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Science  
of Being Carnal





"To what young lady, Good Heaven! Green-  
daisy!"

Illustration of Miss Harriet

Complete Writings  
of  
Oscar Wilde

Salome  
The Importance of Being Earnest



The Nottingham Society  
New York Philadelphia Chicago

K



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A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY  
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## **PERSONNES**

**HÉRODE ANTIPAS**, Tétrarque de Judée  
**IOKANAAN**, le prophète  
**LE JEUNE SYRIEN**, capitaine de la garde  
**TIGELLIN**, un jeune Romain  
**UN CAPPADOCIEN**  
**UN NUBIEN**  
**PREMIER SOLDAT**  
**SECOND SOLDAT**  
**LE PAGE D'HÉRODIAS**  
**DES JUIFS, DES NAZARÉENS, etc.**  
**UN ESCLAVE**  
**NAAMAN**, le bourreau  
  
**HÉRODIAS**, Femme du Tétrarque  
**SALOMÉ**, fille d'Hérodiad  
**LES ESCLAVES DE SALOMÉ**



## SCÈNE

*[Une grande terrasse dans le palais d'Herode donnant sur la salle de festin. Des soldats sont accoudés sur le balcon. A droite il y a un énorme escalier. A gauche, au fond, une ancienne citerne entourée d'un mur de bronze vert. Clair de lune.]*

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

Comme la princesse Salomé est belle ce soir !

LE PAGE D'HÉRODIAS

Regardez la lune. La lune a l'air très étrange. On dirait une femme qui sort d'un tombeau. Elle ressemble à une femme morte. On dirait qu'elle cherche des morts.

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

Elle a l'air très étrange. Elle ressemble à une petite princesse qui porte un voile jaune, et a des pieds d'argent. Elle ressemble à une princesse qui a des pieds comme des petites colombes blanches . . . On dirait qu'elle danse.

## SALOMÉ

**LE PAGE D'HÉRODIAS**

Elle est comme une femme morte. Elle va très lentement. [*Bruit dans la salle de festin.*]

**PREMIER SOLDAT**

Quel vacarme ! Qui sont ces bêtes fauves qui hurlent ?

**SECOND SOLDAT**

Les Juifs. Ils sont toujours ainsi. C'est sur leur religion qu'ils discutent.

**PREMIER SOLDAT**

Pourquoi discutent-ils sur leur religion ?

**SECOND SOLDAT**

Je ne sais pas. Ils le font toujours . . . Ainsi les Pharisiens affirment qu'il y a des anges, et les Sadducéens disent que les anges n'existent pas.

**PREMIER SOLDAT**

Je trouve que c'est ridicule de discuter sur de telles choses.

**LE JEUNE SYRIEN**

Comme la princesse Salomé est belle ce soir

**LE PAGE D'HÉRODIAS**

Vous la regardez toujours. Vous la regardez

---

## SALOMÉ

trop. Il ne faut pas regarder les gens de cette façon . . . Il peut arriver un malheur.

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

Elle est très belle ce soir.

PREMIER SOLDAT

Le tétrarque a l'air sombre.

SECOND SOLDAT

Oui, il a l'air sombre.

PREMIER SOLDAT

Il regarde quelque chose.

SECOND SOLDAT

Il regarde quelqu'un.

PREMIER SOLDAT

Qui regarde-t-il ?

SECOND SOLDAT

Je ne sais pas.

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

Comme la princesse est pâle ! Jamais je ne l'ai vue si pâle. Elle ressemble au reflet d'une rose blanche dans un miroir d'argent.

LE PAGE D'HÉRODIAS

Il ne faut pas la regarder. Vous la regardez trop !



## SALOMÉ

**PREMIER SOLDAT**

Hérodiad a versé à boire au tétrarque.

**LE CAPPADOCIEN**

C'est la reine Hérodiad, celle-là qui porte la mitre noire semée de perles et qui a les cheveux poudrés de bleu ?

**PREMIER SOLDAT**

Oui, c'est Hérodiad. C'est la femme du tétrarque.

**SECOND SOLDAT**

Le tétrarque aime beaucoup le vin. Il possède des vins de trois espèces. Un qui vient de l'île de Samothrace, qui est pourpre comme le manteau de César.

**LE CAPPADOCIEN**

Je n'ai jamais vu César.

**SECOND SOLDAT**

Un autre qui vient de la ville de Chypre, qui est jaune comme de l'or.

**LE CAPPADOCIEN**

J'aime beaucoup l'or.

**SECOND SOLDAT**

Et le troisième qui est un vin sicilien. Ce vin-là est rouge comme le sang.

## SALOMÉ

### LE NUBIEN

Les dieux de mon pays aiment beaucoup le sang. Deux fois par an nous leur sacrifions des jeunes hommes et des vierges : cinquante jeunes hommes et cent vierges. Mais il semble que nous ne leur donnons jamais assez, car ils sont très durs envers nous.

### LE CAPPADOCIEN

Dans mon pays il n'y a pas de dieux à présent, les Romains les ont chassés. Il y en a qui disent qu'ils se sont réfugiés dans les montagnes, mais je ne le crois pas. Moi, j'ai passé trois nuits sur les montagnes les cherchant partout. Je ne les ai pas trouvés. Enfin, je les ai appelés par leurs noms et ils n'ont pas paru. Je pense qu'ils sont morts.

### PREMIER SOLDAT

Les Juifs adorent un Dieu qu'on ne peut pas voir.

### LE CAPPADOCIEN

Je ne peux pas comprendre cela.

### PREMIER SOLDAT

Enfin, ils ne croient qu'aux choses qu'on ne peut pas voir.

## SALOMÉ

**LE CAPPADOCIEN**

Cela me semble absolument ridicule.

**LA VOIX D'IOKANAAN**

Après moi viendra un autre encore plus puissant que moi. Je ne suis pas digne même de délier la courroie de ses sandales. Quand il viendra la terre déserte se réjouira. Elle fleurira comme le lis. Les yeux des aveugles verront le jour, et les oreilles des sourds seront ouvertes . . . Le nouveau-né mettra sa main sur le nid des dragons, et mènera les lions par leurs crinières.

**SECOND SOLDAT**

Faites-le taire. Il dit toujours des choses absurdes.

**PREMIER SOLDAT**

Mais non ; c'est un saint homme. Il est très doux aussi. Chaque jour je lui donne à manger. Il me remercie toujours.

**LE CAPPADOCIEN**

Qui est-ce ?

**PREMIER SOLDAT**

C'est un prophète.

---

## SALOMÉ

**LE CAPPADOCIEN**

Quel est son nom ?

**PREMIER SOLDAT**

Iokanaan.

**LE CAPPADOCIEN**

D'où vient-il ?

**PREMIER SOLDAT**

Du désert, où il se nourrissait de sauterelles et de miel sauvage. Il était vêtu de poil de chameau, et autour de ses reins il portait une ceinture de cuir. Son aspect était très farouche. Une grande foule le suivait. Il avait même de disciples.

**LE CAPPADOCIEN**

De quoi parle-t-il ?

**PREMIER SOLDAT**

Nous ne savons jamais. Quelquefois il dit des choses épouvantables, mais il est impossible de le comprendre.

**LE CAPPADOCIEN**

Peut-on le voir ?

**PREMIER SOLDAT**

Non. Le tétrarque ne le permet pas.

## SALOME

### LE JEUNE SYRIEN

La princesse a caché son visage derrière son éventail ! Ses petites mains blanches s'agitent comme des colombes qui s'envolent vers leurs colombiers. Elles ressemblent à des papillons blancs. Elles sont tout à fait comme des papillons blancs.

### LE PAGE D'HÉRODIAS

Mais qu'est-ce que cela vous fait ? Pourquoi la regarder ? Il ne faut pas la regarder . . . Il peut arriver un malheur.

### LE CAPPADOCIEN [*montrant la citerne*]

Quelle étrange prison !

### SECOND SOLDAT

C'est une ancienne citerne.

### LE CAPPADOCIEN

Une ancienne citerne ! cela doit être très malsain.

### SECOND SOLDAT

Mais non. Par exemple, le frère du tétrarque, son frère aîné, le premier mari de la reine Hérodias, a été enfermé là-dedans pendant douze années. Il n'en est pas mort. A la fin il a fallu l'étrangler.

---

## SALOMÉ

LE CAPPADOCIEN

L'étrangler ? Qui a osé faire cela ?

SECOND SOLDAT

[*montrant le bourreau, un grand nègre*]

Celui-là, Naaman.

LE CAPPADOCIEN

Il n'a pas eu peur ?

SECOND SOLDAT

Mais non. Le tétrarque lui a envoyé la bague.

LE CAPPADOCIEN

Quelle bague ?

SECOND SOLDAT

La bague de la mort. Ainsi, il n'a pas eu peur.

LE CAPPADOCIEN

Cependant, c'est terrible d'étrangler un roi.

PREMIER SOLDAT

Pourquoi ? Les rois n'ont qu'un cou, comme les autres hommes.

LE CAPPADOCIEN

Il me semble que c'est terrible.

## SALOMÉ

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

Mais la princesse se lève ! Elle quitte la table ! Elle a l'air très ennuyée. Ah ! elle vient par ici. Oui, elle vient vers nous. Comme elle est pâle. Jamais je ne l'ai vue si pâle . . .

LE PAGE D'HÉRODIAS

Ne la regardez pas. Je vous prie de ne pas la regarder.

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

Elle est comme une colombe qui s'est égarée . . . Elle est comme un narcisse agité du vent . . . Elle ressemble à une fleur d'argent.

[*Entre SALOMÉ.*]

SALOMÉ

Je ne resterai pas. Je ne peux pas rester. Pourquoi le tétrarque me regarde-t-il toujours avec ses yeux de taupe sous ses paupières tremblantes ? . . . C'est étrange que le mari de ma mère me regarde comme cela. Je ne sais pas ce que cela veut dire. . . Au fait, si, je le sais.

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

Vous venez de quitter le festin, princesse ?

## SALOMÉ

**SALOMÉ**

Comme l'air est frais ici ! Enfin, ici on respire ! Là-dedans il y a des Juifs de Jérusalem qui se déchirent à cause de leurs ridicules cérémonies, et des barbares qui boivent toujours et jettent leur vin sur les dalles, et des Grecs de Smyrne avec leurs yeux peints et leurs joues fardées, et leurs cheveux frisés en spirales, et des Égyptiens, silencieux, subtils, avec leurs ongles de jade et leurs manteaux bruns, et des Romains avec leur brutalité, leur lourdeur, leurs gros mots. Ah ! que je déteste les Romains ! Ce sont des gens communs, et ils se donnent des airs de grands seigneurs.

**LE JEUNE SYRIEN**

Ne voulez-vous pas vous asseoir, princesse ?

**LE PAGE D'HÉRODIAS**

Pourquoi lui parler ? Pourquoi la regarder ?  
... Oh ! il va arriver un malheur.

**SALOMÉ**

Que c'est bon de voir la lune ! Elle ressemble à une petite pièce de monnaie. On dirait une toute petite fleur d'argent. Elle est froide et chaste, la lune . . . Je suis sûre qu'elle est



## SALOMÉ

vierge. Elle a la beauté d'une vierge . . .  
Oui, elle est vierge. Elle ne s'est jamais  
souillée. Elle ne s'est jamais donnée aux  
hommes, comme les autres Déesses.

LA VOIX D'IOKANAAN

Il est venu, le Seigneur ! Il est venu, le fils  
de l'Homme. Les centaures se sont cachés  
dans les rivières, et les sirènes ont quitté les  
rivières et couchent sous les feuilles dans les  
forêts.

SALOMÉ

Qui a crié cela ?

SECOND SOLDAT

C'est le prophète, princesse.

SALOMÉ

Ah ! le prophète. Celui dont le tétrarque a  
peur ?

SECOND SOLDAT

Nous ne savons rien de cela, princesse.  
C'est le prophète Iokanaan.

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

Voulez-vous que je commande votre litière,  
princesse ? Il fait très beau dans le jardin.

---

## SALOMÉ

**SALOMÉ**

Il dit des choses monstrueuses, à propos de ma mère, n'est-ce pas ?

**SECOND SOLDAT**

Nous ne comprenons jamais ce qu'il dit, princesse.

**SALOMÉ**

Oui, il dit des choses monstrueuses d'elle.

**UN ESCLAVE**

Princesse, le tétrarque vous prie de retourner au festin.

**SALOMÉ**

Je n'y retournerai pas.

**LE JEUNE SYRIEN**

Pardon, princesse, mais si vous n'y retournez pas il pourrait arriver un malheur.

**SALOMÉ**

Est-ce un vieillard, le prophète ?

**LE JEUNE SYRIEN**

Princesse, il vaudrait mieux retourner. Permettez-moi de vous reconduire.

**SALOMÉ**

Le prophète . . . est-ce un vieillard ?

## SALOMÉ

**PREMIER SOLDAT**

Non, princesse, c'est un tout jeune homme.

**SECOND SOLDAT**

On ne le sait pas. Il y en a qui disent que c'est Élie ?

**SALOMÉ**

Qui est Élie ?

**SECOND SOLDAT**

Un très ancien prophète de ce pays, princesse.

**UN ESCLAVE**

Quelle réponse dois-je donner au tétrarque de la part de la princesse ?

**LA VOIX D'IOKANAAN**

Ne te réjouis point, terre de Palestine, parce que la verge de celui qui te frappait a été brisée. Car de la race du serpent il sortira un basilic, et ce qui en naîtra dévorera les oiseaux.

**SALOMÉ**

Quelle étrange voix ! Je voudrais bien lui parler.

**PREMIER SOLDAT**

J'ai peur que ce soit impossible, princesse.

## SALOMÉ

Le tétrarque ne veut pas qu'on lui parle. Il a même défendu au grand prêtre de lui parler.

SALOMÉ

Je veux lui parler.

PREMIER SOLDAT

C'est impossible, princesse.

SALOMÉ

Je le veux.

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

En effet, princesse, il vaudrait mieux retourner au festin.

SALOMÉ

Faites sortir le prophète.

PREMIER SOLDAT

Nous n'osons pas, princesse.

SALOMÉ [*s'approchant de la citerne et y regardant*]

Comme il fait noir là-dedans ! Cela doit être terrible d'être dans un trou si noir ! Cela ressemble à une tombe . . . [*aux soldats*] Vous ne m'avez pas entendue ? Faites-le sortir. Je veux le voir.

## SALOMÉ

SECOND SOLDAT

Je vous prie, princesse, de ne pas nous demander cela.

SALOMÉ

Vous me faites attendre.

PREMIER SOLDAT

Princesse, nos vies vous appartiennent, mais nous ne pouvons pas faire ce que vous nous demandez . . . Enfin, ce n'est pas à nous qu'il faut vous adresser.

SALOMÉ [*regardant le jeune Syrien*]

Ah !

LE PAGE D'HÉRODIAS

Oh ! qu'est-ce qu'il va arriver ? Je suis sûr qu'il va arriver un malheur.

SALOMÉ [*s'approchant du jeune Syrien*]

Vous ferez cela pour moi, n'est-ce pas, Narraboth ? Vous ferez cela pour moi ? J'ai toujours été douce pour vous. N'est-ce pas que vous ferez cela pour moi ? Je veux seulement le regarder, cet étrange prophète. On a tant parlé de lui. J'ai si souvent entendu le tétrarque parler de lui. Je pense qu'il a peur de lui, le tétrarque. Je suis sûre qu'il

## SALOMÉ

a peur de lui . . . Est-ce que vous aussi, Narraboth, est-ce que vous aussi vous en avez peur ?

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

Je n'ai pas peur de lui, princesse. Je n'ai peur de personne. Mais le tétrarque a formellement défendu qu'on lève le couvercle de ce puits.

SALOMÉ

Vous ferez cela pour moi, Narraboth, et demain quand je passerai dans ma litière sous la porte des vendeurs d'idoles, je laisserai tomber une petite fleur pour vous, une petite fleur verte.

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

Princesse, je ne peux pas, je ne peux pas.

SALOMÉ [*souriant*]

Vous ferez cela pour moi, Narraboth. Vous savez bien que vous ferez cela pour moi. Et demain quand je passerai dans ma litière sur le pont des acheteurs d'idoles je vous regarderai à travers les voiles de mousseline, je vous regarderai, Narraboth, je vous sourirai, peut-être. Regardez-moi, Narraboth. Regardez-

## SALOMÉ

moi. Ah! vous savez bien que vous allez faire ce que je vous demande. Vous le savez bien, n'est-ce pas? . . . Moi, je sais bien.

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

*[faisant un signe au troisième soldat]*

Faites sortir le prophète . . . La princesse Salomé veut le voir.

SALOMÉ

Ah!

LE PAGE D'HÉRODIAS

Oh! comme la lune a l'air étrange! On dirait la main d'une morte qui cherche à se couvrir avec un linceul.

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

Elle a l'air très étrange. On dirait une petite princesse qui a des yeux d'ambre. A travers les nuages de mousseline elle sourit comme une petite princesse.

*[Le prophète sort de la citerne. Salomé le regarde et recule.]*

IOKANAAN

Où est celui dont la coupe d'abominations est déjà pleine? Où est celui qui en robe d'argent mourra un jour devant tout le

## SALOMÉ

peuple ? Dites-lui de venir afin qu'il puisse entendre la voix de celui qui a crié dans les déserts et dans les palais des rois.

SALOMÉ

De qui parle-t-il ?

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

On ne sait jamais, princesse.

IOKANAAN

Où est celle qui ayant vu des hommes peints sur la muraille, des images de Chaldéens tracées avec des couleurs, s'est laissée emporter à la concupiscence de ses yeux, et a envoyé des ambassadeurs en Chaldée ?

SALOMÉ

C'est de ma mère qu'il parle.

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

Mais non, princesse.

SALOMÉ

Si, c'est de ma mère.

IOKANAAN

Où est celle qui s'est abandonnée aux capitaines des Assyriens, qui ont des baudriers sur les reins, et sur la tête des tiaras de différentes couleurs ? Où est celle qui s'est abandonnée



## SALOMÉ

aux jeunes hommes d'Égypte qui sont vêtus de lin et d'hyacinthe, et portent des boucliers d'or et des casques d'argent, et qui ont de grands corps? Dites-lui de se lever de la couche de son impudicité, de sa couche incestueuse, afin qu'elle puisse entendre les paroles de celui qui prépare la voie du Seigneur; afin qu'elle se repente de ses péchés. Quoiqu'elle ne se repentira jamais, mais restera dans ses abominations, dites-lui de venir, car le Seigneur a son fléau dans la main.

SALOMÉ

Mais il est terrible, il est terrible.

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

Ne restez pas ici, princesse, je vous en prie.

SALOMÉ

Ce sont les yeux surtout qui sont terribles. On dirait des trous noirs laissés par des flambeaux sur une tapisserie de Tyr. On dirait des cavernes noires où demeurent des dragons, des cavernes noires d'Égypte où les dragons trouvent leur asile. On dirait des lacs noirs troublés par des lunes fantastiques. . . Pensez-vous qu'il parlera encore?

## SALOME

**LE JEUNE SYRIEN**

Ne restez pas ici, princesse ! Je vous prie de ne pas rester ici.

**SALOMÉ**

Comme il est maigre aussi ! il ressemble à une mince image d'ivoire. On dirait une image d'argent. Je suis sûre qu'il est chaste, autant que la lune. Il ressemble à un rayon d'argent. Sa chair doit être très froide, comme de l'ivoire . . . Je veux le regarder de près.

**LE JEUNE SYRIEN**

Non, non, princesse !

**SALOMÉ**

Il faut que je le regarde de près.

**LE JEUNE SYRIEN**

Princesse ! Princesse !

**IOKANAAN**

Qui est cette femme qui me regarde ? Je ne veux pas qu'elle me regarde. Pourquoi me regarde-t-elle avec ses yeux d'or sous ses paupières dorées ? Je ne sais pas qui c'est. Je ne veux pas le savoir. Dites-lui de s'en aller. Ce n'est pas à elle que je veux parler.

## SALOMÉ

**SALOMÉ**

Je suis Salomé, fille d'Hérodiad, princesse de Judée.

**IOKANAAN**

Arrière ! Fille de Babylone ! N'approchez pas de l'élu du Seigneur. Ta mère a rempli la terre du vin de ses iniquités, et le cri de ses péchés est arrivé aux oreilles de Dieu.

**SALOMÉ**

Parle encore, Iokanaan. Ta voix m'enivre.

**LE JEUNE SYRIEN**

Princesse ! Princesse ! Princesse !

**SALOMÉ**

Mais parle encore. Parle encore, Iokanaan, et dis-moi ce qu'il faut que je fasse.

**IOKANAAN**

Ne m'approchez pas, fille de Sodome, mais couvrez votre visage avec un voile, et mettez des cendres sur votre tête, et allez dans le désert chercher le fils de l'Homme.

**SALOMÉ**

Qui est-ce, le fils de l'Homme ? Est-il aussi beau que toi, Iokanaan ?

## SALOMÉ

**IOKANAAN**

Arrière ! Arrière ! J'entends dans le palais  
le battement des ailes de l'ange de la mort.

**LE JEUNE SYRIEN**

Princesse, je vous supplie de rentrer !

**IOKANAAN**

Angé du Seigneur Dieu, que fais-tu ici avec  
ton glaive ? Qui cherches-tu dans cet im-  
monde palais ? . . . Le jour de celui qui mourra  
en robe d'argent n'est pas venu.

**SALOMÉ**

Iokanaan !

**IOKANAAN**

Qui parle ?

**SALOMÉ**

Iokanaan ! Je suis amoureuse de ton corps.  
Ton corps est blanc comme le lis d'un pré que  
le faucheur n'a jamais fauché. Ton corps est  
blanc comme les neiges qui couchent sur les  
montagnes, comme les neiges qui couchent  
sur les montagnes de Judée, et descendent  
dans les vallées. Les roses du jardin de la  
reine d'Arabie ne sont pas aussi blanches que

## SALOMÉ

ton corps. Ni les roses du jardin de la reine d'Arabie, ni les pieds de l'aurore qui trépignent sur les feuilles, ni le sein de la lune quand elle couche sur le sein de la mer . . . Il n'y a rien au monde d'aussi blanc que ton corps. — Laisse-moi toucher ton corps !

**IOKANAAN**

Arrière, fille de Babylone ! C'est par la femme que le mal est entré dans le monde. Ne me parlez pas. Je ne veux pas t'écouter. Je n'écoute que les paroles du Seigneur Dieu.

**SALOMÉ**

Ton corps est hideux. Il est comme le corps d'un lépreux. Il est comme un mur de plâtre où les vipères sont passées, comme un mur de plâtre où les scorpions ont fait leur nid. Il est comme un sépulcre blanchi, et qui est plein de choses dégoûtantes. Il est horrible, il est horrible ton corps ! . . . C'est de tes cheveux que je suis amoureuse, Iokanaan. Tes cheveux ressemblent à des grappes de raisins, à des grappes de raisins noirs qui pendent des vignes d'Edom dans le pays des Edomites. Tes cheveux sont comme les cèdres du Liban, comme les grands

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## SALOMÉ

**cèdres du Liban qui donnent de l'ombre aux lions et aux voleurs qui veulent se cacher pendant la journée. Les longues nuits noires, les nuits où la lune ne se montre pas, où les étoiles ont peur, ne sont pas aussi noires. Le silence qui demeure dans les forêts n'est pas aussi noir. Il n'y a rien au monde d'aussi noir que tes cheveux . . . Laisse-moi toucher tes cheveux.**

**IOKANAAN**

**Arrière, fille de Sodome ! Ne me touchez pas. Il ne faut pas profaner le temple du Seigneur Dieu.**

**SALOMÉ**

**Tes cheveux sont horribles. Ils sont couverts de boue et de poussière. On dirait une couronne d'épines qu'on a placée sur ton front. On dirait un nœud de serpents noirs qui se tortillent autour de ton cou. Je n'aime pas tes cheveux . . . C'est de ta bouche que je suis amoureuse, Iokanaan. Ta bouche est comme une bande d'écarlate sur une tour d'ivoire. Elle est comme une pomme de grenade coupée par un couteau d'ivoire. Les fleurs**

## SALOMÉ

de grenade qui fleurissent dans les jardins de Tyr et sont plus rouges que les roses, ne sont pas aussi rouges. Les cris rouges des trompettes qui annoncent l'arrivée des rois, et font peur à l'ennemi ne sont pas aussi rouges. Ta bouche est plus rouge que les pieds de ceux qui foulent le vin dans les pressoirs. Elle est plus rouge que les pieds des colombes qui demeurent dans les temples et sont nourries par les prêtres. Elle est plus rouge que les pieds de celui qui revient d'une forêt où il a tué un lion et vu des tigres dorés. Ta bouche est comme une branche de corail que des pêcheurs ont trouvée dans le crépuscule de la mer et qu'ils réservent pour les rois . . . ! Elle est comme le vermillon que les Moabites trouvent dans les mines de Moab et que les rois leur prennent. Elle est comme l'arc du roi des Perses qui est peint avec du vermillon et qui a des cornes de corail. Il n'y a rien au monde d'aussi rouge que ta bouche . . . laisse-moi baiser ta bouche.

IOKANAAN

Jamais ! fille de Babylone ! Fille de Sodome !  
jamais.

## SALOMÉ

**SALOMÉ**

Je baiserais ta bouche, Iokanaan. Je baiserais ta bouche.

**LE JEUNE SYRIEN**

Princesse, princesse, toi qui es comme un bouquet de myrrhe, toi qui es la colombe des colombes, ne regarde pas cet homme, ne le regarde pas ! Ne lui dis pas de telles choses. Je ne peux pas les souffrir . . . Princesse, princesse, ne dis pas de ces choses.

**SALOMÉ**

Je baiserais ta bouche, Iokanaan.

**LE JEUNE SYRIEN**

Ah !

*[Il se tue et tombe entre Salomé et Iokanaan.]*

**LE PAGE D'HÉRODIAS**

Le jeune Syrien s'est tué ! le jeune capitaine s'est tué ! Il s'est tué, celui qui était mon ami ! Je lui avais donné une petite boîte de parfums, et des boucles d'oreilles faites en argent, et maintenant il s'est tué ! Ah ! n'a-t-il pas prédit qu'un malheur allait arriver ? . . . Je l'ai prédit moi-même et il est arrivé. Je savais bien que la lune cherchait un mort, mais je ne



## SALOMÉ

savais pas que c'était lui qu'elle cherchait.  
Ah ! pourquoi ne l'ai-je pas caché de la lune ?  
Si je l'avais caché dans une caverne elle ne  
l'aurait pas vu.

LE PREMIER SOLDAT

Princesse, le jeune capitaine vient de se  
tuer.

SALOMÉ

Laisse-moi baiser ta bouche, Iokanaan.

IOKANAAN

N'avez-vous pas peur, fille d'Hérodiad ? Ne  
vous ai-je pas dit que j'avais entendu dans le  
palais le battement des ailes de l'ange de la  
mort, et l'ange n'est-il pas venu ?

SALOMÉ

Laisse-moi baiser ta bouche.

IOKANAAN

Fille d'adultère, il n'y a qu'un homme qui  
puisse te sauver. C'est celui dont je t'ai  
parlé. Allez le chercher. Il est dans un  
bateau sur la mer de Galilée, et il parle à ses  
disciples. Agenouillez-vous au bord de la mer,  
et appelez-le par son nom. Quand il viendra  
vers vous, et il vient vers tous ceux qui



THE PEACOCK SKIRT.



## SALOMÉ

l'appellent, prosternez-vous à ses pieds et demandez-lui la rémission de vos péchés.

SALOMÉ

Laisse-moi baiser ta bouche.

IOKANAAN

Soyez maudite, fille d'une mère incestueuse, soyez maudite.

SALOMÉ

Je baiserais ta bouche, Iokanaan.

IOKANAAN

Je ne veux pas te regarder. Je ne te regarderai pas. Tu es maudite, Salomé, tu es maudite.

*[Il descend dans la citerne.]*

SALOMÉ

Je baiserais ta bouche, Iokanaan, je baiserais ta bouche.

LE PREMIER SOLDAT

Il faut faire transporter le cadavre ailleurs. Le tétrarque n'aime pas regarder les cadavres, sauf les cadavres de ceux qu'il a tués lui-même.

LE PAGE D'HÉRODIAS

Il était mon frère, et plus proche qu'un

## SALOMÉ

frère. Je lui ai donné une petite boîte qui contenait des parfums, et une bague d'agate qu'il portait toujours à la main. Le soir nous nous promenions au bord de la rivière et parmi les amandiers et il me racontait des choses de son pays. Il parlait toujours très bas. Le son de sa voix ressemblait au son de la flûte d'un joueur de flûte. Aussi il aimait beaucoup à se regarder dans la rivière. Je lui ai fait des reproches pour cela.

### SECOND SOLDAT

Vous avez raison ; il faut cacher le cadavre. Il ne faut pas que le tétrarque le voie.

### PREMIER SOLDAT

Le tétrarque ne viendra pas ici. Il ne vient jamais sur la terrasse. Il a trop peur du prophète.

*[Entrée d'Hérode, d'Hérodias et de toute la cour.]*

### HÉRODE

Où est Salomé ? Où est la princesse ? Pourquoi n'est-elle pas retournée au festin comme je le lui avais commandé ? ah ! voilà !

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## SALOMÉ

**HÉRODIAS**

Il ne faut pas la regarder. Vous la regardez toujours !

**HÉRODE**

La lune a l'air très étrange ce soir. N'est-ce pas que la lune a l'air très étrange ? On dirait une femme hystérique, une femme hystérique qui va cherchant des amants partout. Elle est nue aussi. Elle est toute nue. Les nuages cherchent à la vêtir, mais elle ne veut pas. Elle chancelle à travers les nuages comme une femme ivre . . . Je suis sûr qu'elle cherche des amants . . . N'est-ce pas qu'elle chancelle comme une femme ivre ? Elle ressemble à une femme hystérique, n'est-ce pas ?

**HÉRODIAS**

Non. La lune ressemble à la lune, c'est tout. Rentrons . . . Vous n'avez rien à faire ici.

**HÉRODE**

Je resterai ! Manassé, mettez des tapis là. Allumez des flambeaux. Apportez les tables d'ivoire, et les tables de jaspe. L'air ici est délicieux. Je boirai encore du vin avec mes

## SALOMÉ

**hôtes.** Aux ambassadeurs de César il faut faire tout honneur.

**HÉRODIAS**

Ce n'est pas à cause d'eux que vous restez.

**HÉRODE**

Oui, l'air est délicieux. Viens, Hérodiás, nos hôtes nous attendent. Ah! j'ai glissé! j'ai glissé dans le sang! C'est d'un mauvais présage. C'est d'un très mauvais présage. Pourquoi y a-t-il du sang ici? . . . Et ce cadavre? Que fait ici ce cadavre? Pensez-vous que je sois comme le roi d'Égypte qui ne donne jamais un festin sans montrer un cadavre à ses hôtes? Enfin, qui est-ce? Je ne veux pas le regarder.

**PREMIER SOLDAT**

C'est notre capitaine, Seigneur. C'est le jeune Syrien que vous avez fait capitaine il y a trois jours seulement.

**HÉRODE**

Je n'ai donné aucun ordre de le tuer.

**SECOND SOLDAT**

Il s'est tué lui-même, Seigneur.

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## SALOMÉ

**HÉRODE**

Pourquoi ? Je l'ai fait capitaine !

**SECOND SOLDAT**

Nous ne savons pas, Seigneur. Mais il s'est tué lui-même.

**HÉRODE**

Cela me semble étrange. Je pensais qu'il n'y avait que les philosophes romains qui se tuaient. N'est-ce pas, Tigellin, que les philosophes à Rome se tuent ?

**TIGELLIN**

Il y en a qui se tuent, Seigneur. Ce sont les Stoïciens. Ce sont des gens très grossiers. Enfin, ce sont des gens très ridicules. Moi, je les trouve très ridicules.

**HÉRODE**

Moi aussi. C'est ridicule de se tuer.

**TIGELLIN**

On rit beaucoup d'eux à Rome. L'empereur a fait un poème satirique contre eux. On le récite partout.

**HÉRODE**

Ah ! il a fait un poème satirique contre eux ? César est merveilleux. Il peut tout faire . . .



## SALOMÉ

C'est étrange qu'il se soit tué, le jeune Syrien. Je le regrette. Oui, je le regrette beaucoup. Car il était beau. Il était même très beau. Il avait des yeux très langoureux. Je me rappelle que je l'ai vu regardant Salomé d'une façon langoureuse. En effet, j'ai trouvé qu'il l'avait un peu trop regardée.

HÉRODIAS

Il y en a d'autres qui la regardent trop.

HÉRODE

Son père était roi. Je l'ai chassé de son royaume. Et de sa mère qui était reine vous avez fait une esclave, Hérodiad. Ainsi, il était ici comme un hôte. C'était à cause de cela que je l'avais fait capitaine. Je regrette qu'il soit mort . . . Enfin, pourquoi avez-vous laissé le cadavre ici ? Il faut l'emporter ailleurs. Je ne veux pas le voir . . . Emportez-le . . . [*On emporte le cadavre.*] Il fait froid ici. Il y a du vent ici. N'est-ce pas qu'il y a du vent ?

HÉRODIAS

Mais non. Il n'y a pas de vent.

## SALOMÉ

**HÉRODE**

Mais si, il y a du vent . . . Et j'entends dans l'air quelque chose comme un battement d'ailes, comme un battement d'ailes gigantesques. Ne l'entendez-vous pas ?

**HÉRODIAS**

Je n'entends rien.

**HÉRODE**

Je ne l'entends plus moi-même. Mais je l'ai entendu. C'était le vent sans doute. C'est passé. Mais non, je l'entends encore. Ne l'entendez-vous pas ? C'est tout à fait comme un battement d'ailes.

**HÉRODIAS**

Je vous dis qu'il n'y a rien. Vous êtes malade. Rentrons.

**HÉRODE**

Je ne suis pas malade. C'est votre fille qui est malade. Elle a l'air très malade, votre fille. Jamais je ne l'ai vue si pâle.

**HÉRODIAS**

Je vous ai dit de ne pas la regarder.

**HÉRODE**

Versez du vin. [*On apporte du vin.*] Salomé,

## SALOMÉ

venez boire un peu de vin avec moi. J'ai un vin ici qui est exquis. C'est César lui-même qui me l'a envoyé. Trempez là-dedans vos petites lèvres rouges et ensuite je viderai la coupe.

SALOMÉ

Je n'ai pas soif, tétrarque.

HÉRODE

Vous entendez comme elle me répond, votre fille.

HÉRODIAS

Je trouve qu'elle a bien raison. Pourquoi la regardez-vous toujours ?

HÉRODE

Apportez des fruits. [*On apporte des fruits.*] Salomé, venez manger du fruit avec moi. J'aime beaucoup voir dans un fruit la morsure de tes petites dents. Mordez un tout petit morceau de ce fruit, et ensuite je mangerai ce qui reste.

SALOMÉ

Je n'ai pas faim, tétrarque.

HÉRODE [*à Hérodias*]

Voilà comme vous l'avez élevée, votre fille.

## SALOMÉ

**HÉRODIAS**

Ma fille et moi, nous descendons d'une race royale. Quant à toi, ton grand-père gardait des chameaux ! Aussi, c'était un voleur !

**HÉRODE**

Tu mens !

**HÉRODIAS**

Tu sais bien que c'est la vérité.

**HÉRODE**

Salomé, viens t'asseoir près de moi. Je te donnerai le trône de ta mère.

**SALOMÉ**

Je ne suis pas fatiguée, tétrarque.

**HÉRODIAS**

Vous voyez bien ce qu'elle pense de vous.

**HÉRODE**

Apportez . . . Qu'est-ce que je veux ? Je ne sais pas. Ah ! Ah ! je m'en souviens . . .

**LA VOIX D'IOKANAAN**

Voici le temps ! Ce que j'ai prédit est arrivé, dit le Seigneur Dieu. Voici le jour dont j'avais parlé.

## SALOMÉ

**HÉRODIAS**

Faites-le taire. Je ne veux pas entendre sa voix. Cet homme vomit toujours des injures contre moi.

**HÉRODE**

Il n'a rien dit contre vous. Aussi, c'est un très grand prophète.

**HÉRODIAS**

Je ne crois pas aux prophètes. Est-ce qu'un homme peut dire ce qui doit arriver? Personne ne le sait. Aussi, il m'insulte toujours. Mais je pense que vous avez peur de lui . . . Enfin, je sais bien que vous avez peur de lui.

**HÉRODE**

Je n'ai pas peur de lui. Je n'ai peur de personne.

**HÉRODIAS**

Si, vous avez peur de lui. Si vous n'aviez pas peur de lui, pourquoi ne pas le livrer aux Juifs qui depuis six mois vous le demandent?

**UN JUIF**

En effet, Seigneur, il serait mieux de nous le livrer.

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## SALOMÉ

**HÉRODE**

Assez sur ce point. Je vous ai déjà donné ma réponse. Je ne veux pas vous le livrer. C'est un homme qui a vu Dieu.

**UN JUIF**

Cela, c'est impossible. Personne n'a vu Dieu depuis le prophète Élie. Lui c'est le dernier qui ait vu Dieu. En ce temps-ci, Dieu ne se montre pas. Il se cache. Et par conséquent il y a de grands malheurs dans le pays.

**UN AUTRE JUIF**

Enfin, on ne sait pas si le prophète Élie a réellement vu Dieu. C'était plutôt l'ombre de Dieu qu'il a vue.

**UN TROISIÈME JUIF**

Dieu ne se cache jamais. Il se montre toujours et dans toute chose. Dieu est dans le mal comme dans le bien.

**UN QUATRIÈME JUIF**

Il ne faut pas dire cela. C'est une idée très dangereuse. C'est une idée qui vient des écoles d'Alexandrie où on enseigne la philosophie grecque. Et les Grecs sont des gentils. Ils ne sont pas même circoncis.

## SALOMÉ

### UN CINQUIÈME JUIF

On ne peut pas savoir comment Dieu agit, ses voies sont très mystérieuses. Peut-être ce que nous appelons le mal est le bien, et ce que nous appelons le bien est le mal. On ne peut rien savoir. Le nécessaire c'est de se soumettre à tout. Dieu est très fort. Il brise au même temps les faibles et les forts. Il n'a aucun souci de personne.

### LE PREMIER JUIF

C'est vrai cela. Dieu est terrible. Il brise les faibles et les forts comme on brise le blé dans un mortier. Mais cet homme n'a jamais vu Dieu. Personne n'a vu Dieu depuis le prophète Élie.

### HÉRODIAS

Faites-les taire. Ils m'ennuient.

### HÉRODE

Mais j'ai entendu dire qu'Iokanaan lui-même est votre prophète Élie.

### LE JUIF

Cela ne se peut pas. Depuis le temps du prophète Élie il y a plus de trois cents ans.

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## SALOMÉ

**HÉRODE**

Il y en a qui disent que c'est le prophète Élie.

**UN NAZARÉEN**

Moi, je suis sûr que c'est le prophète Élie.

**LE JUIF**

Mais non, ce n'est pas le prophète Élie.

**LA VOIX D'IOKANAAN**

Le jour est venu, le jour du Seigneur, et j'entends sur les montagnes les pieds de celui qui sera le Sauveur du monde.

**HÉRODE**

Qu'est-ce que cela veut dire ? Le Sauveur du monde ?

**TIGELLIN**

C'est un titre que prend César.

**HÉRODE**

Mais César ne vient pas en Judée. J'ai reçu hier des lettres de Rome. On ne m'a rien dit de cela. Enfin, vous, Tigellin, qui avez été à Rome pendant l'hiver, vous n'avez rien entendu dire de cela ?

**TIGELLIN**

En effet, Seigneur, je n'en ai pas entendu



## SALOMÉ

parler. J'explique seulement le titre. C'est un des titres de César.

HÉRODE

Il ne peut pas venir, César. Il est goutteux. On dit qu'il a des pieds d'éléphant. Aussi il y a des raisons d'État. Celui qui quitte Rome perd Rome. Il ne viendra pas. Mais, enfin, c'est le maître, César. Il viendra s'il veut. Mais je ne pense pas qu'il vienne.

LE PREMIER NAZARÉEN

Ce n'est pas de César que le prophète a parlé, Seigneur.

HÉRODE

Pas de César ?

LE PREMIER NAZARÉEN

Non, Seigneur.

HÉRODE

De qui donc a-t-il parlé ?

LE PREMIER NAZARÉEN

Du Messie qui est venu.

UN JUIF

Le Messie n'est pas venu.

LE PREMIER NAZARÉEN

Il est venu, et il fait des miracles partout.

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## SALOMÉ

### HÉRODIAS

Oh! oh! les miracles. Je ne crois pas aux miracles. J'en ai vu trop. [*Au page.*] Mon éventail.

### LE PREMIER NAZARÉEN

Cet homme fait de véritables miracles. Ainsi, à l'occasion d'un mariage qui a eu lieu dans une petite ville de Galilée, une ville assez importante, il a changé de l'eau en vin. Des personnes qui étaient là me l'ont dit. Aussi il a guéri deux lépreux qui étaient assis devant la porte de Capharnaüm, seulement en les touchant.

### LE SECOND NAZARÉEN

Non, c'étaient deux aveugles qu'il a guéris à Capharnaüm.

### LE PREMIER NAZARÉEN

Non, c'étaient des lépreux. Mais il a guéri des aveugles aussi, et on l'a vu sur une montagne parlant avec des anges.

### UN SADDUCÉEN

Les anges n'existent pas.

### UN PHARISIEN

Les anges existent, mais je ne crois pas que cet homme leur ait parlé.

## SALOMÉ

**LE PREMIER NAZARÉEN**

Il a été vu par une foule de passants parlant avec des anges.

**UN SADDUCÉEN**

Pas avec des anges.

**HÉRODIAS**

Comme ils m'agacent, ces hommes ! Ils sont bêtes. Ils sont tout à fait bêtes. [*Au page*] Eh ! bien, mon éventail. [*Le page lui donne l'éventail.*] Vous avez l'air de rêver. Il ne faut pas rêver. Les rêveurs sont des malades. [*Elle frappe le page avec son éventail.*]

**LE SECOND NAZARÉEN**

Aussi il y a le miracle de la fille de Jaïre.

**LE PREMIER NAZARÉEN**

Mais oui, c'est très certain cela. On ne peut pas le nier.

**HÉRODIAS**

Ces gens-là sont fous. Ils ont trop regardé la lune. Dites-leur de se taire.

**HÉRODE**

Qu'est-ce que c'est que cela, le miracle de la fille de Jaïre ?

## SALOMÉ

LE PREMIER NAZARÉEN

La fille de Jaïre était morte. Il l'a ressuscitée.

HÉRODE

Il ressuscite les morts ?

LE PREMIER NAZARÉEN

Oui, Seigneur. Il ressuscite les morts.

HÉRODE

Je ne veux pas qu'il fasse cela. Je lui défends de faire cela. Je ne permets pas qu'on ressuscite les morts. Il faut chercher cet homme et lui dire que je ne lui permets pas de ressusciter les morts. Où est-il à présent, cet homme ?

LE SECOND NAZARÉEN

Il est partout, Seigneur, mais est-il très difficile de le trouver.

LE PREMIER NAZARÉEN

On dit qu'il est en Samarie à présent.

UN JUIF

On voit bien que ce n'est le Messie, s'il est en Samarie. Ce n'est pas aux Samaritains que le Messie viendra. Les Samaritains sont

## SALOMÉ

maudits. Ils n'apportent jamais d'offrandes au temple.

### LE SECOND NAZARÉEN

Il a quitté la Samarie il y a quelques jours. Moi, je crois qu'en ce moment-ci il est dans les environs de Jérusalem.

### LE PREMIER NAZARÉEN

Mais non, il n'est pas là. Je viens justement d'arriver de Jérusalem. On n'a pas entendu parler de lui depuis deux mois.

### HÉRODE

Enfin, cela ne fait rien ! Mais il faut le trouver et lui dire de ma part que je ne lui permets pas de ressusciter les morts. Changer de l'eau en vin, guérir les lépreux et les aveugles . . . il peut faire tout cela s'il le veut. Je n'ai rien à dire contre cela. En effet, je trouve que guérir les lépreux est une bonne action. Mais je ne permets pas qu'il ressuscite les morts . . . Ce serait terrible, si les morts reviennent.

### LA VOIX D'IOKANAAN

Ah ! l'impudique ! la prostituée ! Ah ! la fille de Babylone avec ses yeux d'or et ses

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## SALOMÉ

paupières dorées ! Voici ce que dit le Seigneur Dieu. Faites venir contre elle une multitude d'hommes. Que le peuple prenne des pierres et la lapide . . .

**HÉRODIAS**

Faites-le taire !

**LA VOIX D'IOKANAAN**

Que les capitaines de guerre la percent de leurs épées, qu'ils l'écrasent sous leurs boucliers.

**HÉRODIAS**

Mais, c'est infâme.

**LA VOIX D'IOKANAAN**

C'est ainsi que j'abolirai les crimes de dessus la terre, et que toutes les femmes apprendront à ne pas imiter les abominations de celle-là.

**HÉRODIAS**

Vous entendez ce qu'il dit contre moi ? Vous le laissez insulter votre épouse ?

**HÉRODE**

Mais il n'a pas dit votre nom.

**HÉRODIAS**

Qu'est-ce que cela fait ? Vous savez bien

## SALOMÉ

que c'est moi qu'il cherche à insulter. Et je suis votre épouse, n'est-ce pas ?

HÉRODE

Oui, chère et digne Hérodiad, vous êtes mon épouse, et vous avez commencé par être l'épouse de mon frère.

HÉRODIAS

C'est vous qui m'avez arrachée de ses bras.

HÉRODE

En effet, j'étais le plus fort . . . mais ne parlons pas de cela. Je ne veux pas parler de cela. C'est à cause de cela que le prophète a dit des mots d'épouvante. Peut-être à cause de cela va-t-il arriver un malheur. N'en parlons pas . . . Noble Hérodiad, nous oublions nos convives. Verse-moi à boire, ma bien-aimée. Remplissez de vin les grandes coupes d'argent et les grandes coupes de verre. Je vais boire à la santé de César. Il y a des Romains ici, il faut boire à la santé de César.

TOUS

César ! César !

HÉRODE

Vous ne remarquez pas comme votre fille est pâle.

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## SALOMÉ

**HÉRODIAS**

Qu'est-ce que cela vous fait qu'elle soit pâle ou non ?

**HÉRODE**

Jamais je ne l'ai vue si pâle.

**HÉRODIAS**

Il ne faut pas la regarder.

**LA VOIX D'IOKANAAN**

En ce jour-là le soleil deviendra noir comme un sac de poil, et la lune deviendra comme du sang, et les étoiles du ciel tomberont sur la terre comme les figes vertes tombent d'un figuier, et les rois de la terre auront peur.

**HÉRODIAS**

Ah! Ah! Je voudrais bien voir ce jour dont il parle, où la lune deviendra comme du sang et où les étoiles tomberont sur la terre comme des figes vertes. Ce prophète parle comme un homme ivre . . . Mais je ne peux pas souffrir le son de sa voix. Je déteste sa voix. Ordonnez qu'il se taise.

**HÉRODE**

Mais non. Je ne comprends pas ce qu'il a dit. mais cela peut être un présage.



## SALOMÉ

HÉRODIAS

Je ne crois pas aux présages. Il parle comme un homme ivre.

HÉRODE

Peut-être qu'il est ivre du vin de Dieu !

HÉRODIAS

Quel vin est-ce, le vin de Dieu ? De quelles vignes vient-il ? Dans quel pressoir peut-on le trouver ?

HÉRODE [*Il ne quitte plus Salomé du regard.*]

Tigellin, quand tu as été à Rome dernièrement, est-ce que l'empereur t'a parlé au sujet . . . ?

TIGELLIN

A quel sujet, Seigneur ?

HÉRODE

A quel sujet ? Ah ! je vous ai adressé une question, n'est-ce pas ? J'ai oublié ce que je voulais savoir.

HÉRODIAS

Vous regardez encore ma fille. Il ne faut pas la regarder. Je vous ai déjà dit cela

HÉRODE

Vous ne dites que cela.

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## SALOMÉ

**HÉRODIAS**

Je le redis.

**HÉRODE**

Et la restauration du temple dont on a tant parlé ? Est-ce qu'on va faire quelque chose ? On dit, n'est-ce pas, que le voile du sanctuaire a disparu ?

**HÉRODIAS**

C'est toi qui l'a pris. Tu parles à tort et à travers. Je ne veux pas rester ici. Rentrons.

**HÉRODE**

Salomé, dansez pour moi.

**HÉRODIAS**

Je ne veux pas qu'elle danse.

**SALOMÉ**

Je n'ai aucune envie de danser, tétarque.

**HÉRODE**

Salomé, fille d'Hérodias, dansez pour moi.

**HÉRODIAS**

Laissez la tranquille.

**HÉRODE**

Je vous ordonne de danser, Salomé.

**SALOMÉ**

Je ne danserai pas, tétarque.

## SALOMÉ

HÉRODIAS [*riant*]

Voilà comme elle vous obéit !

HÉRODE

Qu'est-ce que cela me fait qu'elle danse ou non ? Cela ne me fait rien. Je suis heureux ce soir. Je suis très heureux. Jamais je n'ai été si heureux.

LE PREMIER SOLDAT

Il a l'air sombre, le tétrarque. N'est-ce pas qu'il a l'air sombre ?

LE SECOND SOLDAT

Il a l'air sombre.

HÉRODE

Pourquoi ne serais-je pas heureux ? César, qui est le maître du monde, qui est le maître de tout, m'aime beaucoup. Il vient de m'envoyer des cadeaux de grande valeur. Aussi il m'a promis de citer à Rome le roi de Cappadoce qui est mon ennemi. Peut-être à Rome il le crucifiera. Il peut faire tout ce qu'il veut, César. Enfin, il est le maître. Ainsi, vous voyez, j'ai le droit d'être heureux. Il n'y a rien au monde qui puisse gâter mon plaisir.

## SALOMÉ

### LA VOIX D'IOKANAAN

Il sera assis sur son trône. Il sera vêtu de pourpre et d'écarlate. Dans sa main il portera un vase d'or plein de ses blasphèmes. Et l'ange du Seigneur Dieu le frappera. Il sera mangé des vers.

### HÉRODIAS

Vous entendez ce qu'il dit de vous. Il dit que vous serez mangé des vers.

### HÉRODE

Ce n'est pas de moi qu'il parle. Il ne dit jamais rien contre moi. C'est du roi de Cappadoce qu'il parle, du roi de Cappadoce qui est mon ennemi. C'est celui-là qui sera mangé des vers. Ce n'est pas moi. Jamais il n'a rien dit contre moi, le prophète, sauf que j'ai eu tort de prendre comme épouse l'épouse de mon frère. Peut-être a-t-il raison. En effet, vous êtes stérile.

### HÉRODIAS

Je suis stérile, moi. Et vous dites cela, vous qui regardez toujours ma fille, vous qui avez voulu la faire danser pour votre plaisir. C'est ridicule de dire cela. Moi j'ai eu un enfant. Vous n'avez jamais eu d'enfant,

## SALOMÉ

même d'une de vos esclaves. C'est vous qui êtes stérile, ce n'est pas moi.

### HÉRODE

Taisez-vous. Je vous dis que vous êtes stérile. Vous ne m'avez pas donné d'enfant, et le prophète dit que notre mariage n'est pas un vrai mariage. Il dit que c'est un mariage incestueux, un mariage qui apportera des malheurs . . . J'ai peur qu'il n'ait raison. Je suis sûr qu'il a raison. Mais ce n'est pas le moment de parler de ces choses. En ce moment-ci je veux être heureux. Au fait je le suis. Je suis très heureux. Il n'y a rien qui me manque.

### HÉRODIAS

Je suis bien contente que vous soyez de si belle humeur, ce soir. Ce n'est pas dans vos habitudes. Mais il est tard. Rentrons. Vous n'oubliez pas qu'au lever du soleil nous allons tous à la chasse. Aux ambassadeurs de César il faut faire tout honneur, n'est-ce pas ?

### LE SECOND SOLDAT

Comme il a l'air sombre, le tétrarque.

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## SALOMÉ

LE PREMIER SOLDAT

Oui, il a l'air sombre.

HÉRODE

Salomé, Salomé, dansez pour moi. Je vous supplie de danser pour moi. Ce soir je suis triste. Oui, je suis très triste ce soir. Quand je suis entré ici, j'ai glissé dans le sang, ce qui est d'un mauvais présage, et j'ai entendu, je suis sûr que j'ai entendu un battement d'ailes dans l'air, un battement d'ailes gigantesques. Je ne sais pas ce que cela veut dire . . . Je suis triste ce soir. Ainsi dansez pour moi. Dansez pour moi, Salomé, je vous supplie. Si vous dansez pour moi vous pourrez me demander tout ce que vous voudrez et je vous le donnerai. Oui, dansez pour moi, Salomé, et je vous donnerai tout ce que vous me demanderez, fût-ce la moitié de mon royaume.

SALOMÉ [*se levant*]

Vous me donnerez tout ce que je demanderai, tétrarque ?

HÉRODIAS

Ne dansez pas, ma fille.

## SALOMÉ

**HÉRODE**

Tout, fût-ce la moitié de mon royaume.

**SALOMÉ**

Vous le jurez, tétrarque ?

**HÉRODE**

Je le jure, Salomé.

**HÉRODIAS**

Ma fille, ne dansez pas.

**SALOMÉ**

Sur quoi jurez-vous, tétrarque ?

**HÉRODE**

Sur ma vie, sur ma couronne, sur mes dieux. Tout ce que vous voudrez je vous le donnerai, fût-ce la moitié de mon royaume, si vous dansez pour moi. Oh ! Salomé, Salomé, dansez pour moi.

**SALOMÉ**

Vous avez juré, tétrarque.

**HÉRODE**

J'ai juré, Salomé.

**SALOMÉ**

Tout ce que je vous demanderai, fût-ce la moitié de votre royaume ?

## SALOMÉ

HÉRODIAS

Ne dansez pas, ma fille.

HÉRODE

Fût-ce la moitié de mon royaume. Comme reine, tu serais très belle, Salomé, s'il te plaisait de demander la moitié de mon royaume. N'est-ce pas qu'elle serait très belle comme reine? . . . Ah! il fait froid ici! il y a un vent très froid, et j'entends . . . pourquoi est-ce que j'entends dans l'air ce battement d'ailes? Oh! on dirait qu'il y a un oiseau, un grand oiseau noir, qui plane sur la terrasse. Pourquoi est-ce que je ne peux pas le voir, cet oiseau? Le battement de ses ailes est terrible. Le vent qui vient de ses ailes est terrible. C'est un vent froid . . . Mais non, il ne fait pas froid du tout. Au contraire, il fait très chaud. Il fait trop chaud. J'étouffe. Versez-moi l'eau sur les mains. Donnez-moi de la neige à manger. Dégrafez mon manteau. Vite, vite, dégrafez mon manteau . . . Non. Laissez-le. C'est ma couronne qui me fait mal, ma couronne de roses. On dirait que ces fleurs sont faites de feu. Elles ont brûlé mon front. [*Il arrache de sa tête la*



## SALOMÉ

*couronne, et la jette sur la table.]* Ah ! enfin, je respire. Comme ils sont rouges ces pétales ! On dirait des taches de sang sur la nappe. Cela ne fait rien. Il ne faut pas trouver des symboles dans chaque chose qu'on voit. Cela rend la vie impossible. Il serait mieux de dire que les taches de sang sont aussi belles que les pétales de roses. Il serait beaucoup mieux de dire cela . . . Mais ne parlons pas de cela. Maintenant je suis heureux. Je suis très heureux. J'ai le droit d'être heureux, n'est-ce pas ? Votre fille va danser pour moi. N'est-ce pas que vous allez danser pour moi, Salomé ? Vous avez promis de danser pour moi.

**HÉRODIAS**

Je ne veux pas qu'elle danse.

**SALOMÉ**

Je danserai pour vous, tétrarque.

**HÉRODE**

Vous entendez ce que dit votre fille. Elle va danser pour moi. Vous avez bien raison, Salomé, de danser pour moi. Et, après que vous aurez dansé n'oubliez pas de me demander tout ce que vous voudrez. Tout ce que vous

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## SALOMÉ

voudrez je vous le donnerai, fût-ce la moitié de mon royaume. J'ai juré, n'est-ce pas ?

SALOMÉ.

Vous avez juré, tétrarque.

HÉRODE.

Et je n'ai jamais manqué à ma parole. Je ne suis pas de ceux qui manquent à leur parole. Je ne sais pas mentir. Je suis l'esclave de ma parole, et ma parole c'est la parole d'un roi. Le roi de Cappadoce ment toujours, mais ce n'est pas un vrai roi. C'est un lâche. Aussi il me doit de l'argent qu'il ne veut pas payer. Il a même insulté mes ambassadeurs. Il a dit des choses très blessantes. Mais César le crucifiera quand il viendra à Rome. Je suis sûr que César le crucifiera. Sinon il mourra mangé des vers. Le prophète l'a prédit. Eh bien ! Salomé, qu'attendez-vous ?

SALOMÉ.

J'attends que mes esclaves m'apportent des parfums et les sept voiles et m'ôtent mes sandales.

*[Les esclaves apportent des parfums et les sept voiles et ôtent les sandales de Salomé.]*

## SALOMÉ

**HÉRODE**

Ah! vous allez danser pieds nus! C'est bien! C'est bien! Vos petits pieds seront comme des colombes blanches. Ils ressembleront à des petites fleurs blanches qui dansent sur un arbre . . . Ah! non. Elle va danser dans le sang! Il y a du sang par terre. Je ne veux pas qu'elle danse dans le sang. Ce serait d'un très mauvais présage.

**HÉRODIAS**

Qu'est-ce que cela vous fait qu'elle danse dans le sang? Vous avez bien marché dedans, vous . . .

**HÉRODE**

Qu'est-ce que cela me fait? Ah! regardez la lune! Elle est devenue rouge. Elle est devenue rouge comme du sang. Ah! le prophète l'a bien prédit. Il a prédit que la lune deviendrait rouge comme du sang. N'est-ce pas qu'il a prédit cela? Vous l'avez tous entendu. La lune est devenue rouge comme du sang. Ne le voyez-vous pas?

**HÉRODIAS**

Je le vois bien, et les étoiles tombent comme des figes vertes, n'est-ce pas? Et le soleil



THE DANCER'S REWARD.



## SALOMÉ

devient noir comme un sac de poil, et les rois de la terre ont peur. Cela au moins on le voit. Pour une fois dans sa vie le prophète a eu raison. Les rois de la terre ont peur. . . . Enfin, rentrons. Vous êtes malade. On va dire à Rome que vous êtes fou. Rentrons, je vous dis.

### LA VOIX D'IOKANAAN

Qui est celui qui vient d'Edom, qui vient de Bosra avec sa robe teinte de pourpre; qui éclate dans la beauté de ses vêtements, et qui marche avec une force toute puissante? Pourquoi vos vêtements sont-ils teints d'écarlate?

### HÉRODIAS.

Rentrons. La voix de cet homme m'exaspère. Je ne veux pas que ma fille danse pendant qu'il crie comme cela. Je ne veux pas qu'elle danse pendant que vous la regardez comme cela. Enfin, je ne veux pas qu'elle danse.

### HÉRODE

Ne te lève pas, mon épouse, ma reine, c'est inutile. Je ne rentrerai pas avant qu'elle ait dansé. Dansez, Salomé, dansez pour moi.

## SALOMÉ

HÉRODIAS

Ne dansez pas, ma fille.

SALOMÉ

Je suis prête, tétrarque.

[*Salomé danse la danse des sept voiles.*]

HÉRODE

Ah ! c'est magnifique, c'est magnifique ! Vous voyez qu'elle a dansé pour moi, votre fille. Approchez, Salomé ! Approchez afin que je puisse vous donner votre salaire. Ah ! je paie bien les danseuses, moi. Toi, je te paierai bien. Je te donnerai tout ce que tu voudras. Que veux-tu, dis ?

SALOMÉ [*s'agenouillant*]

Je veux qu'on m'apporte présentement dans un bassin d'argent . . .

HÉRODE [*riant*]

Dans un bassin d'argent ? mais oui, dans un bassin d'argent, certainement. Elle est charmante, n'est-ce pas ? Qu'est-ce que vous voulez qu'on vous apporte dans un bassin d'argent, ma chère et belle Salomé, vous qui êtes la plus belle de toutes les filles de Judée ? Qu'est-ce que vous voulez qu'on vous apporte

## SALOMÉ

dans un bassin d'argent ? Dites-moi. Quoi que cela puisse être on vous le donnera. Mes trésors vous appartiennent. Qu'est-ce que c'est, Salomé ?

**SALOMÉ** [*se levant*]

La tête d'Iokanaan.

**HÉRODIAS.**

Ah ! c'est bien dit, ma fille.

**HÉRODE**

Non, non.

**HÉRODIAS**

C'est bien dit, ma fille.

**HÉRODE**

Non, non, Salomé. Vous ne me demandez pas cela. N'écoutez pas votre mère. Elle vous donne toujours de mauvais conseils. Il ne faut pas l'écouter.

**SALOMÉ**

Je n'écoute pas ma mère. C'est pour mon propre plaisir que je demande la tête d'Iokanaan dans un bassin d'argent. Vous avez juré, Hérode. N'oubliez pas que vous avez juré.



## SALOMÉ

**HÉRODE**

Je le sais. J'ai juré par mes dieux. Je le sais bien. Mais je vous supplie, Salomé, de me demander autre chose. Demandez-moi la moitié de mon royaume, et je vous la donnerai. Mais ne me demandez pas ce que vous m'avez demandé.

**SALOMÉ**

Je vous demande la tête d'Iokanaan.

**HÉRODE**

Non, non, je ne veux pas.

**SALOMÉ**

Vous avez juré, Hérode.

**HÉRODIAS**

Oui, vous avez juré. Tout le monde vous a entendu. Vous avez juré devant tout le monde.

**HÉRODE**

Taisez-vous. Ce n'est pas à vous que je parle.

**HÉRODIAS**

Ma fille a bien raison de demander la tête de cet homme. Il a vomi des insultes contre moi. Il a dit des choses monstrueuses contre

## SALOME

moi. On voit qu'elle aime beaucoup sa mère  
Ne cédez pas, ma fille. Il a juré, il a juré.

### HÉRODE

Taisez-vous. Ne me parlez pas . . . Voyons, Salomé, il faut être raisonnable, n'est-ce pas ? N'est-ce pas qu'il faut être raisonnable ? Je n'ai jamais été dur envers vous. Je vous ai toujours aimée . . . Peut-être, je vous ai trop aimée. Ainsi, ne me demandez pas cela. C'est horrible, c'est épouvantable de me demander cela. Au fond, je ne crois pas que vous soyez sérieuse. La tête d'un homme décapité, c'est une chose laide, n'est-ce pas ? Ce n'est pas une chose qu'une vierge doive regarder. Quel plaisir cela pourrait-il vous donner ? Aucun. Non, non, vous ne voulez pas cela . . . Écoutez-moi un instant. J'ai une émeraude, une grande émeraude ronde que le favori de César m'a envoyée. Si vous regardiez à travers cette émeraude vous pourriez voir des choses qui se passent à une distance immense. César lui-même en porte une tout à fait pareille quand il va au cirque. Mais la mienne est plus grande. C'est la plus grande émeraude du monde. N'est-ce pas

## SALOMÉ

que vous voulez cela ? Demandez-moi cela et je vous le donnerai.

SALOMÉ

Je demande la tête d'Iokanaan.

HÉRODE

Vous ne m'écoutez pas, vous ne m'écoutez pas. Enfin, laissez-moi parler, Salomé.

SALOMÉ

La tête d'Iokanaan.

HÉRODE

Non, non, vous ne voulez pas cela. Vous me dites cela seulement pour me faire de la peine, parce que je vous ai regardée pendant toute la soirée. Eh ! bien, oui. Je vous ai regardée pendant toute la soirée. Votre beauté m'a troublé. Votre beauté m'a terriblement troublé, et je vous ai trop regardée. Mais je ne le ferai plus. Il ne faut regarder ni les choses ni les personnes. Il ne faut regarder que dans les miroirs. Car les miroirs ne nous montrent que des masques . . . Oh ! oh ! du vin ! j'ai soif . . . Salomé, Salomé, soyons amis. Enfin, voyez . . . Qu'est-ce que je voulais dire ? Qu'est-ce que c'était ? Ah ! je m'en souviens ! . . . Salomé ! Non, venez plus

## SALOMÉ

près de moi. J'ai peur que vous ne m'entendiez pas . . . Salomé, vous connaissez mes paons blancs, mes beaux paons blancs, qui se promènent dans le jardin entre les myrtes et les grands cyprès. Leurs becs sont dorés, et les grains qu'ils mangent sont dorés aussi, et leurs pieds sont teints de pourpre. La pluie vient quand ils crient, et quand ils se pavanent la lune se montre au ciel. Ils vont deux à deux entre les cyprès et les myrtes noirs et chacun a son esclave pour le soigner. Quelquefois ils volent à travers les arbres, et quelquefois ils couchent sur le gazon et autour de l'étang. Il n'y a pas dans le monde d'oiseaux si merveilleux. Il n'y a aucun roi du monde qui possède des oiseaux aussi merveilleux. Je suis sûr que même César ne possède pas d'oiseaux aussi beaux. Eh bien ! je vous donnerai cinquante de mes paons. Ils vous suivront partout, et au milieu d'eux vous serez comme la lune dans un grand nuage blanc . . . Je vous les donnerai tous. Je n'en ai que cent, et il n'y a aucun roi du monde qui possède des paons comme les miens, mais je vous les donnerai tous. Seulement, il faut me délier de ma

## SALOMÉ

parole et ne pas me demander ce que vous m'avez demandé. [*Il vide la coupe de vin.*]

SALOMÉ

Donnez-moi la tête d'Iokanaan.

HÉRODIAS

C'est bien dit, ma fille! Vous, vous êtes ridicule avec vos paons.

HÉRODE

Taisez-vous. Vous criez toujours. Vous criez comme une bête de proie. Il ne faut pas crier comme cela. Votre voix m'ennuie. Taisez-vous, je vous dis . . . Salomé, pensez à ce que vous faites. Cet homme vient peut-être de Dieu. Je suis sûr qu'il vient de Dieu. C'est un saint homme. Le doigt de Dieu l'a touché. Dieu a mis dans sa bouche des mots terribles. Dans le palais, comme dans le désert, Dieu est toujours avec lui . . . Au moins, c'est possible. On ne sait pas, mais il est possible que Dieu soit pour lui et avec lui. Aussi peut-être que s'il mourrait, il m'arriverait un malheur. Enfin, il a dit que le jour où il mourrait il arriverait un malheur à quelqu'un. Ce ne peut être qu'à moi. Souvenez-vous, j'ai glissé dans le sang

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## SALOMÉ

quand je suis entré ici. Aussi j'ai entendu un battement d'ailes dans l'air, un battement d'ailes gigantesques. Ce sont de très mauvais présages. Et il y en avait d'autres. Je suis sûr qu'il y en avait d'autres, quoique je ne les aie pas vus. Eh bien ! Salomé, vous ne voulez pas qu'un malheur m'arrive ? Vous ne voulez pas cela. Enfin, écoutez-moi.

**SALOMÉ**

Donnez-moi la tête d'Iokanaan.

**HÉRODE**

Vous voyez, vous ne m'écoutez pas. Mais soyez calme. Moi, je suis très calme. Je suis tout à fait calme. Écoutez. J'ai des bijoux cachés ici que même votre mère n'a jamais vus, des bijoux tout à fait extraordinaires. J'ai un collier de perles à quatre rangs. On dirait des lunes enchaînées de rayons d'argent. On dirait cinquante lunes captives dans un filet d'or. Une reine l'a porté sur l'ivoire de ses seins. Toi, quand tu le porteras, tu seras aussi belle qu'une reine. J'ai des améthystes de deux espèces. Une qui est noire comme le vin. L'autre qui est rouge comme du vin qu'on a coloré avec de l'eau. J'ai des topazes

## SALOMÉ

jaunes comme les yeux des tigres, et des topazes roses comme les yeux des pigeons, et des topazes vertes comme les yeux des chats. J'ai des opales qui brûlent toujours avec une flamme qui est très froide, des opales qui attristent les esprits et ont peur des ténèbres. J'ai des onyx semblables aux prunelles d'une morte. J'ai des sélénites qui changent quand la lune change et deviennent pâles quand elles voient le soleil. J'ai des saphirs grands comme des œufs et bleus comme des fleurs bleues. La mer erre dedans, et la lune ne vient jamais troubler le bleu de ses flots. J'ai des chrysolithes et des béryls, j'ai des chrysoprases et des rubis, j'ai des sardonyx et des hyacinthes, et des calcédoines et je vous les donnerai tous, mais tous, et j'ajouterai d'autres choses. Le roi des Indes vient justement de m'envoyer quatre éventails faits de plumes de perroquets, et le roi de Numidie une robe faite de plumes d'autruche. J'ai un cristal qu'il n'est pas permis aux femmes de voir et que même les jeunes hommes ne doivent regarder qu'après avoir été flagellés de verges. Dans un coffret de nacre j'ai trois turquoises merveilleuses. Quand on les porte sur le front

## SALOMÉ

imaginer des choses qui arrivent que  
quand on les voit. C'est de rendre  
rendre les femmes stériles. C'est de rendre  
de grande valeur. Ce sont des bijoux au  
prix. Et ce n'est pas tout. Il y a un objet  
d'ébène j'ai deux cages d'acier qui ressem-  
blent à des pommes d'or. Elles contiennent  
du poison dans ces cages. Elles deviennent  
comme des pommes d'or. Elles sont  
incrusté d'ambre j'ai des bijoux en  
de verre. J'ai des bijoux en verre de  
pays des Sères et des bijoux en verre de  
boucles et de jais qui sont en verre de  
d'Euphrate . . . Fais ce que tu veux.  
Dis-moi et que tu déesses je te donnerai.  
Je te donnerai tout et que tu déesses  
sauf une chose. Je te donnerai tout ce que  
je possède, sauf ma vie. Je te donnerai  
manteau du grand père. Je te donnerai  
voile du sanctuaire.

LES JUIFS

Oh ! Oh !

SALOMÉ

Donne-moi

la  
son  
Les



## SALOMÉ

HÉRODE [*s'affaissant sur son siège*]

Qu'on lui donne ce qu'elle demande ! C'est bien la fille de sa mère ! [*Le premier soldat s'approche. Hérodias prend de la main du tétrarque la bague de la mort et la donne au soldat qui l'apporte immédiatement au bourreau. Le bourreau a l'air effaré.*] Qui a pris ma bague ? Il y avait une bague à ma main droite. Qui a bu mon vin ! Il y avait du vin dans ma coupe. Elle était pleine de vin. Quelqu'un l'a bu ? Oh ! je suis sûr qu'il va arriver un malheur à quelqu'un. [*Le bourreau descend dans la citerne.*] Ah ! pourquoi ai-je donné ma parole ? Les rois ne doivent jamais donner leur parole. S'ils ne la gardent pas, c'est terrible. S'ils la gardent, c'est terrible aussi . . .

HÉRODIAS

Je trouve que ma fille a bien fait.

HÉRODE

Je suis sûr qu'il va arriver un malheur.

SALOMÉ [*Elle se penche sur la citerne et écoute.*]

Il n'y a pas de bruit. Je n'entends rien. Pourquoi ne crie-t-il pas, cet homme ? Ah !

## SALOMÉ

si quelqu'un cherchait à me tuer, je crierais, je me débattrais, je ne voudrais pas souffrir . . . Frappe, frappe, Naaman. Frappe, je te dis . . . Non. Je n'entends rien. Il y a un silence affreux. Ah ! quelque chose est tombé par terre. J'ai entendu quelque chose tomber. C'était l'épée du bourreau. Il a peur, cet esclave ! Il a laissé tomber son épée. Il n'ose pas le tuer. C'est un lâche, cet esclave ! Il faut envoyer des soldats. [*Elle voit le page d'Hérodias et s'adresse à lui.*] Viens ici. Tu as été l'ami de celui qui est mort, n'est-ce pas ? Eh bien, il n'y a pas eu assez de morts. Dites aux soldats qu'ils descendent et m'apportent ce que je demande, ce que le tétrarque m'a promis, ce qui m'appartient. [*Le page recule. Elle s'adresse aux soldats.*] Venez ici, soldats. Descendez dans cette citerne, et apportez-moi la tête de cet homme. [*Les soldats reculent.*] Tétrarque, tétrarque, commandez à vos soldats de m'apporter la tête d'Iokanaan. [*Un grand bras noir, le bras du bourreau, sort de la citerne apportant sur un bouclier d'argent la tête d'Iokanaan. Salomé la saisit. Hérode se cache le visage avec son manteau. Hérodias sourit et s'évente. Les*

## SALOMÉ

*Nazaréens s'agenouillent et commencent à prier.*] Ah! tu n'as pas voulu me laisser baiser ta bouche, Iokanaan. Eh bien! je la baisera maintenant. Je la mordrai avec mes dents comme on mord un fruit mûr. Oui, je baisera ta bouche, Iokanaan. Je te l'ai dit, n'est-ce pas? je te l'ai dit. Eh bien! je la baisera maintenant . . . Mais pourquoi ne me regardes-tu pas, Iokanaan? Tes yeux qui étaient si terribles, qui étaient si pleins de colère et de mépris, ils sont fermés? Ouvre tes yeux! Soulève tes paupières, Iokanaan. Pourquoi ne me regardes-tu pas? As-tu peur de moi, Iokanaan, que tu ne veuX pas me regarder? . . . Et ta langue qui était comme un serpent rouge dardant des poisons, elle ne remue plus, elle ne dit rien maintenant, Iokanaan, cette vipère rouge qui a vomi son venin sur moi. C'est étrange, n'est-ce pas? Comment se fait-il que la vipère rouge ne remue plus? . . . Tu n'as pas voulu de moi, Iokanaan. Tu m'as rejetée. Tu m'as dit des choses infâmes. Tu m'as traitée comme une courtisane, comme une prostituée, moi, Salomé, fil'e d'Hérodiad, Princesse de Judée! Eh bien, Iokanaan, moi

## SALOMÉ

je vis encore, mais toi tu es mort et ta tête m'appartient. Je puis en faire ce que je veux. Je puis la jeter aux chiens et aux oiseaux de l'air. Ce que laisseront les chiens, les oiseaux de l'air le mangeront . . . Ah ! Iokanaan, Iokanaan, tu as été le seul homme que j'ai aimé. Tous les autres hommes m'inspirent du dégoût. Mais, toi, tu étais beau. Ton corps était une colonne d'ivoire sur un socle d'argent. C'était un jardin plein de colombes et de lis d'argent. C'était une tour d'argent ornée de boucliers d'ivoire. Il n'y avait rien au monde d'aussi blanc que ton corps. Il n'y avait rien au monde d'aussi noir que tes cheveux. Dans le monde tout entier il n'y avait rien d'aussi rouge que ta bouche. Ta voix était un encensoir qui répandait d'étranges parfums, et quand je te regardais j'entendais une musique étrange ! Ah ! pourquoi ne m'as-tu pas regardée, Iokanaan ? Derrière tes mains et tes blasphèmes tu as caché ton visage. Tu as mis sur tes yeux le bandeau de celui qui veut voir son Dieu. Eh bien, tu l'as vu, ton Dieu, Iokanaan, mais moi, moi . . . tu ne m'as jamais vue. Si tu m'avais vue, tu m'aurais aimée. Moi, je t'ai vu, Iokanaan, et je t'ai

## SALOMÉ

aimé. Oh ! comme je t'ai aimé. Je t'aime encore, Iokanaan. Je n'aime que toi . . . J'ai soif de ta beauté. J'ai faim de ton corps. Et ni le vin, ni les fruits ne peuvent apaiser mon désir. Que ferai-je, Iokanaan, maintenant ? Ni les fleuves ni les grandes eaux, ne pourraient éteindre ma passion. J'étais une Princesse, tu m'as dédaignée. J'étais une vierge, tu m'as déflorée. J'étais chaste, tu as rempli mes veines de feu . . . Ah ! Ah ! pourquoi ne m'as-tu pas regardée, Iokanaan ? Si tu m'avais regardée, tu m'aurais aimée. Je sais bien que tu m'aurais aimée, et le mystère de l'amour est plus grand que le mystère de la mort. Il ne faut regarder que l'amour.

HÉRODE

Elle est monstrueuse, ta fille, elle est tout à fait monstrueuse. Enfin, ce qu'elle a fait est un grand crime. Je suis sûr que c'est un crime contre un Dieu inconnu.

HÉRODIAS

J'approuve ce que ma fille a fait, et je veux rester ici maintenant.

HÉRODE [*se levant*]

Ah ! l'épouse incestueuse qui parle ! Viens !



THE CLIMAX.



## SALOMÉ

Je ne veux pas rester ici. Viens, je te dis. Je suis sûr qu'il va arriver un malheur. Manasse, Issachar, Ozias, éteignez les flambeaux. Je ne veux pas regarder les choses. Je ne veux pas que les choses me regardent. Éteignez les flambeaux. Cachez la lune! Cachez les étoiles! Cachons-nous dans notre palais, Hérodiad. Je commence à avoir peur.

*[Les esclaves éteignent les flambeaux. Les étoiles disparaissent. Un grand nuage noir passe à travers la lune et la cache complètement. La scène devient tout à fait sombre. Le tétrarque commence à monter l'escalier.]*

### LA VOIX DE SALOMÉ

Ah! j'ai baisé ta bouche, Iokanaan, j'ai baisé ta bouche. Il y avait une âcre saveur sur tes lèvres. Était-ce la saveur du sang? . . . Mais, peut-être est-ce la saveur de l'amour. On dit que l'amour a une âcre saveur . . . Mais, qu'importe? Qu'importe? J'ai baisé ta bouche, Iokanaan, j'ai baisé ta bouche.

*[Un rayon de lune tombe sur Salomé et l'éclaire.]*



## SALOMÉ

HÉRODE [*se retournant et voyant Salomé*]

Tuez cette femme !

[*Les soldats s'élancent et écrasent sous leurs boucliers Salomé, fille d'Hérodiad, Princesse de Judée.*]

FIN

**A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY**

*This play is only a fragment and was never completed. The well-known poet, Mr. T. Sturge Moors, has written an opening scene for the purposes of presentation, but only Oscar Wilde's work is given here.*

*A private performance was given by the Literary Theatre Club in 1906. The first public presentation was given by the New English Players at The Cripplegate Institute, Golden Lane, E.C., in 1907. German, French, and Hungarian translations have been presented on the Continental stage.*

*Dramatic and literary rights are the property of Robert Ross.*

*Now issued for the first time, 1907.*

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## A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY

[*Enter* THE HUSBAND]

SIMONE

My good wife, you come slowly, were it not  
better

To run to meet your lord? Here, take my  
cloak.

Take this pack first. 'Tis heavy. I have sold  
nothing:

Save a furred robe unto the Cardinal's son,  
Who hopes to wear it when his father dies,  
And hopes that will be soon.

But who is this?

Why you have here some friend. Some kins-  
man doubtless,

Newly returned from foreign lands and fallen  
Upon a house without a host to greet him?  
I crave your pardon, kinsman. For a house  
Lacking a host is but an empty thing  
And void of honour; a cup without its wine,  
A scabbard without steel to keep it straight.

## **A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY**

**A flowerless garden widowed of the sun.  
Again I crave your pardon, my sweet cousin.**

**BIANCA**

**This is no kinsman and no cousin neither.**

**SIMONE**

**No kinsman, and no cousin! You amaze  
me.**

**Who is it then who with such courtly grace  
Deigns to accept our hospitalities?**

**GUIDO**

**My name is Guido Bardi.**

**SIMONE**

**What! The son  
Of that great Lord of Florence whose dim  
towers**

**Like shadows silvered by the wandering moon  
I see from out my casement every night!**

**Sir Guido Bardi, you are welcome here,  
Twice welcome. For I trust my honest wife,  
Most honest if uncomely to the eye,  
Hath not with foolish chatterings wearied  
you,**

**As is the wont of women.**

---

## A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY

GUIDO

Your gracious lady,  
Whose beauty is a lamp that pales the stars  
And robs Diana's quiver of her beams  
Has welcomed me with such sweet courtesies  
That if it be her pleasure, and your own,  
I will come often to your simple house.  
And when your business bids you walk abroad  
I will sit here and charm her loneliness  
Lest she might sorrow for you overmuch.  
What say you, good Simone ?

SIMONE

My noble Lord,  
You bring me such high honour that my  
tongue  
Like a slave's tongue is tied, and cannot say  
The word it would. Yet not to give you  
thanks  
Were to be too unmannerly. So, I thank  
you,  
From my heart's core.

It is such things as these  
That knit a state together, when a Prince  
So nobly born and of such fair address,  
Forgetting unjust Fortune's differences,

## A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY

Comes to an honest burgher's honest home  
As a most honest friend.

And yet, my Lord,  
I fear I am too bold. Some other night  
We trust that you will come here as a friend,  
To-night you come to buy my merchandise.  
Is it not so? Silks, velvets, what you will,  
I doubt not but I have some dainty wares  
Will woo your fancy. True, the hour is late,  
But we poor merchants toil both night and  
day

'To make our scanty gains. The tolls are high,  
And every city levies its own toll,  
And prentices are unskilful, and wives even  
Lack sense and cunning, though Bianca here  
Has brought me a rich customer to-night.  
Is it not so, Bianca? But I waste time.  
Where is my pack? Where is my pack,  
I say?

Open it, my good wife. Unloose the cords.  
Kneel down upon the floor. You are better so.  
Nay not that one, the other. Despatch,  
despatch!

Buyers will grow impatient oftentimes.  
We dare not keep them waiting. Ay! 'tis  
that,

---

## A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY

Give it to me ; with care. It is most costly.  
Touch it with care. And now, my noble Lord—  
Nay, pardon, I have here a Lucca damask,  
The very web of silver and the roses  
So cunningly wrought that they lack perfume  
merely  
To cheat the wanton sense. Touch it, my  
Lord.

Is it not soft as water, strong as steel?  
And then the roses! Are they not finely  
woven?

I think the hillsides that best love the rose,  
At Bellosguardo or at Fiesole,  
Throw no such blossoms on the lap of spring,  
Or if they do their blossoms droop and die.  
Such is the fate of all the dainty things  
That dance in wind and water. Nature her-  
self

Makes war on her own loveliness and slays  
Her children like Medea. Nay but, my Lord,  
Look closer still. Why in this damask here  
It is summer always, and no winter's tooth  
Will ever blight these blossoms. For every  
ell

I paid a piece of gold. Red gold, and good,  
The fruit of careful thrift.



## A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY

GUIDO

Honest Simone,  
Enough, I pray you. I am well content,  
To-morrow I will send my servant to you,  
Who will pay twice your price.

SIMONE

My generous Prince!  
I kiss your hands. And now I do remember  
Another treasure hidden in my house  
Which you must see. It is a robe of state:  
Woven by a Venetian: the stuff, cut-velvet:  
The pattern, pomegranates: each separate  
seed  
Wrought of a pearl: the collar all of pearls,  
As thick as moths in summer streets at night,  
And whiter than the moons that madmen see  
Through prison bars at morning. A male ruby  
Burns like a lighted coal within the clasp.  
The Holy Father has not such a stone,  
Nor could the Indies show a brother to it.  
The brooch itself is of most curious art,  
Cellini never made a fairer thing  
To please the great Lorenzo. You must  
wear it.  
There is none worthier in our city here,  
And it will suit you well. Upon one side

---

## A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY

A slim and horned satyr leaps in gold  
To catch some nymph of silver. Upon the  
other

Stands Silence with a crystal in her hand,  
No bigger than the smallest ear of corn,  
That wavers at the passing of a bird,  
And yet so cunningly wrought that one would  
say

It breathed, or held its breath.

Worthy Bianca,  
Would not this noble and most costly robe  
Suit young Lord Guido well?

Nay, but entreat him;  
He will refuse you nothing, though the price  
Be as a prince's ransom. And your profit  
Shall not be less than mine.

BIANCA

Am I your prentice?  
Why should I chaffer for your velvet robe?

GUIDO

Nay, fair Bianca, I will buy the robe,  
And all things that the honest merchant has  
I will buy also. Princes must be ransomed,  
And fortunate are all high lords who fall  
Into the white hands of so fair a foe.

## A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY

SIMONE

I stand rebuked. But you will buy my wares?  
Will you not buy them? Fifty thousand crowns  
Would scarce repay me. But you, my Lord,  
shall have them

For forty thousand. Is that price too high?  
Name your own price. I have a curious fancy  
To see you in this wonder of the loom  
Amidst the noble ladies of the court,  
A flower among flowers.

They say, my lord,  
These highborn dames do so affect your Grace  
That where you go they throng like flies  
around you,  
Each seeking for your favour.

I have heard also  
Of husbands that wear horns, and wear them  
bravely,  
A fashion most fantastical.

GUIDO

Simone,  
Your reckless tongue needs curbing; and  
besides,  
You do forget this gracious lady here  
Whose delicate ears are surely not attuned  
To such coarse music.

## A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY

**SIMONE**

True : I had forgotten,  
Nor will offend again. Yet, my sweet Lord,  
You 'll buy the robe of state. Will you not  
buy it?

But forty thousand crowns. 'Tis but a trifle,  
'To one who is Giovanni Bardi's heir.

**GUIDO**

Settle this thing to-morrow with my steward  
Antonio Costa. He will come to you.  
And you will have a hundred thousand  
crowns  
If that will serve your purpose.

**SIMONE**

A hundred thousand !  
Said you a hundred thousand? Oh! be sure  
That will for all time, and in everything  
Make me your debtor. Ay! from this time  
forth

My house, with everything my house contains  
Is yours, and only yours.

A hundred thousand !  
My brain is dazed. I will be richer far  
Than all the other merchants. I will buy

## A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY

Vineyards, and lands, and gardens. Every  
loom

From Milan down to Sicily shall be mine,  
And mine the pearls that the Arabian seas  
Store in their silent caverns.

Generous Prince,  
This night shall prove the herald of my love,  
Which is so great that whatsoe'er you ask  
It will not be denied you.

GUIDO

What if I asked  
For white Bianca here ?

SIMONE

You jest, my Lord,  
She is not worthy of so great a Prince.  
She is but made to keep the house and spin.  
Is it not so, good wife ? It is so. Look !  
Your distaff waits for you. Sit down and  
spin.

Women should not be idle in their homes,  
For idle fingers make a thoughtless heart.  
Sit down, I say.

BIANCA

What shall I spin ?

---

## A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY

**SIMONE**

Oh ! spin  
Some robe which, dyed in purple, sorrow  
might wear  
For her own comforting : or some long-fringed  
cloth  
In which a new-born and unwelcome babe  
Might wail unheeded ; or a dainty sheet  
Which, delicately perfumed with sweet herbs,  
Might serve to wrap a dead man. Spin what  
you will ;  
I care not, I.

**BIANCA**

The brittle thread is broken,  
The dull wheel wearies of its ceaseless round,  
The duller distaff sickens of its load ;  
I will not spin to-night.

**SIMONE**

It matters not.  
To-morrow you shall spin, and every day  
Shall find you at your distaff. So Lucretia  
Was found by Tarquin. So, perchance,  
Lucretia  
Waited for Tarquin. Who knows ? I have  
heard

## A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY

Strange things about men's wives. And now,  
my lord,

What news abroad? I heard to-day at Pisa  
That certain of the English merchants there  
Would sell their woollens at a lower rate  
Than the just laws allow, and have entreated  
The Signory to hear them.

Is this well?

Should merchant be to merchant as a wolf?  
And should the stranger living in our land  
Seek by enforced privilege or craft  
To rob us of our profits?

GUIDO

What should I do  
With merchants or their profits? Shall I go  
And wrangle with the Signory on your count  
And wear the gown in which you buy from  
fools,  
Or sell to sillier bidders? Honest Simone,  
Wool-selling or wool-gathering is for you.  
My wits have other quarries.

BIANCA

Noble Lord,  
I pray you pardon my good husband here,  
His soul stands ever in the market-place,

## A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY

And his heart beats but at the price of wool.  
Yet he is honest in his common way.

[ *To SIMONE* ]

And you, have you no shame? A gracious  
Prince

Comes to our house, and you must weary him  
With most misplaced assurance. Ask his  
pardon.

**SIMONE**

I ask it humbly. We will talk to-night  
Of other things. I hear the Holy Father  
Has sent a letter to the King of France  
Bidding him cross that shield of snow, the  
Alps,

And make a peace in Italy, which will be  
Worse than war of brothers, and more bloody  
Than civil rapine or intestine feuds.

**GUIDO**

Oh! we are weary of that King of France,  
Who never comes, but ever talks of coming.  
What are these things to me? There are  
other things

Closer, and of more import, good Simone.

**BIANCA** [*to SIMONE*]

I think you tire our most gracious guest.



## A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY

What is the King of France to us? As much  
As are your English merchants with their  
wool.

. . . . .

**SIMONE**

Is it so then? Is all this mighty world  
Narrowed into the confines of this room  
With but three souls for poor inhabitants?  
Ay! there are times when the great uni-  
verse,

Like cloth in some unskilful dyer's vat,  
Shrivels into a handsbreadth, and perchance  
That time is now! Well! let that time be  
now.

Let this mean room be as that mighty stage  
Whereon kings die, and our ignoble lives  
Become the stakes God plays for.

I do not know  
Why I speak thus. My ride has wearied me.  
And my horse stumbled thrice, which is an  
omen

That bodes not good to any.

Alas! my lord,  
How poor a bargain is this life of man,  
And in how mean a market are we sold!

## A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY

When we are born our mothers weep, but  
when  
We die there is none weep for us. No, not  
one. *[Passes to back of stage.]*

BIANCA

How like a common chapman does he speak !  
I hate him, soul and body. Cowardice  
Has set her pale seal on his brow. His hands  
Whiter than poplar leaves in windy springs,  
Shake with some palsy; and his stammering  
mouth  
Blurts out a foolish froth of empty words  
Like water from a conduit.

GUIDO

Sweet Bianca,  
He is not worthy of your thought or mine.  
The man is but a very honest knave  
Full of fine phrases for life's merchandise,  
Selling most dear what he must hold most  
cheap,  
A windy brawler in a world of words.  
I never met so eloquent a fool.

BIANCA

Oh, would that Death might take him where  
he stands !

## A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY

SIMONE [*turning round*]

Who spake of Death? Let no one speak of  
Death.

What should Death do in such a merry house,  
With but a wife, a husband, and a friend  
To give it greeting? Let Death go to houses  
Where there are vile, adulterous things, chaste  
wives

Who growing weary of their noble lords  
Draw back the curtains of their marriage  
beds,

And in polluted and dishonoured sheets  
Feed some unlawful lust. Ay! 'tis so  
Strange, and yet so. *You* do not know the  
world.

*You* are too single and too honourable.

I know it well. And would it were not so,  
But wisdom comes with winters. My hair  
grows grey,

And youth has left my body. Enough of  
that.

To-night is ripe for pleasure, and indeed,  
I would be merry, as beseems a host  
Who finds a gracious and unlooked-for guest  
Waiting to greet him. [*Takes up a lute.*]

But what is this, my lord?

## A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY

Why, you have brought a lute to play to us.  
Oh! play, sweet Prince. And, if I am bold,  
Pardon, but play.

GUIDO

I will not play to-night.  
Some other night, Simone.

[To BIANCA] You and I  
Together, with no listeners but the stars,  
Or the more jealous moon.

SIMONE

Nay, but my lord!  
Nay, but I do beseech you. For I have  
heard  
That by the simple fingering of a string,  
Or delicate breath breathed along hollowed  
reeds,  
Or blown into cold mouths of cunning bronze,  
Those who are curious in this art can draw  
Poor souls from prison-houses. I have heard  
also  
How such strange magic lurks within these  
shells  
And innocence puts vine-leaves in her hair,  
And wantons like a mænad. Let that  
pass.

## A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY

Your lute I know is chaste. And therefore  
play :

Ravish my ears with some sweet melody ;  
My soul is in a prison-house, and needs  
Music to cure its madness. Good Bianca,  
Entreat our guest to play.

BIANCA

Be not afraid,  
Our well-loved guest will choose his place and  
moment :  
That moment is not now. You weary him  
With your uncouth insistence.

GUIDO

Honest Simone,  
Some other night. To-night I am content  
With the low music of Bianca's voice,  
Who, when she speaks, charms the too  
amorous air,  
And makes the reeling earth stand still, or  
fix  
His cycle round her beauty.

SIMONE

You flatter her.  
She has her virtues as most women have,  
But beauty is a gem she may not wear.

---

## A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY

It is better so, perchance.

Well, my dear lord,  
If you will not draw melodies from your  
lute

To charm my moody and o'er-troubled soul  
You'll drink with me at least? [*Sees table.*]

Your place is laid.  
Fetch me a stool, Bianca. Close the shutters.  
Set the great bar across. I would not have  
The curious world with its small prying eyes  
To peer upon our pleasure.

Now, my lord,  
Give us a toast from a full brimming cup.  
[*Starts back.*]

What is this stain upon the cloth? It  
looks

As purple as a wound upon Christ's side.  
Wine merely is it? I have heard it said  
When wine is spilt blood is spilt also,  
But that's a foolish tale.

My lord, I trust  
My grape is to your liking? The wine of  
Naples  
Is fiery like its mountains. Our Tuscan  
vineyards  
Yield a more wholesome juice.

## A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY

GUIDO

I like it well,  
Honest Simone ; and, with your good leave,  
Will toast the fair Bianca when her lips  
Have like red rose-leaves floated on this  
cup  
And left its vintage sweeter. Taste, Bianca.

[BIANCA *drinks.*]

Oh, all the honey of Hyblean bees,  
Matched with this draught were bitter !  
Good Simone,  
You do not share the feast.

SIMONE

It is strange, my lord,  
I cannot eat or drink with you, to-night.  
Some humour, or some fever in my blood,  
At other seasons temperate, or some thought  
That like an adder creeps from point to point,  
That like a madman crawls from cell to cell,  
Poisons my palate and makes appetite  
A loathing, not a longing. [Goes aside.]

GUIDO

Sweet Bianca,  
This common chapman wearies me with  
words.

---

## A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY

I must go hence. To-morrow I will come.  
Tell me the hour.

BLANCA

                                  Come with the youngest dawn!  
Until I see you all my life is vain.

GUIDO

Ah! loose the falling midnight of your hair,  
And in those stars, your eyes, let me behold  
Mine image, as in mirrors. Dear Bianca,  
Though it be but a shadow, keep me there,  
Nor gaze at anything that does not show  
Some symbol of my semblance. I am jealous  
Of what your vision feasts on.

BLANCA

  Oh! be sure  
Your image will be with me always. Dear,  
Love can translate the very meanest thing  
Into a sign of sweet remembrances.  
But come before the lark with its shrill song  
Has waked a world of dreamers. I will stand  
Upon the balcony,

GUIDO

                                  And by a ladder  
Wrought out of scarlet silk and sewn with  
                                  pearls



## A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY

Will come to meet me. White foot after foot,  
Like snow upon a rose-tree.

**BIANCA**

As you will.  
You know that I am yours for love or  
Death.

**GUIDO**

Simone, I must go to mine house.

**SIMONE**

So soon? Why should you? the great  
Duomo's bell  
Has not yet tolled its midnight, and the  
watchman  
Who with their hollow horns mock the pale  
moon,  
Lie drowsy in their towers. Stay awhile.  
I fear we may not see you here again,  
And that fear saddens my too simple heart.

**GUIDO**

Be not afraid, Simone. I will stand  
Most constant in my friendship. But to-night  
I go to mine own home, and that at once.  
To-morrow, sweet Bianca.

---

## A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY

SIMONE

Well, well, so be it.  
I would have wished for fuller converse with  
you,  
My new friend, my honourable guest,  
But that it seems may not be.

And besides  
I do not doubt your father waits for you,  
Wearing for voice or footstep. You, I  
think,  
Are his one child? He has no other child.  
You are the gracious pillar of his house,  
The flower of a garden full of weeds.  
Your father's nephews do not love him well.  
So run folk's tongues in Florence. I meant  
but that;  
Men say they envy your inheritance  
And look upon your vineyard with fierce eyes  
As Ahab looked on Naboth's goodly field.  
But that is but the chatter of a town  
Where women talk too much.

Good night, my lord.  
Fetch a pine torch, Bianca. The old stair-  
case  
Is full of pitfalls, and the churlish moon  
Grows, like a miser, niggard of her beams,

## A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY

And hides her face behind a muslin mask  
As harlots do when they go forth to snare  
Some wretched soul in sin. Now, I will get  
Your cloak and sword. Nay, pardon, my  
good Lord,

It is but meet that I should wait on you  
Who have so honoured my poor burgher's  
house,

Drunk of my wine, and broken bread, and  
made

Yourself a sweet familiar. Oftentimes  
My wife and I will talk of this fair night  
And its great issues.

Why, what a sword is this!

Ferrara's temper, pliant as a snake,  
And deadlier, I doubt not. With such steel  
One need fear nothing in the moil of life.

I never touched so delicate a blade.

I have a sword too, somewhat rusted now.

We men of peace are taught humility,  
And to bear many burdens on our backs,  
And not to murmur at an unjust world,  
And to endure unjust indignities.

We are taught that, and like the patient Jew  
Find profit in our pain.

Yet I remember

---

## A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY

How once upon the road to Padua  
A robber sought to take my pack-horse from  
me,  
I slit his throat and left him. I can bear  
Dishonour, public insult, many shames,  
Shrill scorn, and open contumely, but he  
Who filches from me something that is mine,  
Ay! though it be the meanest trencher-plate  
From which I feed mine appetite—oh! he  
Perils his soul and body in the theft  
And dies for his small sin. From what  
strange clay  
We men are moulded!

GUIDO

Why do you speak like this?

SIMONE

I wonder, my Lord Guido, if my sword  
Is better tempered than this steel of yours?  
Shall we make trial? Or is my state too low  
For you to cross your rapier against mine,  
In jest, or earnest?

GUIDO

Naught would please me better  
Than to stand fronting you with naked  
blade

## A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY

In jest, or earnest. Give me mine own sword.

Fetch yours. To-night will settle the great issue

Whether the Prince's or the merchant's steel  
Is better tempered. Was not that your word?

Fetch your own sword. Why do you tarry, sir?

SIMONE

My lord, of all the gracious courtesies  
That you have showered on my barren house  
This is the highest.

Bianca, fetch my sword  
Thrust back that stool and table. We must  
have

An open circle for our match at arms,  
And good Bianca here shall hold the torch  
Lest what is but a jest grow serious.

BIANCA [*to GUIDO*]

Oh! kill him, kill him!

SIMONE

Hold the torch, Bianca  
[*They begin to fight*]

---

## A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY

SIMONE

Have at you! Ah! Ha! would you?

[*He is wounded by GUIDO.*]

A scratch, no more. The torch was in mine eyes.

Do not look sad, Bianca. It is nothing.

Your husband bleeds, 'tis nothing. Take a cloth,

Bind it about mine arm. Nay, not so tight.

More softly, my good wife. And be not sad,

I pray you be not sad. No: take it off.

What matter if I bleed? [*Tears bandage off.*]

Again! again!

[SIMONE *disarms* GUIDO]

My gentle Lord, you see that I was right.

My sword is better tempered, finer steel,

But let us match our daggers.

BIANCA [*to* GUIDO]

Kill him! kill him!

SIMONE

Put out the torch, Bianca.

[BIANCA *puts out torch.*]

Now, my good Lord,

Now to the death of one, or both of us,

Or all the three it may be. [*They fight.*]

## A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY

There and there.

Ah, devil! do I hold thee in my grip?

[SIMONE *overpowers* GUIDO *and throws him down over table.*]

GUIDO

Fool! take your strangling fingers from my throat.

I am my father's only son; the State  
Has but one heir, and that false enemy France  
Waits for the ending of my father's line  
To fall upon our city.

SIMONE

Hush! your father  
When he is childless will be happier.  
As for the State, I think our state of Florence  
Needs no adulterous pilot at its helm.  
Your life would soil its lilies.

GUIDO

Take off your hands.  
Take off your damned hands. Loose me, I  
say!

SIMONE

Nay, you are caught in such a cunning vice  
That nothing will avail you, and your life

---

## A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY

Narrowed into a single point of shame  
Ends with that shame and ends most shame-  
fully.

GUIDO

Oh! let me have a priest before I die!

SIMONE

What wouldst thou have a priest for? Tell  
thy sins  
To God, whom thou shalt see this very night  
And then no more for ever. Tell thy sins  
To Him who is most just, being pitiless,  
Most pitiful being just. As for myself. . . .

GUIDO

Oh! help me, sweet Bianca! help me, Bianca,  
Thou knowest I am innocent of harm.

SIMONE

What, is there life yet in those lying lips?  
Die like a dog with lolling tongue! Die!  
Die!

And the dumb river shall receive your corpse  
And wash it all unheeded to the sea.

GUIDO

Lord Christ receive my wretched soul to-  
night!



## A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY

**SIMONE**

Amen to that. Now for the other.

*[He dies. SIMONE rises and looks at BIANCA  
She comes towards him as one dazed with  
wonder and with outstretched arms.]*

**BIANCA**

Why

Did you not tell me you were so strong?

**SIMONE**

Why

Did you not tell me you were beautiful?

*[He kisses her on the mouth.]*

**CURTAIN**

---

**VERA**  
**OR**  
**THE NIHILISTS**  
**A DRAMA IN A**  
**PROLOGUE, AND FOUR ACTS**

*This play was written in 1881, and is now (1907) published for the first time with the author's own corrections and additions to the original text, which was privately printed in New York, 1882. Pirated editions have been printed from the prompt copies.*

*The literary and dramatic rights are the property of Robert Ross.*

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## PERSONS IN THE PROLOGUE

PETER SABOUROFF (an Innkeeper)  
VERA SABOUROFF (his Daughter)  
MICHAEL (a Peasant)  
DMITRI SABOUROFF  
NICOLAS  
COLONEL KOTEMKIN

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## PERSONS IN THE PLAY

IVAN THE CZAR  
PRINCE PAUL MARALOFFSKI (Prime Minister  
of Russia)  
PRINCE PETROVITCH  
COUNT ROUVALOFF  
MARQUIS DE POIVRARD  
BARON RAFF  
GENERAL KOTEMKIN  
A Page  
Colonel of the Guard

### *NIHILISTS*

PETER TCHERNAVITCH, President of the  
Nihilists.  
MICHAEL  
ALEXIS IVANACIEVITCH, known as a Student  
of Medicine  
PROFESSOR MARFA  
VERA SABOUROFF  
Soldiers, Conspirators, etc.



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## PROLOGUE

### SCENE

#### *A Russian Inn*

*Large door opening on snowy landscape at back of stage.*

[PETER SABOUROFF and MICHAEL]

PETER

[*Warming his hands at a stove.*] Has Vera not come back yet, Michael?

MICHAEL

No, Father Peter, not yet; 'tis a good three miles to the post office, and she has to milk the cows besides, and that dun one is a rare plaguey creature for a wench to handle.

PETER

Why didn't you go with her, you young fool? she'll never love you unless you are always at her heels; women like to be bothered.

MICHAEL

She says I bother her too much already,

## VERA;

**PROLOGUE** Father Peter, and I fear she'll never love me after all.

**PETER**

Tut, tut, boy, why shouldn't she? you're young, and wouldn't be ill-favoured either, had God or thy mother given thee another face. Aren't you one of Prince Maraloffski's gamekeepers; and haven't you got a good grass farm, and the best cow in the village? What more does a girl want?

**MICHAEL**

But Vera, Father Peter—

**PETER**

Vera, my lad, has got too many ideas; I don't think much of ideas myself; I've got on well enough in life without 'em; why shouldn't my children? There's Dmitri! could have stayed here and kept the inn; many a young lad would have jumped at the offer in these hard times; but he, scatter-brained featherhead of a boy, must needs go off to Moscow to study the law! What does he want knowing about the law! let a man do his duty, say I, and no one will trouble him.

---

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

**MICHAEL**

**PROLOGUE**

Ay! but, Father Peter, they say a good lawyer can break the law as often as he likes, and no one can say him nay. If a man knows the law he knows his duty.

**PETER**

True, Michael, if a man knows the law there is nothing illegal he cannot do when he likes: that is why folk become lawyers. That is about all they are good for; and there he stays, and has not written a line to us for four months now—a good son that, eh?

**MICHAEL**

Come, come, Father Peter, Dmitri's letters must have gone astray—perhaps the new postman can't read; he looks stupid enough, and Dmitri, why, he was the best fellow in the village. Do you remember how he shot the bear at the barn in the great winter?

**PETER**

Ay, it was a good shot; I never did a better myself.

**MICHAEL**

And as for dancing, he tired out three fiddlers Christmas come two years.



## VERA;

### PROLOGUE PETER

Ay, ay, he was a merry lad. It is the girl that has the seriousness—she goes about as solemn as a priest for days at a time.

### MICHAEL

Vera is always thinking of others.

### PETER

There is her mistake, boy. Let God and our little Father the Czar look to the world. It is none of my work to mend my neighbour's thatch. Why, last winter old Michael was frozen to death in his sleigh in the snowstorm, and his wife and children starved afterwards when the hard times came; but what business was it of mine? I didn't make the world. Let God and the Czar look to it. And then the blight came, and the black plague with it, and the priests couldn't bury the people fast enough, and they lay dead on the roads—men and women both. But what business was it of mine? I didn't make the world. Let God and the Czar look to it. Or two autumns ago, when the river overflowed on a sudden, and the children's school was carried away and drowned every girl and boy in it.

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## OR, THE NIHILISTS

I didn't make the world—let God or the PROLOGUE  
Czar look to it.

MICHAEL

But, Father Peter—

PETER

No, no, boy ; no man could live if he took  
his neighbour's pack on his shoulders. [*Enter*  
VERA *in peasant's dress.*] Well, my girl, you've  
been long enough away—where is the letter ?

VERA

There is none to-day, Father.

PETER

I knew it.

VERA

But there will be one to-morrow, Father.

PETER

Curse him, for an ungrateful son.

VERA

O Father, don't say that; he must be  
sick.

PETER

Ay ! Sick of profligacy, perhaps.

VERA;

PROLOGUE VERA

How dare you say that of him, Father!  
You know that is not true.

PETER

Where does the money go, then? Michael, listen. I gave Dmitri half his mother's fortune to bring with him to pay the lawyer folk at Moscow. He has only written three times, and every time for more money. He got it, not at my wish, but at hers [*pointing to VERA*], and now for five months, close on six almost, we have heard nothing from him.

VERA

Father, he will come back.

PETER

Ay! the prodigals always return; but let him never darken my doors again.

VERA

[*Sitting down pensive.*] Some evil has come on him; he must be dead! Oh! Michael, I am so wretched about Dmitri.

MICHAEL

Will you never love any one but him, Vera?

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

**VERA**

**PROLOGUE**

[*Smiling.*] I don't know ; there is so much else to do in the world but love.

**MICHAEL**

Nothing else worth doing, Vera.

**PETER**

What noise is that, Vera ? [*A metallic clink is heard.*]

**VERA**

[*Rising and going to the door.*] I don't know, Father ; it is not like the cattle bells, or I would think Nicholas had come from the fair. Oh Father ! it is soldiers coming down the hill—there is one of them on horseback. How pretty they look ! But there are some men with them, with chains on ! They must be robbers. Oh ! don't let them in, Father ; I couldn't look at them.

**PETER**

Men in chains ! Why, we are in luck, my child ! I heard this was to be the new road to Siberia, to bring the prisoners to the mines ; but I didn't believe it. My fortune is made ! Bustle, Vera, bustle ! I'll die a rich man

**VERA;**

**PROLOGUE** after all. There will be no lack of good customers now. An honest man should have the chance of making his living out of rascals now and then.

**VERA**

Are these men rascals, Father? What have they done?

**PETER**

I reckon they're some of those Nihilists the priest warns us against. Don't stand there idle, my girl.

**VERA**

I suppose, then, they are all wicked men.

*[Sound of soldiers outside; cry of 'Halt!'*  
*enter Russian officer with a body of soldiers*  
*and eight men in chains, raggedly dressed; one*  
*of them on entering, hurriedly puts his coat above*  
*his ears and hides his face; some soldiers guard*  
*the door, others sit down; the prisoners stand.]*

**COLONEL**

Innkeeper!

**PETER**

Yes, Colonel.

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

COLONEL

PROLOGUE

[*Pointing to Nihilists.*] Give these men some bread and water.

PETER

[*To himself.*] I shan't make much out of that order.

COLONEL

As for myself, what have you got fit to eat?

PETER

Some good dried venison, your Excellency —and some rye whisky.

COLONEL

Nothing else?

PETER

Why, more whisky, your Excellency.

COLONEL

What clods these peasants are! You have a better room than this?

PETER

Yes, sir.

COLONEL

Bring me there. Sergeant, post your picket

**VERA;**

**PROLOGUE** outside, and see that these scoundrels do not communicate with any one. No letter writing, you dogs, or you'll be flogged for it. Now for the venison. [*To PETER bowing before him.*] Get out of the way, you fool! Who is that girl? [*sees VERA*].

**PETER**

My daughter, your Highness.

**COLONEL**

Can she read and write?

**PETER**

Ay, that she can, sir.

**COLONEL**

Then she is a dangerous woman. No peasant should be allowed to do anything of the kind. Till your fields, store your harvests, pay your taxes, and obey your masters—that is your duty.

**VERA**

Who are our masters?

**COLONEL**

Young woman, these men are going to the mines for life for asking the same foolish question.

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

VERA

PROLOGUE

Then they have been unjustly condemned.

PETER

Vera, keep your tongue quiet. She is a foolish girl, sir, who talks too much.

COLONEL

Every woman does talk too much. Come, where is this venison? Count, I am waiting for you. How can you see anything in a girl with coarse hands? [*He passes with PETER and his aide-de-camp into an inner room.*]

VERA

[*To one of the Nihilists.*] Won't you sit down? you must be tired.

SERGEANT

Come now, young woman, no talking to my prisoners.

VERA

I shall speak to them. How much do you want?

SERGEANT

How much have you?

1



## VERA;

### PROLOGUE VERA

Will you let these men sit down if I give you this? [*Takes off her peasant's necklace.*] It is all I have; it was my mother's.

### SERGEANT

Well, it looks pretty enough, and is heavy too. What do you want with these men?

### VERA

They are hungry and wretched. Let me go to them?

### ONE OF THE SOLDIERS

Let the wench be, if she pays us.

### SERGEANT

Well, have your way. If the Colonel sees you, you may have to come with us, my pretty one.

### VERA

[*Advances to the Nihilists.*] Sit down; you must be tired. [*Serves them food.*] What are you?

### ▲ PRISONER

Nihilists.

### VERA

Who put you in chains?

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

**PRISONER**

Our Father the Czar.

**PROLOGUE**

**VERA**

Why ?

**PRISONER**

For loving liberty too well.

**VERA**

[*To the prisoner who hides his face.*] What did you want to do ?

**DMITRI**

To give liberty to thirty millions of people enslaved to one man.

**VERA**

[*Startled at the voice.*] What is your name ?

**DMITRI**

I have no name.

**VERA**

Where are your friends ?

**DMITRI**

I have no friends.

**VERA**

Let me see your face !

## VERA;

### PROLOGUE DMITRI

You will see nothing but suffering in it.  
They have tortured me.

### VERA

[*Tears his cloak from his face.*] O God!  
Dmitri! my brother!

### DMITRI

Hush! Vera; be calm. You must not  
let my father know; it would kill him. I  
thought I could free Russia. I heard men  
talk of Liberty one night in a café. I had  
never heard the word before. It seemed to  
be a new God they spoke of. I joined them.  
It was there all the money went. Five  
months ago they seized us. They found me  
printing the paper. I am going to the mines  
for life. I could not write. I thought it  
would be better to let you think I was dead;  
for they are bringing us to a living tomb.

### VERA

[*Looking round.*] You must escape, Dmitri.  
I will take your place.

### DMITRI

Impossible! You can only revenge us.

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

**VERA**

PROLOGUE

I shall revenge you.

**DMITRI**

Listen! there is a house in Moscow—

**SERGEANT**

Prisoners, attention!—the Colonel is coming—  
young woman, your time is up.

[*Enter COLONEL, AIDE-DE-CAMP, and PETER.*]

**PETER**

I hope your Highness is pleased with the venison. I shot it myself.

**COLONEL**

It had been better had you talked less about it. Sergeant, get ready. [*Gives purse to PETER.*] Here, you cheating rascal!

**PETER**

My fortune is made! long live your Highness. I hope your Highness will come often this way.

**COLONEL**

By St. Nicholas, I hope not. It is too cold here for me. [*To VERA.*] Young girl,

VERA;

PROLOGUE don't ask questions again about what does not concern you. I will not forget your face.

VERA

Nor I yours, or what you are doing.

COLONEL

You peasants are getting too saucy since you ceased to be serfs, and the knout is the best school for you to learn politics in. Sergeant, proceed.

*[The COLONEL turns and goes to top of stage. The prisoners pass out double file; as DMITRI passes VERA he lets a piece of paper fall on the ground; she puts her foot on it and remains immobile.]*

PETER

*[Who has been counting the money the COLONEL gave him.]* Long life to your Highness. I will hope to see another batch soon. *[Suddenly catches sight of DMITRI as he is going out of the door, and screams and rushes up.]* Dmitri! Dmitri! my God! what brings you here? he is innocent, I tell you. I'll pay for him. Take your money *[flings money on the ground]*,

---

OR, THE NIHILISTS

Take all I have, give me my son. Villains! PROLOGUE  
Villains! where are you bringing him?

COLONEL

To Siberia, old man.

PETER

No, no; take me instead.

COLONEL

He is a Nihilist.

PETER

You lie! you lie! He is innocent. [*The soldiers force him back with their guns and shut the door against him. He beats with his fists against it.*] Dmitri! Dmitri! a Nihilist!  
a Nihilist! [*Falls down on floor.*]

VERA

[*Who has remained motionless, picks up paper now from under her foot and reads.*] '99 Rue Tchernavaya, Moscow. To strangle whatever nature is in me; neither to love nor to be loved; neither to pity nor to be pitied; neither to marry nor to be given in marriage, till the end is come.' My brother, I shall

## VERA; OR, THE NIHILISTS

PROLOGUE keep the oath. [*Kisses the paper.*] You shall be revenged!

[*VERA stands immobile, holding paper in her lifted hand. PETER is lying on the floor. MICHAEL, who has just come in, is bending over him.*]

END OF PROLOGUE

## ACT I

### SCENE

99 *Tchernavaya, Moscow. A large garret lit by oil lamps hung from ceiling. Some masked men standing silent and apart from one another. A man in a scarlet mask is writing at a table. Door at back. Man in yellow with drawn sword at it. Knocks heard. Figures in cloaks and masks enter.*

*Password.* Per crucem ad lucem.

*Answer.* Per sanguinem ad libertatem.

[*Clock strikes. CONSPIRATORS form a semi-circle in the middle of the stage.*]

**PRESIDENT**

What is the word ?

**FIRST CONSPIRATOR**

Nabat.

**PRESIDENT**

The answer ?

**SECOND CONSPIRATOR**

Kalit.



**V E R A ;**

**ACT I. PRESIDENT**

**What hour is it ?**

**THIRD CONSPIRATOR**

**The hour to suffer**

**PRESIDENT**

**What day ?**

**FOURTH CONSPIRATOR**

**The day of oppression.**

**PRESIDENT**

**What year ?**

**FIFTH CONSPIRATOR**

**The year of hope.**

**PRESIDENT**

**How many are we in number ?**

**SIXTH CONSPIRATOR**

**Ten, nine, and three.**

**PRESIDENT**

**The Galilæan had less to conquer the world  
but what is our mission ?**

**SEVENTH CONSPIRATOR**

**To give freedom.**

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

**PRESIDENT**

**ACT I.**

Our creed ?

**EIGHTH CONSPIRATOR**

To annihilate.

**PRESIDENT**

Our duty ?

**NINTH CONSPIRATOR**

To obey.

**PRESIDENT**

Brothers, the questions have been answered well. There are none but Nihilists present. Let us see each other's faces. [*The CONSPIRATORS unmask.*] Michael, recite the oath.

**MICHAEL**

To strangle whatever nature is in us ; neither to love nor to be loved, neither to pity nor to be pitied, neither to marry nor to be given in marriage, till the end is come ; to stab secretly by night ; to drop poison in the glass ; to set father against son, and husband against wife ; without fear, without hope, without future, to suffer, to annihilate, to revenge.

## VERA;

ACT I. PRESIDENT

Are we all agreed?

CONSPIRATORS

We are all agreed. [*They disperse in various directions about the stage.*]

PRESIDENT

'Tis after the hour, Michael, and she is not yet here.

MICHAEL

Would that she were! We can do little without her.

ALEXIS

She cannot have been seized, President! but the police are on her track, I know.

MICHAEL

You always do seem to know a good deal about the movements of the police in Moscow—too much for an honest conspirator.

PRESIDENT

If those dogs have caught her, the red flag of the people will float on a barricade in every street till we find her! It was foolish of her to go to the Grand Duke's ball. I told her so, but she said she wanted to see

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

the Czar and all his cursed brood face to ACT I.  
face for once.

ALEXIS

Gone to the State ball!

MICHAEL

I have no fear. She is as hard to capture as a she-wolf is, and twice as dangerous; besides, she is well disguised. To-night it is a masked ball. But is there any news from the Palace, President? What is that bloody despot doing now besides torturing his only son? What sort of a whelp is this Czarevitch, by the way? Have any of you seen him? One hears strange stories about him. They say he loves the people; but a king's son never does that. You cannot breed them like that.

PRESIDENT

Since he came back from abroad a year ago his father has kept him in close prison in his palace.

MICHAEL

An excellent training to make him a tyrant in his turn; but is there any news, I say?

## VERA;

### ACT I. PRESIDENT

A council is to be held to-morrow, at four o'clock, on some secret business the committee cannot find out.

### MICHAEL

A council in a king's palace is sure to be about some bloody work or other. But in what room is it to be held?

### PRESIDENT

[*Reading from letter.*] In the yellow tapestry room called after the Empress Catherine.

### MICHAEL

I care not for such long-sounding names. I would know where it is.

### PRESIDENT

I cannot tell, Michael. I know more about the inside of prisons than of palaces.

### MICHAEL

[*Speaking suddenly to ALEXIS.*] Where is this room, Alexis?

### ALEXIS

It is on the first floor, looking out on to the inner courtyard. But why do you ask, Michael?

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

**MICHAEL**

**ACT I.**

Nothing, nothing, boy! I merely take a great interest in the Czar's life and movements, and I knew you could tell me all about the palace. Every poor student of medicine in Moscow knows all about kings' houses. It is their duty, is it not?

**ALEXIS**

[*Aside.*] Can Michael suspect me? There is something strange in his manner to-night. Why doesn't she come? The whole fire of revolution seems fallen into dull ashes when she is not here.

**MICHAEL**

Have you cured many patients, lately, at your hospital, boy?

**ALEXIS**

There is one who lies sick to death I would fain cure, but cannot.

**MICHAEL**

Ay! and who is that?

**ALEXIS**

Russia, our mother.

**VERA;**

**ACT I. MICHAEL**

The curing of Russia is surgeon's business, and must be done by the knife. I like not your method of medicine.

**PRESIDENT**

Professor, we have read the proofs of your last article; it is very good indeed.

**MICHAEL**

What is it about, Professor?

**PROFESSOR**

The subject, my good brother, is assassination considered as a method of political reform.

**MICHAEL**

I think little of pen and ink in revolutions. One dagger will do more than a hundred epigrams. Still, let us read this scholar's last production. Give it to me. I will read it myself.

**PROFESSOR**

Brother, you never mind your stops; let Alexis read it.

**MICHAEL**

Ay! he is as tripping of speech as if he

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

were some young aristocrat; but for my own **ACT I**  
part I care not for the stops so that the sense  
be plain.

**ALEXIS**

[*Reading.*] 'The past has belonged to the tyrant, and he has defiled it; ours is the future, and we shall make it holy.' Ay! let us make the future holy; let there be one revolution at least which is not bred in crime, nurtured in murder!

**MICHAEL**

They have spoken to us by the sword, and by the sword we shall answer! You are too delicate for us, Alexis. There should be none here but men whose hands are rough with labour or red with blood.

**PRESIDENT**

Peace, Michael, peace! He is the bravest heart amongst us.

**MICHAEL**

[*Aside.*] He will need to be brave to-night.

[*The sound of sleigh bells is heard outside.*]



**VERA;**

**ACT I. VOICE**

*[Outside.]* Per crucem ad lucem.  
*Answer of man on guard.*  
Per sanguinem ad libertatem.

**MICHAEL**

Who is that?  
*[Enter VERA in a cloak, which she throws off, appearing in full ball dress.]*

**VERA**

God save the people!

**PRESIDENT**

Welcome, Vera, welcome! We have been sick at heart till we saw you; but now methinks the star of freedom has come to wake us from the night.

**VERA**

It is night, indeed, brother! Night without moon or star! Russia is smitten to the heart! The man Ivan whom men called the Czar strikes now at our mother with a dagger deadlier than any ever forged by tyranny against a people's life!

**MICHAEL**

What has the tyrant done now?

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

**VERA**

**ACT I.**

To-morrow martial law is to be proclaimed over all Russia.

**OMNES**

Martial law! We are lost! We are lost!

**ALEXIS**

Martial law! Impossible!

**MICHAEL**

Fool, nothing is impossible in Russia but reform.

**VERA**

Ay, martial law. The last right to which the people clung has been taken from them. Without trial, without appeal, without accuser even, our brothers will be taken from their houses, shot in the streets like dogs, sent away to die in the snow, to starve in the dungeon, to rot in the mine. Do you know what martial law means? It means the strangling of a whole nation. The streets will be filled with soldiers night and day; there will be sentinels at every door. No man dare walk abroad now but the spy or the traitor. Cooped up in the dens we hide in,

**VERA;**

**ACT I.** meeting by stealth, speaking with bated breath; what good can we do now for Russia?

**PRESIDENT**

We can suffer at least.

**VERA**

We have done that too much already. The hour is now come to annihilate and to revenge.

**PRESIDENT**

Up to this the people have borne everything.

**VERA**

Because they have understood nothing. But now we, the Nihilists, have given them the tree of knowledge to eat of, and the day of silent suffering is over for Russia.

**MICHAEL**

Martial law, Vera! This is fearful tidings you bring.

**PRESIDENT**

It is the death-warrant of liberty in Russia

**VERA**

Or the signal for revolution.

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

**MICHAEL**

**ACT I.**

Are you sure it is true ?

**VERA**

Here is the proclamation. I stole it myself at the ball to-night from a young fool, one of Prince Paul's secretaries, who had been given it to copy. It was that which made me so late.

[*VERA hands proclamation to MICHAEL, who reads it.*]

**MICHAEL**

'To ensure the public safety—martial law. By order of the Czar, father of his people.'  
The father of his people !

**VERA**

Ay ! a father whose name shall not be hallowed, whose kingdom shall change to a republic, whose trespasses shall not be forgiven him, because he has robbed us of our daily bread ; with whom is neither might, nor right, nor glory, now or for ever.

**PRESIDENT**

It must be about this time that the council meet to-morrow. It has not yet been signed.

## VERA;

ACT I. ALEXIS

It shall not be while I have a tongue to plead with.

MICHAEL

Or while I have hands to smite with.

VERA

Martial law! O God, how easy it is for a king to kill his people by thousands, but we cannot rid ourselves of one crowned man in Europe! What is there of awful majesty in these men which makes the hand unsteady, the dagger treacherous, the pistol-shot harmless? Are they not men of like passions with ourselves, vulnerable to the same diseases, of flesh and blood not different from our own? What made Olgiati tremble at the supreme crisis of that Roman life, and Guido's nerve fail him when he should have been of iron and of steel? A plague, I say, on these fools of Naples, Berlin, and Spain! Methinks that if I stood face to face with one of the crowned men my eye would see more clearly, my aim be more sure, my whole body gain a strength and power that was not my own! Oh, to think what stands between us and freedom in

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

Europe! a few old men, wrinkled, feeble, **ACT I**  
tottering dotards whom a boy could strangle  
for a ducat, or a woman stab in a night-time.  
These are the things that keep us from liberty.  
But now methinks the brood of men is dead  
and the dull earth grown sick of childbearing,  
else would no crowned dog pollute God's air  
by living.

**OMNES**

Try us! Try us! Try us!

**MICHAEL**

We shall try thee, too, some day, Vera.

**VERA**

I pray God thou mayest! Have I not  
strangled whatever nature is in me, and shall  
I not keep my oath?

**MICHAEL**

[*To* PRESIDENT.] Martial law, President!  
Come, there is no time to be lost. We have  
twelve hours yet before us till the council  
meet. Twelve hours! One can overthrow a  
dynasty in less time than that.

## VERA;

### ACT I. PRESIDENT

Ay! or lose one's own head.

[MICHAEL and the PRESIDENT retire to one corner of the stage and sit whispering. VERA takes up the proclamation, and reads it to herself. ALEXIS watches and suddenly rushes up to her.]

ALEXIS

Vera!

VERA

Alexis, you here! Foolish boy, have I not prayed you to stay away? All of us here are doomed to die before our time, fated to expiate by suffering whatever good we do; but you, with your bright boyish face, you are too young to die yet.

ALEXIS

One is never too young to die for one's country!

VERA

Why do you come here night after night?

ALEXIS

Because I love the people.

---

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

**VERA**

**ACT I**

But your fellow-students must miss you. Are there no traitors among them? You know what spies there are in the University here. O Alexis, you must go! You see how desperate suffering has made us. There is no room here for a nature like yours. You must not come again.

**ALEXIS**

Why do you think so poorly of me? Why should I live while my brothers suffer?

**VERA**

You spake to me of your mother once. You said you loved her. Oh, think of her!

**ALEXIS**

I have no mother now but Russia, my life is hers to take or give away; but to-night I am here to see you. They tell me you are leaving for Novgorod to-morrow.

**VERA**

I must. They are getting faint-hearted there, and I would fan the flame of this revolution into such a blaze that the eyes of all kings in Europe shall be blinded. If martial law is passed they will need me all



**VERA;**

**ACT I** the more there. There is no limit, it seems, to the tyranny of one man; but to the suffering of a whole people there shall be a limit. Too many of us have died on block and barricade: it is their turn to be victims now.

**ALEXIS**

God knows it, I am with you. But you must not go. The police are watching every train for you. When you are seized they have orders to place you without trial in the lowest dungeon of the palace. I know it—no matter how. Oh, think how without you the sun goes from our life, how the people will lose their leader and liberty her priestess. Vera, you must not go!

**VERA**

You are right: I will stay. I would live a little longer for freedom, a little longer for Russia.

**ALEXIS**

When you die then Russia is smitten indeed; when you die then I shall lose all hope—all . . . Vera, this is fearful news you bring—martial law—it is too terrible. I knew it not, by my soul, I knew it not!

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

**VERA**

**ACT I.**

How could you have known it? It is too well laid a plot for that. This great White Czar, whose hands are red with the blood of the people he has murdered, whose soul is black with his iniquity, is the cleverest conspirator of us all. Oh, how could Russia bear two hearts like yours and his!

**ALEXIS**

Vera, the Emperor was not always like this. There was a time when he loved the people. It is that devil, whom God curse, Prince Paul Maraloffski who has brought him to this. Tomorrow, I swear it, I shall plead for the people to the Emperor.

**VERA**

Plead to the Czar! Foolish boy, it is only those who are sentenced to death that ever see our Czar. Besides, what should he care for a voice that pleads for mercy? The cry of a strong nation in its agony has not moved that heart of stone.

**ALEXIS**

[*Aside.*] Yet shall I plead to him. They can but kill me.

VERA;

ACT I. PROFESSOR

Here are the proclamations, Vera. Do you think they will do?

VERA

I shall read them. How fair he looks! Methinks he never seemed so noble as to-night. Liberty is blessed in having such a lover.

ALEXIS

Well, President, what are you deep in?

MICHAEL

We are thinking of the best way of killing bears. [*Whispers to PRESIDENT and leads him aside.*]

PROFESSOR

[*To VERA*]. And the letters from our brothers at Paris and Berlin. What answer shall we send to them?

VERA

[*Takes them mechanically.*] Had I not strangled nature, sworn neither to love nor to be loved, methinks I might have loved him. Oh, I am a fool, a traitor myself, a traitor myself! But why did he come

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

amongst us with his bright young face, his **ACT I**  
heart aflame for liberty, his pure white soul?  
Why does he make me feel at times as if I  
would have him as my king, Republican  
though I be? Oh, fool, fool, fool! False  
to your oath! weak as water! Have done!  
Remember what you are — a Nihilist, a  
Nihilist!

**PRESIDENT**

[*To MICHAEL.*] But you will be seized,  
Michael.

**MICHAEL**

I think not. I will wear the uniform of the  
Imperial Guard, and the Colonel on duty is one  
of us. It is on the first floor, you remember;  
so I can take a long shot.

**PRESIDENT**

Shall I not tell the brethren?

**MICHAEL**

Not a word, not a word! There is a traitor  
amongst us.

**VERA**

Come, are these the proclamations? Yes,  
they will do; yes, they will do. Send five

**VERA;**

**ACT I.** hundred to Kiev and Odessa and Novgorod, five hundred to Warsaw, and have twice the number distributed among the Southern provinces, though these dull Russian peasants care little for our proclamations, and less for our martyrdoms. When the blow is struck, it must be from the town, not from the country.

**MICHAEL**

Ay, and by the sword, not by the goose-quill.

**VERA**

Where are the letters from Poland?

**PROFESSOR**

Here.

**VERA**

Unhappy Poland! The eagles of Russia have fed on her heart. We must not forget our brothers there.

**PRESIDENT**

Is it true, Michael?

**MICHAEL**

Ay, I stake my life on it.

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

**PRESIDENT**

**ACT I**

Let the doors be locked, then. Alexis Ivanacievitch entered on our roll of the brothers as a student of the School of Medicine at Moscow. Why did you not tell us of this bloody scheme of martial law ?

**ALEXIS**

I, President ?

**MICHAEL**

Ay, you! You knew it, none better. Such weapons as these are not forged in a day. Why did you not tell us of it? A week ago there had been time to lay the mine, to raise the barricade, to strike one blow at least for liberty. But now the hour is past! It is too late, it is too late! Why did you keep it a secret from us, I say ?

**ALEXIS**

Now by the hand of freedom, Michael, my brother, you wrong me. I knew nothing of this hideous law. By my soul, my brothers, I knew not of it! How should I know ?

**MICHAEL**

Because you are a traitor! Where did you

**VERA;**

**ACT I.** go when you left us the night of our last meeting here?

**ALEXIS**

To mine own house, Michael.

**MICHAEL**

Liar! I was on your track. You left here an hour after midnight. Wrapped in a large cloak, you crossed the river by a boat a mile below the second bridge, and gave the ferryman a gold piece, you, the poor student of medicine! You doubled back twice, and hid in an archway so long that I had almost made up my mind to stab you at once, only that I am fond of hunting. So! you thought you had baffled all pursuit, did you? Fool! I am a bloodhound that never loses the scent. I followed you from street to street. At last I saw you pass swiftly across the Place St Isaac, whisper to the guards some secret password, enter the palace by a private door with your own key.

**CONSPIRATORS**

The palace!

**VERA**

Alexis!

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

MICHAEL

ACT I

I waited. All through the dreary watches of our long Russian night I waited, that I might kill you with your Judas hire still hot in your hand. But you never came back; you never left that palace. I saw the blood-red sun rise through the yellow fog over the murky town; I saw a new day of oppression dawn on Russia; but you never came back. So you pass nights in the palace, do you? You know the password for the guards; you have a key to a secret door. You are a spy—I never trusted you, with your soft white hands, your curled hair, your pretty graces. You have no mark of suffering about you; you cannot be of the people. You are a spy—a spy—traitor!

OMNES

Kill him! Kill him! [*Draw their knives.*]

VERA

[*Rushing in front of* ALEXIS.] Stand back, I say, Michael! Stand back all! Do not dare lay a hand upon him! He is the noblest heart amongst us.

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## VERA;

ACT I. OMNES

Kill him! Kill him! He is a spy!

VERA

Dare to lay a finger on him, and I leave you all to yourselves.

PRESIDENT

Vera, did you not hear what Michael said of him? He stayed all night in the Czar's palace. He has a password and a private key. What else should he be but a spy?

VERA

Bah! I do not believe Michael. It is a lie! It is a lie! Alexis, say it is a lie!

ALEXIS

It is true. Michael has told what he saw. I did pass that night in the Czar's palace. Michael has spoken the truth.

VERA

Stand back, I say; stand back! Alexis, I do not care. I trust you; you would not betray us; you would not sell the people for money. You are honest, true! Oh, say you are no spy!

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

ALEXIS

ACT I.

Spy? You know I am not. I am with you,  
my brothers, to the death.

MICHAEL

Ay, to your own death.

ALEXIS

Vera, you know I am true.

VERA

I know it well.

PRESIDENT

Why are you here, traitor?

ALEXIS

Because I love the people.

MICHAEL

Then you can be a martyr for them?

VERA

You must kill me first, Michael, before you  
lay a finger on him.

PRESIDENT

Michael, we dare not lose Vera. It is her  
whim to let this boy live. We can keep him  
here to-night. Up to this he has not betrayed

us.

*[Tramp of soldiers outside, knocking at door.]*

## VERA;

ACT I. VOICE

Open, in the name of the Emperor!

MICHAEL

He *has* betrayed us. This is your doing, spy!

PRESIDENT

Come, Michael, come. We have no time to cut one another's throats while we have our own heads to save.

VOICE

Open, in the name of the Emperor!

PRESIDENT

Brothers, be masked, all of you. Michael, open the door. It is our only chance.

[*Enter* GENERAL KOTEMKIN *and* soldiers.]

GENERAL

All honest citizens should be in their own houses an hour before midnight, and not more than five people have a right to meet privately. Have you not noticed the proclamation, fellows?

MICHAEL

Ay, you have spoiled every honest wall in Moscow with it.

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

**VERA**

**ACT I.**

Peace, Michael, peace. Nay, Sir, we knew it not. We are a company of strolling players travelling from Samara to Moscow to amuse his Imperial Majesty the Czar.

**GENERAL**

But I heard loud voices before I entered. What was that?

**VERA**

We were rehearsing a new tragedy.

**GENERAL**

Your answers are too *honest* to be true. Come, let me see who you are. Take off those players' masks. By St. Nicholas, my beauty, if your face matches your figure, you must be a choice morsel! Come, I say, pretty one; I would sooner see your face than those of all the others.

**PRESIDENT**

O God! if he sees it is Vera, we are all lost!

**GENERAL**

No coquetting, my girl. Come, unmask, I say, or I shall tell my guards to do it for you.

**VERA;**

**ACT I. ALEXIS**

Stand back, I say, General Kotemkin!

**GENERAL**

Who are you, fellow, that talk with such a tripping tongue to your betters? [**ALEXIS** takes his mask off.] His Imperial Highness the Czarevitch!

**OMNES**

The Czarevitch! It is all over!

**PRESIDENT**

I knew he was a spy. He will give us up to the soldiers.

**MICHAEL**

[*To VERA*]. Why did you not let me kill him? Come, we must fight to the death for it.

**VERA**

Peace! he will not betray us.

**ALEXIS**

A whim of mine, General! You know how my father keeps me from the world and imprisons me in the palace. I should really be

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

bored to death if I could not get out at night **ACT I**  
in disguise sometimes, and have some romantic  
adventure in town. I fell in with these honest  
folks a few hours ago.

**GENERAL**

Actors, are they, Prince ?

**ALEXIS**

Ay, and very ambitious actors, too. They  
only care to play before kings.

**GENERAL**

I' faith, your Highness, I was in hopes I had  
made a good haul of Nihilists.

**ALEXIS**

Nihilists in Moscow, General ! with you as  
head of the police ? Impossible !

**GENERAL**

So I always tell your Imperial father. But  
I heard at the council to-day that that woman  
Vera Sabouroff, the head of them, had been  
seen in this very city. The Emperor's face  
turned as white as the snow outside. I think  
I never saw such terror in any man before.

**VERA;**

**ACT I. ALEXIS**

She is a dangerous woman, then, this Vera Sabouroff?

**GENERAL**

The most dangerous in all Europe.

**ALEXIS**

Did you ever see her, General?

**GENERAL**

Why, five years ago, when I was a plain Colonel, I remember her, your Highness, a common waiting-girl in an inn. If I had known then what she was going to turn out, I would have flogged her to death on the roadside. She is not a woman at all; she is a sort of devil! For the last eighteen months I have been hunting her, and caught sight of her once last September outside Odessa.

**ALEXIS**

How did you let her go, General?

**GENERAL**

I was by myself, and she shot one of my horses just as I was gaining on her. If I see her again I shan't miss my chance. The

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

Emperor has put twenty thousand roubles on ACT I.  
her head.

**ALEXIS**

I hope you will get it, General; but meanwhile you are frightening these honest folk out of their wits, and disturbing the tragedy. Good-night, General.

**GENERAL**

Yes; but I should like to see their faces, your Highness.

**ALEXIS**

No, General; you must not ask that; you know how these gipsies hate to be stared at.

**GENERAL**

Yes. But, your Highness—

**ALEXIS**

[*Haughtily.*] General, they are my friends, that is enough. Good-night. And, General, not a word of my little adventure here, you understand.

**GENERAL**

But shall we not see you back to the palace? The State ball is almost over and you are expected.



## VERA; OR, THE NIHILISTS

ACT I. ALEXIS

I shall be there; but I shall return alone.  
Remember, not a word.

GENERAL

Or your pretty gipsy, eh, Prince? your pretty gipsy! I' faith, I should like to see her before I go; she has such fine eyes through her mask. Well, good night, your Highness; good night.

ALEXIS

Good night, General.

*[Exeunt GENERAL and the soldiers.]*

VERA

*[Throwing off her mask.]* Saved! and by you!

ALEXIS

*[Clasping her hand.]* Brothers, you trust me now? *[Exit.*

*Tableau*

END OF ACT I

## ACT II

### SCENE

*Council Chamber in the Emperor's Palace, hung with yellow tapestry. Table, with chair of State, set for the Czar; window behind, opening on to a balcony. As the scene progresses the light outside gets darker.*

*Present.*—PRINCE PAUL MARALOFFSKI. PRINCE PETROVITCH. COUNT ROVALOFF. BARON RAFF. COUNT PETOUCHOF.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

So our young scatter-brained Czarevitch has been forgiven at last, and is to take his seat here again.

PRINCE PAUL

Yes; if that is not meant as an extra punishment. For my own part, at least, I find these Cabinet Councils extremely tiring.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

Naturally; you are always speaking.

## VERA;

### ACT II. PRINCE PAUL

No; I think it must be that I have to listen sometimes. It is so exhausting not to talk.

### COUNT ROUVALOFF

Still, anything is better than being kept in a sort of prison, like he was—never allowed to go out into the world.

### PRINCE PAUL

My dear Count, for romantic young people like he is the world always looks best at a distance; and a prison where one's allowed to order one's own dinner is not at all a bad place. [*Enter the CZAREVITCH. The courtiers rise.*] Ah! Good afternoon, Prince. Your Highness is looking a little pale to-day.

### CZAREVITCH

[*Slowly, after a pause.*] I want change of air.

### PRINCE PAUL

[*Smiling.*] A most revolutionary sentiment! Your Imperial father would highly disapprove of any reforms even with the thermometer in Russia.

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

CZAREVITCH

ACT II.

[*Bitterly.*] My Imperial father had kept me for six months in this dungeon of a palace. This morning he has me suddenly woke up to see some wretched Nihilists hung; it sickened me, the bloody butchery, though it was a noble thing to see how well these men can die.

PRINCE PAUL

When you are as old as I am, Prince, you will understand that there are few things easier than to live badly and to die well.

CZAREVITCH

Easy to die well! A lesson experience cannot have taught you, much as you know of a bad life.

PRINCE PAUL

[*Shrugging his shoulders.*] Experience, the name men give to their mistakes. I never commit any.

CZAREVITCH

[*Bitterly.*] No; crimes are more in your line.

**VERA;**

**ACT II. PRINCE PETROVITCH**

[*To the CZAREVITCH.*] The Emperor was a good deal agitated about your late appearance at the ball last night, Prince.

**COUNT ROUVALOFF**

[*Laughing.*] I believe he thought the Nihilists had broken into the palace and carried you off.

**BARON RAFF**

If they had you would have missed a charming dance.

**PRINCE PAUL**

And an excellent supper. Gringoire really excelled himself in his salad. Ah! you may laugh, Baron; but to cook a good salad is a much more difficult thing than cooking accounts. To make a good salad is to be a brilliant diplomatist — the problem is entirely the same in both cases. To know exactly how much oil one must put with one's vinegar.

**BARON RAFF**

A cook and a diplomatist! an excellent parallel. If I had a son who was a fool I'd make him one or the other.

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

PRINCE PAUL

ACT II.

I see your father did not hold the same opinion, Baron. But, believe me, you are wrong to run down cookery. Culture depends on cookery. For myself, the only immortality I desire is to invent a new sauce. I have never had time enough to think seriously about it, but I feel it is in me, I feel it is in me.

CZAREVITCH

You have certainly missed your *métier*, Prince Paul; the *cordons bleu* of the kitchen would have suited you much better than the Grand Cross of Honour. But you know you could never have worn your white apron well; you would have soiled it too soon, your hands are not clean enough.

PRINCE PAUL

[*Bowing.*] You forget—or, how could they be? I manage your father's business.

CZAREVITCH

[*Bitterly.*] You mismanage my father's business, you mean! Evil genius of his life that you are! before you came there was some love left in him. It is you who have

**VERA ;**

**ACT II.** embittered his nature, poured into his ear the poison of treacherous counsel, made him hated by the whole people, made him what he is—a tyrant !

*[The courtiers look significantly at each other.]*

**PRINCE PAUL**

*[Calmly.]* I see your Highness does want change of air. But I have been an eldest son myself. *[Lights a cigarette.]* I know what it is when a father won't die to please one.

*[The CZAREVITCH goes to the top of the stage, and leans against the window, looking out.]*

**PRINCE PETROVITCH**

*[To BARON RAFF.]* Foolish boy! He will be sent into exile, or worse, if he is not careful.

**BARON RAFF**

Yes. What a mistake it is to be sincere!

**PRINCE PETROVITCH**

The only folly you have never committed, Baron.

**BARON RAFF**

One has only one head, you know, Prince.

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

PRINCE PAUL

ACT II.

My dear Baron, your head is the last thing any one would wish to take from you. [*Pulls out snuff-box and offers it to PRINCE PETROVITCH*].

PRINCE PETROVITCH

Thanks, Prince! Thanks!

PRINCE PAUL

Very delicate, isn't it? I get it direct from Paris. But under this vulgar Republic everything has degenerated over there. Côtelettes à l'impériale vanished of course with the Bonaparte, and omelettes went out with the Orleanists. La belle France is entirely ruined, Prince, through bad morals and worse cookery. [*Enter the MARQUIS DE POIVRARD.*] Ah! Marquis. I trust Madame la Marquise is well.

MARQUIS DE POIVRARD

You ought to know better than I do, Prince Paul; you see more of her.

PRINCE PAUL

[*Bowing.*] Perhaps I see more in her, Marquis. Your wife is really a charming



**VERA;**

**ACT II.** woman, so full of *esprit*, and so satirical too; she talks continually of you when we are together.

**PRINCE PETROVITCH**

[*Looking at the clock.*] His Majesty is a little late to-day, is he not?

**PRINCE PAUL**

What has happened to you, my dear Petrovitch? you seem quite out of sorts. You haven't quarrelled with your cook, I hope? What a tragedy that would be for you; you would lose all your friends.

**PRINCE PETROVITCH**

I fear I wouldn't be so fortunate as that. You forget I would still have my purse. But you are wrong for once; my chef and I are on excellent terms.

**PRINCE PAUL**

Then your creditors or Mademoiselle Vera Sabouroff have been writing to you? They compose more than half of my correspondents. But really you needn't be alarmed. I find the most violent proclamations from the

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

**Executive Committee, as they call it, left all** ACT II.  
**over my house. I never read them; they are**  
**so badly spelt as a rule.**

**PRINCE PETROVITCH**

Wrong again, Prince; the Nihilists leave me alone for some reason or other.

**PRINCE PAUL**

[*Aside.*] True! Indifference is the revenge the world takes on mediocrities.

**PRINCE PETROVITCH**

I am bored with life, Prince. Since the opera season ended I have been a perpetual martyr to ennui.

**PRINCE PAUL**

The *maladie du siècle*! You want a new excitement, Prince. Let me see—you have been married twice already; suppose you try—falling in love for once.

**BARON RAFF**

I cannot understand your nature.

**V E R A ;**

**ACT II. PRINCE PAUL**

[*Smiling.*] If my nature had been made to suit your comprehension rather than my own requirements, I am afraid I would have made a very poor figure in the world.

**COUNT ROUVALOFF**

There seems to be nothing in life about which you would not jest.

**PRINCE PAUL**

Ah! my dear Count, life is much too important a thing ever to talk seriously about it.

**CZAREVITCH**

[*Coming back from window.*] I don't think Prince Paul's nature is such a mystery. He would stab his best friend for the sake of writing an epigram on his tombstone.

**PRINCE PAUL**

Parbleu! I would sooner lose my best friend than my worst enemy. To have friends, you know, one need only be good-natured; but when a man has no enemy left there must be something mean about him.

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

CZAREVITCH

ACT II.

[*Bitterly.*] If to have enemies is a measure of greatness, then you must be a Colossus, indeed, Prince.

PRINCE PAUL

Yes, your Highness, I know I'm the most hated man in Russia, except your father, except your father of course. He doesn't seem to like it much, by the way ; but I do, I assure you. [*Bitterly.*] I love to drive through the streets and see how the rabble scowl at me from every corner. It makes me feel I am a power in Russia ; one man against millions ! Besides, I have no ambition to be a popular hero, to be crowned with laurels one year and pelted with stones the next ; I prefer dying peaceably in my own bed.

CZAREVITCH

And after death ?

PRINCE PAUL

[*Shrugging his shoulders.*] Heaven is a despotism. I shall be at home there.

CZAREVITCH

Do you never think of the people and their rights ?

## VERA;

### ACT II. PRINCE PAUL

The people and their rights bore me. I am sick of both. In these modern days to be vulgar, illiterate, common and vicious, seems to give a man a marvellous infinity of rights that his honest fathers never dreamed of. Believe me, Prince, in good democracy every man should be an aristocrat; but these people in Russia who seek to thrust us out are no better than the animals in one's preserves, and made to be shot at, most of them.

#### CZAREVITCH

*[Excitedly.]* If they *are* common, illiterate, vulgar, no better than the beasts of the field, who made them so? *[Enter AIDE-DE-CAMP.]*

#### AIDE-DE-CAMP

His Imperial Majesty, the Emperor!  
*[PRINCE PAUL looks at the CZAREVITCH, and smiles.]*

*[Enter the CZAR, surrounded by his guard.]*

#### CZAREVITCH

*[Rushing forward to meet him.]* Sire!

#### CZAR

*[Nervous and frightened.]* Don't come too near me, boy! Don't come too near me, I

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

say! There is always something about an heir to a crown unwholesome to his father. Who is that man over there? I don't know him. What is he doing? Is he a conspirator? Have you searched him? Give him till to-morrow to confess, then hang him!—hang him!

**PRINCE PAUL**

Sire, you are anticipating history. This is Count Petouchof, your new Ambassador to Berlin. He is come to kiss hands on his appointment.

**CZAR**

To kiss my hand? There is some plot in it. He wants to poison me. There, kiss my son's hand; it will do quite as well.

[*PRINCE PAUL signs to PRINCE PETOUCHOF to leave the room. Exeunt PETOUCHOF and the guards. CZAR sinks down into his chair. The courtiers remain silent.*]

**PRINCE PAUL**

[*Approaching.*] Sire! will your Majesty—

**CZAR**

What do you startle me for like that? No,

VERA;

ACT II. I won't. [*Watches the courtiers nervously.*]  
Why are you clattering your sword, sir?  
[*To COUNT ROUVALOFF.*] Take it off. I shall  
have no man wear a sword in my presence  
[*looking at CZAREVITCH*], least of all my son.  
[*To PRINCE PAUL.*] You are not angry with  
me, Prince? You won't desert me, will you?  
Say you won't desert me. What do you  
want? You can have anything—anything.

PRINCE PAUL

[*Bowing very low.*] Sire, 'tis enough for  
me to have your confidence. [*Aside.*] I was  
afraid he was going to revenge himself, and  
give me another decoration.

CZAR

[*Returning to his chair.*] Well, gentlemen.

MARQUIS DE POIVRARD

Sire, I have the honour to present to you  
a loyal address from your subjects in the  
Province of Archangel, expressing their horror  
at the last attempt on your Majesty's life.

PRINCE PAUL

The last attempt but two, you ought to  
have said, Marquis. Don't you see it is dated  
three weeks back?

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

CZAR

ACT II.

They are good people in the Province of Archangel—honest, loyal people. They love me very much—simple, loyal people; give them a new saint, it costs nothing. Well, Alexis [*turning to the CZAREVITCH*—how many traitors were hung this morning?

CZAREVITCH

There were three men strangled, Sire.

CZAR

There should have been three thousand. I would to God that this people had but one neck that I might strangle them with one noose! Did they tell anything? whom did they implicate? what did they confess?

CZAREVITCH

Nothing, Sire.

CZAR

They should have been tortured then; why weren't they tortured? Must I always be fighting in the dark? Am I never to know from what root these traitors spring?

CZAREVITCH

What root should there be of discontent



**VERA;**

**ACT II.** among the people but tyranny and injustice  
amongst their rulers?

**CZAR**

What did you say, boy? tyranny! tyranny!  
Am I a tyrant? I'm not. I love the people.  
I'm their father. I'm called so in every  
official proclamation. Have a care, boy;  
have a care. You don't seem to be cured yet  
of your foolish tongue. [*Goes over to PRINCE  
PAUL and puts his hand on his shoulder.*]  
Prince Paul, tell me were there many  
people there this morning to see the Nihilists  
hung?

**PRINCE PAUL**

Hanging is of course a good deal less of a  
novelty in Russia now, Sire, than it was three  
or four years ago; and you know how easily  
the people get tired even of their best amuse-  
ments. But the square and the tops of the  
houses were really quite crowded, were they  
not, Prince? [*To the CZAREVITCH, who takes no  
notice.*]

**CZAR**

That's right; all loyal citizens should be

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

there. It shows them what to look forward to. **ACT II.**  
to. Did you arrest any one in the crowd?

**PRINCE PAUL**

Yes, Sire; a woman, for cursing your name.  
[*The CZAREVITCH starts anxiously.*] She was  
the mother of two of the criminals.

**CZAR**

[*Looking at CZAREVITCH.*] She should have  
blessed me for having rid her of her children.  
Send her to prison.

**CZAREVITCH**

The prisons of Russia are too full already,  
Sire. There is no room in them for any more  
victims.

**CZAR**

They don't die fast enough, then. You  
should put more of them into one cell at once.  
You don't keep them long enough in the  
mines. If you do they're sure to die; but  
you're all too merciful. I'm too merciful  
myself. Send her to Siberia. She is sure  
to die on the way. [*Enter an AIDE-DE-CAMP.*]  
Who's that? Who's that?

**AIDE-DE-CAMP**

A letter for his Imperial Majesty.

## VERA;

### ACT II. CZAR

[*To PRINCE PAUL.*] I won't open it. There may be something in it.

#### PRINCE PAUL

It would be a very disappointing letter, Sire, if there wasn't. [*Takes letter himself, and reads it.*]

#### PRINCE PETROVITCH

[*To COUNT ROUVALOFF.*] It must be some sad news. I know that smile too well.

#### PRINCE PAUL

From the Chief of the Police at Archangel, Sire. 'The Governor of the province was shot this morning by a woman as he was entering the courtyard of his own house. The assassin has been seized.'

#### CZAR

I never trusted the people in Archangel. It's a nest of Nihilists and conspirators. Take away their saints; they don't deserve them.

#### PRINCE PAUL

Your Highness would punish them more severely by giving them an extra one. Three governors shot in two months! [*Smiles to*

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

*himself.*] Sire, permit me to recommend ACT II  
your loyal subject, the Marquis de Poivnard,  
as the new governor of your Province of  
Archangel.

MARQUIS DE POIVNARD

[*Hurriedly.*] Sire, I am unfit for this post.

PRINCE PAUL

Marquis, you are too modest. Believe me,  
there is no man in Russia I would sooner  
see Governor of Archangel than yourself.

[*Whispers to CZAR.*]

CZAR

Quite right, Prince Paul; you are always  
right. See that the Marquis's letters are  
made out at once.

PRINCE PAUL

He can start to-night, Sire. I shall really  
miss you very much, Marquis. I always  
liked your taste in wine and wives extremely.

MARQUIS DE POIVNARD

[*To the CZAR.*] Start to-night, Sire?  
[PRINCE PAUL *whispers to the CZAR.*]

CZAR

Yes, Marquis, to-night; it is better to go  
at once.

## VERA;

ACT II. PRINCE PAUL

I shall see that Madame la Marquise is not too lonely while you are away; so you need not be alarmed for her.

COUNT ROUVALOFF

[To PRINCE PETROVITCH.] I should be more alarmed for myself.

CZAR

The Governor of Archangel shot in his own courtyard by a woman! I'm not safe here. I'm not safe anywhere, with that she devil of the revolution, Vera Saboureff, here in Moscow. Prince Paul, is that woman still here?

PRINCE PAUL

They tell me she was at the Grand Duke's ball last night. I can hardly believe that; but she certainly had intended to leave for Novgorod to-day, Sire. The police were watching every train for her; but, for some reason or other, she did not go. Some traitor must have warned her. But I shall catch her yet. A chase after a beautiful woman is always exciting.

---

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

**CZAR**

**ACT II.**

You must hunt her down with bloodhounds, and when she is taken I shall hew her limb from limb. I shall stretch her on the rack till her pale white body is twisted and curled like paper in the fire.

**PRINCE PAUL**

Oh, we shall have another hunt immediately for her, Sire! Prince Alexis will assist us, I am sure.

**CZAREVITCH**

You never require any assistance to ruin a woman, Prince Paul

**CZAR**

Vera, the Nihilist, in Moscow! O God, were it not better to die at once the dog's death they plot for me than to live as I live now! Never to sleep, or, if I do, to dream such horrid dreams that hell itself were peace when matched with them. To trust none but those I have bought, to buy none worth trusting! To see a traitor in every smile, poison in every dish, a dagger in every

## VERA;

ACT II. hand! To lie awake at night, listening from hour to hour for the stealthy creeping of the murderer, for the laying of the damned mine! You are all spies! you are all spies! You worst of all—you, my own son! Which of you is it who hides these bloody proclamations under my own pillow, or at the table where I sit? Which of ye all is the Judas who betrays me? O God! O God! methinks there was a time once, in our war with England, when nothing could make me afraid. [*This with more calm and pathos.*] I have ridden into the crimson heart of war, and borne back an eagle which those wild islanders had taken from us. Men said I was brave then. My father gave me the Iron Cross of Valour. Oh, could he see me now, with this coward's livery ever in my cheek! [*Sinks into his chair.*] I never knew any love when I was a boy. I was ruled by terror myself, how else should I rule now? [*Starts up.*] But I will have revenge; I will have revenge. For every hour I have lain awake at night, waiting for the noose or the dagger, they shall pass years in Siberia, centuries in the mines! Ay! I shall have revenge.

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

**CZAREVITCH**

**ACT II.**

Father! have mercy on the people. Give them what they ask.

**PRINCE PAUL**

And begin, Sire, with your own head; they have a particular liking for that.

**CZAR**

The people! the people! A tiger which I have let loose on myself; but I will fight with it to the death. I am done with half measures. I shall crush these Nihilists at a blow. There shall not be a man of them, no, nor a woman either, left alive in Russia. Am I Emperor for nothing, that a woman should hold me at bay? Vera Sabouroff shall be in my power, I swear it, before a week is ended, though I burn my whole city to find her. She shall be flogged by the knout, stifled in the fortress, strangled in the square!

**CZAREVITCH**

O God!

**CZAR**

For two years her hands have been clutching at my throat; for two years she has made



## VERA;

ACT II. my life a hell; but I shall have revenge. Martial law, Prince, martial law over the whole Empire; that will give me revenge. A good measure, Prince, eh? a good measure.

PRINCE PAUL

And an economical one too, Sire. It will carry off your surplus population in six months, and save you any expense in courts of justice; they will not be needed now.

CZAR

Quite right. There are too many people in Russia, too much money spent on them, too much money on courts of justice. I'll shut them up.

CZAREVITCH

Sire, reflect before——

CZAR

When can you have the proclamations ready, Prince Paul?

PRINCE PAUL

They have been printed for the last six months, Sire. I knew you would need them.

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

**CZAR**

**ACT II.**

That's good! That's very good! Let us begin at once. Ah, Prince, if every king in Europe had a minister like you——

**CZAREVITCH**

There would be less kings in Europe than there are.

**CZAR**

[*In frightened whisper, to PRINCE PAUL.*] What does he mean? Do you trust him? His prison hasn't cured him yet. Shall I banish him? Shall I [*whispers*] . . .? The Emperor Paul did it. The Empress Catherine there [*points to picture on the wall*] did it. Why shouldn't I?

**PRINCE PAUL**

Your Majesty, there is no need for alarm. The Prince is a very ingenuous young man. He pretends to be devoted to the people, and lives in a palace; preaches socialism, and draws a salary that would support a province. Some day he'll find out that the best cure for Republicanism is the Imperial crown, and will cut up the red cap of liberty to make decorations for his Prime Minister.

## VERA;

ACT II. CZAR

You are right. If he really loved the people, he could not be my son.

PRINCE PAUL

If he lived with the people for a fortnight, their bad dinners would soon cure him of his democracy. Shall we begin, Sire?

CZAR

At once. Read the proclamation. Gentlemen, be seated. Alexis, Alexis, I say, come and hear it! It will be good practice for you; you will be doing it yourself some day.

CZAREVITCH

I have heard too much of it already.  
[*Takes his seat at the table.* COUNT ROUVALOFF  
*whispers to him.*]

CZAR

What are you whispering about there, Count Rouvaloff?

COUNT ROUVALOFF

I was giving his Royal Highness some good advice, your Majesty.

PRINCE PAUL

Count Rouvaloff is the typical spendthrift,

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

Sire; he is always giving away what he needs ACT II  
most. [*Lays papers before the* CZAR.] I think Sire, you will approve of this:—‘Love of the people,’ ‘Father of his people,’ ‘Martial law,’ and the usual allusions to Providence in the last line. All it requires now is your Imperial Majesty’s signature.

**CZAREVITCH**

Sire!

**PRINCE PAUL**

[*Hurriedly.*] I promise your Majesty to crush every Nihilist in Russia in six months if you sign this proclamation; every Nihilist in Russia.

**CZAR**

Say that again! To crush every Nihilist in Russia; to crush this woman, their leader, who makes war upon me in my own city. Prince Paul Maraloffski, I create you Maréchal of the whole Russian Empire to help you to carry out martial law.

**CZAR**

Give me the proclamation. I will sign it at once.

## VERA,

ACT II. PRINCE PAUL

[*Points on paper.*] Here, Sire.

CZAREVITCH

[*Starts up and puts his hands on the paper.*]  
Stay! I tell you, stay! The priests have taken heaven from the people, and you would take the earth away too.

PRINCE PAUL

[*Hurriedly.*] We have no time, Prince, now. This boy will ruin everything. The pen, Sire.

CZAREVITCH

What! is it so small a thing to strangle a nation, to murder a kingdom, to wreck an empire? Who are we who dare lay this ban of terror on a people? Have we less vices than they have, that we bring them to the bar of judgment before us?

PRINCE PAUL

What a Communist the Prince is! He would have an equal distribution of sin as well as of property.

CZAREVITCH

Warmed by the same sun, nurtured by the same air, fashioned of flesh and blood like to our own, wherein are they different to us,

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

save that they starve while we surfeit, that **ACT II**  
they toil while we idle, that they sicken while  
we poison, that they die while we——

**CZAR**

How dare——?

**CZAREVITCH**

I dare all for the people; but you would  
rob them of common rights of men.

**CZAR**

The people have no rights.

**CZAREVITCH**

Then they have great wrongs. Father,  
they have won your battles for you; from the  
pine forests of the Baltic to the palms of  
India they have ridden on victory's mighty  
wings! Boy as I am in years, I have seen  
wave after wave of living men sweep up the  
heights of battle to their death; ay, and  
snatch perilous conquest from the scales  
of war when the bloody crescent seemed  
to shake above our eagles.

**CZAR**

[*Somewhat moved.*] Those men are dead.  
What have I to do with them?

## VERA ;

### ACT II. CZAREVITCH

Nothing! The dead are safe; you cannot harm them now. They sleep their last long sleep. Some in Turkish waters, others by the wind-swept heights of Norway and the Dane! But these, the living, our brothers, what have you done for them? They asked you for bread, you gave them a stone. They sought for freedom, you scourged them with scorpions. You have sown the seeds of this revolution yourself——!

PRINCE PAUL

And are we not cutting down the harvest?

CZAREVITCH

Oh, my brothers! better far that ye had died in the iron hail and screaming shell of battle than to come back to such a doom as this! The beasts of the forests have their lairs, and the wild beasts their caverns, but the people of Russia, conquerors of the world, have not where to lay their heads.

PRINCE PAUL

They have the headsman's block.

CZAREVITCH

The block! Ay! you have killed their

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

souls at your pleasure, you would kill their **ACT II.**  
bodies now.

**CZAR**

Insolent boy! Have you forgotten who is  
Emperor of Russia?

**CZAREVITCH**

No! The people reign now, by the grace  
of God. You should have been their shep-  
herd; you have fled away like the hireling,  
and let the wolves in upon them.

**CZAR**

Take him away! Take him away, Prince  
Paul!

**CZAREVITCH**

God hath given this people tongues to  
speak with; you would cut them out that  
they may be dumb in their agony, silent in  
their torture! But He hath given them  
hands to smite with, and they shall smite!  
Ay! from the sick and labouring womb of  
this unhappy land some revolution, like a  
bloody child, may rise up and slay you.

**CZAR**

[*Leaping up.*] Devil! Assassin! Why do  
you beard me thus to my face?



**V E R A ;**

**ACT II. CZAREVITCH**

Because I am a Nihilist! [*The ministers start to their feet; there is a dead silence for a few minutes.*]

**CZAR**

A Nihilist! a Nihilist! Viper whom I have nurtured, traitor whom I have fondled, is this your bloody secret? Prince Paul Maraloffski, Maréchal of the Russian Empire, arrest the Czarevitch!

**MINISTERS**

Arrest the Czarevitch!

**CZAR**

A Nihilist! If you have sown with them, you shall reap with them! If you have talked with them, you shall rot with them! If you have lived with them, with them you shall die!

**PRINCE PETROVITCH**

Die!

**CZAR**

A plague on all sons, I say! There should be no more marriages in Russia when one can

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

breed such Serpents as you are! Arrest the **ACT II**  
Czarevitch, I say!

**PRINCE PAUL**

Czarevitch! by order of the Emperor, I demand your sword. [CZAREVITCH gives up sword; PRINCE PAUL places it on the table.]

**CZAREVITCH**

You will find it unstained by blood.

**PRINCE PAUL**

Foolish boy! you are not made for a conspirator; you have not learned to hold your tongue. Heroics are out of place in a palace.

**CZAR**

[Sinks into his chair with his eyes fixed on the CZAREVITCH.] O God! My own son against me, my own flesh and blood against me; but I am rid of them all now.

**CZAREVITCH**

The mighty brotherhood to which I belong has a thousand such as I am, ten thousand better still! [The CZAR starts in his seat.]

**V E R A ;**

**ACT II.** The star of freedom is risen already, and far off I hear the mighty wave Democracy break on these cursed shores.

**PRINCE PAUL**

[*To PRINCE PETROVITCH.*] In that case you and I must learn how to swim.

**CZAREVITCH**

Father, Emperor, Imperial Master, I plead not for my own life, but for the lives of my brothers, the people.

**PRINCE PAUL**

[*Bitterly.*] Your brothers, the people, Prince, are not content with their own lives, they always want to take their neighbours' too.

**CZAR**

[*Standing up.*] I am tired of being afraid. I have done with terror now. From this day I proclaim war against the people—war to their annihilation. As they have dealt with me, so shall I deal with them. I shall grind them to powder, and strew their dust upon the air. There shall be a spy in every man's house, a traitor on every hearth, a hangman

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

in every village, a gibbet in every square. ACT II.  
Plague, leprosy, or fever shall be less deadly than my wrath; I will make every frontier a graveyard, every province a lazaret-house, and cure the sick by the sword. I shall have peace in Russia, though it be the peace of the dead. Who said I was a coward? Who said I was afraid? See, thus shall I crush this people beneath my feet! [*Takes up sword of CZAREVITCH off table and tramples on it.*]

**CZAREVITCH**

Father, beware, the sword you tread on may turn and wound you. The people suffer long, but vengeance comes at last, vengeance with red hands and silent feet.

**PRINCE PAUL**

Bah! the people are bad shots; they always miss one.

**CZAREVITCH**

There are times when the people are the instruments of God.

**CZAR**

Ay! and when kings are God's scourges for the people. Take him away! Take him

VERA;

ACT II. away! Bring in my guards. [*Enter the Imperial Guard. CZAR points to CZAREVITCH, who stands alone at the side of the stage.*] We will bring him to prison ourselves: prison! I trust no prison. He would escape and kill me. I will have him shot here, here in the open square by the soldiers. Let me never see his face again. [*CZAREVITCH is being led out.*] No, no, leave him! I don't trust guards. They are all Nihilists! [*To PRINCE PAUL.*] I trust you, you have no mercy— [*Throws window open and goes out on balcony.*]

CZAREVITCH

If I am to die for the people I am ready  
One Nihilist more or less in Russia, what does  
that matter?

PRINCE PAUL

[*Looking at his watch.*] The dinner is sur-  
to be spoiled. How annoying politics are  
and eldest sons!

VOICE

[*Outside, in the street.*] God save the  
people! [*CZAR is shot, and staggers back into  
the room.*]

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

CZAREVITCH

ACT II.

*[Breaking from the guards, and rushing over.]* Father!

CZAR

Murderer! Murderer! You did it!  
Murderer! *[Dies.]*

*Tableau*

END OF ACT II

## ACT III

*Same scene and business as Act I. Man in yellow dress,  
with drawn sword, at the door.*

*Password outside. Væ tyrannis.*

*Answer. Væ victis [repeated three times].*

*[Enter CONSPIRATORS who form a semicircle,  
masked and cloaked.]*

**PRESIDENT**

What hour is it ?

**FIRST CONSPIRATOR**

The hour to strike.

**PRESIDENT**

What day ?

**SECOND CONSPIRATOR**

The day of Marat.

**PRESIDENT**

In what month ?

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

THIRD CONSPIRATOR

The month of liberty.

ACT III.

PRESIDENT

What is our duty ?

FOURTH CONSPIRATOR

To obey.

PRESIDENT

Our creed ?

FIFTH CONSPIRATOR

Parbleu, Monsieur le Président, I never knew you had one.

CONSPIRATORS

A spy ! A spy ! Unmask ! Unmask ! A spy !

PRESIDENT

Let the doors be shut. There are others but Nihilists present.

CONSPIRATORS

Unmask ! Unmask ! Kill him ! kill him ! [*Masked Conspirator unmasks.*] Prince Paul !

VERA

Devil ! Who lured you into the lion's den ?

o



**VERA ;**

**ACT III. CONSPIRATORS**

**Kill him ! Kill him !**

**PRINCE PAUL**

**En vérité, Messieurs, you are not over hospitable in your welcome.**

**VERA**

**Welcome ! What welcome should we give you but the dagger or the noose ?**

**PRINCE PAUL**

**I had no idea really that the Nihilists were so exclusive. Let me assure you that if I had not always had an entrée to the very best society, and the very worst conspiracies, I could never have been Prime Minister in Russia.**

**VERA**

**The tiger cannot change its nature, nor the snake lose its venom ; but are you turned a lover of the people ?**

**PRINCE PAUL**

**Mon Dieu, non, Mademoiselle ! I would much sooner talk scandal in a drawing-room than treason in a cellar. Besides, I hate the common mob, who smell of garlic, smoke**

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

bad tobacco, get up early, and dine off one ACT III.  
dish.

PRESIDENT

What have you to gain, then, by a revolution ?

PRINCE PAUL

Mon ami, I have nothing left to lose. That scatter-brained boy, this new Czar, has banished me.

VERA

To Siberia ?

PRINCE PAUL

No, to Paris. He has confiscated my estates, robbed me of my office and my cook. I have nothing left but my decorations. I am here for revenge.

PRESIDENT

Then you have a right to be one of us. We also meet daily for revenge.

PRINCE PAUL

You want money of course. No one ever joins a conspiracy who has any. Here. [*Throws money on table.*] You have so many spies that I should think you want informa-

**VERA;**

**ACT III.** tion. Well, you will find me the best-informed man in Russia on the abuses of our Government. I made them nearly all myself.

**VERA**

President, I don't trust this man. He has done us too much harm in Russia to let him go in safety.

**PRINCE PAUL**

Believe me, Mademoiselle, you are wrong. I will be a most valuable addition to your circle; and as for you, gentlemen, if I had not thought that you would be useful to me I shouldn't have risked my neck among you, or dined an hour earlier than usual so as to be in time.

**PRESIDENT**

Ay, if he had wanted to spy on us, Vera, he wouldn't have come himself.

**PRINCE PAUL**

[*Aside.*] No; I should have sent my best friend.

**PRESIDENT**

Besides, Vera, he is just the man to give us

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

the information we want about some business ACT III.  
we have in hand to-night.

**VERA**

Be it so if you wish it.

**PRESIDENT**

Brothers, is it your will that Prince Paul Maraloffski be admitted, and take the oath of the Nihilist?

**CONSPIRATORS**

It is! it is!

**PRESIDENT**

*[Holding out dagger and a paper.]* Prince Paul, the dagger or the oath?

**PRINCE PAUL**

*[Smiles sardonically.]* I would sooner annihilate than be annihilated. *[Takes paper.]*

**PRESIDENT**

Remember: Betray us, and as long as earth holds poison or steel, as long as men can strike or women betray, you shall not escape vengeance. The Nihilists never forget their friends, or forgive their enemies.

## VERA;

ACT III. PRINCE PAUL

Really? I did not think you were so civilised.

VERA

[*Pacing up and down behind.*] Why is he not here? He will not keep the crown. I know him well.

PRESIDENT

Sign. [PRINCE PAUL *signs.*] You said you thought we had no creed. You were wrong. Read it!

VERA

This is a dangerous thing, President. What can we do with this man?

PRESIDENT

We can use him. He is of value to us to-night and to-morrow.

VERA

Perhaps there will be no morrow for any of us; but we have given him our word: he is safer here than ever he was in his palace.

PRINCE PAUL

[*Reading.*] 'The rights of humanity'! In the old times men carried out their rights for themselves as they lived, but nowadays every

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

baby seems born with a social manifesto in ACT III.  
its mouth much bigger than itself. 'Nature  
is not a temple, but a workshop : we demand  
the right to labour.' Ah, I shall surrender  
my own rights in that respect.

VERA

[*Pacing up and down behind.*] Oh, will he  
never come? will he never come?

PRINCE PAUL

'The family as subversive of true socialistic  
and communal unity is to be annihilated.'  
Yes, President, I agree completely with  
Article 5. A family is a terrible incumbrance,  
especially when one is not married. [*Three  
knocks at the door.*]

VERA

Alexis at last!

*Password*

Væ tyrannis!

*Answer*

Væ victis! [*Enter MICHAEL STROGANOFF.*]

PRESIDENT

Michael, the regicide! Brothers, let us do  
honour to a man who has killed a king.

**VERA;**

**ACT III. VERA**

[*Aside.*] Oh, he will come yet!

**PRESIDENT**

Michael, you have saved Russia.

**MICHAEL**

Ay, Russia was free for a moment when the tyrant fell, but the sun of liberty has set again like that false dawn which cheats our eyes in autumn.

**PRESIDENT**

The dread night of tyranny is not yet past for Russia.

**MICHAEL**

[*Clutching his knife.*] One more blow, and the end is come indeed.

**VERA**

[*Aside.*] One more blow! What does he mean? Oh, impossible! but why is he not with us? Alexis! Alexis! why are you not here?

**PRESIDENT**

But how did you escape, Michael? They said you had been seized.

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

**MICHAEL**

**ACT III.**

I was dressed in the uniform of the Imperial Guard. The Colonel on duty was a brother, and gave me the password. I drove through the troops in safety with it, and, thanks to my good horse, reached the walls before the gates were closed.

**PRESIDENT**

What a chance his coming out on the balcony was!

**MICHAEL**

A chance? There is no such thing as chance. It was God's finger led him there.

**PRESIDENT**

And where have you been these three days?

**MICHAEL**

Hiding in the house of the priest Nicholas at the cross-roads.

**PRESIDENT**

Nicholas is an honest man.

**MICHAEL**

Ay, honest enough for a priest. I am here now for vengeance on a traitor!



## VERA;

### ACT III. VERA

[*Aside.*] O God, will he never come! Alexis! why are you not here? You cannot have turned traitor!

MICHAEL

[*Seeing PRINCE PAUL.*] Prince Paul Marloffski here! By St. George, a lucky capture! This must have been Vera's doing. She is the only one who could have lured that serpent into the trap.

PRESIDENT

Prince Paul has just taken the oath.

VERA

Alexis, the Czar, has banished him from Russia.

MICHAEL

Bah! A blind to cheat us. We will keep Prince Paul here, and find some office for him in our reign of terror. He is well accustomed by this time to bloody work.

PRINCE PAUL

[*Approaching MICHAEL.*] That was a long shot of yours, mon camarade.

MICHAEL

I have had a good deal of practice shooting,

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

since I have been a boy, off your Highness's ACT III.  
wild boars.

PRINCE PAUL

Are my gamekeepers like moles, then,  
always asleep ?

MICHAEL

No, Prince. I am one of them ; but, like  
you, I am fond of robbing what I am put to  
watch.

PRESIDENT

This must be a new atmosphere for you,  
Prince Paul. We speak the truth to one  
another here.

PRINCE PAUL

How misleading you must find it ! You  
have an odd medley here, President.

PRESIDENT

You recognise a good many friends, I dare  
say ?

PRINCE PAUL

Yes, there is always more brass than brains  
in an aristocracy.

PRESIDENT

But you are here yourself ?

**VERA;**

**ACT III. PRINCE PAUL**

I? As I cannot be Prime Minister, I must be a Nihilist. There is no alternative.

**VERA**

O God, will he never come? The hand is on the stroke of the hour. Will he never come?

**MICHAEL**

[*Aside.*] President, you know what we have to do? 'Tis but a sorry hunter who leaves the wolf cub alive to avenge his father. How are we to get at this boy? It must be to-night. To-morrow he will be throwing some sop of reform to the people, and it will be too late for a republic.

**PRINCE PAUL**

You are quite right. Good kings are the only dangerous enemies that modern democracy has, and when he has begun by banishing me you may be sure he intends to be a patriot.

**MICHAEL**

I am sick of patriot kings; what Russia needs is a Republic.

**PRINCE PAUL**

Messieurs, I have brought you two docu-

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

ments which I think will interest you—the ACT III.  
proclamation this young Czar intends publishing to-morrow, and a plan of the Winter Palace, where he sleeps to-night.

[*Hands papers.*]

**VERA**

I dare not ask them what they are plotting about. Oh, why is Alexis not here?

**PRESIDENT**

Prince, this is most valuable information. Michael, you were right. If it is not to-night it will be too late. Read that.

**MICHAEL**

Ah! A loaf of bread flung to a starving nation. A lie to cheat the people. [*Tears it up.*] It must be to-night. I do not believe him. Would he have kept his crown had he loved the people? But how are we to get at him, and shall we who could not bear the scorpions of the father suffer the whips of the son?—no; whatever is, must be destroyed: whatever is, is wrong.

**PRINCE PAUL**

The key of the private door in the street.

[*Hands key.*]

## VERA;

### ACT III. PRESIDENT

Prince, we are in your debt.

PRINCE PAUL

[*Smiling.*] The normal condition of the Nihilists.

MICHAEL

Ay, but we are paying our debts off with interest now. Two Emperors in one week. That will make the balance straight. We would have thrown in a Prime Minister if you had not come.

PRINCE PAUL

Ah, I am sorry you told me. It robs my visit of all its picturesqueness and adventure. I thought I was perilling my head by coming here, and you tell me I have saved it. One is sure to be disappointed if one tries to get romance out of modern life.

MICHAEL.

It is not so romantic a thing to lose one's head, Prince Paul.

PRINCE PAUL

No, but it must often be very dull to keep it. Don't you find that sometimes?

[*Clock strikes six.*]

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

VERA

ACT III.

[*Sinking into a seat.*] Oh, it is past the hour! It is past the hour!

MICHAEL

[*To PRESIDENT.*] Remember to-morrow will be too late.

PRESIDENT

Brothers, it is full time. Which of us is absent?

CONSPIRATORS

Alexis! Alexis!

PRESIDENT

Michael, read Rule 7.

MICHAEL

'When any brother shall have disobeyed a summons to be present, the president shall inquire if there is anything alleged against him.'

PRESIDENT

Is there anything against our brother Alexis?

CONSPIRATORS

He wears a crown! He wears a crown!

## **VERA;**

**ACT III. PRESIDENT**

**Michael read Article 7 of the Code of Revolution.**

**MICHAEL**

**'Between the Nihilists and all men who wear crowns above their fellows, there is war to the death.'**

**PRESIDENT**

**Brothers, what say you? Is Alexis, the Czar, guilty or not?**

**OMNES**

**He is guilty!**

**PRESIDENT**

**What shall the penalty be?**

**OMNES**

**Death!**

**PRESIDENT**

**Let the lots be prepared; it shall be to-night.**

**PRINCE PAUL**

**Ah, this is really interesting! I was getting afraid conspiracies were as dull as courts are.**

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

PROFESSOR MARFA

ACT III

My forte is more in writing pamphlets than in taking shots. Still a regicide has always a place in history.

MICHAEL

If your pistol is as harmless as your pen, this young tyrant will have a long life.

PRINCE PAUL

You ought to remember, too, Professor, that if you were seized, as you probably would be, and hung, as you certainly would be, there would be nobody left to read your own articles.

PRESIDENT

Brothers, are you ready?

VERA

[*Starting up.*] Not yet! Not yet! I have a word to say.

MICHAEL

[*Aside.*] Plague take her! I knew it would come to this.

VERA

This boy has been our brother. Night after night he has perilled his own life to



**VERA;**

**ACT III** come here. Night after night, when every street was filled with spies, every house with traitors. Delicately nurtured like a king's son, he has dwelt among us.

**PRESIDENT**

Ay! under a false name. He lied to us at the beginning. He lies to us now at the end.

**VERA**

I swear he is true. There is not a man here who does not owe him his life a thousand times. When the bloodhounds were on us that night, who saved us from arrest, torture, flogging, death, but he ye seek to kill?—

**MICHAEL**

To kill all tyrants is our mission!

**VERA**

He is no tyrant. I know him well! He loves the people.

**PRESIDENT**

We know him too; he is a traitor.

**VERA**

A traitor! Three days ago he could have

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

betrayed every man of you here, and the ACT III  
gibbet would have been your doom. He  
gave you all your lives once. Give him a  
little time—a week, a month, a few days;  
but now!—O God, not now!

CONSPIRATORS

[*Brandishing daggers.*] To-night! to-night!  
to-night!

VERA

Peace, you gorgèd adders! peace!

MICHAEL

What, are we not here to annihilate? Shall  
we not keep our oath?

VERA

Your oath! your oath! Greedy that you  
are of gain, every man's hand lusting for his  
neighbour's pelf, every heart set on pillage  
and rapine; who, of ye all, if the crown  
were set on his head, would give an empire  
up for the mob to scramble for? The people  
are not yet fit for a republic in Russia.

PRESIDENT

Every nation is fit for a republic.

## VERA;

ACT III MICHAEL

The man is a tyrant.

VERA

A tyrant! Hath he not dismissed his evil counsellors. That ill-omened raven of his father's life hath had his wings clipped and his claws pared, and comes to us croaking for revenge. Oh, have mercy on him! Give him a week to live!

PRESIDENT

Vera, pleading for a king!

VERA

[*Proudly.*] I plead not for a king, but for a brother.

MICHAEL

For a traitor to his oath, a coward who should have flung the purple back to the fools that gave it him. No, Vera, no. The brood of men is not yet dead, nor the dull earth grown sick of child-bearing. No crowned man in Russia shall pollute God's air by living.

PRESIDENT

You bade us try you once. We have tried you, and you are found wanting.

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

**MICHAEL**

**ACT III.**

Vera, I am not blind; I know your secret. You love this boy, this young prince with his pretty face, his curled hair, his soft white hands. Fool that you are, dupe of a lying tongue, do you know what he would have done to you, this boy you think loved you? He would have made you his mistress, used your body at his pleasure, thrown you away when he was wearied of you; you, the priestess of liberty, the flame of revolution, the torch of democracy.

**VERA**

What he would have done to me matters little. To the people, at least, he will be true. He loves the people; at least, he loves liberty.

**PRESIDENT**

So, he would play the citizen-king, would he, while we starve? Would flatter us with sweet speeches, would cheat us with promises like his father, would lie to us as his whole race have lied.

**MICHAEL**

And you whose very name made every

**VERA;**

**ACT III.** despot tremble for his life, you, Vera Sabou-  
roff, you would betray liberty for a lover  
and the people for a paramour!

**CONSPIRATORS**

Traitress! Draw the lots; draw the  
lots!

**VERA**

In thy throat thou liest, Michael! I love  
him not. He loves me not.

**MICHAEL**

You love him not? Shall he not die then?

**VERA**

[*With an effort, clenching her hands.*] Ay,  
it is right that he should die. He hath broken  
his oath. There should be no crowned man  
in Europe. Have I not sworn it? To be  
strong, our new republic should be drunk  
with the blood of kings. He hath broken  
his oath. As the father died so let the son  
die too. Yet not to-night, not to-night.  
Russia, that hath borne her centuries of  
wrong, can wait a week for liberty. Give  
him a week.

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

PRESIDENT

ACT III.

We will have none of you! Begone from us to this boy you love.

MICHAEL

Though I find him in your arms I shall kill him.

CONSPIRATORS

To-night! To-night! To-night!

MICHAEL

[ *Holding up his hand.* ] A moment! I have something to say. [ *Approaches VERA ; speaks very slowly.* ] Vera Sabouroff, have you forgotten your brother? [ *Pauses to see effect ; VERA starts.* ] Have you forgotten that young face, pale with famine; those young limbs twisted with torture; the iron chains they made him walk in? What week of liberty did they give him? What pity did they show him for a day? [ *VERA falls in a chair.* ] Oh! you could talk glibly enough then of vengeance, glibly enough of liberty. When you said you would come to Moscow, your old father caught you by the knees and begged you not to leave him to die childless

**VERA;**

**ACT III.** and alone. I seem to hear his cries still ringing in my ears, but you were as deaf to him as the rocks on the roadside. You left your father that night, and three weeks after he died of a broken heart. You wrote to me to follow you here. I did so; first because I loved you; but you soon cured me of that; whatever gentle feeling, whatever pity, whatever love, whatever humanity, was in my heart you withered up and destroyed, as the canker worm eats the corn. You bade me cast out love from my breast as a vile thing, you turned my hand to iron, and my heart to stone; you told me to live for freedom and revenge. I have done so. But you, what have you done?

**VERA**

Let the lots be drawn! [**CONSPIRATORS** *applaud.*]

**PRINCE PAUL**

[*Aside.*] Ah, the Grand Duke will come to the throne sooner than he expected. He is sure to make a good king under my guidance. He is so cruel to animals, and never keeps his word

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## OR, THE NIHILISTS

MICHAEL

ACT III.

Now you are yourself at last, Vera.

VERA

[*Standing motionless in the middle.*] The lots, I say, the lots! I am no woman now. My blood seems turned to gall; my heart is as cold as steel is; my hand shall be more deadly. From the desert and the tomb the voice of my prisoned brother cries aloud, and bids me strike one blow for liberty. The lots, I say, the lots!

PRESIDENT

Are ready. Michael, you have the right to draw first: you are a regicide.

VERA

O God, into my hands! Into my hands!  
[*They draw the lots from a bowl surmounted by a skull.*]

PRESIDENT

Open your lots.

VERA

[*Opening her lot.*] The lot is mine! See, the bloody sign upon it! Dmitri, my brother, you shall have your revenge now.



## VERA;

### ACT III. PRESIDENT

Vera Sabouroff, you are chosen to be a regicide. God has been good to you. The dagger or the poison? [*Offers her dagger and vial.*]

### VERA

I can trust my hand better with the dagger; it never fails. [*Takes dagger.*] I shall stab him to the heart, as he has stabbed me. Traitor, to leave us for a ribbon, a gaud, a bauble, to lie to me every day he came here, to forget us in an hour. Michael was right, he loved me not, nor the people either. Methinks that if I was a mother and bore a man-child, I would poison my breast against him, lest he might grow to a traitor or to a king. [PRINCE PAUL *whispers to the* PRESIDENT.]

### PRESIDENT

Ay, Prince Paul, that is the best way. Vera, the Czar sleeps to-night in his own room in the north wing of the palace. Here is a key of the private door in the street. The passwords of the guards will be given to you. His own servants will be drugged. You will find him alone.

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## OR, THE NIHILISTS

**VERA**

**ACT III.**

It is well. I shall not fail.

**PRESIDENT**

We will wait outside in the Place Saint Isaac, under the window. As the clock strikes twelve from the tower of St. Nicholas you will give us the sign that the dog is dead.

**VERA**

And what shall the sign be ?

**PRESIDENT**

You are to throw us out the bloody dagger.

**MICHAEL**

Dripping with the traitor's life.

**PRESIDENT**

Else we shall know that you have been seized, and we will burst our way in, drag you from his guards.

**MICHAEL**

And kill him in the midst of them.

**PRESIDENT**

Michael, you will lead us ?

## VERA;

ACT III. MICHAEL

Ay, I shall lead you. See that your hand fails you not, Vera Sabouroff.

VERA

Fool, is it so hard a thing to kill one's enemy?

PRINCE PAUL

[*Aside.*] This is the ninth conspiracy I have been in in Russia. They always end in a 'voyage en Sibérie' for my friends and a new decoration for myself.

MICHAEL

It is your last conspiracy, Prince.

PRESIDENT

At twelve o'clock, the bloody dagger.

VERA

Ay, red with the blood of that false heart. I shall not forget it. [*Standing in middle of stage.*] To strangle whatever nature is in me, neither to love nor to be loved, neither to pity nor to be pitied. Ay! it is an oath, an oath. Methinks the spirit of Charlotte Corday has entered my soul now. I shall carve my name on the world, and be ranked among the

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## OR, THE NIHILISTS

great heroines. Ay! the spirit of Charlotte ACT III.  
Corday beats in each petty vein, and nerves  
my woman's hand to strike, as I have nerved  
my woman's heart to hate. Though he laugh  
in his dreams I shall not falter. Though he  
sleep peacefully I shall not miss my blow.  
Be glad, my brother, in your stifled cell; be  
glad and laugh to-night. To-night this new-  
fledged Czar shall post with bloody feet to  
hell, and greet his father there! This  
Czar! O traitor, liar, false to his oath, false  
to me! To play the patriot among us, and  
now to wear a crown; to sell us, like Judas,  
for thirty silver pieces, to betray us with a  
kiss! [*With more passion.*] O Liberty, O  
mighty mother of eternal time, thy robe is  
purple with the blood of those who have died  
for thee! Thy throne is the Calvary of the  
people, thy crown the crown of thorns. O  
crucified mother, the despot has driven a  
nail through thy right hand, and the tyrant  
through thy left! Thy feet are pierced with  
their iron. When thou wert athirst thou  
calledst on the priests for water, and they  
gave thee bitter drink. They thrust a sword  
into thy side. They mocked thee in thine

## VERA; OR, THE NIHILISTS

ACT III. agony of age on age. Here, on thy altar, O Liberty, do I dedicate myself to thy service; do with me as thou wilt! [*Brandishing the dagger.*] The end has come now, and by thy sacred wounds, O crucified mother, O Liberty, I swear that Russia shall be saved!

*Curtain*

END OF ACT III

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## ACT IV

### SCENE

*Antechamber of the Czar's private room. Large window at the back, with drawn curtains over it.*

*Present.*—PRINCE PETROVITCH. BARON RAFF.  
MARQUIS DE POIVRARD. COUNT ROUVALOFF.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

He is beginning well, this young Czar.

BARON RAFF

*[Shrugs his shoulders.]* All young Czars do begin well.

COUNT ROUVALOFF

And end badly.

MARQUIS DE POIVRARD

Well, I have no right to complain. He has done me one good service, at any rate.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

Cancelled your appointment to Archangel, I suppose?

**V E R A ;**

**ACT IV. MARQUIS DE POIVREARD**

Yes; my head wouldn't have been safe there for an hour.

[*Enter* GENERAL KOTEMKIN.]

**BARON RAFF**

Ah! General, any more news of our romantic young Emperor?

**GENERAL KOTEMKIN**

You are quite right to call him romantic, Baron; a week ago I found him amusing himself in a garret with a company of strolling players; to-day his whim is all the convicts in Siberia are to be recalled, and the political prisoners, as he calls them, amnestied.

**PRINCE PETROVITCH**

Political prisoners! Why, half of them are no better than common murderers!

**COUNT ROUVALOFF**

And the other half much worse?

**BARON RAFF**

Oh, you wrong them, surely, Count. Wholesale trade has always been more respectable than retail.

**COUNT ROUVALOFF**

But he is really too romantic. He objected

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

yesterday to my having the monopoly of the salt tax. He said the people had a right to have cheap salt. ACT IV.

**MARQUIS DE POIVREARD**

Oh, that's nothing; but he actually disapproved of a State banquet every night because there is a famine in the Southern provinces. [*The young CZAR enters unobserved, and overhears the rest.*]

**PRINCE PETROVITCH**

Quelle bêtise! The more starvation there is among the people the better. It teaches them self-denial, an excellent virtue, Baron.

**BARON RAFF**

I have often heard so.

**GENERAL KOTEMKIN**

He talked of a Parliament, too, in Russia, and said the people should have deputies to represent them.

**BARON RAFF**

As if there was not enough brawling in the streets already, but we must give the people a room to do it in. But, Messieurs, the worst



**VERA;**

**ACT IV.** is yet to come. He threatens a complete reform of the public service on the ground that the people are too heavily taxed.

**MARQUIS DE POIVRARD**

He can't be serious there. What is the use of the people except for us to get money out of? But talking of the taxes, my dear Baron, you must really let me have forty thousand roubles to-morrow; my wife says she must have a new diamond bracelet.

**COUNT ROUVALOFF**

[*Aside to BARON RAFF.*] Ah, to match the one Prince Paul gave her last week, I suppose.

**PRINCE PETROVITCH**

I must have sixty thousand roubles at once, Baron. My son is overwhelmed with debts of honour which he can't pay.

**BARON RAFF**

What an excellent son to imitate his father so carefully!

**GENERAL KOTEMKIN**

You are always getting money. I never get a single kopeck I have not got a right to.

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**OR, THE NIHILISTS**

**ACT IV.**

It's unbearable ; it's ridiculous ! My nephew is going to be married. I must get his dowry for him.

**PRINCE PETROVITCH**

My dear General, your nephew must be a perfect Turk. He seems to get married three times a week regularly.

**GENERAL KOTEMKIN**

Well, he wants a dowry to console him.

**COUNT ROUVALOFF**

I am sick of town. I want a house in the country.

**MARQUIS DE POIVRARD**

I am sick of the country. I want a house in town.

**BARON RAFF**

Gentlemen, I am extremely sorry for you. It is out of the question.

**PRINCE PETROVITCH**

But my son, Baron ?

**GENERAL KOTEMKIN**

But my nephew ?

**MARQUIS DE POIVRARD**

But my house in town ?

V E R A ;

ACT IV. COUNT ROUVALOFF

But my house in the country ?

MARQUIS DE POIVRARD

But my wife's diamond bracelet ?

BARON RAFF

Gentlemen, impossible ! The old régime in Russia is dead ; the funeral begins to-day.

COUNT ROUVALOFF

Then I shall wait for the resurrection.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

Yes ; but, *en attendant*, what are we to do !

BARON RAFF

What have we always done in Russia when a Czar suggests reform ?—nothing. You forget we are diplomatists. Men of thought should have nothing to do with action—Reforms in Russia are very tragic, but they always end in a farce.

COUNT ROUVALOFF

I wish Prince Paul were here. By the way, I think this boy is rather ungrateful to him. If that clever old Prince had not proclaimed him Emperor at once without giving him time to think about it, he would hav-

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## OR, THE NIHILISTS

given up his crown, I believe, to the first ACT IV.  
cobbler he met in the street.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

But do you think, Baron, that Prince Paul  
is really going ?

BARON RAFF

He is exiled.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

Yes ; but is he going ?

BARON RAFF

I am sure of it ; at least he told me he had  
sent two telegrams already to Paris about his  
dinner.

COUNT ROUVALOFF

Ah ! that settles the matter.

CZAR

[*Coming forward.*] Prince Paul had better  
send a third telegram and order [*counting*  
*them*] six extra places.

BARON RAFF

The devil !

CZAR

No, Baron, the Czar. Traitors ! There

## VERA ;

**ACT IV.** would be no bad kings in the world if there were no bad ministers like you. It is men such as you are who wreck mighty empires on the rock of their own greatness. Our mother, Russia, hath no need of such unnatural sons. You can make no atonement now ; it is too late for that. The grave cannot give back your dead, nor the gibbet your martyrs, but I shall be more merciful to you. I give you your lives ! That is the curse I would lay on you. But if there is a man of you found in Moscow by to-morrow night your heads will be off your shoulders.

**BARON RAFF**

You remind us wonderfully, Sire, of your Imperial father.

**CZAR**

I banish you all from Russia. Your estates are confiscated to the people. You may carry your titles with you. Reforms in Russia, Baron, always end in a farce. You will have a good opportunity, Prince Petrovitch, of practising self-denial, that excellent virtue ! that excellent virtue ! So, Baron, you think a Parliament in Russia would be merely

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## OR, THE NIHILISTS

a place for brawling. Well, I will see that **ACT IV.**  
the reports of each session are sent to you  
regularly.

**BARON RAFF**

Sire, you are adding another horror to  
exile.

**CZAR**

But you will have such time for literature  
now. You forget you are diplomatists. Men  
of thought should have nothing to do with  
action.

**PRINCE PETROVITCH**

Sire, we did but jest.

**CZAR**

Then I banish you for your bad jokes.  
Bon voyage, Messieurs. If you value your  
lives you will catch the first train for Paris.  
[*Exeunt Ministers.*] Russia is well rid of  
such men as these. They are the jackals that  
follow in the lion's track. They have no  
courage themselves except to pillage and rob.  
But for these men and for Prince Paul my  
father would have been a good king, would  
not have died so horribly as he did die. How

**V E R A ;**

**ACT IV.** strange it is, the most real parts of one's life always seem to be a dream! The council, the fearful law which was to kill the people, the arrest, the cry in the court-yard, the pistol-shot, my father's bloody hands, and then the crown! One can live for years sometimes without living at all, and then all life comes crowding into one single hour. I had no time to think. Before my father's hideous shriek of death had died in my ears I found this crown on my head, the purple robe around me, and heard myself called a king. I would have given it up all then; it seemed nothing to me then; but now, can I give it up now? Well, Colonel, well? [*Enter COLONEL OF THE GUARD.*]

**COLONEL**

What password does your Imperial Majesty desire should be given to-night?

**CZAR**

Password?

**COLONEL**

For the cordon of guards, Sire, on night-duty around the palace.

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## OR, THE NIHILISTS

CZAR

ACT IV.

You can dismiss them. I have no need of them. [*Exit COLONEL.*] [*Goes to the crown lying on the table.*] What subtle potency lies hidden in this gaudy bauble, the crown, that makes one feel like a god when one wears it? To hold in one's hand this little fiery-coloured world, to reach out one's arm to earth's uttermost limit, to girdle the seas with one's galley; to make the land a highway for one's hosts; this is to wear a crown! to wear a crown! The meanest serf in Russia who is loved is better crowned than I. How love outweighs the balance! How poor appears the widest empire of this golden world when matched with love! Pent up in this palace, with spies dogging every step, I have heard nothing of her; I have not seen her once since that fearful hour, three days ago, when I found myself suddenly the Czar of this wide waste, Russia. Oh, could I see her for a moment; tell her now the secret of my life I have never dared to utter before; tell her why I wear this crown, when I have sworn eternal war against all crowned men! There was a meeting to-night. I received



**VERA;**

**ACT IV.** my summons by an unknown hand ; but how could I go ? I, who have broken my oath ! who have broken my oath ! [*Enter PAGE.*]

**PAGE**

It is after eleven, Sire. Shall I take the first watch in your room to-night ?

**CZAR**

Why should you watch me, boy ? The stars are my best sentinels.

**PAGE**

It was your Imperial father's wish, Sire, never to be left alone while he slept.

**CZAR**

My father was troubled with bad dreams. Go, get to your bed, boy ; it is nigh on midnight, and these late hours will spoil those red cheeks. [*PAGE tries to kiss his hand.*] Nay, nay ; we have played together too often for that. Oh, to breathe the same air as her, and not to see her ! the light seems to have gone from my life, the sun vanished from my day.

**PAGE**

Sire—Alexis—let me stay with you to—

---

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

night! There is some danger over you; I ACT IV.  
feel there is.

**CZAR**

What should I fear? I have banished all my enemies from Russia. Set the brazier here, by me; it is very cold, and I would sit by it for a time. Go, boy, go; I have much to think about to-night. [*Goes to back of stage, draws aside the curtain. View of Moscow by moonlight.*] The snow has fallen heavily since sunset. How white and cold my city looks under this pale moon! And yet, what hot and fiery hearts beat in this icy Russia, for all its frost and snow. Oh, to see her for a moment; to tell her all; to tell her why I am a king! But she does not doubt me; she said she would trust in me. Though I have broken my oath, she will have trust. It is very cold. Where is my cloak? I shall sleep for an hour. Then I have ordered my sledge, and, though I die for it, I shall see Vera to-night. Did I not bid thee go, boy? What! must I play the tyrant so soon? Go, go! I cannot live without seeing her. My horses will be here in an hour; one hour

V E R A ;

ACT IV. between me and love! How heavy this charcoal fire smells. [*Exit the PAGE. Lies down on a couch beside brazier.*]

[*Enter VERA, in a black cloak.*]

VERA

Asleep! God, thou art good! Who shall deliver him from my hands now? This is he! The democrat who would make himself a king, the republican who hath worn a crown, the traitor who hath lied to us. Michael was right. He loved not the people. He loved me not. [*Bends over him.*] Oh, why should such deadly poison lie in such sweet lips! Was there not gold enough in his hair before, but he should tarnish it with this crown! But my day has come now; the day of the people, of liberty, has come! Your day, my brother, has come! Though I have strangled whatever nature is in me, I did not think it had been so easy to kill. One blow and it is over, and I can wash my hands in water afterwards, I can wash my hands afterwards. Come, I shall save Russia. I have sworn it. [*Raises the dagger to strike.*]

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## OR, THE NIHILISTS

CZAR

ACT IV.

*[Starting up, seizes her by both hands.]*

Vera, you here! My dream was no dream at all. Why have you left me three days alone, when I most needed you? O God, you think I am a traitor, a liar, a king? I am, for love of you. Vera, it was for you I broke my oath and wear my father's crown. I would lay at your feet this mighty Russia, which you and I have loved so well; would give you this earth as your footstool; set this crown on your head. The people will love us. We will rule them by love, as a father rules his children. There shall be liberty in Russia for every man to think as his heart bids him; liberty for men to speak as they think. I have banished the wolves that preyed on us; I have brought back your brother from Siberia; I have opened the blackened jaws of the mine. The courier is already on his way; within a week Dmitri and all those with him will be back in their own land. The people shall be free — are free now. When they gave me this crown first, I would have flung it back to them, had it not been for you, Vera. O God! It is men's custom

VERA;

ACT IV. in Russia to bring gifts to those they love. I said, I will bring to the woman I love a people, an empire, a world! Vera, it is for you, for you alone, I kept this crown; for you alone I am a king. Oh, I have loved you better than my oath! Why will you not speak to me? You love me not! You love me not! You have come to warn me of some plot against my life. What is life worth to me without you? [CONSPIRATORS murmur outside.]

VERA

Oh, lost! lost! lost!

CZAR

Nay, you are safe here. It wants five hours still of dawn. To-morrow, I will lead you forth to the whole people——

VERA

To-morrow——!

CZAR

Will crown you with my own hands as Empress in that great cathedral which my fathers built.

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## OR, THE NIHILISTS

VERA

ACT IV.

[*Loosens her hands violently from him, and starts up.*] I am a Nihilist! I cannot wear a crown!

CZAR

[*Falls at her feet.*] I am no king now. I am only a boy who has loved you better than his honour, better than his oath. For love of the people I would have been a patriot. For love of you I have been a traitor. Let us go forth together, we will live amongst the common people. I am no king. I will toil for you like the peasant or the serf. Oh, love me a little too! [CONSPIRATORS *murmur outside.*]

VERA

[*Clutching dagger.*] To strangle whatever nature is in me, neither to love nor to be loved, neither to pity nor—Oh, I am a woman! God help me, I am a woman! O Alexis! I too have broken my oath; I am a traitor. I love. Oh, do not speak, do not speak—[*Kisses his lips*—the first, the last time. [*He clasps her in his arms; they sit on the couch together.*]

**VERA;**

**ACT IV. CZAR**

I could die now.

**VERA**

What does death do in thy lips? Thy life, thy love are enemies of death. Speak not of death. Not yet, not yet.

**CZAR**

I know not why death came into my heart. Perchance the cup of life is filled too full of pleasure to endure. This is our wedding night.

**VERA**

Our wedding night!

**CZAR**

And if death came himself, methinks that I could kiss his pallid mouth, and suck sweet poison from it.

**VERA**

Our wedding night! Nay, nay. Death should not sit at the feast. There is no such thing as death.

**CZAR**

There shall not be for us. [CONSPIRATORS murmur outside.]

## OR, THE NIHILISTS

VERA

ACT IV.

What is that? Did you not hear something?

CZAR

Only your voice, that fowler's note which lures my heart away like a poor bird upon the limed twig.

VERA

Methought that some one laughed.

CZAR

It was but the wind and rain; the night is full of storm. [CONSPIRATORS *murmur outside.*]

VERA

It should be so, indeed. Oh, where are your guards? where are your guards?

CZAR

Where should they be but at home? I shall not live pent round by sword and steel. The love of a people is a king's best body-guard.

VERA

The love of a people!

B



## VERA;

### ACT IV. CZAR

Sweet, you are safe here. Nothing can harm you here. O love, I knew you trusted me! You said you would have trust.

### VERA

I have had trust. O love, the past seems but some dull, grey dream from which our souls have wakened. This is life at last.

### CZAR

Ay, life at last.

### VERA

Our wedding night! Oh, let me drink my fill of love to-night! Nay, sweet, not yet, not yet. How still it is, and yet methinks the air is full of music. It is some nightingale who, wearying of the south, has come to sing in this bleak north to lovers such as we. It is the nightingale. Dost thou not hear it?

### CZAR

O sweet, mine ears are clogged to all sweet sounds save thine own voice, and mine eyes blinded to all sights but thee, else had I heard that nightingale, and seen the golden-

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## OR, THE NIHILISTS

vestured morning sun itself steal from its ACT IV.  
sombre east before its time, for jealousy that  
thou art twice as fair.

VERA

Yet would that thou hadst heard the night-  
ingale. Methinks that bird will never sing  
again.

CZAR

It is no nightingale. 'Tis love himself  
singing for very ecstasy of joy that thou art  
changed into his votaress. [*Clock begins  
striking twelve.*] Oh, listen, sweet, it is the  
lover's hour. Come, let us stand without,  
and hear the midnight answered from tower  
to tower over the wide white town. Our  
wedding night! What is that? What is  
that? [*Loud murmurs of CONSPIRATORS in  
the street.*]

VERA

[*Breaks from him and rushes across the stage.*]  
The wedding guests are here already! Ay!  
you shall have your sign! [*Stabs herself.*]  
You shall have your sign! [*Rushes to the  
window.*]

VERA;

ACT IV. CZAR

*[Intercepts her by rushing between her and window, and snatches dagger out of her hand.]*

Vera!

VERA

*[Clinging to him.]* Give me back the dagger! Give me back the dagger! There are men in the street who seek your life! Your guards have betrayed you! This bloody dagger is the signal that you are dead. *[CONSPIRATORS begin to shout below in the street.]* Oh, there is not a moment to be lost! Throw it out! Throw it out! Nothing can save me now; this dagger is poisoned! I feel death already in my heart. There was no other way but this.

CZAR

*[Holding dagger out of her reach.]* Death is in my heart too; we shall die together!

VERA

Oh, love! love! love! be merciful to me! The wolves are hot upon you!—you must live for liberty, for Russia, for me! Oh, you do not love me! You offered me an empire

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## OR, THE NIHILISTS

once! Give me this dagger, now! Oh, you ACT IV.  
are cruel! My life for yours! What does it  
matter? [*Loud shout in the street, 'Vera!  
Vera! To the rescue! To the rescue!'*]

CZAR

The bitterness of death is past for me.

VERA

Oh, they are breaking in below! See!  
The bloody man behind you! [CZAR *turns  
round for an instant.*] Ah! [VERA *snatches  
dagger and flings it out of window.*]

CONSPIRATORS

[*Below.*] Long live the people!

CZAR

What have you done?

VERA

I have saved Russia! [*Dies.*]

*Tableau*

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## THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

JOHN WORTHING, J.P.

ALGERNON MONCRIEFF

REV. CANON CHASUBLE, D.D.

MERRIMAN, Butler

LANE, Manservant

LADY BRACKNELL

HON. GWENDOLEN FAIRFAX

CECILY CARDEW

MISS PRISM, Governess

## THE SCENES OF THE PLAY

ACT I. *Algernon Moncrieff's Flat in Half-Moon Street, W.*

ACT II. *The Garden at the Manor House, Woolton.*

ACT III. *Drawing-Room at the Manor House, Woolton.*

TIME: *The Present.*

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## FIRST ACT

### SCENE

*Morning-room in Algernon's flat in Half-Moon Street. The room is luxuriously and artistically furnished. The sound of a piano is heard in the adjoining room.*

[LANE is arranging afternoon tea on the table, and after the music has ceased, ALGERNON enters.]

ALGERNON

Did you hear what I was playing, Lane ?

LANE

I didn't think it polite to listen, sir.

ALGERNON

I'm sorry for that, for your sake. I don't play accurately—any one can play accurately—but I play with wonderful expression. As far as the piano is concerned, sentiment is my forte. I keep science for Life.

▲

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT I. LANE

Yes, sir.

ALGERNON

And, speaking of the science of Life, have you got the cucumber sandwiches cut for Lady Bracknell?

LANE

Yes, sir. [*Hands them on a salver.*]

ALGERNON

[*Inspects them, takes two, and sits down on the sofa.*] Oh! . . . by the way, Lane, I see from your book that on Thursday night, when Lord Shoreman and Mr. Worthing were dining with me, eight bottles of champagne are entered as having been consumed.

LANE

Yes, sir; eight bottles and a pint.

ALGERNON

Why is it that at a bachelor's establishment the servants invariably drink the champagne? I ask merely for information.

## BEING EARNEST

LANE

ACT I

I attribute it to the superior quality of the wine, sir. I have often observed that in married households the champagne is rarely of a first-rate brand.

ALGERNON

Good Heavens! Is marriage so demoralising as that?

LANE

I believe it *is* a very pleasant state, sir. I have had very little experience of it myself up to the present. I have only been married once. That was in consequence of a misunderstanding between myself and a young person.

ALGERNON

[*Languidly.*] I don't know that I am much interested in your family life, Lane.

LANE

No, sir; it is not a very interesting subject. I never think of it myself.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT I. ALGERNON

Very natural, I am sure. That will do, Lane, thank you.

LANE

Thank you, sir. [LANE goes out.]

ALGERNON

Lane's views on marriage seem somewhat lax. Really, if the lower orders don't set us a good example, what on earth is the use of them? They seem, as a class, to have absolutely no sense of moral responsibility.

[Enter LANE.]

LANE

Mr. Ernest Worthing.

[Enter JACK.] [LANE goes out.]

ALGERNON

How are you, my dear Ernest? What brings you up to town?

JACK

Oh, pleasure, pleasure! What else should bring one anywhere? Eating as usual, I see, Algy!

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## BEING EARNEST

ALGERNON

ACT I.

[*Stiffly.*] I believe it is customary in good society to take some slight refreshment at five o'clock. Where have you been since last Thursday?

JACK

[*Sitting down on the sofa.*] In the country.

ALGERNON

What on earth do you do there?

JACK

[*Pulling off his gloves.*] When one is in town one amuses oneself. When one is in the country one amuses other people. It is excessively boring.

ALGERNON

And who are the people you amuse?

JACK

[*Airily.*] Oh, neighbours, neighbours.

ALGERNON

Got nice neighbours in your part of Shropshire?

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT I. JACK

Perfectly horrid! Never speak to one of them.

ALGERNON

How immensely you must amuse them! [*Goes over and takes sandwich.*] By the way, Shropshire is your county, is it not?

JACK

Eh? Shropshire? Yes, of course. Hallo! Why all these cups? Why cucumber sandwiches? Why such reckless extravagance in one so young? Who is coming to tea?

ALGERNON

Oh! merely Aunt Augusta and Gwendolen.

JACK

How perfectly delightful!

ALGERNON

Yes, that is all very well; but I am afraid Aunt Augusta won't quite approve of your being here.

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## BEING EARNEST

**JACK**

**ACT I.**

May I ask why?

**ALGERNON**

My dear fellow, the way you flirt with Gwendolen is perfectly disgraceful. It is almost as bad as the way Gwendolen flirts with you.

**JACK**

I am in love with Gwendolen. I have come up to town expressly to propose to her.

**ALGERNON**

I thought you had come up for pleasure?  
. . . I call that business.

**JACK**

How utterly unromantic you are!

**ALGERNON**

I really don't see anything romantic in proposing. It is very romantic to be in love. But there is nothing romantic about a definite proposal. Why, one may be accepted. One usually is, I believe. Then the excitement is all over. The very

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT I. essence of romance is uncertainty. If ever I get married, I'll certainly try to forget the fact.

JACK

I have no doubt about that, dear Algy. The Divorce Court was specially invented for people whose memories are so curiously constituted.

ALGERNON

Oh! there is no use speculating on that subject. Divorces are made in Heaven — [JACK *puts out his hand to take a sandwich.* ALGERNON *at once interferes.*] Please don't touch the cucumber sandwiches. They are ordered specially for Aunt Augusta. [*Takes one and eats it.*]

JACK

Well, you have been eating them all the time.

ALGERNON

That is quite a different matter. She is my aunt. [*Takes plate from below.*] Have some bread and butter. The bread and

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## BEING EARNEST

butter is for Gwendolen. Gwendolen is ACT I.  
devoted to bread and butter.

**JACK**

*[Advancing to table and helping himself.]*  
And very good bread and butter it is too.

**ALGERNON**

Well, my dear fellow, you need not eat  
as if you were going to eat it all. You  
behave as if you were married to her already.  
You are not married to her already, and I  
don't think you ever will be.

**JACK**

Why on earth do you say that?

**ALGERNON**

Well, in the first place girls never marry  
the men they flirt with. Girls don't think  
it right.

**JACK**

Oh, that is nonsense!

**ALGERNON**

It isn't. It is a great truth. It accounts  
for the extraordinary number of bachelors



## THE IMPORTANCE OF

**ACT I** that one sees all over the place. In the second place, I don't give my consent.

**JACK**

Your consent!

**ALGERNON**

My dear fellow, Gwendolen is my first cousin. And before I allow you to marry her, you will have to clear up the whole question of Cecily. [*Rings bell.*]

**JACK**

Cecily! What on earth do you mean! What do you mean, Algy, by Cecily! I don't know any one of the name of Cecily.  
[*Enter LANE.*]

**ALGERNON**

Bring me that cigarette case Mr. Worthing left in the smoking-room the last time he dined here.

**LANE**

Yes, sir. [*LANE goes out.*]

**JACK**

Do you mean to say you have had my  
10

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## BEING EARNEST

cigarette case all this time? I wish to ACT L  
goodness you had let me know. I have  
been writing frantic letters to Scotland  
Yard about it. I was very nearly offering  
a large reward.

ALGERNON

Well, I wish you would offer one. I  
happen to be more than usually hard up.

JACK

There is no good offering a large reward  
now that the thing is found.

*[Enter LANE with the cigarette case on a  
salver. ALGERNON takes it at once. LANE  
goes out.]*

ALGERNON

I think that is rather mean of you,  
Ernest, I must say. *[Opens case and ex-  
amines it.]* However, it makes no matter,  
for, now that I look at the inscription  
inside, I find that the thing isn't yours  
after all.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT I. JACK

Of course it's mine. [*Moving to him.*]  
You have seen me with it a hundred times,  
and you have no right whatsoever to read  
what is written inside. It is a very un-  
gentlemanly thing to read a private cigarette  
case.

ALGERNON

Oh! it is absurd to have a hard and fast  
rule about what one should read and what  
one shouldn't. More than half of modern  
culture depends on what one shouldn't  
read.

JACK

I am quite aware of the fact, and I don't  
propose to discuss modern culture. It isn't  
the sort of thing one should talk of in  
private. I simply want my cigarette case  
back.

ALGERNON

Yes; but this isn't your cigarette case.  
This cigarette case is a present from some  
one of the name of Cecily, and you said  
you didn't know any one of that name.

## BEING EARNEST

**JACK**

**ACT I**

Well, if you want to know, Cecily happens to be my aunt.

**ALGERNON**

Your aunt!

**JACK**

Yes. Charming old lady she is, too. Lives at Tunbridge Wells. Just give it back to me, Algy.

**ALGERNON**

*[Retreating to back of sofa.]* But why does she call herself little Cecily if she is your aunt and lives at Tunbridge Wells? *[Reading.]* 'From little Cecily with her fondest love.'

**JACK**

*[Moving to sofa and kneeling upon it.]* My dear fellow, what on earth is there in that? Some aunts are tall, some aunts are not tall. That is a matter that surely an aunt may be allowed to decide for herself. You seem to think that every aunt should be exactly like your aunt! That is absurd!

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT I. For Heaven's sake give me back my cigarette case. [*Follows ALGERNON round the room.*]

ALGERNON

Yes. But why does your aunt call you her uncle? 'From little Cecily, with her fondest love to her dear Uncle Jack.' There is no objection, I admit, to an aunt being a small aunt, but why an aunt, no matter what her size may be, should call her own nephew her uncle, I can't quite make out. Besides, your name isn't Jack at all; it is Ernest.

JACK

It isn't Ernest; it's Jack.

ALGERNON

You have always told me it was Ernest. I have introduced you to every one as Ernest. You answer to the name of Ernest. You look as if your name was Ernest. You are the most earnest-looking person I ever saw in my life. It is perfectly absurd your saying that your name isn't

## BEING EARNEST

**Ernest.** It's on your cards. Here is one of **ACT I** them. [*Taking it from case.*] 'Mr. Ernest Worthing, B. 4, The Albany.' I'll keep this as a proof that your name is Ernest if ever you attempt to deny it to me, or to Gwendolen, or to any one else. [*Puts the card in his pocket.*]

**JACK**

Well, my name is Ernest in town and Jack in the country, and the cigarette case was given to me in the country.

**ALGERNON**

Yes, but that does not account for the fact that your small Aunt Cecily, who lives at Tunbridge Wells, calls you her dear uncle. Come, old boy, you had much better have the thing out at once.

**JACK**

My dear Algy, you talk exactly as if you were a dentist. It is very vulgar to talk like a dentist when one isn't a dentist. It produces a false impression.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

### ACT I. ALGERNON

Well, that is exactly what dentists always do. Now, go on! Tell me the whole thing. I may mention that I have always suspected you of being a confirmed and secret Bunburyist; and I am quite sure of it now.

### JACK

Bunburyist? What on earth do you mean by a Bunburyist?

### ALGERNON

I'll reveal to you the meaning of that incomparable expression as soon as you are kind enough to inform me why you are Ernest in town and Jack in the country.

### JACK

Well, produce my cigarette case first.

### ALGERNON

Here it is. [*Hands cigarette case.*] Now produce your explanation, and pray make it improbable. [*Sits on sofa.*]

## BEING EARNEST

JACK

ACT I.

My dear fellow, there is nothing improbable about my explanation at all. In fact it's perfectly ordinary. Old Mr. Thomas Cardew, who adopted me when I was a little boy, made me in his will guardian to his grand-daughter, Miss Cecily Cardew. Cecily, who addresses me as her uncle from motives of respect that you could not possibly appreciate, lives at my place in the country under the charge of her admirable governess, Miss Prism.

ALGERNON

Where is that place in the country, by the way?

JACK

That is nothing to you, dear boy. You are not going to be invited. . . . I may tell you candidly that the place is not in Shropshire.

ALGERNON

I suspected that, my dear fellow! I have Bunbured all over Shropshire on two



## THE IMPORTANCE OF

**ACT I** separate occasions. Now, go on. Why are you Ernest in town and Jack in the country?

**JACK**

My dear Algy, I don't know whether you will be able to understand my real motives. You are hardly serious enough. When one is placed in the position of guardian, one has to adopt a very high moral tone on all subjects. It's one's duty to do so. And as a high moral tone can hardly be said to conduce very much to either one's health or one's happiness, in order to get up to town I have always pretended to have a younger brother of the name of Ernest, who lives in the Albany, and gets into the most dreadful scrapes. That, my dear Algy, is the whole truth, pure and simple.

**ALGERNON**

The truth is rarely pure and never simple. Modern life would be very tedious if it were either, and modern literature a complete impossibility!

## BEING EARNEST

**JACK**

**ACT I.**

That wouldn't be at all a bad thing.

**ALGERNON**

Literary criticism is not your forte, my dear fellow. Don't try it. You should leave that to people who haven't been at a University. They do it so well in the daily papers. What you really are is a Bunburyist. I was quite right in saying you were a Bunburyist. You are one of the most advanced Bunburyists I know.

**JACK**

What on earth do you mean ?

**ALGERNON**

You have invented a very useful younger brother called Ernest, in order that you may be able to come up to town as often as you like. I have invented an invaluable permanent invalid called Bunbury, in order that I may be able to go down into the country whenever I choose. Bunbury is perfectly invaluable. If it wasn't for Bunbury's extraordinary bad health, for

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

**ACT I.** instance, I wouldn't be able to dine with you at Willis's to-night, for I have been really engaged to Aunt Augusta for more than a week.

**JACK**

I haven't asked you to dine with me anywhere to-night.

**ALGERNON**

I know. You are absurdly careless about sending out invitations. It is very foolish of you. Nothing annoys people so much as not receiving invitations.

**JACK**

You had much better dine with your Aunt Augusta.

**ALGERNON**

I haven't the smallest intention of doing anything of the kind. To begin with, I dined there on Monday, and once a week is quite enough to dine with one's own relations. In the second place, whenever I do dine there I am always treated as a member of the family, and sent down with

## BEING EARNEST

either no woman at all, or two. In the ACT I. third place, I know perfectly well whom she will place me next to, to-night. She will place me next Mary Farquhar, who always flirts with her own husband across the dinner-table. That is not very pleasant. Indeed, it is not even decent . . . and that sort of thing is enormously on the increase. The amount of women in London who flirt with their own husbands is perfectly scandalous. It looks so bad. It is simply washing one's clean linen in public. Besides, now that I know you to be a confirmed Bunburyist I naturally want to talk to you about Bunburying. I want to tell you the rules.

JACK

I'm not a Bunburyist at all. If Gwendolen accepts me, I am going to kill my brother, indeed I think I'll kill him in any case. Cecily is a little too much interested in him. It is rather a bore. So I am going to get rid of Ernest. And I strongly advise you to do the same with Mr. . . .

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT I. with your invalid friend who has the absurd name.

ALGERNON

Nothing will induce me to part with Bunbury, and if you ever get married, which seems to me extremely problematic, you will be very glad to know Bunbury. A man who marries without knowing Bunbury has a very tedious time of it.

JACK

That is nonsense. If I marry a charming girl like Gwendolen, and she is the only girl I ever saw in my life that I would marry, I certainly won't want to know Bunbury.

ALGERNON

Then your wife will. You don't seem to realise, that in married life three is company and two is none.

JACK

[*Sententiously.*] That, my dear young friend, is the theory that the corrupt

## BEING EARNEST

French Drama has been propounding for ACT I.  
the last fifty years.

ALGERNON

Yes; and that the happy English home  
has proved in half the time.

JACK

For heaven's sake, don't try to be cynical.  
It's perfectly easy to be cynical.

ALGERNON

My dear fellow, it isn't easy to be anything nowadays. There's such a lot of beastly competition about. [*The sound of an electric bell is heard.*] Ah! that must be Aunt Augusta. Only relatives, or creditors, ever ring in that Wagnerian manner. Now, if I get her out of the way for ten minutes, so that you can have an opportunity for proposing to Gwendolen, may I dine with you to-night at Willis's?

JACK

I suppose so, if you want to.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

### ACT I. ALGERNON

Yes, but you must be serious about it. I hate people who are not serious about meals. It is so shallow of them.

[*Enter* LANE.]

### LANE

Lady Bracknell and Miss Fairfax.

[ALGERNON *goes forward to meet them.*  
*Enter* LADY BRACKNELL and GWENDOLEN.]

### LADY BRACKNELL

Good afternoon, dear Algernon, I hope you are behaving very well.

### ALGERNON

I'm feeling very well, Aunt Augusta.

### LADY BRACKNELL

That's not quite the same thing. In fact the two things rarely go together. [*Sees* JACK *and bows to him with icy coldness.*]

### ALGERNON

[*To* GWENDOLEN.] Dear me, you are smart!

## BEING EARNEST

GWENDOLEN

ACT I.

I am always smart! Am I not, Mr. Worthing?

JACK

You're quite perfect, Miss Fairfax.

GWENDOLEN

Oh! I hope I am not that. It would leave no room for developments, and I intend to develop in many directions. [GWENDOLEN and JACK sit down together in the corner.]

LADY BRACKNELL

I'm sorry if we are a little late, Algernon, but I was obliged to call on dear Lady Harbury. I hadn't been there since her poor husband's death. I never saw a woman so altered; she looks quite twenty years younger. And now I'll have a cup of tea, and one of those nice cucumber sandwiches you promised me.

ALGERNON

Certainly, Aunt Augusta. [*Goes over to tea-table.*]



## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT I. LADY BRACKNELL

Won't you come and sit here, Gwendolen?

GWENDOLEN

Thanks, mamma, I'm quite comfortable where I am.

ALGERNON

*[Picking up empty plate in horror.]* Good heavens! Lane! Why are there no cucumber sandwiches? I ordered them specially.

LANE

*[Gravely.]* There were no cucumbers in the market this morning, sir. I went down twice.

ALGERNON

No cucumbers!

LANE

No, sir. Not even for ready money.

ALGERNON

That will do, Lane, thank you.

---

## BEING EARNEST

LANE

Thank you, sir.

ACT I.

[*Goes out.*]

ALGERNON

I am greatly distressed, Aunt Augusta, about there being no cucumbers, not even for ready money.

LADY BRACKNELL

It really makes no matter, Algernon. I had some crumpets with Lady Harbury, who seems to me to be living entirely for pleasure now.

ALGERNON

I hear her hair has turned quite gold from grief.

LADY BRACKNELL

It certainly has changed its colour. From what cause I, of course, cannot say. [ALGERNON *crosses and hands tea.*] Thank you. I've quite a treat for you to-night, Algernon. I am going to send you down with Mary Farquhar. She is such a nice woman, and so attentive to her husband. It's delightful to watch them.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

### ACT I. ALGERNON

I am afraid, Aunt Augusta, I shall have to give up the pleasure of dining with you to-night after all.

### LADY BRACKNELL

[*Frowning.*] I hope not, Algernon. It would put my table completely out. Your uncle would have to dine upstairs. Fortunately he is accustomed to that.

### ALGERNON

It is a great bore, and, I need hardly say, a terrible disappointment to me, but the fact is I have just had a telegram to say that my poor friend Bunbury is very ill again. [*Exchanges glances with JACK.*] They seem to think I should be with him.

### LADY BRACKNELL

It is very strange. This Mr. Bunbury seems to suffer from curiously bad health.

### ALGERNON

Yes ; poor Bunbury is a dreadful invalid.

---

## BEING EARNEST

LADY BRACKNELL

ACT I.

Well, I must say, Algernon, that I think it is high time that Mr. Bunbury made up his mind whether he was going to live or to die. This shilly-shallying with the question is absurd. Nor do I in any way approve of the modern sympathy with invalids. I consider it morbid. Illness of any kind is hardly a thing to be encouraged in others. Health is the primary duty of life. I am always telling that to your poor uncle, but he never seems to take much notice . . . as far as any improvement in his ailments goes. I should be much obliged if you would ask Mr. Bunbury, from me, to be kind enough not to have a relapse on Saturday, for I rely on you to arrange my music for me. It is my last reception, and one wants something that will encourage conversation, particularly at the end of the season when every one has practically said whatever they had to say, which, in most cases, was probably not much.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

### ACT I. ALGERNON

I'll speak to Bunbury, Aunt Augusta, if he is still conscious, and I think I can promise you he'll be all right by Saturday. Of course the music is a great difficulty. You see, if one plays good music, people don't listen, and if one plays bad music people don't talk. But I'll run over the programme I've drawn out, if you will kindly come into the next room for a moment.

### LADY BRACKNELL

Thank you, Algernon. It is very thoughtful of you. [*Rising, and following ALGERNON.*] I'm sure the programme will be delightful, after a few expurgations. French songs I cannot possibly allow. People always seem to think that they are improper, and either look shocked, which is vulgar, or laugh, which is worse. But German sounds a thoroughly respectable language, and indeed, I believe is so. Gwendolen, you will accompany me.

## BEING EARNEST

GWENDOLEN

ACT I.

Certainly, mamma.

[LADY BRACKNELL *and* ALGERNON *go into the music-room, GWENDOLEN remains behind.*]

JACK

Charming day it has been, Miss Fairfax.

GWENDOLEN

Pray don't talk to me about the weather, Mr. Worthing. Whenever people talk to me about the weather, I always feel quite certain that they mean something else. And that makes me so nervous.

JACK

I do mean something else.

GWENDOLEN

I thought so. In fact, I am never wrong.

JACK

And I would like to be allowed to take advantage of Lady Bracknell's temporary absence . . .

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

### ACT I. GWENDOLEN

I would certainly advise you to do so. Mamma has a way of coming back suddenly into a room that I have often had to speak to her about.

### JACK

[*Nervously.*] Miss Fairfax, ever since I met you I have admired you more than any girl . . . I have ever met since . . . I met you.

### GWENDOLEN

Yes, I am quite well aware of the fact. And I often wish that in public, at any rate, you had been more demonstrative. For me you have always had an irresistible fascination. Even before I met you I was far from indifferent to you. [JACK *looks at her in amazement.*] We live, as I hope you know, Mr. Worthing, in an age of ideals. The fact is constantly mentioned in the more expensive monthly magazines, and has reached the provincial pulpits, I am told; and my ideal has always been to love some one of the name of Ernest.

## BEING EARNEST

There is something in that name that **ACT I**,  
inspires absolute confidence. The moment  
Algernon first mentioned to me that he  
had a friend called Ernest, I knew I was  
destined to love you.

**JACK**

You really love me, Gwendolen?

**GWENDOLEN**

Passionately!

**JACK**

Darling! You don't know how happy  
you've made me.

**GWENDOLEN**

My own Ernest!

**JACK**

But you don't really mean to say that  
you couldn't love me if my name wasn't  
Ernest?

**GWENDOLEN**

But your name is Ernest.

c



## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT I. JACK

Yes, I know it is. But supposing it was something else? Do you mean to say you couldn't love me then?

GWENDOLEN

[*Glibly.*] Ah! that is clearly a metaphysical speculation, and like most metaphysical speculations has very little reference at all to the actual facts of real life, as we know them.

JACK

Personally, darling, to speak quite candidly, I don't much care about the name of Ernest. . . . I don't think the name suits me at all.

GWENDOLEN

It suits you perfectly. It is a divine name. It has a music of its own. It produces vibrations.

JACK

Well, really, Gwendolen, I must say that I think there are lots of other much nicer

## BEING EARNEST

names. I think Jack, for instance, a ACT I charming name.

GWENDOLEN

Jack? . . . No, there is very little music in the name Jack, if any at all, indeed. It does not thrill. It produces absolutely no vibrations. . . . I have known several Jacks, and they all, without exception, were more than usually plain. Besides, Jack is a notorious domesticity for John! And I pity any woman who is married to a man called John. She would probably never be allowed to know the entrancing pleasure of a single moment's solitude. The only really safe name is Ernest.

JACK

Gwendolen, I must get christened at once—I mean we must get married at once. There is no time to be lost.

GWENDOLEN

Married, Mr. Worthing?

JACK

[*Astounded.*] Well . . . surely. You

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

**ACT I** know that I love you, and you led me to believe, Miss Fairfax, that you were not absolutely indifferent to me.

**GWENDOLEN**

I adore you. But you haven't proposed to me yet. Nothing has been said at all about marriage. The subject has not even been touched on.

**JACK**

Well . . . may I propose to you now ?

**GWENDOLEN**

I think it would be an admirable opportunity. And to spare you any possible disappointment, Mr. Worthing, I think it only fair to tell you quite frankly beforehand that I am fully determined to accept you.

**JACK**

Gwendolen !

**GWENDOLEN**

Yes, Mr. Worthing, what have you got to say to me ?

## BEING EARNEST

**JACK**

**ACT I.**

You know what I have got to say to you.

**GWENDOLEN**

Yes, but you don't say it.

**JACK**

Gwendolen, will you marry me? [*Goes on his knees.*]

**GWENDOLEN**

Of course I will, darling. How long you have been about it! I am afraid you have had very little experience in how to propose.

**JACK**

My own one, I have never loved any one in the world but you.

**GWENDOLEN**

Yes, but men often propose for practice. I know my brother Gerald does. All my girl-friends tell me so. What wonderfully blue eyes you have, Ernest! They are quite, quite, blue. I hope you will always

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT I. look at me just like that, especially when there are other people present.

[*Enter* LADY BRACKNELL.]

LADY BRACKNELL

Mr. Worthing! Rise, sir, from this semi-recumbent posture. It is most indecorous.

GWENDOLEN

Mamma! [*He tries to rise; she restrains him.*] I must beg you to retire. This is no place for you. Besides, Mr. Worthing has not quite finished yet.

LADY BRACKNELL

Finished what, may I ask?

GWENDOLEN

I am engaged to Mr. Worthing, mamma. [*They rise together.*]

LADY BRACKNELL

Pardon me, you are not engaged to any one. When you do become engaged to some one, I, or your father, should his health permit him, will inform you of the

## BEING EARNEST

fact. An engagement should come on a ACT I  
young girl as a surprise, pleasant or un-  
pleasant, as the case may be. It is hardly  
a matter that she could be allowed to  
arrange for herself. . . . And now I have  
a few questions to put to you, Mr. Worth-  
ing. While I am making these inquiries,  
you, Gwendolen, will wait for me below in  
the carriage.

GWENDOLEN

*[Reproachfully.]* Mamma!

LADY BRACKNELL

In the carriage, Gwendolen! [GWEN-  
DOLEN goes to the door. She and JACK blow  
kisses to each other behind LADY BRACKNELL'S  
back. LADY BRACKNELL looks vaguely about  
as if she could not understand what the noise  
was. Finally turns round.] Gwendolen,  
the carriage!

GWENDOLEN

Yes, mamma. *[Goes out, looking back at  
JACK.]*

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

**ACT I. LADY BRACKNELL**

[*Sitting down.*] You can take a seat, Mr. Worthing.

[*Looks in her pocket for note-book and pencil.*]

**JACK**

Thank you, Lady Bracknell, I prefer standing.

**LADY BRACKNELL**

[*Pencil and note-book in hand.*] I feel bound to tell you that you are not down on my list of eligible young men, although I have the same list as the dear Duchess of Bolton has. We work together, in fact. However, I am quite ready to enter your name, should your answers be what a really affectionate mother requires. Do you smoke?

**JACK**

Well, yes, I must admit I smoke.

**LADY BRACKNELL**

I am glad to hear it. A man should always have an occupation of some kind.

## BEING EARNEST

There are far too many idle men in ACT I  
London as it is. How old are you ?

JACK

Twenty-nine.

LADY BRACKNELL

A very good age to be married at. I have always been of opinion that a man who desires to get married should know either everything or nothing. Which do you know ?

JACK

[*After some hesitation.*] I know nothing, Lady Bracknell.

LADY BRACKNELL

I am pleased to hear it. I do not approve of anything that tampers with natural ignorance. Ignorance is like a delicate exotic fruit; touch it and the bloom is gone. The whole theory of modern education is radically unsound. Fortunately in England, at any rate, education produces no effect whatsoever. If it did, it would prove a serious danger to the upper classes, and



## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT I. probably lead to acts of violence in Grosvenor Square. What is your income?

JACK

Between seven and eight thousand a year.

LADY BRACKNELL

[*Makes a note in her book.*] In land, or in investments?

JACK

In investments, chiefly.

LADY BRACKNELL

That is satisfactory. What between the duties expected of one during one's lifetime, and the duties exacted from one after one's death, land has ceased to be either a profit or a pleasure. It gives one position, and prevents one from keeping it up. That's all that can be said about land.

JACK

I have a country house with some land, of course, attached to it, about fifteen hundred acres, I believe; but I don't depend on that for my real income. In

## BEING EARNEST

ACT I.

fact, as far as I can make out, the poachers are the only people who make anything out of it.

LADY BRACKNELL

A country house! How many bedrooms? Well, that point can be cleared up afterwards. You have a town house, I hope? A girl with a simple, unspoiled nature, like Gwendolen, could hardly be expected to reside in the country.

JACK

Well, I own a house in Belgrave Square, but it is let by the year to Lady Bloxham. Of course, I can get it back whenever I like, at six months' notice.

LADY BRACKNELL

Lady Bloxham? I don't know her.

JACK

Oh, she goes about very little. She is a lady considerably advanced in years.

LADY BRACKNELL

Ah, nowadays that is no guarantee of

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT I. respectability of character. What number in Belgrave Square ?

JACK

149.

LADY BRACKNELL

[*Shaking her head.*] The unfashionable side. I thought there was something. However, that could easily be altered.

JACK

Do you mean the fashion, or the side ?

LADY BRACKNELL

[*Sternly.*] Both, if necessary, I presume. What are your politics ?

JACK

Well, I am afraid I really have none. I am a Liberal Unionist.

LADY BRACKNELL

Oh, they count as Tories. They dine with us. Or come in the evening, at any rate. Now to minor matters. Are your parents living ?

## BEING EARNEST

JACK

ACT I.

I have lost both my parents.

LADY BRACKNELL

To lose one parent, Mr. Worthing, may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness. Who was your father? He was evidently a man of some wealth. Was he born in what the Radical papers call the purple of commerce, or did he rise from the ranks of the aristocracy?

JACK

I am afraid I really don't know. The fact is, Lady Bracknell, I said I had lost my parents. It would be nearer the truth to say that my parents seem to have lost me. . . . I don't actually know who I am by birth. I was . . . well, I was found.

LADY BRACKNELL

Found!

JACK

The late Mr. Thomas Cardew, an old gentleman of a very charitable and kindly disposition, found me, and gave me the name of Worthing, because he happened

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT I. to have a first-class ticket for Worthing in his pocket at the time. Worthing is a place in Sussex. It is a seaside resort.

LADY BRACKNELL

Where did the charitable gentleman who had a first-class ticket for this seaside resort find you?

JACK

[*Gravely.*] In a hand-bag.

LADY BRACKNELL

A hand-bag?

JACK

[*Very seriously.*] Yes, Lady Bracknell. I was in a hand-bag—a somewhat large, black leather hand-bag, with handles to it—an ordinary hand-bag in fact.

LADY BRACKNELL

In what locality did this Mr. James, or Thomas, Cardew come across this ordinary hand-bag?

JACK

In the cloak-room at Victoria Station.

## BEING EARNEST

It was given to him in mistake for his ACT I  
OWN.

LADY BRACKNELL

The cloak-room at Victoria Station ?

JACK

Yes. The Brighton line.

LADY BRACKNELL

The line is immaterial. Mr. Worthing, I confess I feel somewhat bewildered by what you have just told me. To be born, or at any rate bred, in a hand-bag, whether it had handles or not, seems to me to display a contempt for the ordinary decencies of family life that remind one of the worst excesses of the French Revolution. And I presume you know what that unfortunate movement led to ? As for the particular locality in which the hand-bag was found, a cloak-room at a railway station might serve to conceal a social indiscretion—has probably, indeed, been used for that purpose before now—but it could hardly be regarded as an assured basis for a recognised position in good society.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

**ACT I. JACK**

May I ask you then what you would advise me to do? I need hardly say I would do anything in the world to ensure Gwendolen's happiness.

**LADY BRACKNELL**

I would strongly advise you, Mr. Worthing, to try and acquire some relations as soon as possible, and to make a definite effort to produce at any rate one parent, of either sex, before the season is quite over.

**JACK**

Well, I don't see how I could possibly manage to do that. I can produce the hand-bag at any moment. It is in my dressing-room at home. I really think that should satisfy you, Lady Bracknell.

**LADY BRACKNELL**

Me, sir! What has it to do with me? You can hardly imagine that I and Lord Bracknell would dream of allowing our only daughter—a girl brought up with the utmost care—to marry into a cloak-room,

## BEING EARNEST

and form an alliance with a parcel? Good ACT I  
morning, Mr. Worthing!

[LADY BRACKNELL *sweeps out in majestic indignation.*]

JACK

Good morning! [ALGERNON, *from the other room, strikes up the Wedding March. JACK looks perfectly furious, and goes to the door.*] For goodness' sake don't play that ghastly tune, Algy! How idiotic you are!

[*The music stops and ALGERNON enters cheerily.*]

ALGERNON

Didn't it go off all right, old boy? You don't mean to say Gwendolen refused you? I know it is a way she has. She is always refusing people. I think it is most ill-natured of her.

JACK

Oh, Gwendolen is as right as a trivet. As far as she is concerned, we are engaged. Her mother is perfectly unbearable. Never



## THE IMPORTANCE OF

**ACT I** met such a Gorgon. . . . I don't really know what a Gorgon is like, but I am quite sure that Lady Bracknell is one. In any case, she is a monster, without being a myth, which is rather unfair. . . . I beg your pardon, Algy, I suppose I shouldn't talk about your own aunt in that way before you.

**ALGERNON**

My dear boy, I love hearing my relations abused. It is the only thing that makes me put up with them at all. Relations are simply a tedious pack of people, who haven't got the remotest knowledge of how to live, nor the smallest instinct about when to die.

**JACK**

Oh, that is nonsense!

**ALGERNON**

It isn't!

**JACK**

Well, I won't argue about the matter. You always want to argue about things.

## BEING EARNEST

ALGERNON

ACT I

That is exactly what things were originally made for.

JACK

Upon my word, if I thought that, I'd shoot myself. . . . [*A pause.*] You don't think there is any chance of Gwendolen becoming like her mother in about a hundred and fifty years, do you, Algy?

ALGERNON

All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. No man does. That's his.

JACK

Is that clever?

ALGERNON

It is perfectly phrased! and quite as true as any observation in civilised life should be.

JACK

I am sick to death of cleverness. Everybody is clever nowadays. You can't go anywhere without meeting clever people.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

**ACT I.** The thing has become an absolute public nuisance. I wish to goodness we had a few fools left.

**ALGERNON**

We have.

**JACK**

I should extremely like to meet them. What do they talk about?

**ALGERNON**

The fools? Oh! about the clever people, of course.

**JACK**

What fools!

**ALGERNON**

By the way, did you tell Gwendolen the truth about your being Ernest in town, and Jack in the country?

**JACK**

[*In a very patronising manner.*] My dear fellow, the truth isn't quite the sort of thing one tells to a nice, sweet, refined girl.

## BEING EARNEST

What extraordinary ideas you have about ACT I.  
the way to behave to a woman!

ALGERNON

The only way to behave to a woman is  
to make love to her, if she is pretty, and to  
some one else, if she is plain.

JACK

Oh, that is nonsense.

ALGERNON

What about your brother? What about  
the profligate Ernest?

JACK

Oh, before the end of the week I shall  
have got rid of him. I'll say he died in  
Paris of apoplexy. Lots of people die of  
apoplexy, quite suddenly, don't they?

ALGERNON

Yes, but it's hereditary, my dear fellow.  
It's a sort of thing that runs in families.  
You had much better say a severe chill.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT I. JACK

You are sure a severe chill isn't hereditary, or anything of that kind ?

ALGERNON

Of course it isn't !

JACK

Very well, then. My poor brother Ernest is carried off suddenly, in Paris, by a severe chill. That gets rid of him.

ALGERNON

But I thought you said that . . . Miss Cardew was a little too much interested in your poor brother Ernest ? Won't she feel his loss a good deal ?

JACK

Oh, that is all right. Cecily is not a silly romantic girl, I am glad to say. She has got a capital appetite, goes long walks, and pays no attention at all to her lessons.

ALGERNON

I would rather like to see Cecily.

## BEING EARNEST

**JACK**

**ACT I**

I will take very good care you never do. She is excessively pretty, and she is only just eighteen.

**ALGERNON**

Have you told Gwendolen yet that you have an excessively pretty ward who is only just eighteen?

**JACK**

Oh! one doesn't blurt these things out to people. Cecily and Gwendolen are perfectly certain to be extremely great friends. I'll bet you anything you like that half an hour after they have met, they will be calling each other sister.

**ALGERNON**

Women only do that when they have called each other a lot of other things first. Now, my dear boy, if we want to get a good table at Willis's, we really must go and dress. Do you know it is nearly seven?

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

**ACT I. JACK**

*[Irritably.]* Oh! it always is nearly seven.

**ALGERNON**

Well, I'm hungry.

**JACK**

I never knew you when you weren't. . . .

**ALGERNON**

What shall we do after dinner? Go to a theatre?

**JACK**

Oh no! I loathe listening.

**ALGERNON**

Well, let us go to the Club?

**JACK**

Oh, no! I hate talking.

**ALGERNON**

Well, we might trot round to the Empire at ten?

**JACK**

Oh no! I can't bear looking at things. It is so silly.

## BEING EARNEST

ALGERNON

ACT I.

Well, what shall we do ?

JACK

Nothing !

ALGERNON

It is awfully hard work doing nothing. However, I don't mind hard work where there is no definite object of any kind.

[*Enter* LANE.]

LANE

Miss Fairfax.

[*Enter* GWENDOLEN. LANE *goes out.*]

ALGERNON

Gwendolen, upon my word !

GWENDOLEN

Algy, kindly turn your back. I have something very particular to say to Mr. Worthing.

ALGERNON

Really, Gwendolen, I don't think I can allow this at all.



## THE IMPORTANCE OF

### ACT I. GWENDOLEN

Algy, you always adopt a strictly immoral attitude towards life. You are not quite old enough to do that. [ALGERNON *retires to the fireplace.*]

JACK

My own darling!

GWENDOLEN

Ernest, we may never be married. From the expression on mamma's face I fear we never shall. Few parents nowadays pay any regard to what their children say to them. The old-fashioned respect for the young is fast dying out. Whatever influence I ever had over mamma, I lost at the age of three. But although she may prevent us from becoming man and wife, and I may marry some one else, and marry often, nothing that she can possibly do can alter my eternal devotion to you.

JACK

Dear Gwendolen!

## BEING EARNEST

GWENDOLEN

ACT I.

The story of your romantic origin, as related to me by mamma, with unpleasing comments, has naturally stirred the deeper fibres of my nature. Your Christian name has an irresistible fascination. The simplicity of your character makes you exquisitely incomprehensible to me. Your town address at the Albany I have. What is your address in the country ?

JACK

The Manor House, Woolton, Hertfordshire.

[ALGERNON, *who has been carefully listening, smiles to himself, and writes the address on his shirt-cuff. Then picks up the Railway Guide.*]

GWENDOLEN

There is a good postal service, I suppose ? It may be necessary to do something desperate. That of course will require serious consideration. I will communicate with you daily.

JACK

My own one !

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT I. GWENDOLEN

How long do you remain in town ?

JACK .

Till Monday.

GWENDOLEN

Good! Algy, you may turn round now.

ALGERNON

Thanks, I 've turned round already.

GWENDOLEN

You may also ring the bell.

JACK

You will let me see you to your carriage,  
my own darling ?

GWENDOLEN

Certainly.

JACK

[*To LANE, who now enters.*] I will see  
Miss Fairfax out.

LANE

Yes, sir. [JACK and GWENDOLEN go off.]

[LANE presents several letters on a salver

## BEING EARNEST

to ALGERNON. *It is to be surmised that they are bills, as ALGERNON, after looking at the envelopes, tears them up.* ACT I.]

ALGERNON

A glass of sherry, Lane.

LANE

Yes, sir.

ALGERNON

To-morrow, Lane, I'm going Bunburying.

LANE

Yes, sir.

ALGERNON

I shall probably not be back till Monday. You can put up my dress clothes, my smoking jacket, and all the Bunbury suits . . .

LANE

Yes, sir. [*Handing sherry.*]

ALGERNON

I hope to-morrow will be a fine day. Lane.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

**ACT I. LANE**

It never is, sir.

**ALGERNON**

Lane, you're a perfect pessimist.

**LANE**

I do my best to give satisfaction, sir.

[*Enter JACK. LANE goes off.*]

**JACK**

There's a sensible, intellectual girl!  
the only girl I ever cared for in my life.

[*ALGERNON is laughing immoderately.*]

What on earth are you so amused at?

**ALGERNON**

Oh, I'm a little anxious about poor  
Bunbury, that is all.

**JACK**

If you don't take care, your friend Bun-  
bury will get you into a serious scrape some  
day.

**ALGERNON**

I love scrapes. They are the only things  
that are never serious.

## BEING EARNEST

JACK

ACT I.

Oh, that's nonsense, Algy. You never talk anything but nonsense.

ALGERNON

Nobody ever does.

[JACK looks indignantly at him, and leaves the room. ALGERNON lights a cigarette, reads his shirt-cuff, and smiles.]

ACT DROP

11

## **SECOND ACT**





## SECOND ACT

### SCENE

*Garden at the Manor House. A flight of grey stone steps leads up to the house. The garden, an old-fashioned one, full of roses. Time of year, July. Basket chairs, and a table covered with books, are set under a large yew-tree.*

[MISS PRISM *discovered seated at the table. CECILY is at the back watering flowers.*]

MISS PRISM

[*Calling.*] Cecily, Cecily! Surely such a utilitarian occupation as the watering of flowers is rather Moulton's duty than yours? Especially at a moment when intellectual pleasures await you. Your German grammar is on the table. Pray open it at page fifteen. We will repeat yesterday's lesson.

CECILY

[*Coming over very slowly.*] But I don't like German. It isn't at all a becoming

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT II. language. I know perfectly well that I look quite plain after my German lesson.

MISS PRISM

Child, you know how anxious your guardian is that you should improve yourself in every way. He laid particular stress on your German, as he was leaving for town yesterday. Indeed, he always lays stress on your German when he is leaving for town.

CECILY

Dear Uncle Jack is so very serious! Sometimes he is so serious that I think he cannot be quite well.

MISS PRISM

[*Drawing herself up.*] Your guardian enjoys the best of health, and his gravity of demeanour is especially to be commended in one so comparatively young as he is. I know no one who has a higher sense of duty and responsibility.

## BEING EARNEST

CECILY

ACT I'

I suppose that is why he often looks a little bored when we three are together.

MISS PRISM

Cecily! I am surprised at you. Mr. Worthing has many troubles in his life. Idle merriment and triviality would be out of place in his conversation. You must remember his constant anxiety about that unfortunate young man his brother.

CECILY

I wish Uncle Jack would allow that unfortunate young man, his brother, to come down here sometimes. We might have a good influence over him, Miss Prism. I am sure you certainly would. You know German, and geology, and things of that kind influence a man very much. [CECILY *begins to write in her diary.*]

MISS PRISM

[*Shaking her head.*] I do not think that even I could produce any effect on a char-

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

**ACT II.** actor that according to his own brother's admission is irretrievably weak and vacillating. Indeed I am not sure that I would desire to reclaim him. I am not in favour of this modern mania for turning bad people into good people at a moment's notice. As a man sows so let him reap. You must put away your diary, Cecily. I really don't see why you should keep a diary at all.

**CECILY**

I keep a diary in order to enter the wonderful secrets of my life. If I didn't write them down, I should probably forget all about them.

**MISS PRISM**

Memory, my dear Cecily, is the diary that we all carry about with us.

**CECILY**

Yes, but it usually chronicles the things that have never happened, and couldn't possibly have happened. I believe that Memory is responsible for nearly all the three-volume novels that Mudie sends us.

## BEING EARNEST

MISS PRISM

ACT II.

Do not speak slightingly of the three-volume novel, Cecily. I wrote one myself in earlier days.

CECILY

Did you really, Miss Prism? How wonderfully clever you are! I hope it did not end happily? I don't like novels that end happily. They depress me so much.

MISS PRISM

The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means.

CECILY

I suppose so. But it seems very unfair. And was your novel ever published?

MISS PRISM

Alas! no. The manuscript unfortunately was abandoned. [CECILY *starts.*] I use the word in the sense of lost or mislaid. To your work, child, these speculations are profitless.

CECILY

[*Smiling.*] But I see dear Dr. Chasuble coming up through the garden.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT II. MISS PRISM

[*Rising and advancing.*] Dr. Chasuble!  
This is indeed a pleasure.

[*Enter CANON CHASUBLE.*]

CHASUBLE

And how are we this morning? Miss Prism, you are, I trust, well?

CECILY

Miss Prism has just been complaining of a slight headache. I think it would do her so much good to have a short stroll with you in the Park, Dr. Chasuble.

MISS PRISM

Cecily, I have not mentioned anything about a headache.

CECILY

No, dear Miss Prism, I know that, but I felt instinctively that you had a headache. Indeed I was thinking about that, and not about my German lesson, when the Rector came in.

CHASUBLE

I hope, Cecily, you are not inattentive.

## BEING EARNEST

CECILY

ACT II.

Oh, I am afraid I am.

CHASUBLE

That is strange. Were I fortunate enough to be Miss Prism's pupil, I would hang upon her lips. [MISS PRISM *glares.*] I spoke metaphorically.—My metaphor was drawn from bees. Ahem! Mr. Worthing, I suppose, has not returned from town yet?

MISS PRISM

We do not expect him till Monday afternoon.

CHASUBLE

Ah yes, he usually likes to spend his Sunday in London. He is not one of those whose sole aim is enjoyment, as, by all accounts, that unfortunate young man his brother seems to be. But I must not disturb Egeria and her pupil any longer.

MISS PRISM

Egeria? My name is Lætitia, Doctor.



## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT II. CHASUBLE

[*Bowing.*] A classical allusion merely, drawn from the Pagan authors. I shall see you both no doubt at Evensong?

MISS PRISM

I think, dear Doctor, I will have a stroll with you. I find I have a headache after all, and a walk might do it good.

CHASUBLE

With pleasure, Miss Prism, with pleasure. We might go as far as the schools and back.

MISS PRISM

That would be delightful. Cecily, you will read your Political Economy in my absence. The chapter on the Fall of the Rupee you may omit. It is somewhat too sensational. Even these metallic problems have their melodramatic side.

[*Goes down the garden with* DR. CHASUBLE.]

CECILY

[*Picks up books and throws them back on*

## BEING EARNEST

*table.*] Horrid Political Economy! Hor- ACT II.  
rid Geography! Horrid, horrid German!

[*Enter MERRIMAN with a card on a salver.*]

**MERRIMAN**

Mr. Ernest Worthing has just driven over from the station. He has brought his luggage with him.

**CECILY**

[*Takes the card and reads it.*] 'Mr. Ernest Worthing, B. 4, The Albany, W.' Uncle Jack's brother! Did you tell him Mr. Worthing was in town?

**MERRIMAN**

Yes, Miss. He seemed very much disappointed. I mentioned that you and Miss Prism were in the garden. He said he was anxious to speak to you privately for a moment.

**CECILY**

Ask Mr. Ernest Worthing to come here. I suppose you had better talk to the house-keeper about a room for him.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT II. MERRIMAN

Yes, Miss.

[MERRIMAN *goes off.*]

CECILY

I have never met any really wicked person before. I feel rather frightened. I am so afraid he will look just like every one else.

[*Enter ALGERNON, very gay and debonnaire.*]

He does!

ALGERNON

[*Raising his hat.*] You are my little cousin Cecily, I'm sure.

CECILY

You are under some strange mistake. I am not little. In fact, I believe I am more than usually tall for my age. [ALGERNON *is rather taken aback.*] But I am your cousin Cecily. You, I see from your card, are Uncle Jack's brother, my cousin Ernest, my wicked cousin Ernest.

ALGERNON

Oh! I am not really wicked at all,

## BEING EARNEST

cousin Cecily. You mustn't think that I ACT II  
am wicked.

CECILY

If you are not, then you have certainly been deceiving us all in a very inexcusable manner. I hope you have not been leading a double life, pretending to be wicked and being really good all the time. That would be hypocrisy.

ALGERNON

[*Looks at her in amazement.*] Oh! Of course I have been rather reckless.

CECILY

I am glad to hear it.

ALGERNON

In fact, now you mention the subject, I have been very bad in my own small way.

CECILY

I don't think you should be so proud of that, though I am sure it must have been very pleasant.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

**ACT II. ALGERNON**

It is much pleasanter being here with you.

**CECILY**

I can't understand how you are here at all. Uncle Jack won't be back till Monday afternoon.

**ALGERNON**

That is a great disappointment. I am obliged to go up by the first train on Monday morning. I have a business appointment that I am anxious . . . to miss?

**CECILY**

Couldn't you miss it anywhere but in London?

**ALGERNON**

No: the appointment is in London.

**CECILY**

Well, I know, of course, how important it is not to keep a business engagement, if one wants to retain any sense of the beauty of life, but still I think you had better wait

## BEING EARNEST

till Uncle Jack arrives. I know he wants **ACT II.**  
to speak to you about your emigrating.

**ALGERNON**

About my what?

**CECILY**

Your emigrating. He has gone up to buy your outfit.

**ALGERNON**

I certainly wouldn't let Jack buy my outfit. He has no taste in neckties at all.

**CECILY**

I don't think you will require neckties. Uncle Jack is sending you to Australia.

**ALGERNON**

Australia! I'd sooner die

**CECILY**

Well, he said at dinner on Wednesday night, that you would have to choose between this world, the next world, and Australia.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT II. ALGERNON

Oh, well! The accounts I have received of Australia and the next world, are not particularly encouraging. This world is good enough for me, cousin Cecily.

CECILY

Yes, but are you good enough for it?

ALGERNON

I'm afraid I'm not that. That is why I want you to reform me. You might make that your mission, if you don't mind, cousin Cecily.

CECILY

I'm afraid I've no time, this afternoon.

ALGERNON

Well, would you mind my reforming myself this afternoon?

CECILY

It is rather Quixotic of you. But I think you should try.

ALGERNON

I will. I feel better already.

## BEING EARNEST

CECILY

ACT II.

You are looking a little worse.

ALGERNON

That is because I am hungry

CECILY

How thoughtless of me. I should have remembered that when one is going to lead an entirely new life, one requires regular and wholesome meals. Won't you come in?

ALGERNON

Thank you. Might I have a buttonhole first? I never have any appetite unless I have a buttonhole first.

CECILY

A Maréchal Niel? [*Picks up scissors.*]

ALGERNON

No, I'd sooner have a pink rose.

CECILY

Why? [*Cuts a flower.*]

F



## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT II. ALGERNON

Because you are like a pink rose, Cousin Cecily.

CECILY

I don't think it can be right for you to talk to me like that. Miss Prism never says such things to me.

ALGERNON

Then Miss Prism is a short-sighted old lady. [CECILY *puts the rose in his button-hole.*] You are the prettiest girl I ever saw.

CECILY

Miss Prism says that all good looks are a snare.

ALGERNON

They are a snare that every sensible man would like to be caught in.

CECILY

Oh, I don't think I would care to catch a sensible man. I shouldn't know what to talk to him about.

[*They pass into the house. MISS PRISM and DR. CHASUBLE return.*]

## BEING EARNEST

MISS PRISM

ACT II.

You are too much alone, dear Dr. Chasuble. You should get married. A misanthrope I can understand—a womanthrope, never!

CHASUBLE

[*With a scholar's shudder.*] Believe me, I do not deserve so neologistic a phrase. The precept as well as the practice of the Primitive Church was distinctly against matrimony.

MISS PRISM

[*Sententiously.*] That is obviously the reason why the Primitive Church has not lasted up to the present day. And you do not seem to realise, dear Doctor, that by persistently remaining single, a man converts himself into a permanent public temptation. Men should be more careful; this very celibacy leads weaker vessels astray.

CHASUBLE

But is a man not equally attractive when married?

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT II. MISS PRISM

No married man is ever attractive except to his wife.

CHASUBLE

And often, I've been told, not even to her.

MISS PRISM

That depends on the intellectual sympathies of the woman. Maturity can always be depended on. Ripeness can be trusted. Young women are green. [DR. CHASUBLE starts.] I spoke horticulturally. My metaphor was drawn from fruits. But where is Cecily?

CHASUBLE

Perhaps she followed us to the schools.

[*Enter JACK slowly from the back of the garden. He is dressed in the deepest mourning, with crape hatband and black gloves.*]

MISS PRISM

Mr. Worthing!

CHASUBLE

Mr. Worthing?

## BEING EARNEST

MISS PRISM

ACT II

This is indeed a surprise. We did not look for you till Monday afternoon.

JACK

[*Shakes MISS PRISM'S hand in a tragic manner.*] I have returned sooner than I expected. Dr. Chasuble, I hope you are well?

CHASUBLE

Dear Mr. Worthing, I trust this garb of woe does not betoken some terrible calamity?

JACK

My brother.

MISS PRISM

More shameful debts and extravagance?

CHASUBLE

Still leading his life of pleasure?

JACK

[*Shaking his head.*] Dead!

CHASUBLE

Your brother Ernest dead?

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT II. JACK

Quite dead.

MISS PRISM

What a lesson for him! I trust he will profit by it.

CHASUBLE

Mr. Worthing, I offer you my sincere condolence. You have at least the consolation of knowing that you were always the most generous and forgiving of brothers.

JACK

Poor Ernest! He had many faults, but it is a sad, sad blow.

CHASUBLE

Very sad indeed. Were you with him at the end?

JACK

No. He died abroad; in Paris, in fact. I had a telegram last night from the manager of the Grand Hotel.

CHASUBLE

Was the cause of death mentioned?

## BEING EARNEST

JACK

ACT II.

A severe chill, it seems.

MISS PRISM

As a man sows, so shall he reap.

CHASUBLE

[*Raising his hand.*] Charity, dear Miss Prism, charity! None of us are perfect. I myself am peculiarly susceptible to draughts. Will the interment take place here?

JACK

No. He seems to have expressed a desire to be buried in Paris?

CHASUBLE

In Paris! [*Shakes his head.*] I fear that hardly points to any very serious state of mind at the last. You would no doubt wish me to make some slight allusion to this tragic domestic affliction next Sunday. [*JACK presses his hand convulsively.*] My sermon on the meaning of the manna in the wilderness can be adapted to almost any

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT II. occasion, joyful, or, as in the present case, distressing. [*All sigh.*] I have preached it at harvest celebrations, christenings, confirmations, on days of humiliation and festal days. The last time I delivered it was in the Cathedral, as a charity sermon on behalf of the Society for the Prevention of Discontent among the Upper Orders. The Bishop, who was present, was much struck by some of the analogies I drew.

JACK

Ah! that reminds me, you mentioned christenings I think, Dr. Chasuble? I suppose you know how to christen all right? [DR. CHASUBLE *looks astounded.*] I mean, of course, you are continually christening, aren't you?

MISS PRISM

It is, I regret to say, one of the Rector's most constant duties in this parish. I have often spoken to the poorer classes on the subject. But they don't seem to know what thrift is.

## BEING EARNEST

CHASUBLE

ACT II.

But is there any particular infant in whom you are interested, Mr. Worthing? Your brother was, I believe, unmarried, was he not?

JACK

Oh yes.

MISS PRISM

[*Bitterly.*] People who live entirely for pleasure usually are.

JACK

But it is not for any child, dear Doctor. I am very fond of children. No! the fact is, I would like to be christened myself, this afternoon, if you have nothing better to do.

CHASUBLE

But surely, Mr. Worthing, you have been christened already?

JACK

I don't remember anything about it.



## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT II. CHASUBLE

But have you any grave doubts on the subject?

JACK

I certainly intend to have. Of course I don't know if the thing would bother you in any way, or if you think I am a little too old now.

CHASUBLE

Not at all. The sprinkling, and, indeed, the immersion of adults is a perfectly canonical practice.

JACK

Immersion!

CHASUBLE

You need have no apprehensions. Sprinkling is all that is necessary, or indeed I think advisable. Our weather is so changeable. At what hour would you wish the ceremony performed?

JACK

Oh, I might trot round about five if that would suit you.

## BEING EARNEST

CHASUBLE

ACT II.

Perfectly, perfectly! In fact I have two similar ceremonies to perform at that time. A case of twins that occurred recently in one of the outlying cottages on your own estate. Poor Jenkins the carter, a most hard-working man.

JACK

Oh! I don't see much fun in being christened along with other babies. It would be childish. Would half-past five do?

CHASUBLE

Admirably! Admirably! [*Takes out watch.*] And now, dear Mr. Worthing, I will not intrude any longer into a house of sorrow. I would merely beg you not to be too much bowed down by grief. What seem to us bitter trials are often blessings in disguise.

MISS PRISM

This seems to me a blessing of an extremely obvious kind.

[*Enter CECILY from the house.*]

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT II. CECILY

Uncle Jack! Oh, I am pleased to see you back. But what horrid clothes you have got on! Do go and change them.

MISS PRISM

Cecily!

CHASUBLE

My child! my child! [CECILY goes towards JACK; he kisses her brow in a melancholy manner.]

CECILY

What is the matter, Uncle Jack? Do look happy! You look as if you had toothache, and I have got such a surprise for you. Who do you think is in the dining-room? Your brother!

JACK

Who?

CECILY

Your brother Ernest. He arrived about half an hour ago.

## BEING EARNEST

**JACK**

**ACT II**

What nonsense! I haven't got a brother.

**CECILY**

Oh, don't say that. However badly he may have behaved to you in the past he is still your brother. You couldn't be so heartless as to disown him. I'll tell him to come out. And you will shake hands with him, won't you, Uncle Jack?

*[Runs back into the house.]*

**CHASUBLE**

These are very joyful tidings.

**MISS PRISM**

After we had all been resigned to his loss, his sudden return seems to me peculiarly distressing.

**JACK**

My brother is in the dining-room? I don't know what it all means. I think it is perfectly absurd.

*[Enter ALGERNON and CECILY hand in hand. They come slowly up to JACK.]*

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT II. JACK

Good heavens! [*Motions ALGERNON away.*]

ALGERNON

Brother John, I have come down from town to tell you that I am very sorry for all the trouble I have given you, and that I intend to lead a better life in the future. [*JACK glares at him and does not take his hand.*]

CECILY

Uncle Jack, you are not going to refuse your own brother's hand?

JACK

Nothing will induce me to take his hand. I think his coming down here disgraceful. He knows perfectly well why.

CECILY

Uncle Jack, do be nice. There is some good in every one. Ernest has just been telling me about his poor invalid friend Mr. Bunbury whom he goes to visit so often. And surely there must be much

## BEING EARNEST

good in one who is kind to an invalid, and ACT II.  
leaves the pleasures of London to sit by a  
bed of pain.

JACK

Oh! he has been talking about Bunbury,  
has he?

CECILY

Yes, he has told me all about poor Mr.  
Bunbury, and his terrible state of health.

JACK

Bunbury! Well, I won't have him talk  
to you about Bunbury or about anything  
else. It is enough to drive one perfectly  
frantic.

ALGERNON

Of course I admit that the faults were  
all on my side. But I must say that I  
think that Brother John's coldness to me  
is peculiarly painful. I expected a more  
enthusiastic welcome, especially consider-  
ing it is the first time I have come here.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

**ACT II. CECILY**

Uncle Jack, if you don't shake hands with Ernest I will never forgive you.

**JACK**

Never forgive me?

**CECILY**

Never, never, never!

**JACK**

Well, this is the last time I shall ever do it. [*Shakes hands with ALGERNON and gloves.*]

**CHASTLE**

It's pleasant, is it not, to see so perfect a reconciliation? I think we might leave the two brothers together.

**MISS PRISM**

Cecily, you will come with us.

**CECILY**

Certainly, Miss Prism. My little task of reconciliation is over.

## BEING EARNEST

CHASUBLE

ACT II

You have done a beautiful action to-day,  
dear child.

MISS PRISM

We must not be premature in our  
judgments.

CECILY

I feel very happy. [*They all go off except  
JACK and ALGERNON.*]

JACK

You young scoundrel, Algy, you must  
get out of this place as soon as possible.  
I don't allow any Bunburying here.

[*Enter MERRIMAN.*]

MERRIMAN

I have put Mr. Ernest's things in the  
room next to yours, sir. I suppose that is  
all right?

JACK

What?

MERRIMAN

Mr. Ernest's luggage, sir. I have un-

c



## THE IMPORTANCE OF

**MORIL** packed it and put it in the room next to your own.

**JACK**

His luggage?

**MERRIDIAN**

Yes, sir. Three portmanteaus, a dressing-case, two hat-boxes, and a large luncheon-basket.

**ALGERNON**

I am afraid I can't stay more than a week this time.

**JACK**

Merriman, order the dog-cart at once. Mr. Ernest has been suddenly called back to town.

**MERRIDIAN**

Yes, sir. [*Goes back into the house.*]

**ALGERNON**

What a fearful liar you are, Jack. I have not been called back to town at all.

**JACK**

Yes, you have.

## BEING EARNEST

ALGERNON

ACT II

I haven't heard any one call me.

JACK

Your duty as a gentleman calls you back.

ALGERNON

My duty as a gentleman has never interfered with my pleasures in the smallest degree.

JACK

I can quite understand that.

ALGERNON

Well, Cecily is a darling.

JACK

You are not to talk of Miss Cardew like that. I don't like it.

ALGERNON

Well, I don't like your clothes. You look perfectly ridiculous in them. Why on earth don't you go up and change? It is perfectly childish to be in deep mourning for a man who is actually staying for a

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT II. whole week with you in your house as a guest. I call it grotesque.

**JACK**

You are certainly not staying with me for a whole week as a guest or anything else. You have got to leave . . . by the four-five train.

**ALGERNON**

I certainly won't leave you so long as you are in mourning. It would be most unfriendly. If I were in mourning you would stay with me, I suppose. I should think it very unkind if you didn't.

**JACK**

Well, will you go if I change my clothes?

**ALGERNON**

Yes, if you are not too long. I never saw anybody take so long to dress, and with such little result.

**JACK**

Well, at any rate, that is better than being always over-dressed as you are.

## BEING EARNEST

ALGERNON

ACT II

If I am occasionally a little over-dressed, I make up for it by being always immensely over-educated.

JACK

Your vanity is ridiculous, your conduct an outrage, and your presence in my garden utterly absurd. However, you have got to catch the four-five, and I hope you will have a pleasant journey back to town. This Bunburying, as you call it, has not been a great success for you.

*[Goes into the house.]*

ALGERNON

I think it has been a great success. I'm in love with Cecily, and that is everything.

*[Enter CECILY at the back of the garden. She picks up the can and begins to water the flowers.]*

But I must see her before I go, and make arrangements for another Bunbury. Ah, there she is.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT II. CECILY

Oh, I merely came back to water the roses. I thought you were with Uncle Jack.

ALGERNON

He's gone to order the dog-cart for me.

CECILY

Oh, is he going to take you for a nice drive?

ALGERNON

He's going to send me away.

CECILY

Then have we got to part?

ALGERNON

I am afraid so. It's a very painful parting.

CECILY

It is always painful to part from people whom one has known for a very brief space of time. The absence of old friends one can endure with equanimity. But even a momentary separation from any one to

## BEING EARNEST

whom one has just been introduced is ACT II.  
almost unbearable.

ALGERNON

Thank you.

[*Enter* MERRIMAN.]

MERRIMAN

The dog-cart is at the door, sir. [ALGERNON *looks appealingly at* CECILY.]

CECILY

It can wait, Merriman . . . for . . . five minutes.

MERRIMAN

Yes, Miss.

[*Exit* MERRIMAN.]

ALGERNON

I hope, Cecily, I shall not offend you if I state quite frankly and openly that you seem to me to be in every way the visible personification of absolute perfection.

CECILY

I think your frankness does you great credit, Ernest. If you will allow me, I

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT II. will copy your remarks into my diary.  
[*Goes over to table and begins writing in diary.*]

ALGERNON

Do you really keep a diary? I'd give anything to look at it. May I?

CECILY

Oh no. [*Puts her hand over it.*] You see, it is simply a very young girl's record of her own thoughts and impressions, and consequently meant for publication. When it appears in volume form I hope you will order a copy. But pray, Ernest, don't stop. I delight in taking down from dictation. I have reached 'absolute perfection.' You can go on. I am quite ready for more.

ALGERNON

[*Somewhat taken aback.*] Ahem! Ahem!

CECILY

Oh, don't cough, Ernest. When one is dictating one should speak fluently and not

## BEING EARNEST

cough. Besides, I don't know how to spell **ACT II.**  
a cough. [*Writes as ALGERNON speaks.*]

**ALGERNON**

[*Speaking very rapidly.*] Cecily, ever since I first looked upon your wonderful and incomparable beauty, I have dared to love you wildly, passionately, devotedly, hopelessly.

**CECILY**

I don't think that you should tell me that you love me wildly, passionately, devotedly, hopelessly. Hopelessly doesn't seem to make much sense, does it?

**ALGERNON**

Cecily!

[*Enter MERRIMAN.*]

**MERRIMAN**

The dog-cart is waiting, sir.

**ALGERNON**

Tell it to come round next week, at the same hour.



## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT II. MERRIMAN

[*Looks at CECILY, who makes no sign.*]  
Yes, sir. [MERRIMAN *retires.*]

CECILY

Uncle Jack would be very much annoyed if he knew you were staying on till next week, at the same hour.

ALGERNON

Oh, I don't care about Jack. I don't care for anybody in the whole world but you. I love you, Cecily. You will marry me, won't you?

CECILY

You silly boy! Of course. Why, we have been engaged for the last three months.

ALGERNON

For the last three months?

CECILY

Yes, it will be exactly three months on Thursday.

## BEING EARNEST

ALGERNON

ACT II

But how did we become engaged ?

CECILY

Well, ever since dear Uncle Jack first confessed to us that he had a younger brother who was very wicked and bad, you of course have formed the chief topic of conversation between myself and Miss Prism. And of course a man who is much talked about is always very attractive. One feels there must be something in him, after all. I daresay it was foolish of me, but I fell in love with you, Ernest.

ALGERNON

Darling! And when was the engagement actually settled ?

CECILY

On the 14th of February last. Worn out by your entire ignorance of my existence, I determined to end the matter one way or the other, and after a long struggle with myself I accepted you under this dear old tree here. The next day I bought this

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT II. little ring in your name, and this is the little bangle with the true lovers' knot I promised you always to wear.

ALGERNON

Did I give you this? It's very pretty, isn't it?

CECILY

Yes, you've wonderfully good taste, Ernest. It's the excuse I've always given for your leading such a bad life. And this is the box in which I keep all your dear letters. [*Kneels at table, opens box, and produces letters tied up with blue ribbon.*]

ALGERNON

My letters! But, my own sweet Cecily, I have never written you any letters.

CECILY

You need hardly remind me of that, Ernest. I remember only too well that I was forced to write your letters for you. I wrote always three times a week, and sometimes oftener.

## BEING EARNEST

ALGERNON

ACT II.

Oh, do let me read them, Cecily ?

CECILY

Oh, I couldn't possibly. They would make you far too conceited. [*Replaces box.*] The three you wrote me after I had broken off the engagement are so beautiful, and so badly spelled, that even now I can hardly read them without crying a little.

ALGERNON

But was our engagement ever broken off ?

CECILY

Of course it was. On the 22nd of last March. You can see the entry if you like. [*Shows diary.*] 'To-day I broke off my engagement with Ernest. I feel it is better to do so. The weather still continues charming.'

ALGERNON

But why on earth did you break it off ? What had I done ? I had done nothing at all. Cecily, I am very much hurt indeed

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT II. to hear you broke it off. Particularly when the weather was so charming.

CECILY

It would hardly have been a really serious engagement if it hadn't been broken off at least once. But I forgave you before the week was out.

ALGERNON

[*Crossing to her, and kneeling.*] What a perfect angel you are, Cecily.

CECILY

You dear romantic boy. [*He kisses her, she puts her fingers through his hair.*] I hope your hair curls naturally, does it?

ALGERNON

Yes, darling, with a little help from others.

CECILY

I am so glad.

ALGERNON

You'll never break off our engagement again, Cecily?

## BEING EARNEST

CECILY

ACT II.

I don't think I could break it off now that I have actually met you. Besides, of course, there is the question of your name.

ALGERNON

Yes, of course. [*Nervously.*]

CECILY

You must not laugh at me, darling, but it had always been a girlish dream of mine to love some one whose name was Ernest. [*ALGERNON rises, CECILY also.*] There is something in that name that seems to inspire absolute confidence. I pity any poor married woman whose husband is not called Ernest.

ALGERNON

But, my dear child, do you mean to say you could not love me if I had some other name?

CECILY

But what name?

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

### ACT II. ALGERNON

Oh, any name you like—Algernon—for instance . . .

#### CECILY

But I don't like the name of Algernon.

#### ALGERNON

Well, my own dear, sweet, loving little darling, I really can't see why you should object to the name of Algernon. It is not at all a bad name. In fact, it is rather an aristocratic name. Half of the chaps who get into the Bankruptcy Court are called Algernon. But seriously, Cecily . . . [*Moving to her*] . . . if my name was Algy, couldn't you love me?

#### CECILY

[*Rising.*] I might respect you, Ernest, I might admire your character, but I fear that I should not be able to give you my undivided attention.

#### ALGERNON

Ahem! Cecily! [*Picking up hat.*] Your Rector here is, I suppose, thoroughly ex-

## BEING EARNEST

perienced in the practice of all the rites **ACT II**  
and ceremonials of the Church?

**CECILY**

Oh, yes. Dr. Chasuble is a most learned man. He has never written a single book, so you can imagine how much he knows.

**ALGERNON**

I must see him at once on a most important christening—I mean on most important business.

**CECILY**

Oh!

**ALGERNON**

I shan't be away more than half an hour.

**CECILY**

Considering that we have been engaged since February the 14th, and that I only met you to-day for the first time. I think it is rather hard that you should leave me for so long a period as half an hour. Couldn't you make it twenty minutes?



## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT II. ALGERNON

I'll be back in no time.

*[Kisses her and rushes down the garden.]*

CECILY

What an impetuous boy he is! I like his hair so much. I must enter his proposal in my diary.

*[Enter MERRIMAN.]*

MERRIMAN

A Miss Fairfax has just called to see Mr. Worthing. On very important business, Miss Fairfax states.

CECILY

Isn't Mr. Worthing in his library?

MERRIMAN

Mr. Worthing went over in the direction of the Rectory some time ago.

CECILY

Pray ask the lady to come out here; Mr. Worthing is sure to be back soon. And you can bring tea.

## BEING EARNEST

MERRIMAN

Yes, Miss.

ACT II.

[*Goes out.*]

CECILY

Miss Fairfax! I suppose one of the many good elderly women who are associated with Uncle Jack in some of his philanthropic work in London. I don't quite like women who are interested in philanthropic work. I think it is so forward of them.

[*Enter MERRIMAN.*]

MERRIMAN

Miss Fairfax.

[*Enter GWENDOLEN.*] [*Exit MERRIMAN.*]

CECILY

[*Advancing to meet her.*] Pray let me introduce myself to you. My name is Cecily Cardew.

GWENDOLEN

Cecily Cardew? [*Moving to her and shaking hands.*] What a very sweet name! Something tells me that we are going to be great friends. I like you already more

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

**ACT II** than I can say. My first impressions of people are never wrong.

**CECILY**

How nice of you to like me so much after we have known each other such a comparatively short time. Pray sit down.

**GWENDOLEN**

[*Still standing up.*] I may call you Cecily, may I not?

**CECILY**

With pleasure!

**GWENDOLEN**

And you will always call me Gwendolen, won't you?

**CECILY**

If you wish.

**GWENDOLEN**

Then that is all quite settled, is it not?

**CECILY**

I hope so. [*A pause. They both sit down together.*]

## BEING EARNEST

GWENDOLEN

ACT II

Perhaps this might be a favourable opportunity for my mentioning who I am. My father is Lord Bracknell. You have never heard of papa, I suppose?

CECILY

I don't think so.

GWENDOLEN

Outside the family circle, papa, I am glad to say, is entirely unknown. I think that is quite as it should be. The home seems to me to be the proper sphere for the man. And certainly once a man begins to neglect his domestic duties he becomes painfully effeminate, does he not? And I don't like that. It makes men so very attractive. Cecily, mamma, whose views on education are remarkably strict, has brought me up to be extremely shortsighted; it is part of her system; so do you mind my looking at you through my glasses?

GWEN. - Do you mind my looking  
at you for a moment?

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

### ACT II. CECILY

Oh! not at all, Gwendolen. I am very fond of being looked at.

### GWENDOLEN

[*After examining CECILY carefully through a lorgnette.*] You are here on a short visit, I suppose.

### CECILY

Oh no! I live here.

### GWENDOLEN

[*Severely.*] Really? Your mother, no doubt, or some female relative of advanced years, resides here also?

### CECILY

Oh no! I have no mother, nor, in fact, any relations.

### GWENDOLEN

Indeed?

### CECILY

My dear guardian, with the assistance of Miss Prism, has the arduous task of looking after me.

## BEING EARNEST

GWENDOLEN

ACT II.

Your guardian?

CECILY

Yes, I am Mr. Worthing's ward.

GWENDOLEN

Oh! It is strange he never mentioned to me that he had a ward. ~~How secretive of him!~~ He grows more interesting ~~hourly~~ *by the hour*. I am not sure, however, that the news inspires me with feelings of unmixed delight. [*Rising and going to her.*] I am very fond of you, Cecily; I have liked you ever since I met you! But I am bound to state that now that I know that you are Mr. Worthing's ward, I cannot help expressing a wish you were—well, just a little older than you seem to be—and not quite so very alluring in appearance. In fact, if I may speak candidly—

CECILY

Pray do! I think that whenever one has anything unpleasant to say, one should always be quite candid.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

### ACT II. GWENDOLEN

Well, to speak with perfect candour, Cecily, I wish that you were fully forty-two, and more than usually plain for your age. Ernest has a strong upright nature. He is the very soul of truth and honour. Disloyalty would be as impossible to him as deception. ~~But even men of the noblest possible moral character are extremely susceptible to the influence of the physical charms of others. Modern, no less than Ancient History, supplies us with many most painful examples of what I refer to. If it were not so, indeed, History would be quite unreadable.~~

### CECILY

I beg your pardon, Gwendolen, did you say Ernest?

### GWENDOLEN

Yes.

### CECILY

Oh, but it is not Mr. Ernest Worthing

## BEING EARNEST

who is my guardian. It is his brother—his ACT II.  
elder brother.

GWENDOLEN

[*Sitting down again.*] Ernest never mentioned to me that he had a brother.

CECILY

I am sorry to say they have not been on good terms for a long time.

GWENDOLEN

~~Ah! that accounts for it. And now that I think of it I have never heard any man mention his brother. The subject seems distasteful to most men.~~ Cecily, you have lifted a load from my mind. I was growing almost anxious. It would have been terrible if any cloud had come across a friendship like ours, would it not? Of course you are quite, quite sure that it is not Mr. Ernest Worthing who is your guardian?

CECILY

Quite sure. [*A pause.*] In fact, I am going to be his.



## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT II. GWENDOLEN

[*Inquiringly.*] I beg your pardon ?

CECILY

[*Rather shy and confidingly.*] Dearest Gwendolen, there is no reason why I should make a secret of it to you. ~~Our little county newspaper is sure to chronicle the fact next week.~~ Mr. Ernest Worthing and I are engaged to be married.

GWENDOLEN

[*Quite politely, rising.*] My darling Cecily, I think there must be some slight error. Mr. Ernest Worthing is engaged to me. ~~The announcement will appear in the Morning Post on Saturday at the latest.~~

CECILY

[*Very politely, rising.*] I am afraid you must be under some misconception. Ernest proposed to me exactly ten minutes ago. [*Shows diary.*]

GWENDOLEN

[*Examines diary through her lorgnette carefully.*] It is certainly very curious, for

*play it down.*

*keep it out.*

## BEING EARNEST

he asked me to be his wife yesterday after- ACT II  
noon at 5.30. ~~If you would care to verify~~  
~~the incident, pray do so. [Produces diary~~  
~~of her own.] I never travel without my~~  
~~diary. One should always have something~~  
~~sensational to read in the train.~~ I am so  
sorry, dear Cecily, if it is any disappoint-  
ment to you, but I am afraid I have the  
prior claim.

CECILY

It would distress me more than I can  
tell you, dear Gwendolen, if it caused you  
any mental or physical anguish, but I feel  
bound to point out that since Ernest pro-  
posed to you he clearly has changed his  
mind.

GWENDOLEN

[*Meditatively.*] If the poor fellow has  
been entrapped into any foolish promise I  
shall consider it my duty to rescue him at  
once, and with a firm hand.

CECILY

[*Thoughtfully and sadly.*] Whatever un-

*underplay*

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT II. fortunate entanglement my dear boy may have got into, I will never reproach him with it after we are married.

GWENDOLEN

Do you allude to me, Miss Cardew, as an entanglement? You are presumptuous. On an occasion of this kind it becomes more than a moral duty to speak one's mind. It becomes a pleasure.

CECILY

Do you suggest, Miss Fairfax, that I entrapped Ernest into an engagement? How dare you? This is no time for wearing the shallow mask of manners. When I see a spade I call it a spade.

GWENDOLEN

[*Satirically.*] I am glad to say that I have never seen a spade. It is obvious that our social spheres have been widely different.

[*Enter MERRIMAN, followed by the footman. He carries a salver, table cloth, and plate stand. CECILY is about to retort. The*

## BEING EARNEST

*presence of the servants exercises a restraining influence, under which both girls chafe.* ACT II

MERRIMAN

Shall I lay tea here as usual, Miss ?

CECILY

[*Sternly, in a calm voice.*] Yes, as usual.  
[MERRIMAN *begins to clear table and lay cloth. A long pause. CECILY and GWENDOLEN glare at each other.*]

GWENDOLEN

Are there many interesting walks in the vicinity, Miss Cardew ?

CECILY

Oh ! yes ! a great many. From the top of one of the hills quite close one can see five counties.

GWENDOLEN

Five counties ! I don't think I should like that ; I hate crowds.

CECILY

[*Sweetly.*] I suppose that is why you live in town ? [GWENDOLEN *bites her lip,*

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT II. *and beats her foot nervously with her parasol.*]

GWENDOLEN

[*Looking round.*] Quite a well-kept garden this is, Miss Cardew.

CECILY

So glad you like it, Miss Fairfax.

GWENDOLEN

I had no idea there were any flowers in the country.

CECILY

Oh, flowers are as common here, Miss Fairfax, as people are in London.

GWENDOLEN

Personally I cannot understand how anybody manages to exist in the country, if anybody who is anybody does. The country always bores me to death.

CECILY

Ah! This is what the newspapers call agricultural depression, is it not? I believe the aristocracy are suffering very much

## BEING EARNEST

from it just at present. It is almost an **ACT II**  
epidemic amongst them, I have been told.  
May I offer you some tea, Miss Fairfax ?

GWENDOLEN

[*With elaborate politeness.*] Thank you.  
[*Aside.*] Detestable girl! But I require  
tea!

CECILY

[*Sweetly.*] Sugar ?

GWENDOLEN

[*Superciliously.*] No, thank you. Sugar  
is not fashionable any more. [CECILY *looks*  
*angrily at her, takes up the tongs and puts*  
*four lumps of sugar into the cup.*]

CECILY

[*Severely.*] Cake or bread and butter ?

GWENDOLEN

[*In a bored manner.*] Bread and butter,  
please. Cake is rarely seen at the best  
houses nowadays.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

### ACT II. CECILY

*[Cuts a very large slice of cake, and puts it on the tray.]* Hand that to Miss Fairfax.

*[MERRIMAN does so, and goes out with footman. GWENDOLEN drinks the tea and makes a grimace. Puts down cup at once, reaches out her hand to the bread and butter, looks at it, and finds it is cake. Rises in indignation.]*

### GWENDOLEN

You have filled my tea with lumps of sugar, and though I asked most distinctly for bread and butter, you have given me cake. I am known for the gentleness of my disposition, and the extraordinary sweetness of my nature, but I warn you, Miss Cardew, you may go too far.

### CECILY

*[Rising.]* To save my poor, innocent, trusting boy from the machinations of any other girl there are no lengths to which I would not go.

## BEING EARNEST

GWENDOLEN

ACT II

From the moment I saw you I distrusted you. I felt that you were false and deceitful. I am never deceived in such matters. My first impressions of people are invariably right.

CECILY

It seems to me, Miss Fairfax, that I am trespassing on your valuable time. No doubt you have many other calls of a similar character to make in the neighbourhood.

[*Enter JACK.*]

GWENDOLEN

[*Catching sight of him.*] Ernest! My own Ernest!

JACK

Gwendolen! Darling! [*Offers to kiss her.*]

GWENDOLEN

[*Drawing back.*] A moment! May I ask if you are engaged to be married to this young lady? [*Points to CECILY.*]



## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT II. JACK

[*Laughing.*] To dear little Cecily! Of course not! What could have put such an idea into your pretty little head?

GWENDOLEN

Thank you. You may! [*Offers her cheek.*]

CECILY

[*Very sweetly.*] I knew there must be some misunderstanding, Miss Fairfax. The gentleman whose arm is at present round your waist is my dear guardian, Mr. John Worthing.

GWENDOLEN

I beg your pardon?

CECILY

This is Uncle Jack.

GWENDOLEN

[*Receding.*] Jack! Oh!

[*Enter ALGERNON.*]

CECILY

Here is Ernest.

## BEING EARNEST

ALGERNON

ACT II.

[*Goes straight over to CECILY without noticing any one else.*] My own love!  
[*Offers to kiss her.*]

CECILY

[*Drawing back.*] A moment, Ernest!  
May I ask you—are you engaged to be married to this young lady?

ALGERNON

[*Looking round.*] To what young lady?  
Good heavens! Gwendolen!

CECILY

Yes! to good heavens, Gwendolen, I mean to Gwendolen.

ALGERNON

[*Laughing.*] Of course not! What could have put such an idea into your pretty little head?

CECILY

Thank you. [*Presenting her cheek to be kissed.*] You may. [ALGERNON *kisses her.*]

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

### ACT II. GWENDOLEN

I felt there was some slight error, Miss Cardew. The gentleman who is now embracing you is my cousin, Mr. Algernon Moncrieff.

### CECILY

*[Breaking away from ALGERNON.]* Algernon Moncrieff! Oh! *[The two girls move towards each other and put their arms round each other's waists as if for protection.]*

### CECILY

Are you called Algernon?

### ALGERNON

I cannot deny it.

### CECILY

Oh!

### GWENDOLEN

Is your name really John?

### JACK

*[Standing rather proudly.]* I could deny it if I liked. I could deny anything if I

## BEING EARNEST

liked. But my name certainly is John. ACT II  
It has been John for years.

CECILY

[*To GWENDOLEN.*] A gross deception  
has been practised on both of us.

GWENDOLEN

My poor wounded Cecily!

CECILY

My sweet wronged Gwendolen!

GWENDOLEN

[*Slowly and seriously.*] You will call me  
sister, will you not? [*They embrace.* JACK  
and ALGERNON groan and walk up and  
down.]

CECILY

[*Rather brightly.*] There is just one  
question I would like to be allowed to ask  
my guardian.

GWENDOLEN

An admirable idea! Mr. Worthing, there  
is just one question I would like to be  
permitted to put to you. Where is your

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT II. brother Ernest? We are both engaged to be married to your brother Ernest, so it is a matter of some importance to us to know where your brother Ernest is at present.

JACK

[*Slowly and hesitatingly.*] Gwendolen—Cecily—it is very painful for me to be forced to speak the truth. It is the first time in my life that I have ever been reduced to such a painful position, and I am really quite inexperienced in doing anything of the kind. However, I will tell you quite frankly that I have no brother Ernest. I have no brother at all. I never had a brother in my life, and I certainly have not the smallest intention of ever having one in the future.

CECILY

[*Surprised.*] No brother at all?

JACK

[*Cheerily.*] None!

## BEING EARNEST

GWENDOLEN

ACT II.

[*Severely.*] Had you never a brother of any kind?

JACK

[*Pleasantly.*] Never. Not even of any kind.

GWENDOLEN

I am afraid it is quite clear, Cecily, that neither of us is engaged to be married to any one.

CECILY

It is not a very pleasant position for a young girl suddenly to find herself in. Is it?

GWENDOLEN

Let us go into the house. They will hardly venture to come after us there.

CECILY

No, men are so cowardly, aren't they?  
[*They retire into the house with scornful looks.*]

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT II. JACK

This ghastly state of things is what you call Bunburying, I suppose ?

ALGERNON

Yes, and a perfectly wonderful Bunbury it is. The most wonderful Bunbury I have ever had in my life.

JACK

Well, you've no right whatsoever to Bunbury here.

ALGERNON

That is absurd. One has a right to Bunbury anywhere one chooses. Every serious Bunburyist knows that.

JACK

Serious Bunburyist ! Good heavens !

ALGERNON

Well, one must be serious about something, if one wants to have any amusement in life. I happen to be serious about Bunburying. What on earth you are serious about I haven't got the remotest

## BEING EARNEST

idea. About everything, I should fancy. ACT II  
You have such an absolutely trivial nature.

JACK

Well, the only small satisfaction I have in the whole of this wretched business is that your friend Bunbury is quite exploded. You won't be able to run down to the country quite so often as you used to do, dear Alg. And a very good thing too.

ALGERNON

Your brother is a little off colour, isn't he, dear Jack? You won't be able to disappear to London quite so frequently as your wicked custom was. And not a bad thing either.

JACK

As for your conduct towards Miss Cardew, I must say that your taking in a sweet, simple, innocent girl like that is quite inexcusable. To say nothing of the fact that she is my ward.

ALGERNON

I can see no possible defence at all for



## THE IMPORTANCE OF

**ACT II.** your deceiving a brilliant, clever, thoroughly experienced young lady like Miss Fairfax. To say nothing of the fact that she is my cousin.

**JACK**

I wanted to be engaged to Gwendolen, that is all. I love her.

**ALGERNON**

Well, I simply wanted to be engaged to Cecily. I adore her.

**JACK**

There is certainly no chance of your marrying Miss Cardew.

**ALGERNON**

I don't think there is much likelihood, Jack, of you and Miss Fairfax being united.

**JACK**

Well, that is no business of yours.

**ALGERNON**

If it was my business, I wouldn't talk about it. [*Begins to eat muffins.*] It is

## BEING EARNEST

very vulgar to talk about one's business. ACT II.  
Only people like stockbrokers do that,  
and then merely at dinner parties.

**JACK**

How can you sit there, calmly eating muffins when we are in this horrible trouble, I can't make out. You seem to me to be perfectly heartless.

**ALGERNON**

Well, I can't eat muffins in an agitated manner. The butter would probably get on my cuffs. One should always eat muffins quite calmly. It is the only way to eat them.

**JACK**

I say it's perfectly heartless your eating muffins at all, under the circumstances.

**ALGERNON**

When I am in trouble, eating is the only thing that consoles me. Indeed, when I am in really great trouble, as any one who knows me intimately will tell you, I refuse everything except food and drink. At the

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT II. present moment I am eating muffins because I am unhappy. Besides, I am particularly fond of muffins. [*Rising.*]

JACK

[*Rising.*] Well, that is no reason why you should eat them all in that greedy way. [*Takes muffins from ALGERNON.*]

ALGERNON

[*Offering tea-cake.*] I wish you would have tea-cake instead. I don't like tea-cake.

JACK

Good heavens! I suppose a man may eat his own muffins in his own garden.

ALGERNON

But you have just said it was perfectly heartless to eat muffins.

JACK

I said it was perfectly heartless of you, under the circumstances. That is a very different thing.

## BEING EARNEST

ALGERNON

ACT II.

That may be. But the muffins are the same. [*He seizes the muffin-dish from JACK.*]

JACK

Algy, I wish to goodness you would go.

ALGERNON

You can't possibly ask me to go without having some dinner. It's absurd. I never go without my dinner. No one ever does, except vegetarians and people like that. Besides I have just made arrangements with Dr. Chasuble to be christened at a quarter to six under the name of Ernest.

JACK

My dear fellow, the sooner you give up that nonsense the better. I made arrangements this morning with Dr. Chasuble to be christened myself at 5.30, and I naturally will take the name of Ernest. Gwendolen would wish it. We can't both be christened Ernest. It's absurd. Besides, I have a perfect right to be christened if I like.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

**ACT II.** There is no evidence at all that I ever have been christened by anybody. I should think it extremely probable I never was, and so does Dr. Chasuble. It is entirely different in your case. You have been christened already.

**ALGERNON**

Yes, but I have not been christened for years.

**JACK**

Yes, but you have been christened. That is the important thing.

**ALGERNON**

Quite so. So I know my constitution can stand it. If you are not quite sure about your ever having been christened, I must say I think it rather dangerous your venturing on it now. It might make you very unwell. You can hardly have forgotten that some one very closely connected with you was very nearly carried off this week in Paris by a severe chill.

## BEING EARNEST

JACK

ACT II.

Yes, but you said yourself that a severe chill was not hereditary.

ALGERNON

It usen't to be, I know—but I daresay it is now. Science is always making wonderful improvements in things.

JACK

[*Picking up the muffin-dish.*] Oh, that is nonsense; you are always talking nonsense.

ALGERNON

Jack, you are at the muffins again! I wish you wouldn't. There are only two left. [*Takes them.*] I told you I was particularly fond of muffins.

JACK

But I hate tea-cake.

ALGERNON

Why on earth then do you allow tea-cake to be served up for your guests? What ideas you have of hospitality!

## IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

ACT II JACK

Algernon! I have already told you to go. I don't want you here. Why don't you go!

ALGERNON

I haven't quite finished my tea yet! and there is still one muffin left. [JACK groans, and sinks into a chair. ALGERNON still continues eating.]

ACT DROP

**THIRD ACT**





## THIRD ACT

### SCENE

*Morning-room at the Manor House.*

[GWENDOLEN and CECILY are at the window, looking out into the garden.]

GWENDOLEN

The fact that they did not follow us at once into the house, as any one else would have done, seems to me to show that they have some sense of shame left.

CECILY

They have been eating muffins. That looks like repentance.

GWENDOLEN

[*After a pause.*] They don't seem to notice us at all. Couldn't you cough?

CECILY

But I haven't got a cough.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT III. GWENDOLEN

They're looking at us. What effrontery!

CECILY

They're approaching. That's very forward of them.

GWENDOLEN

Let us preserve a dignified silence.

CECILY

Certainly. It's the only thing to do now.

*[Enter JACK followed by ALGERNON. They whistle some dreadful popular air from a British Opera.]*

GWENDOLEN

This dignified silence seems to produce an unpleasant effect.

CECILY

A most distasteful one.

GWENDOLEN

But we will not be the first to speak.

CECILY

Certainly not.

## BEING EARNEST

GWENDOLEN

ACT III.

Mr. Worthing, I have something very particular to ask you. Much depends on your reply.

CECILY

Gwendolen, your common sense is invaluable. Mr. Moncrieff, kindly answer me the following question. Why did you pretend to be my guardian's brother?

ALGERNON

In order that I might have an opportunity of meeting you.

CECILY

[To GWENDOLEN.] That certainly seems a satisfactory explanation, does it not?

GWENDOLEN

Yes, dear, if you can believe him.

CECILY

I don't. But that does not affect the wonderful beauty of his answer.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

### ACT III. GWENDOLEN

True. In matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity is the vital thing. Mr. Worthing, what explanation can you offer to me for pretending to have a brother? Was it in order that you might have an opportunity of coming up to town to see me as often as possible?

### JACK

Can you doubt it, Miss Fairfax?

### GWENDOLEN

I have the gravest doubts upon the subject. But I intend to crush them. This is not the moment for German scepticism. [*Moving to CECILY.*] Their explanations appear to be quite satisfactory, especially Mr. Worthing's. That seems to me to have the stamp of truth upon it.

### CECILY

I am more than content with what Mr. Moncrieff said. His voice alone inspires one with absolute credulity.

## BEING EARNEST

GWENDOLEN

ACT III

Then you think we should forgive them?

CECILY

Yes. I mean no.

GWENDOLEN

True! I had forgotten. There are principles at stake that one cannot surrender. Which of us should tell them? The task is not a pleasant one.

CECILY

Could we not both speak at the same time?

GWENDOLEN

An excellent idea! I nearly always speak at the same time as other people. Will you take the time from me?

CECILY

Certainly. [GWENDOLEN *beats time with uplifted finger.*]

GWENDOLEN and CECILY

[*Speaking together.*] Your Christian

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT III names are still an insuperable barrier.  
That is all!

JACK and ALGERNON

[*Speaking together.*] Our Christian names! Is that all? But we are going to be christened this afternoon.

GWENDOLEN

[*To JACK.*] For my sake you are prepared to do this terrible thing?

JACK

I am.

CECILY

[*To ALGERNON.*] To please me you are ready to face this fearful ordeal?

ALGERNON

I am!

GWENDOLEN

How absurd to talk of the equality of the sexes! Where questions of self-sacrifice are concerned, men are infinitely beyond us.

## BEING EARNEST

JACK

ACT III

We are. [*Clasps hands with ALGERNON.*]

CECILY

They have moments of physical courage of which we women know absolutely nothing.

GWENDOLEN

[*To JACK.*] Darling!

ALGERNON

[*To CECILY.*] Darling! [*They fall into each other's arms.*]

[*Enter MERRIMAN. When he enters he coughs loudly, seeing the situation.*]

MERRIMAN

Ahem! Ahem! Lady Bracknell!

JACK

Good heavens!

[*Enter LADY BRACKNELL. The couples separate in alarm. Exit MERRIMAN.*]

LADY BRACKNELL

Gwendolen! What does this mean?



## THE IMPORTANCE OF

### ACT III. GWENDOLEN

Merely that I am engaged to be married to Mr. Worthing, mamma.

#### LADY BRACKNELL

Come here. Sit down. Sit down immediately. Hesitation of any kind is a sign of mental decay in the young, of physical weakness in the old. [*Turns to JACK.*] Apprised, sir, of my daughter's sudden flight by her trusty maid, whose confidence I purchased by means of a small coin, I followed her at once by a luggage train. Her unhappy father is, I am glad to say, under the impression that she is attending a more than usually lengthy lecture by the University Extension Scheme on the Influence of a permanent income on Thought. I do not propose to undeceive him. Indeed I have never undeceived him on any question. I would consider it wrong. But of course, you will clearly understand that all communication between yourself and my daughter must cease immediately from this moment.

## BEING EARNEST

On this point, as indeed on all points, I ACT III  
am firm.

**JACK**

I am engaged to be married to Gwendolen, Lady Bracknell!

**LADY BRACKNELL**

You are nothing of the kind, sir. And now, as regards Algernon! . . . Algernon!

**ALGERNON**

Yes, Aunt Augusta.

**LADY BRACKNELL**

May I ask if it is in this house that your invalid friend Mr. Bunbury resides?

**ALGERNON**

[*Stammering.*] Oh! No! Bunbury doesn't live here. Bunbury is somewhere else at present. In fact, Bunbury is dead.

**LADY BRACKNELL**

Dead! When did Mr. Bunbury die? His death must have been extremely sudden.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT III. ALGERNON

[*Airily.*] Oh! I killed Bunbury this afternoon. I mean poor Bunbury died this afternoon.

LADY BRACKNELL

What did he die of?

ALGERNON

Bunbury? Oh, he was quite exploded.

LADY BRACKNELL

Exploded! Was he the victim of a revolutionary outrage? I was not aware that Mr. Bunbury was interested in social legislation. If so, he is well punished for his morbidity.

ALGERNON

My dear Aunt Augusta, I mean he was found out! The doctors found out that Bunbury could not live, that is what I mean—so Bunbury died.

LADY BRACKNELL

He seems to have had great confidence in the opinion of his physicians. I am

## BEING EARNEST

glad, however, that he made up his mind **ACT III**  
at the last to some definite course of action,  
and acted under proper medical advice.  
And now that we have finally got rid of  
this Mr. Bunbury, may I ask, Mr. Worth-  
ing, who is that young person whose hand  
my nephew Algernon is now holding in  
what seems to me a peculiarly unnecessary  
manner?

**JACK**

That lady is Miss Cecily Cardew, my  
ward. [**LADY BRACKNELL** *bows coldly to*  
**CECILY.**]

**ALGERNON**

I am engaged to be married to Cecily,  
Aunt Augusta.

**LADY BRACKNELL**

I beg your pardon?

**CECILY**

Mr. Moncrieff and I are engaged to be  
married, Lady Bracknell.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

### ACT III. LADY BRACKNELL.

[*With a sciver, crossing to the sofa and sitting down.*] I do not know whether there is anything peculiarly exciting in the air of this particular part of Hertfordshire, but the number of engagements that go on seems to me considerably above the proper average that statistics have laid down for our guidance. I think some preliminary inquiry on my part would not be out of place. Mr. Worthing, is Miss Cardew at all connected with any of the larger railway stations in London? I merely desire information. Until yesterday I had no idea that there were any families or persons whose origin was a Terminus. [JACK *looks perfectly furious, but restrains himself.*]

### JACK

[*In a clear, cold voice.*] Miss Cardew is the grand-daughter of the late Mr. Thomas Cardew of 149 Belgrave Square, S.W.; Gervase Park, Dorking, Surrey; and the Sporran, Fifeshire, N.B.

## BEING EARNEST

LADY BRACKNELL

ACT III.

That sounds not unsatisfactory. Three addresses always inspire confidence, even in tradesmen. But what proof have I of their authenticity?

JACK

I have carefully preserved the Court Guides of the period. They are open to your inspection, Lady Bracknell.

LADY BRACKNELL

[*Grimly.*] I have known strange errors in that publication.

JACK

Miss Cardew's family solicitors are Messrs. Markby, Markby, and Markby.

LADY BRACKNELL

Markby, Markby, and Markby? A firm of the very highest position in their profession. Indeed I am told that one of the Mr. Markby's is occasionally to be seen at dinner parties. So far I am satisfied.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

### ACT III. JACK

[*Very irritably.*] How extremely kind of you, Lady Bracknell! I have also in my possession, you will be pleased to hear, certificates of Miss Cardew's birth, baptism, whooping cough, registration, vaccination, confirmation, and the measles; both the German and the English variety.

### LADY BRACKNELL

Ah! A life crowded with incident, I see; though perhaps somewhat too exciting for a young girl. I am not myself in favour of premature experiences. [*Rises, looks at her watch.*] Gwendolen! the time approaches for our departure. We have not a moment to lose. As a matter of form, Mr. Worthing, I had better ask you if Miss Cardew has any little fortune?

### JACK

Oh! about a hundred and thirty thousand pounds in the Funds. That is all. Good-bye, Lady Bracknell. So pleased to have seen you.

## BEING EARNEST

LADY BRACKNELL

ACT III.

[*Sitting down again.*] A moment, Mr. Worthing. A hundred and thirty thousand pounds! And in the Funds! Miss Cardew seems to me a most attractive young lady, now that I look at her. Few girls of the present day have any really solid qualities, any of the qualities that last, and improve with time. We live, I regret to say, in an age of surfaces. [*To CECILY.*] Come over here, dear. [*CECILY goes across.*] Pretty child! your dress is sadly simple, and your hair seems almost as Nature might have left it. But we can soon alter all that. A thoroughly experienced French maid produces a really marvellous result in a very brief space of time. I remember recommending one to young Lady Lancing, and after three months her own husband did not know her.

JACK

And after six months nobody knew her.

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF

### ACT III. LADY BRACKNELL

*[Glares at JACK for a few moments. Then bends, with a practised smile, to CECILY.]*  
Kindly turn round, sweet child. *[CECILY turns completely round.]* No, the side view is what I want. *[CECILY presents her profile.]* Yes, quite as I expected. There are distinct social possibilities in your profile. The two weak points in our age are its want of principle and its want of profile. The chin a little higher, dear. Style largely depends on the way the chin is worn. They are worn very high, just at present. Algernon!

### ALGERNON

Yes, Aunt Augusta!

### LADY BRACKNELL

There are distinct social possibilities in Miss Cardew's profile.

### ALGERNON

Cecily is the sweetest, dearest, prettiest girl in the whole world. And I don't care twopence about social possibilities.

## BEING EARNEST

LADY BRACKNELL

ACT III

Never speak disrespectfully of Society, Algernon. Only people who can't get into it do that. [*To CECILY.*] Dear child, of course you know that Algernon has nothing but his debts to depend upon. But I do not approve of mercenary marriages. When I married Lord Bracknell I had no fortune of any kind. But I never dreamed for a moment of allowing that to stand in my way. Well, I suppose I must give my consent.

ALGERNON

Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

LADY BRACKNELL

Cecily, you may kiss me!

CECILY

[*Kisses her.*] Thank you, Lady Bracknell.

LADY BRACKNELL

You may also address me as Aunt Augusta for the future.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT III. CECILY

Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

LADY BRACKNELL

The marriage, I think, had better take place quite soon.

ALGERNON

Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

CECILY

Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

LADY BRACKNELL

To speak frankly, I am not in favour of long engagements. They give people the opportunity of finding out each other's character before marriage, which I think is never advisable.

JACK

I beg your pardon for interrupting you, Lady Bracknell, but this engagement is quite out of the question. I am Miss Cardew's guardian, and she cannot marry without my consent until she comes of age. That consent I absolutely decline to give.

## BEING EARNEST

LADY BRACKNELL

ACT III.

Upon what grounds may I ask? Algernon is an extremely, I may almost say an ostentatiously, eligible young man. He has nothing, but he looks everything. What more can one desire?

JACK

It pains me very much to have to speak frankly to you, Lady Bracknell, about your nephew, but the fact is that I do not approve at all of his moral character. I suspect him of being untruthful. [ALGERNON *and* CECILY *look at him in indignant amazement.*]

LADY BRACKNELL

Untruthful! My nephew Algernon? Impossible! He is an Oxonian.

JACK

I fear there can be no possible doubt about the matter. This afternoon, during my temporary absence in London on an important question of romance, he obtained admission to my house by means of the

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

**ACT III.** false pretence of being my brother. Under an assumed name he drank, I've just been informed by my butler, an entire pint bottle of my Perrier-Jouet, Brut, '89; a wine I was specially reserving for myself. Continuing his disgraceful deception, he succeeded in the course of the afternoon in alienating the affections of my only ward. He subsequently stayed to tea, and devoured every single muffin. And what makes his conduct all the more heartless is, that he was perfectly well aware from the first that I have no brother, that I never had a brother, and that I don't intend to have a brother, not even of any kind. I distinctly told him so myself yesterday afternoon.

**LADY BRACKNELL**

Ahem! Mr. Worthing, after careful consideration I have decided entirely to overlook my nephew's conduct to you.

**JACK**

That is very generous of you, Lady

## BEING EARNEST

Bracknell. My own decision, however, is ACT III.  
unalterable. I decline to give my consent.

LADY BRACKNELL

[*To CECILY.*] Come here, sweet child.  
[*CECILY goes over.*] How old are you,  
dear?

CECILY

Well, I am really only eighteen, but I  
always admit to twenty when I go to  
evening parties.

LADY BRACKNELL

You are perfectly right in making some  
slight alteration. Indeed, no woman should  
ever be quite accurate about her age. It  
looks so calculating. . . . [*In a meditative  
manner.*] Eighteen, but admitting to  
twenty at evening parties. Well, it will  
not be very long before you are of age and  
free from the restraints of tutelage. So  
I don't think your guardian's consent is,  
after all, a matter of any importance.

JACK

Pray excuse me, Lady Bracknell, for

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

**ACT III.** interrupting you again, but it is only fair to tell you that according to the terms of her grandfather's will Miss Cardew does not come legally of age till she is thirty-five.

**LADY BRACKNELL**

That does not seem to me to be a grave objection. Thirty-five is a very attractive age. London society is full of women of the very highest birth who have, of their own free choice, remained thirty-five for years. Lady Dumbleton is an instance in point. To my own knowledge she has been thirty-five ever since she arrived at the age of forty, which was many years ago now. I see no reason why our dear Cecily should not be even still more attractive at the age you mention than she is at present. There will be a large accumulation of property.

**CECILY**

Algy, could you wait for me till I was thirty-five?

## BEING EARNEST

ALGERNON

ACT III

Of course I could, Cecily. You know I could.

CECILY

Yes, I felt it instinctively, but I couldn't wait all that time. I hate waiting even five minutes for anybody. It always makes me rather cross. I am not punctual myself, I know, but I do like punctuality in others, and waiting, even to be married, is quite out of the question.

ALGERNON

Then what is to be done, Cecily ?

CECILY

I don't know, Mr. Moncrieff.

LADY BRACKNELL

My dear Mr. Worthing, as Miss Cardew states positively that she cannot wait till she is thirty-five—a remark which I am bound to say seems to me to show a somewhat impatient nature—I would beg of you to reconsider your decision.



## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT III. JACK

But my dear Lady Bracknell, the matter is entirely in your own hands. The moment you consent to my marriage with Gwendolen, I will most gladly allow your nephew to form an alliance with my ward.

LADY BRACKNELL

[*Rising and drawing herself up.*] You must be quite aware that what you propose is out of the question.

JACK

Then a passionate celibacy is all that any of us can look forward to.

LADY BRACKNELL

That is not the destiny I propose for Gwendolen. Algernon, of course, can choose for himself. [*Pulls out her watch.*] Come, dear; [GWENDOLEN *rises*] we have already missed five, if not six, trains. To miss any more might expose us to comment on the platform.

[*Enter DR. CHASUBLE.*]

## BEING EARNEST

CHASUBLE

ACT III.

Everything is quite ready for the christenings.

LADY BRACKNELL

The christenings, sir! Is not that somewhat premature?

CHASUBLE

[*Looking rather puzzled, and pointing to JACK and ALGERNON.*] Both these gentlemen have expressed a desire for immediate baptism.

LADY BRACKNELL

At their age? The idea is grotesque and irreligious! Algernon, I forbid you to be baptized. I will not hear of such excesses. Lord Bracknell would be highly displeased if he learned that that was the way in which you wasted your time and money.

CHASUBLE

Am I to understand then that there are to be no christenings at all this afternoon?

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

### ACT III. JACK

I don't think that, as things are now, it would be of much practical value to either of us, Dr. Chasuble.

#### CHASUBLE

I am grieved to hear such sentiments from you, Mr. Worthing. They savour of the heretical views of the Anabaptists, views that I have completely refuted in four of my unpublished sermons. However, as your present mood seems to be one peculiarly secular, I will return to the church at once. Indeed, I have just been informed by the pew-opener that for the last hour and a half Miss Prism has been waiting for me in the vestry.

#### LADY BRACKNELL

[*Starting.*] Miss Prism! Did I hear you mention a Miss Prism?

#### CHASUBLE

Yes, Lady Bracknell. I am on my way to join her.

## BEING EARNEST

LADY BRACKNELL

ACT III.

Pray allow me to detain you for a moment. This matter may prove to be one of vital importance to Lord Bracknell and myself. Is this Miss Prism a female of repellent aspect, remotely connected with education?

CHASUBLE

[*Somewhat indignantly.*] She is the most cultivated of ladies, and the very picture of respectability.

LADY BRACKNELL

It is obviously the same person. May I ask what position she holds in your household?

CHASUBLE

[*Severely.*] I am a celibate, madam.

JACK

[*Interposing.*] Miss Prism, Lady Bracknell, has been for the last three years Miss Cardew's esteemed governess and valued companion.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

### ACT III. LADY BRACKNELL

In spite of what I hear of her, I must see her at once. Let her be sent for.

CHASUBLE

[*Looking off.*] She approaches; she is nigh.

[*Enter MISS PRISM hurriedly.*]

MISS PRISM

I was told you expected me in the vestry, dear Canon. I have been waiting for you there for an hour and three-quarters. [*Catches sight of LADY BRACKNELL who has fixed her with a stony glare. MISS PRISM grows pale and quails. She looks anxiously round as if desirous to escape.*]

LADY BRACKNELL

[*In a severe, judicial voice.*] Prism! [*MISS PRISM bows her head in shame.*] Come here, Prism! [*MISS PRISM approaches in a humble manner.*] Prism! Where is that baby? [*General consternation. The CANON starts back in horror. ALGERNON and JACK*

## BEING EARNEST

*pretend to be anxious to shield CECILY and* ACT III  
*GWENDOLEN from hearing the details of a*  
*terrible public scandal.]* Twenty-eight years  
ago, Prism, you left Lord Bracknell's house,  
Number 104, Upper Grosvenor Street, in  
charge of a perambulator that contained a  
baby of the male sex. You never returned.  
A few weeks later, through the elaborate  
investigations of the Metropolitan police,  
the perambulator was discovered at mid-  
night, standing by itself in a remote corner  
of Bayswater. It contained the manuscript  
of a three-volume novel of more than  
usually revolting sentimentality. [*MISS*  
*PRISM starts in involuntary indignation.*]  
But the baby was not there! *Every one*  
*looks at MISS PRISM.]* Prism! Where is  
that baby? [*A pause.*]

### MISS PRISM

Lady Bracknell, I admit with shame that  
I do not know. I only wish I did. The  
plain facts of the case are these. On the  
morning of the day you mention, a day  
that is for ever branded on my memory,

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

**ACT III.** I prepared as usual to take the baby out in its perambulator. I had also with me a somewhat old, but capacious hand-bag in which I had intended to place the manuscript of a work of fiction that I had written during my few unoccupied hours. In a moment of mental abstraction, for which I never can forgive myself, I deposited the manuscript in the basinette, and placed the baby in the hand-bag.

**JACK**

[*Who has been listening attentively.*] But where did you deposit the hand-bag?

**MISS PRISM**

Do not ask me, Mr. Worthing.

**JACK**

Miss Prism, this is a matter of no small importance to me. I insist on knowing where you deposited the hand-bag that contained that infant.

**MISS PRISM**

I left it in the cloak-room of one of the larger railway stations in London.

## BEING EARNEST

JACK

ACT III.

What railway station?

MISS PRISM

[*Quite crushed.*] Victoria. The Brighton line. [*Sinks into a chair.*]

JACK

I must retire to my room for a moment. Gwendolen, wait here for me.

GWENDOLEN

If you are not too long, I will wait here for you all my life.

[*Exit JACK in great excitement.*]

CHASUBLE

What do you think this means, Lady Bracknell?

LADY BRACKNELL

I dare not even suspect, Dr. Chasuble. I need hardly tell you that in families of high position strange coincidences are not supposed to occur. They are hardly considered the thing.

[*Noises heard overhead as if some one was throwing trunks about. Every one looks up.*]



## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT III. CECILY

Uncle Jack seems strangely agitated.

CHASUBLE

Your guardian has a very emotional nature.

LADY BRACKNELL

This noise is extremely unpleasant. It sounds as if he was having an argument. I dislike arguments of any kind. They are always vulgar, and often convincing.

CHASUBLE

[*Looking up.*] It has stopped now. [*The noise is redoubled.*]

LADY BRACKNELL

I wish he would arrive at some conclusion.

GWENDOLEN

This suspense is terrible. I hope it will last.

[*Enter JACK with a hand-bag of black leather in his hand.*]

## BEING EARNEST

JACK

ACT III

[*Rushing over to* MISS PRISM.] Is this the hand-bag, Miss Prism? Examine it carefully before you speak. The happiness of more than one life depends on your answer.

MISS PRISM

[*Calmly.*] It seems to be mine. Yes, here is the injury it received through the upsetting of a Gower Street omnibus in younger and happier days. Here is the stain on the lining caused by the explosion of a temperance beverage, an incident that occurred at Leamington. And here, on the lock, are my initials. I had forgotten that in an extravagant mood I had had them placed there. The bag is undoubtedly mine. I am delighted to have it so unexpectedly restored to me. It has been a great inconvenience being without it all these years.

JACK

[*In a pathetic voice.*] Miss Prism, more

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT III is restored to you than this hand-bag. I was the baby you placed in it.

MISS PRISM

[*Amazed.*] You?

JACK

[*Embracing her.*] Yes . . . mother!

MISS PRISM

[*Recoiling in indignant astonishment.*]  
Mr. Worthing! I am unmarried!

JACK

Unmarried! I do not deny that is a serious blow. But after all, who has the right to cast a stone against one who has suffered? Cannot repentance wipe out an act of folly? Why should there be one law for men, and another for women? Mother, I forgive you. [*Tries to embrace her again.*]

MISS PRISM

[*Still more indignant.*] Mr. Worthing, there is some error. [*Pointing to LADY BRACKNELL.*] There is the lady who can tell you who you really are.

## BEING EARNEST

JACK

ACT III.

[*After a pause.*] Lady Bracknell, I hate to seem inquisitive, but would you kindly inform me who I am?

LADY BRACKNELL

I am afraid that the news I have to give you will not altogether please you. You are the son of my poor sister, Mrs. Moncrieff, and consequently Algernon's elder brother.

JACK

Algy's elder brother! Then I have a brother after all. I knew I had a brother! I always said I had a brother! Cecily,—how could you have ever doubted that I had a brother? [*Seizes hold of ALGERNON.*] Dr. Chasuble, my unfortunate brother. Miss Prism, my unfortunate brother. Gwendolen, my unfortunate brother. Algy, you young scoundrel, you will have to treat me with more respect in the future. You have never behaved to me like a brother in all your life.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT III ALGERNON

Well, not till to-day, old boy, I admit. I did my best, however, though I was out of practice. [*Shakes hands.*]

GWENDOLEN

[*To JACK.*] My own! But what own are you? What is your Christian name, now that you have become some one else?

JACK

Good heavens! . . . I had quite forgotten that point. Your decision on the subject of my name is irrevocable, I suppose?

GWENDOLEN

I never change, except in my affections.

CECILY

What a noble nature you have, Gwendolen!

JACK

Then the question had better be cleared up at once. Aunt Augusta, a moment. At the time when Miss Prism left me

## BEING EARNEST

in the hand-bag, had I been christened ACT III.  
already?

LADY BRACKNELL

Every luxury that money could buy, including christening, had been lavished on you by your fond and doting parents.

JACK

Then I was christened! That is settled. Now, what name was I given? Let me know the worst.

LADY BRACKNELL

Being the eldest son you were naturally christened after your father.

JACK

[*Irritably.*] Yes, but what was my father's Christian name?

LADY BRACKNELL

[*Meditatively.*] I cannot at the present moment recall what the General's Christian name was. But I have no doubt he had one. He was eccentric, I admit. But only in later years. And that was the

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

ACT III. result of the Indian climate, and marriage, and indigestion, and other things of that kind.

JACK

Algy! Can't you recollect what our father's Christian name was?

ALGERNON

My dear boy, we were never even on speaking terms. He died before I was a year old.

JACK

His name would appear in the Army Lists of the period, I suppose, Aunt Augusta?

LADY BRACKNELL

The General was essentially a man of peace, except in his domestic life. But I have no doubt his name would appear in any military directory.

JACK

The Army Lists of the last forty years are here. These delightful records should

## BEING EARNEST

have been my constant study. [*Rushes* ACT III.  
*to bookcase and tears the books out.*] M.  
Generals . . . Mallam, Maxbohm, Magley,  
what ghastly names they have—Markby,  
Migsby, Mobbs, Moncrieff! Lieutenant  
1840, Captain, Lieutenant-Colonel, Colonel,  
General 1869, Christian names, Ernest  
John. [*Puts book very quietly down and  
speaks quite calmly.*] I always told you,  
Gwendolen, my name was Ernest, didn't  
I? Well, it is Ernest after all. I mean  
it naturally is Ernest.

LADY BRACKNELL

Yes, I remember now that the General  
was called Ernest. I knew I had some  
particular reason for disliking the name.

GWENDOLEN

Ernest! My own Ernest! I felt from  
the first that you could have no other  
name!

JACK

Gwendolen, it is a terrible thing for a



**THE IMPORTANCE OF**

**ACT III.** man to find out suddenly that all his life he has been speaking nothing but the truth. Can you forgive me ?

**GWENDOLEN**

I can. For I feel that you are sure to change.

**JACK**

My own one !

**CHASUBLE**

[*To MISS PRISM.*] Lætitia ! [*Embraces her.*]

**MISS PRISM**

[*Enthusiastically.*] Frederick ! At last !

**ALGERNON**

Cecily ! [*Embraces her.*] At last !

**JACK**

Gwendolen ! [*Embraces her.*] At last !

**LADY BRACKNELL**

My nephew, you seem to be displaying signs of triviality.

## BEING EARNEST

JACK

ACT III

On the contrary, Aunt Augusta, I've now realised for the first time in my life the vital Importance of Being Earnest.

TABLEAU

CURTAIN





