to feed sparrows from his hand. (She breaks down)
- W.P.C. Look, I'll bring the other woman in to you – his fiancé. (She goes to the door And calls.) Would you come in here, please?

(Helen enters and moves to console Miriam.
They are interrupted by shouting from a crowd outside.)

Voices We want Justice! We want justice! Set Joshua free! (Repeated several times getting louder and more angry.)

(Enter Sgt and Councillor.)

Sgt. (Calling through the door to the Reception area) What's all that noise?

P.C. (Entering, in response) It's the mob outside , Sgt. The inspector's phoned to say that they're all leaving the Market Square and marching up Bridlesmith Gate. There's a group of them gathered outside here and there's more coming Down High Pavement. The guards can't hold them back.

Sgt. They must. Get out the gas canisters, ring the Super and warn the military.
(The Sergeant and the W.P.C. rush out towards Reception. P.C. Draper moves towards the telephone on the desk but then turns to unlocks a cupboard to retrieves a black plastic bag. He pauses in uncertainty.)

Cllr. (To him) What are you waiting for? This is our moment, Will.

P.C. It's no good, Joe. He's refused.

Cllr. He's refused! – But he can't. Everything's set up. I've got the van waiting. You've got his disguise. The sergeant's distracted by the crowd.....

P.C. But he won't come. He says he has his orders. He has to go through with this.

Cllr. (Aghast) Go through with it!

Helen It's true. I was in the cell with him, when Will explained the plan. We told him all the trouble you'd gone to setting this up, and the risk that Will was taking – but he said he was'nt free to choose. He was in God's hands – not ours.

M (Remorsefully) It does'nt surprise me. He was like that from the beginning.

Cllr. I'll go and speak to him myself.

P.C. He won't see you.

(Re-enter Sgt and W.P.C. Everyone freezes. He glances suspiciously at them all, and then fixedly at P.C. Draper.)

Sgt. What's going on here? Draper, do you know these people?

P.C. No, Sgt. I never saw them before today.

Sgt. Are you sure? And how about the prisoner– do you know him?

P.C. No sir, I swear it.

Sgt (To the visitors) Well, they're clearing High Pavement of the rabble,
so you'd better all go out by the side gate. Show them out, Collins.

 (She opens the inner door and ushers out the Councillor, Miriam
and Helen. She follows them out.)

Sgt. What have you got in that bag?

P.C. It's my spare uniform, sir, that's all.

Sgt. (Accusingly) Draper – are you sure you don't know Joshua Barratt?

P.C. I've never seen the man before, honest Sgt!

 (They both realize the historic significance of these words and stare at each other
fearfully.)

Sgt. You're an imposter, aren't you? You're not a police officer – you're one of
them. I thought I'd seen you somewhere – it was on the photographs.
My God – I fell for it. (His anger suddenly turns to terror. Doubts about what is
happening, and his role in it suddenly seize him.) Get out, Draper. The back way
- go and join the rabble.

 (Exit Draper. Sgt paces the room talking to himself.)

 What if the Super finds out?
(Stops in sudden fear.) Oh, my God. Is history repeating itself?

 (He falls to his knees, shaking with fear and begins to babble.)

Sgt. Our Father, which art in Heaven,
Hallowed by Thy Name,
(He stumbles over the next line and then reverts into trembling German)
Dein Reich komme..
Dein Wille... (He can say no more.)

BLACKOUT

(Pause. Sound of marching feet. The Council House clock booms seven times. Three shots are heard.

LIGHTS UP.

The stage is empty. The W.P.C. enters from the inner door. She takes off her Nazi arm-band and places it on the Sgt's desk, take off her hat and uniform and drapes it over a chair and walks out through the reception door.)

CURTAIN