Oscar Wilde BY LESLIE AND SEWELL STO

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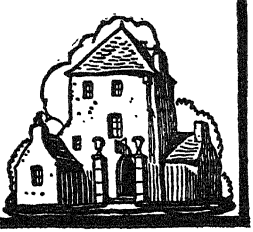
OSCAR WILDE

Oscar Wilde

A PLAY BY

LESLIE AND SEWELL STOKES

RANDOM HOUSE
NEW YORK



MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

FOR

NORMAN MARSHALL

AND

ROBERT MORLEY

To whom the authors owe
more than they care to admit

AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors particularly wish to express their gratitude to Lord Alfred Douglas for his kindness in permitting them to portray him on the stage, and also for his help in checking the authenticity of several facts contained in this play. In addition they wish to acknowledge the various works on which they have drawn for information, especially the following: *Wilde: Three Times Tried* (Ferrestone Press, 1912); *Letters to the Sphinx,* Ada Leverson (Duckworth, 1930); *Oscar Wilde: His Life and Confessions* by Frank Harris; *Oscar Wilde* by André Gide; *Poems in Prose* by Oscar Wilde (Paris, 1905); *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (Collins).

PREFACE

It will probably be within the general recollection that when, about eighteen months ago, Mr. Norman Marshall proposed to put on at the Gate Theatre an English version of Monsieur Maurice Rostand's play about Oscar Wilde, I intervened and objected to the production. My objection, as I explained to Mr. Marshall in an interview I had with him at the time in my flat at Hove, was not because I considered then, any more than I do now, that a play dealing with more or less contemporary facts and persons may not rightly be presented on the stage, but simply because Monsieur Rostand's play was a travesty of the truth and a deliberate misrepresentation of well-known and often-recorded facts. It is sufficient to point out that the whole idea of Rostand's play was based on the false assumption that I had never seen or spoken to Oscar Wilde again after he came out of prison. This is, of course, so far from being the truth that it is well known, or notorious if one prefers the word, that I resumed my friendship with Wilde which, on my side at least, had never been interrupted, immediately after his release, that I wrote to him a number of letters and received a number of letters in reply while he was at Bernaval for three months after he came out of prison, that I then invited him to stay as my guest at my villa in Posilippo (Naples), where he remained for several months with me, that I left him there in possession of my villa, and after giving him a sum of money, only because my

mother threatened to stop my allowance if I continued to reside in the same house with him, and that thereafter in Paris for three years, right up to the time of his death, I saw him constantly (often daily for months at a time), that I continually supplied him with money, and that when he died I paid for his funeral and was the principal mourner at the church of Saint Germain des Près, and at the cemetery at Bagneux. Naturally I objected violently to the production of a play which was based on what I can only describe as a deliberate perversion of the truth, and it did not take me ten minutes to convince Mr. Marshall that, quite apart from the legal aspect of the matter, it would be impossible for him as an honorable man to be a party to any such production.

Mr. Marshall entirely agreed as soon as he had grasped the facts and after I had shown him a number of Wilde's letters written to me from Bernaval. He at once stopped the rehearsals and issued notices to the Press that the production was canceled.

At that time I told Mr. Marshall that if, and when, he cared to produce another play which did not falsify the story, I would not raise any objection to its production, and I pointed out that Monsieur Rostand, whatever may have been his motives (possibly he was only ignorant and had not taken the trouble to verify the facts), had merely succeeded in completely destroying what was and is, in truth, a very dramatic and romantic story.

Accordingly, when Mr. Marshall and Mr. Sewell Stokes visited me at Hove a few months ago and showed me the present play, I agreed at once to its performance, with a few minor alterations in the text. As it stands it represents an historically true story, allowing, of course, for dramatic license.

For example, when Wilde came out of prison he left England the same day and never returned. The house in Tite Street was no longer his, and his furniture and goods had all been seized and sold under distraint to satisfy his creditors, within a week or two of his arrest.

To place the second act of the play in Tite Street is therefore, of course, incorrect, but I think it is a legitimate piece of dramatic arrangement.

Again the scenes at Algiers and in Paris while not pretending to be exact reproductions of actual scenes are sufficiently close to the truth to be accepted without objection. I could have wished that poor Wilde had not been shown in the last act drunk on the stage. On the other hand, it is idle to deny that he was drunk, on occasions, at that period of his life, and if Byron and Browning and Shakespeare can be shown on the stage, why not Oscar Wilde?

I did not see the play myself, because I felt that it would be too painful for me, devoted as I still am and always shall be to the memory of this brilliant and wonderful man, and conscious as I am and always shall be of my own failings (though not in the direction of any unkindness or disloyalty to Wilde) to witness it. But as I have been asked to write a preface for the present publication, I can say that I regard the play as truthful and dramatic in a high degree, and I am glad to know from the evidence of numerous people who witnessed it that it aroused great sympathy for a man whom I consider to have been cruelly and unjustly treated and whose brilliant genius, if he had not been condemned by an ungrateful country to prison and resulting early death, would have enriched the English stage with many more masterpieces of dramatic art. Wilde was at his best a fine poet and a

master of prose, and he was also the author of what I consider to be, apart from Shakespeare, the finest comedy ever written in the English language. If his fellow countrymen had treated him in a more Christian spirit, he would have written half a dozen more comedies as good. Let England bear the responsibility for what she did to him.

"From the beginning when was ought but stones for English prophets?"

ALFRED DOUGLAS

St. Ann's Court,
Hove.

Oscar Wilde was first produced in America by Norman Marshall at the Fulton Theatre on October 10, 1938, with the following cast:

In the order of appearance

Lord Alfred Douglas	John Buckmaster
Louis Dijon	Edward Trevor
An Arab Boy	Richard Charlton
Oscar Wilde	Robert Morley
An Hotel Waiter	Kenneth Treseder
Eustace	Wyman Kane
A Waiter	Reginald Malcolm
Frank Harris	Harold Young
Charlie Parker	John Carol
A Butler	Colin Hunter
Allen	Arthur Gould-Porter
Sir Edward Clarke, Q.C.	J. W. Austin
Mr. Justice Henn Collins	Frederick Graham
Clerk of the Court	Lewis Dayton
Mr. E. H. Carson, Q.C.	Mark Dignam
The Solicitor-General	Gordon Richards
Mr. Justice Wills	Oswald Yorke
A Waiter	Jean Del Val

Staged by Norman Marshall
Settings and costumes by Raymond Sovey

ACT ONE

SCENE I. *The terrace of an Hotel in Algiers.*
SCENE II. *A Private Room at a Restaurant.*
SCENE III. *Wilde's study, Tite Street, Chelsea.*

ACT TWO

SCENE I. *The Queensberry Trial. The old Court at the Old Bailey.*
(*The curtain is lowered once to denote a lapse of time.*)
SCENE II. *The Wilde Trial. Another view of the Court.*
(*The curtain is lowered twice to denote lapse of time.*)

ACT THREE

SCENE I. *Wilde's study, Tite Street.*
SCENE II. *A Café in Paris.*

ACT ONE

ACT ONE

SCENE I

SCENE: *The terrace of an hotel in Algiers. There are two or three wicker chairs, and tables. The entrance to the hotel is on the left. Beyond the stone balustrade at the back is a deep blue sky, against which a palm-tree spreads itself decoratively.*

When the curtain rises a native orchestra is playing not far away, and its music is heard at intervals throughout the scene.

LORD ALFRED DOUGLAS, *a startlingly good-looking, golden-haired young man of twenty-four, is lounging in a chair and writing.*

From the right enters an ARAB PORTER, *carrying a large suitcase. He is closely followed by* LOUIS DIJON, *an elegant young Frenchman.*

LORD ALFRED *puts his pencil down and closes his eyes.*

PORTER

(*Putting down the case at the hotel entrance*)

This hotel very nice. Very quiet. What Monsieur wants, yes?

DIJON

It looks all right. Tell me, are there any other tourists staying here?

PORTER

(*Hoping to please*)
Yes, many tourists stay here. Very nice hotel.

DIJON

Then I shall certainly have to find somewhere else. (*Explaining, with emphasis*) I do not like tourists. (*He turns, and for the first time sees* LORD ALFRED) *Un moment!* (*In a loud whisper*) Isn't that gentleman Lord Alfred Douglas?

PORTER

Yes. He stays in the hotel with friend—*big* gentleman.

DIJON

Oh. I think I will stay here. (*The* PORTER *and* DIJON *go into the hotel.* LORD ALFRED *immediately turns to look after them. He smiles; then slowly lights a cigarette. Taking up the Ms. on which he has been working, he reads softly to himself, making one or two corrections with a pencil. Looking up from the paper, he recites aloud.*)

LORD ALFRED

"Pipe unto him with pipes and flute with flutes,
Woo him with flowers and spices odorous,
Let singing boys with lips mellifluous
Make madrigals and lull his ears with lutes."

DIJON

(*Who has appeared in time to hear the last two lines*)
But that is enchanting. Is it your own?

LORD ALFRED

It is. And who may you be?

DIJON

I am Louis Dijon. You are Lord Alfred Douglas, I believe. We met in London, about a year ago, at Lady Brandon's house.

LORD ALFRED

Why, of course. (*Shaking hands*) How are you?

DIJON

When we met you told me that you wrote poetry. I remember, too, that you were brought to the house by Mr. Oscar Wilde.

LORD ALFRED

Your memory is a little at fault there. It was I who brought Oscar Wilde to the house. He is staying with me here now.

DIJON

Yes, I've just seen your name in the hotel register. And how is dear Oscar?

LORD ALFRED

You know him, then?

DIJON

Not intimately. But we've met several times. And he has always been perfectly charming to me.

LORD ALFRED

That is not at all surprising.

DIJON

Why do you say that?

LORD ALFRED

Oscar is always charming to young men—particularly young men with good looks.

DIJON

(*Bowing*)

Thank you, Lord Alfred!

LORD ALFRED

And how is Lady Brandon? I haven't seen her lately.

DIJON

She continues to entertain as lavishly as ever.

LORD ALFRED

Her dinners are always rather tiresome, don't you think? She treats her guests exactly as an auctioneer treats his goods. She tells one everything about them except what one wants to know.

DIJON

Poor Lady Brandon! Aren't you being a little hard on her?

LORD ALFRED

My dear fellow, you can't expect me to admire her. She tried to found a *salon,* and only succeeded in opening a restaurant.

DIJON

Is that one of Oscar's sayings?

LORD ALFRED

It is what *I* say. The disadvantage of being Oscar's great friend is that all one's best remarks are believed to be his. I have a little wit of my own, I hope.

DIJON

I am sorry, Lord Alfred.

LORD ALFRED

Call me just Alfred. (*Smiling*) And do sit down, please.

DIJON

(*Sitting*)

Thank you. Are you making a long stay in Algiers?

LORD ALFRED

That depends entirely upon Oscar. He ought to return to London for the rehearsals of his new play. But at present he seems to be enjoying himself far too much to want to leave this town. He finds it full of attractions.

DIJON

What is his new play like? You've read it, of course?

LORD ALFRED

It's a farce, called "The Importance of Being Earnest." I think it is really one of the best things Oscar has done.

DIJON

I shall make a point of being in London for the *première.*

LORD ALFRED

You don't live in London?

DIJON

No, in Paris. Oscar is very popular there, too. Everybody talks about him.

LORD ALFRED

And what do they say?

DIJON

Opinions are divided. Some say that he is nothing more than a dandy who smokes gold-tipped cigarettes and walks about the streets with a sunflower in his hand. But he is more generally regarded as the most amusing and successful man in England.

LORD ALFRED

Sometimes I think perhaps he is too successful. It makes me a little afraid of what may happen.

DIJON

How do you mean—afraid?

LORD ALFRED

Oh, I don't know. You see, Oscar has reached that stage when he believes he can do no wrong. Sometimes he is positively reckless.

DIJON

He has the reputation of being wonderfully wicked.

LORD ALFRED

And that pleases him. He is always declaring that his pleasure is to amuse the mob, frighten the middle-classes, and fascinate the aristocrats.

DIJON

Well, he does all three superbly. Where is he now?

LORD ALFRED

Somewhere in the town, I expect. He spends most of the day walking about the streets surrounded by a crowd of Arab boys—throwing them money, and joking with them. He imagines himself a king distributing largesse among his subjects. He should be back any moment now.

DIJON

Perhaps I had better leave you for the time being. Oscar might like to find you alone when he returns.

LORD ALFRED

My dear Louis, your presence will be a delightful surprise for him. Oscar and I have known each other long enough not to be jealous of another's company. In fact, Oscar is only jealous of my poems, which happen to be rather better than his own. You must certainly dine with us tonight.

DIJON

That is most kind of you. I shall be charmed. (OSCAR WILDE's *voice can be heard off, admonishing a crowd of Arab boys who have followed him, and whose voices can also be distinguished. He enters with his back to the audience, throwing a few coins to the crowd.*)

WILDE

That is sufficient. . . . Off with you now! Run along home! (*He turns and faces* LORD ALFRED *and* DIJON. WILDE *is over six feet in height, broad and rather stout. He evidently pays a great deal of attention to his personal appearance. His hair is waved; his clothes fit him a little too tightly; he wears a large green scarab ring on one finger. Most people dislike him at first, but they are quickly won over by his charm of manner, his exceptionally fine speaking voice, his genial gaiety and vivacity of expression.*)

WILDE

What is this picture I behold? (*Looking from one to the other*) Hylas and Hyacinthus have returned to earth! The flower of Grecian boyhood is here to welcome my homecoming. Too wonderful! (*Moving forward*) How are you, my dear Louis? This is indeed a delightful surprise. (*He offers a limp hand for* LOUIS *to shake.*)

DIJON

(*Shaking hands*)

How are you, Oscar?

WILDE

You are looking younger than ever. (*Drawing back a little*) But I am not sure that I like your lips, they are quite straight,

like the lips of a man who has never told a lie. You must learn to lie, so that your lips may become beautiful and curved like the lips of an antique mask.

LORD ALFRED

Will you stop acting, Oscar?

WILDE

But I like acting. It is so much more real than real life. (*Suddenly remembering*) Let me introduce you. Louis Dijon. (*Turning to* LORD ALFRED, *and emphasizing the title*) *Lord* Alfred Douglas.

LORD ALFRED

We have already met. And Louis is aware of my title. (*Smiling at this little thrust,* WILDE *playfully flicks* LORD ALFRED'S *cheek with his finger*) What have you been doing with yourself all day, Oscar?

WILDE

Demoralizing the town, dear boy. I find the Arabs too attractive. (*To* DIJON) Don't tell me, Louis, that you have come to this lovely spot to work?

DIJON

I had thought of starting to write a new novel here. I came from Paris for that purpose.

WILDE

Oh, but really you must do nothing of the sort. In such heavenly surroundings as these, your duty is to plunge madly into amusement. I do—all the time.

DIJON

But are you doing no work?

WILDE

I am fleeing from art. Have you never noticed how the sun detests thought? The sun always causes thought to withdraw itself and take refuge in the shade. Thought dwelt in Egypt originally, but the sun conquered Egypt; then it lived for a long time in Greece; and the sun conquered Greece; then in Italy and then in France. Nowadays all thought is driven as far back as Norway and Russia, places where the sun never goes. The sun is jealous of art.

LORD ALFRED

Nevertheless, I managed to write a very good poem while you were playing in the sun.

WILDE

Busy little Bosie! (*To* DIJON) He will spend his time writing pretty verses. I can't think why.

LORD ALFRED

Have you any objection, Oscar?

WILDE

You know I haven't, Bosie. (*Looking at him with affection*) I am always telling you that it doesn't matter in the least *what*

you do, since you happen to be a charming and graceful young man, related to everyone in the peerage, who does whatever he wants to do in a charming and graceful manner.

LORD ALFRED

Then why do you blame me for working?

WILDE

It is only of your looks I am thinking, dear boy. Real beauty ends where an intellectual expression begins. The moment one sits down to think, one becomes all nose, or all forehead, or something horrid. Look at the successful men in any of the professions. How perfectly hideous they are! Except, of course, in the Church. But then in the Church they don't think. A bishop keeps on saying at the age of eighty what he was told when he was a boy of eighteen, and as a natural consequence he always looks absolutely delightful.

LORD ALFRED

You harp too much on my good looks, Oscar.

WILDE

Not at all. While it is considered in England almost criminal for a man to speak of good looks either in himself or in another man, good looks are half the battle in society.

LORD ALFRED

All the same, I shall continue to write poetry.

WILDE

Of course. You should publish one of those slim volumes that are so much in vogue. Bring out a book that is all margin; full of beautiful unwritten thoughts, and bound in some Nile-green skin, powdered with gilt stars. It must be dedicated to me; and Aubrey Beardsley shall illustrate the unwritten text.

LORD ALFRED

Aubrey has a superb line, but he doesn't know where to draw it.

WILDE

Really, Bosie. I would not have been ashamed to say that myself.

LORD ALFRED

Thank you, Oscar! The book is a marvelous idea. There must be five hundred signed copies for particular friends, six for the general public, and one for America.

WILDE

Be an angel, Bosie, and fetch me my cigarettes from my room. I am too fatigued to mount the stairs. (*Until now* WILDE *has been standing, with one leg resting on a chair. He now sits down.*)

LORD ALFRED

(*Rising*)

Where shall I find them?

WILDE

In my room, by the bed. I am *always* tidy. Which reminds me, Bosie, that you are *not*. How often have I told you never

to leave letters lying about? On the table in your room this morning I found several that I wrote to you over a year ago, at Oxford. Why do you not destroy them?

LORD ALFRED

You know very well, Oscar, that you would be perfectly furious if I did. (*To* DIJON) Oscar regards his letters as masterpieces.

WILDE

Some of them are! But the point is that people in our position cannot afford to leave letters about for anybody to read. It is not always—safe.

LORD ALFRED

It's strange to hear you talk of safety, Oscar. (*He goes into the hotel.*)

WILDE

(*To* DIJON)

I am absolutely devoted to Bosie. But sometimes I feel that I have given away my whole soul to someone who treats it as if it were a flower to put in his coat.

DIJON

You must not think such things, Oscar. Even I can see how fond of you Lord Alfred really is.

WILDE

(*Gratefully patting his hand*)

Thank you, dear boy. (*Smiling, and with a return to his assured mood*) I think, perhaps, that Bosie will always be

fond of me—if only because I represent to him all the sins he will never have the courage to commit. (*A* WAITER *enters with letters.*)

WAITER

(*To* WILDE)

The post has just arrived, sir.

WILDE

(*Taking the letters*)

Thank you. (*Looking up from the letters*) You might bring us three of those inspiring new drinks you mix in the bar. What is it they're called . . . cocktails.

WAITER

Certainly, sir. (*He goes out.*)

WILDE

(*To* DIJON)

Such a fascinating drink. Like a synthesis of sins. (*Starting to open the letters*) Will you excuse me?

DIJON

Of course.

WILDE

(*Glancing at the first letter*)

From Frank Harris, the journalist. Do you know him?

DIJON

I think I have met him in London.

WILDE

Possibly you have. Frank is asked to all the best houses—once. (*Opening another letter, he reads it with a smile of affectionate amusement*) From Charlie Parker. You will not have met him. He is a groom, or something. But a dear lad. His spelling is too amusing.

DIJON

A groom did you say?

WILDE

Yes. I have some quite odd friends, you know. But all of them are charming in their way. Where youth is concerned, I make no social distinctions. (*Laughs to himself.* LORD ALFRED *returns.*)

LORD ALFRED

Here are your cigarettes, Oscar. Is there a letter for me?

WILDE

One from your dear father, Bosie. Judging by the handwriting on the envelope, I should say he is in a temper about something.

LORD ALFRED

(*Crossly*)

What does he want, I wonder? (*He opens the letter and reads it.*)

WILDE

(*To* DIJON)

Can I offer you one of my perfumed cigarettes? A cigarette is the perfect type of a perfect pleasure. It is exquisite, and it

leaves one unsatisfied. What more can one want? (*He lights* DIJON's *cigarette, and they smoke for a few seconds in silence, while* LORD ALFRED, *whose expression has darkened, reads his letter.*)

LORD ALFRED

(*Rising from his chair in anger*)

But this is monstrous. My father must be mad. He *is* mad.

WILDE

Is something the matter, Bosie?

LORD ALFRED

You would not believe what my father has put in this letter.

WILDE

I can believe anything, provided it is quite incredible.

LORD ALFRED

Then listen to this.

WILDE

(*Turning to* DIJON)

Forgive these domestic interludes. They will occur.

DIJON

Would you rather I left you?

LORD ALFRED

There is no need for you to go, Louis. The whole world knows that I have a madman for a father. (*He reads the letter in a tone one imagines the writer would have used had he spoken the words*) "Alfred. It is extremely painful to me to have to write to you in the strain I must; but understand that I strongly disapprove of your intimacy with this man Wilde. It must either cease or I will disown you and stop all money supplies. I am not going to try and analyze this intimacy, and I make no charge; but to my mind to pose as a thing is as bad as to be it. No wonder people are talking as they are. If I catch you again with that man I will make a public scandal in a way you little dream of; it is already a suppressed one. I prefer an open one, and at any rate I shall not be blamed for allowing such a state of things to go on. Unless this acquaintance ceases at once, I shall carry out my threat. Your disgusted so-called father—Queensberry."

WILDE

(*After a pause*)

It is perfectly monstrous the way people say things against one behind one's back that are absolutely and entirely true.

LORD ALFRED

He's insufferable! He's always hated me since I was a child. What are we going to do about it, Oscar? We must put a stop to these insults.

WILDE

At the moment I'm not sure that we can do anything.

LORD ALFRED

We must return to London at once. Meanwhile I shall send him a telegram. That will at least make him angry.

WILDE

I think he is already quite angry. What will you say?

LORD ALFRED

I shall think of something. (*He goes out.* WILDE *gets up from his chair, and paces slowly about, smoking. He is upset, but not too much so.*)

DIJON

I am sorry this has happened, Oscar.

WILDE

Oh, it is really nothing to worry about. The Marquis of Queensberry has been persecuting me for some time. Bosie is right, you know; his father is a little mad.

DIJON

Madmen can be very dangerous. Surely it would be better to remain out of England until the scandal has died down?

WILDE

I think I must return to London.

DIJON

But if you do, what will happen? Do you know the risk you are running?

WILDE

(*Significantly*)

It is best never to know. My friends are extraordinary. They are always begging me to be careful. But that would be a backward step. I must go on as far as possible. (*Confidentially*) I cannot go much farther. Something is bound to happen.

DIJON

But for the sake of your own happiness. . . .

WILDE

I don't want happiness, only pleasure.

DIJON

I am afraid I don't understand.

WILDE

Some things in my life nobody understands but myself. Even Bosie does not share all my secrets. Would you like to know the great drama of my life? It is that I put my genius into life, and only my talent into my work. Writing bores me so.

DIJON

Is that true?

WILDE

(*Smiling*)

Nothing is ever quite true! (*The* WAITER *brings in the drinks, places them on a table, and goes out again. As he*

goes out he passes LORD ALFRED, *who returns with a smile of satisfaction on his face.*)

LORD ALFRED

Well, I've sent my telegram.

WILDE

What did you put?

LORD ALFRED

I put "What a funny little man you are." (*All three laugh at the joke. They take up their glasses.*)

DIJON

May I propose a toast? To Oscar Wilde. A lord of language. And a king of life! (*He drains his glass, then breaks it on the table and throws away the stem. The other two gaze at him, a little bewildered by his sudden enthusiasm.*)

WILDE

(*Bowing*)

Thank you, Louis, for that sweet gesture. I hope you may never have cause to regret it.

Curtain

ACT ONE

SCENE II

SCENE: *A private room at a restaurant. A supper table is set for two on the one side of the stage, and there is a settee on the other side. The orchestra in the restaurant downstairs is playing when the curtain rises, and is heard at intervals during the scene.*

A WAITER *ushers into the room* EUSTACE, *a young dandy who wears a satin-lined cloak over his evening-clothes, a green carnation in his buttonhole, and carries a cane.*

WAITER

Excuse me, sir, but are you the young gentleman Mr. Wilde is expecting to supper?

EUSTACE

No. But I wish to see Mr. Wilde for a moment, so I will wait until he comes.

WAITER

Very good, sir. (*He goes out.* EUSTACE *looks at his face closely in a mirror which hangs on the wall. He licks a finger and smoothes down each eyebrow, tidies his hair, then makes a grotesque grin and examines his teeth. While he is still at the mirror the door is opened by the* WAITER *to admit* LOUIS

DIJON, *who is also in evening dress, and wears a green carnation. The* WAITER *goes out.*)

DIJON

Eustace!

EUSTACE

My dear Louis! (*They shake hands.*)

DIJON

How are you? I caught sight of you at the theater, but there was such a tremendous crush, I couldn't get near you.

EUSTACE

So you, Louis, are the honored guest whom Oscar has chosen to sup with him after his victorious first-night? Congratulations!

DIJON

(*Surprised*)

Oscar has not invited me to supper. I heard he was coming on here, so I called in to tell him how much I enjoyed his play.

EUSTACE

I did the same. (*Looking toward the table*) Then for whom is the nocturnal feast? (*They both gaze at the table in wonder.*)

DIJON

I haven't the slightest idea.

EUSTACE

This is most intriguing. If we wait long enough we may learn who is the new favorite.

DIJON

And you enjoyed "The Importance of Being Earnest"?

EUSTACE

I thought it was too marvelous. Altogether a perfectly divine evening.

DIJON

There can be no doubt about the importance of being Oscar Wilde. Simply *everybody* was at the theater tonight, despite the rain and the bitter wind.

EUSTACE

I am sure to catch cold. I left the tassel off my cane.

DIJON

Even George Alexander couldn't help being good in the play.

EUSTACE

And what a performance Oscar himself gave. Coming to the front of the box at the end, and solemnly informing the audience that Mr. Wilde was not in the house! Oscar's too marvelous.

DIJON

There's nobody like him.

EUSTACE

He's had a new triumph tonight.

DIJON

There was a solid block of carriages from the Haymarket to St. James's; and people who'd been standing for hours in the rain cheered him as he went into the theater.

EUSTACE

I've never seen anything like it. But did you hear what the Marquis of Queensberry did? He arrived at the theater with a large bouquet, only to find that the police had orders not to admit him.

DIJON

Queensberry with a bouquet for Oscar? You're not serious.

EUSTACE

It was a bouquet composed of carrots, turnips, and cauliflowers! Queensberry is a perfectly dreadful person, and utterly mad. He's furious about Oscar's friendship with Bosie, and he'll stop at nothing to get his revenge. One of these days, unless I'm much mistaken, he'll expose Oscar. When that happens, we shall all have to look out for ourselves.

DIJON

A man's private life ought to be his own affair.

EUSTACE

Life would be very much easier if it were. But Oscar is more than a trifle indiscreet. I believe he takes a positive delight in shocking the Philistines.

DIJON

Yes, he can be absurdly reckless.

EUSTACE

And invariably he is.

DIJON

I don't see why, just because Oscar and Bosie choose to go about together, the whole town should fling mud at them. England may be a country of hypocrites, but surely things are not as bad as all that?

EUSTACE

It's not merely his friendship with Bosie. That's the least part of it.

DIJON

Then what . . . ?

EUSTACE

If Oscar chose all his friends from the pages of Debrett, it would not matter so much. But he goes farther afield than that. And one can hardly blame people, when they see him treating a stable-lad to champagne at the Café Royal, for thinking it a little—well odd.

DIJON

(*Thoughtfully*)

Does he really make his pleasures so obvious?

EUSTACE

He does. That's why so many of his friends are afraid for him. There's one young groom he goes about with who paints his face as if he were Sarah Bernhardt. I use a little color myself, but there are limits. (LORD ALFRED *comes in. He is also in evening dress, but does not wear a green carnation. He looks worried.*)

LORD ALFRED

Have either of you seen Oscar since he left the theater? I've missed him.

DIJON

He hasn't arrived yet, Alfred; but (*Pointing to the table*) your supper awaits you.

EUSTACE

So you are the mysterious guest. *What* a disappointment!

LORD ALFRED

I'm not having supper here. But there's something I must talk to Oscar about. I suppose you know how my father tried to insult us?

EUSTACE

The bouquet of vegetables? Disgraceful!

LORD ALFRED

(*Passionately*)

I won't tolerate it! I'm of age and my own master. My father has disowned me at least a dozen times, and has no

right over me either legally or morally. I shall go where I like and with whom I choose.

DIJON

If I were you, Alfred, I should try to reason with your father.

LORD ALFRED

One can't reason with a madman, and he's quite mad. If Oscar were to prosecute him in the criminal courts for libel, he'd get seven years' penal servitude. I want to avoid that for the sake of the family. But if he tries to assault me, as he's threatened to, I shall defend myself with a revolver. And if I shoot him, or if Oscar does, we should be completely justified, because we should be acting in self-defense against a violent and dangerous rough. (*There is a noise outside, then the door bursts open, and* WILDE *enters. He wears a cloak, a green carnation, and carries a cane and white gloves. He is flushed with success, but appears a little surprised at finding the room occupied.*)

DIJON *and* EUSTACE

Oscar! Oscar! (*They rush to help him off with his things.*)

DIJON

The play was superb, magnificent! Quite the most amusing thing you've ever written.

EUSTACE

Too divinely witty, Oscar. I simply *loved* every word of it!

WILDE

Wasn't it a *delightful* play? *So* amusing. I can't remember *when* I've laughed so much.

DIJON

You're a second Congreve.

EUSTACE

Only infinitely more amusing.

WILDE

(*With his arms round their shoulders*)

Thank you, dear boys; thank you a thousand times. (*He sees* LORD ALFRED, *who has been impatiently standing apart*) But why is Bosie looking so somber? Did he not have a wonderful evening, too?

LORD ALFRED

I want to talk to you, Oscar. Alone.

DIJON

(*To* WILDE, *taking* EUSTACE'S *arm*)

We're just going. We only came to offer our congratulations.

EUSTACE

Yes, we are leaving you. (*Glances at the table*) To your little romance!

DIJON

Good night, Alfred.

EUSTACE

Good night, Bosie.

LORD ALFRED

Good night. (EUSTACE *and* DIJON *go out.*)

WILDE

(*As they leave*)

Good night, dear boys. Tonight I am in love with all the world!

LORD ALFRED

All the world is not in love with you, Oscar. You have as many enemies as friends.

WILDE

I beg of you, Bosie, let us not talk of enemies tonight. Do not spoil my hour of triumph. You heard them at the theater, cheering me as if I had been a king. (*Drawing himself up*) I feel like a king! Not even your father can touch me now.

LORD ALFRED

I know my father better than you do, Oscar. He will stop at nothing, to ruin you. If we don't do something to silence him, at once, we shall have only ourselves to blame. Oh, I wish you'd be reasonable, and face the facts.

WILDE

(*Puts his hand on* LORD ALFRED'S *shoulder*)

Tonight, Bosie, I wish to face only one fact; to forget the ugliness of the world, and surrender myself entirely to the pleasures that are my reward for creating beauty. Leave me, now, Bosie—please. In the morning, I promise you, we will discuss these tedious matters together. Please, Bosie. . . .

LORD ALFRED

(*Giving in*)

Very well, Oscar. I will leave you.

WILDE

Thank you. I knew you would understand.

LORD ALFRED

Good night. Oscar.

WILDE

Good night, my dear. (LORD ALFRED *goes. As the door closes* WILDE *goes to the mirror and arranges his hair, tie, etc. There is a sharp knock at the door. He turns with a smile on his face*) Come in! (FRANK HARRIS *comes quickly into the room. He is a determined, loud-voiced little man, with a big mustache curled upward at the ends. Seeing him,* WILDE'S *smile almost fades.*)

HARRIS

Ah! There you are, Oscar! I was having supper in the restaurant downstairs, and they told me you were up here. I must have a word with you.

WILDE

You must excuse me, Frank. I am expecting to supper a guest who is already late. Can't what you have to say to me wait?

HARRIS

My dear fellow, I want to speak to you seriously. Very seriously indeed! Don't frown like that. You make it so much more difficult for me.

WILDE

Frank, what is it you have to say? (*Impatiently*) I hope it is not about myself.

HARRIS

It is about yourself, and I must say it to you. It is entirely for your own sake that I am speaking. I think it right that you should know that the most scandalous things are being said against you, all over London.

WILDE

I don't wish to hear anything about them. I love scandals about other people, but scandals about myself don't interest me. They haven't the charm of novelty. (*Takes an olive from the table and eats it.*)

HARRIS

Surely, you don't want people to talk of you as something vile and degraded? I know that you have the security of your position, and your wealth, and all that kind of thing. But in these matters position and wealth are not everything. Mind you, *I* don't believe a word of these rumors. I treat them as what they are—malicious lies, manufactured by those who are jealous of your success.

WILDE

(*Offering the dish of olives to* HARRIS)

Have an olive?

HARRIS

(*Irritably*)

No, thank you! You must be more careful in your behavior, Oscar. Avoid giving these enemies of yours a chance to gossip.

WILDE

And how would you have me do that, Frank?

HARRIS

By being more careful of the company you keep; and less extravagant in the theories you are always propounding.

WILDE

What theories?

HARRIS

Oh, your theories about life; your theories about pleasure. All your theories, in fact.

WILDE

Pleasure is the only thing worth having a theory about.

HARRIS

I'm no prude, as you very well know, but . . .

WILDE

(*Holding his olive stone*)

Tell me, what do you do with the stones? My dear Frank, medieval art is charming, but medieval emotions are out of date. Believe me, no civilized man ever regrets a pleasure, and no uncivilized man ever knows what a pleasure is. One must be in harmony with one's self. One's own life, that is the important thing.

HARRIS

(*Earnestly*)

If one lives one's own life, one may have to pay a terrible price for doing so.

WILDE

(*Lightly*)

Yes, we are over-charged for everything nowadays. I should fancy that the real tragedy of the poor is that they can afford nothing but self-denial. Beautiful sins, like beautiful pleasures, are the privilege of the rich.

HARRIS

You don't believe half of what you say, Oscar; you know you don't. You are much better than you pretend to be. (*There is a knock at the door.*)

WILDE

Come in! (CHARLES PARKER *is ushered in by the* WAITER. *He is a cockney lad, not yet out of his teens, flashily dressed, with his hair plastered in a lovelock on his forehead. He is obviously ill at ease in the surroundings in which he finds himself, but is anxious to make himself pleasant. The* WAITER *goes out.*)

WILDE

(*With a gracious smile*)

Charlie Parker, at last!

PARKER

Good evening, sir.

HARRIS

(*Quickly*)

I must be going, Oscar.

WILDE

Good night then, Frank. We must continue our little discussion some other time.

HARRIS

I'll call at your house during the week. Good night. (HARRIS *goes, at the same time glancing suspiciously at* PARKER.)

WILDE

(*Looking at* PARKER *and taking out his cigarette case*) Cigarette, Charlie?

PARKER

Ta!

WILDE

Let me take your hat and coat, Charlie. (WILDE *takes the hat and coat and* PARKER *lights his cigarette*) Sit down, Charlie, and make yourself at home.

PARKER

Thank you, sir.

WILDE

How many times have I told you that you must not call me "sir"? My name is Oscar.

PARKER

Thank you, Mr. Oscar.

WILDE

Just "Oscar" will do.

PARKER

All right—(*Smiling*)—Oscar.

WILDE

That's better. And now, Charlie, you must have some supper. (*They sit at the table, and during the following scene drink and eat liberally.* PARKER'S *table manners leave something to be desired.*)

PARKER

(*Putting out his cigarette*)

Nice fags, these. (*He has only smoked half the cigarette, so he puts the stub behind his ear.*)

WILDE

I'm *so* glad you like them. I will give you some—and a silver cigarette-case to put them in. When you came into the room just now, I decided to give you a present.

PARKER

(*With his mouth full*)

Thanks, Oscar. You're very kind.

WILDE

Well, you know, people are often very kind to me. *You* are. When my friend Mr. Taylor first spoke to me about you, he said you were a good boy, and now I know that he was perfectly right.

PARKER

(*Sitting back and holding his knife and fork vertically*)

My dad don't think I'm good! He turned me outer the house. Said I 'adn't got no principles. (*He smiles.*)

WILDE

I think that your father and I would never agree. (*Confidentially*) You see, I happen to like people better than principles. And I like people with no principles better than anything else in the world! (*After a pause*) Has anybody ever told you, Charlie, what a nice face you have?

PARKER

Yes, I think Mr. Tayıor said something of that sort to me.

WILDE

And what else did Mr. Taylor say to you?

PARKER

(*After a pause for mastication*)

He said *you*— (*He finds that a further pause is necessary for mastication*)—he said *you* was a very nice gentleman. And he told me that you did a bit of writin'.

WILDE

I write books and plays. Do you ever go to the theater, or read?

PARKER

I've been to the Old Mo' once or twice, to see Marie Lloyd and Charlie Coburn. I'm not much of a one for readin', really,

though I like a bit of Dickens now and again. Are your books like his?

WILDE

Not exactly.

PARKER

Dickens ain't so dusty.

WILDE

No, indeed. One must have a heart of stone to read the death of Little Nell without laughing.

PARKER

(*Seriously*)

I don't remember that one.

WILDE

Now, Charlie, you must tell me about yourself. It would interest me enormously to know what you do with your time.

PARKER

I don't know as I do much with my time.

WILDE

And what do you think about life?

PARKER

I don't know as I think so very much about life, either.

WILDE

So much the better. There are only two kinds of people who are really fascinating—those who know absolutely everything, and those who know absolutely nothing. (PARKER *looks rather bewildered*) Dear boy, don't look so tragic. The secret

of remaining young is never to have an emotion that is unbecoming. (PARKER *smiles*) That's better! Let me fill your glass. (WILDE *fills both glasses and they drink.*)

PARKER

(*Smacking his lips*)

This stuff's all right.

WILDE

(*Regarding him with admiration*)

How inspiring you are, Charlie! You remind me of a youth in Ancient Greece. (*He takes a decoration of leaves from the dish of fruit and places it on* PARKER'S *head, having first removed the cigarette-end from behind his ear*) And with this to wear, you will look like a young victor, crowned at the Olympic Games.

PARKER

(*Amused*)

Did Greek boys wear things like this in their 'air?

WILDE

Often they wore nothing else.

PARKER

Do you mean to say they was niked?

WILDE

Divinely nude. Clothed only in sunshine and beauty.

PARKER

(*He gets up from the table and goes to look at himself in the mirror*)

Blimey! Don't I look funny? (*He turns from the mirror to find that* WILDE *is standing close beside him, and is watching his face intently*) Who's looking tragic now?

WILDE

(*Slowly*)

I was thinking—thinking of The Pleasure that Abideth for a Moment. Sit down, Charlie, and I will tell you a story. (*They sit on the settee*) Once there was an artist and there came into his soul the desire to fashion an image of The Pleasure that Abideth for a Moment. And he went forth into the world to look for bronze. For he could only think in bronze. But all the bronze in the whole world had disappeared; nor anywhere in the whole world was there any bronze to be found, save only the bronze of the image of The Sorrow that Endureth for Ever. Now this image the artist had himself, with his own hands, fashioned, and had set it on the tomb of the one thing he had loved in life. On the tomb of the dead thing he had most loved had he set this image of his own fashioning that it might serve as a sign of the love of man that dieth not, and a symbol of the sorrow of man that endureth for ever. And in the whole world there was no other bronze save the bronze of this image. And out of the bronze of the image of The Sorrow that Endureth for Ever he fashioned an image of The Pleasure that Abideth for a Moment.

PARKER

Was you ever a play-actor? (*Goes to the table and finishes the food on his plate.*)

WILDE

(*Shocked*)

No! What put such an idea into your head, Charlie?

PARKER

Well, you talk like one.

WILDE

Lots of people act well, but very few people talk well, which shows that talking is much the more difficult of the two.

PARKER

Is it?

WILDE

Yes, I suppose so.

PARKER

I wish I'd seen your play tonight. A pal of mine who was up in the gallery told me it was a proper scream. Said 'e didn't arf laugh.

WILDE

The first act is ingenious, the second beautiful, the third abominably clever. You shall see it whenever you like, Charlie. I will arrange for you to be given one of the best seats.

PARKER

Thanks, Oscar. You're a sport. D'you think I'll understand the play?

WILDE

Why not, dear boy?

PARKER

(*Confidentially*)

Between you and me, I ain't 'ad much edgecation.

WILDE

Really, Charlie, I should never have guessed. Shall we be going? (*They collect their things. The orchestra plays "You Should See Me Dance the Polka"*) Delicious tune! (*He dances a few steps.* PARKER *takes his arm and sings the song as they dance out of the room.*)

Curtain

ACT ONE

SCENE III

SCENE: *The study of* WILDE'S *house in Chelsea. It is a small room with a window in the left wall looking on to the street. Door leading to hall in back center. Fireplace right. The walls are lined with books. A desk is placed in front of the window. One or two comfortable chairs are about.*

When the curtain rises the stage is in darkness. A knocking at the front door is heard, followed by the sound of voices in the hall and the door closing.

The study door is then opened by a BUTLER *carrying a lighted lamp, which he places on the desk. He is followed by* FRANK HARRIS, *who wears a heavy overcoat and carries his silk hat.*

HARRIS

But I insist upon seeing your master!

BUTLER

I am sorry, sir, but my master's instructions were that on *no* account was he to be disturbed. No matter *who* called, he said.

HARRIS

Isn't it unusual for him to retire so early? (*Looking at his watch*) Why, it's scarcely past midnight.

BUTLER

The master has had a busy day. If I may say so, sir, he seemed a bit worried this evening, and he did mention that he needed a good night's rest.

HARRIS

Yes. Yes. Your master has worries—business worries, you understand. It is about them that I particularly wish to see him. So, my good man, please tell him at once that Mr. Frank Harris is here.

BUTLER

I'm afraid, sir, that I cannot very well. . . . (WILDE, *wearing an elaborate dressing-gown, enters at this moment. He is smoking a cigarette.*)

WILDE

Good evening, Frank! (*To the* BUTLER) You need not wait up, Charles. Nobody else is likely to call.

BUTLER

Thank you, sir. Good night, sir.

WILDE

Good night, Charles. (BUTLER *goes out.*)

HARRIS

I have been trying to get hold of you all day, Oscar. What is this I hear about Queensberry making a scandal at the club?

WILDE

So you have heard? All London seems to have heard. It is not a pretty story, Frank.

HARRIS

What happened exactly? Already there are several versions floating about. But I have come to you to hear the right one.

WILDE

It is not a story you can publish in the "Saturday," Frank. Need we discuss it? To tell you the truth, I am rather weary of the whole business.

HARRIS

(*Extravagantly*)

I come, not as a journalist, but as your friend, Oscar, to help you if I can.

WILDE

That is good of you, Frank. But I have put the matter in the hands of my solicitors. I am charging Queensberry with criminal libel.

HARRIS

(*Vehemently*)

You intend to do that?

WILDE

What else would you have me do? Queensberry called at my club today with a card addressed to: "Oscar Wilde, posing as sodomite," and handed it to the porter. It was delivered to me later in an envelope. That is sufficient evidence for me to act upon.

HARRIS

(*Gently for once*)

But is it wise to act at all, Oscar?

WILDE

It is time somebody shut this madman's mouth. For Bosie's sake, as well as for my own, I feel that it is the right thing—the only thing—to do.

HARRIS

I am not thinking of Lord Alfred, but of you, Oscar. If this is only a family feud between father and son, you cannot afford to get yourself mixed up in it.

WILDE

Frank, I am sure your advice is well meant, but I have already decided what to do.

HARRIS

Oscar, I don't think you realize what is being said about you.

WILDE

I realize how people chatter in England. The middle-classes air their moral prejudices over their gross dinner-tables, and whisper about what they call the profligacies of their betters, in order to try and pretend that they are in smart society, and on intimate terms with people they slander. In this country it is enough for a man to have distinction and brains for every common tongue to wag against him. You forget that we are in the native land of the hypocrite.

HARRIS

(*Excitedly*)

That is just what I am remembering when I ask you to think before taking a rash step that you may afterwards regret. Instead of being careful, you go out of your way to shock the very public who would jump at an opportunity to bring about your downfall. Why do you behave so recklessly, Oscar?

WILDE

Do I?

HARRIS

You know very well that you do. For one thing, you are singularly careless in your choice of associates. You think nothing of being seen in public with the oddest people. That lad I saw you at supper with the other night. . . .

WILDE

Charlie Parker? An altogether charming person. I found his youthful company most stimulating.

HARRIS

Naturally, Oscar, I have never believed a word of the things that are said against you. I know that as a writer you must familiarize yourself with every type of mind, and for that reason go into every sort of company. But there are others who think differently. And when they see you, as you were the other night, treating a working lad to champagne, and plying him with rich food, they immediately start slandering you.

WILDE

(*Wistfully*)

But Charlie Parker is a friend of mine.

HARRIS

(*Impatiently*)

A friend! Really, Oscar. . . .

WILDE

Yes, a friend. I choose my friends for their good looks, my acquaintances for their good characters, and my enemies for their good intellects.

HARRIS

(*Hopelessly*)

You are quite incorrigible, Oscar. Yet it is impossible to be angry with you.

WILDE

Then don't be angry with me, Frank.

HARRIS

I repeat, though, that you are seriously misguided in your determination to prosecute Queensberry. You would do better to ignore him, instead of making his accusations public property; turning them into a scandal for a dirty-minded world to lick its lips over.

WILDE

I am quite indifferent to the world's opinion. Let it think what it likes of me.

HARRIS

(*Suddenly recollecting*)

I heard something the other day about a strange letter that was sent to Beerbohm Tree, anonymously. I believe it concerned you, Oscar.

WILDE

(*Smiling*)

Journalists seem always to be hearing something, but seldom the truth.

HARRIS

I had my information on the best authority.

WILDE

I am sure you did, Frank. It would not surprise me if one day you wrote the story of my life.

HARRIS

Who knows? I may!

WILDE

Oh, I hope not. Every man should be his own Boswell. It is always Judas who writes the biography.

HARRIS

(*After laughing uncomfortably*)

Well, what about this letter to Tree?

WILDE

How persistent you are! But I will tell you exactly what happened. (*After a pause*) A *copy* of a letter I wrote to Bosie was sent anonymously to Tree, who showed it to me, saying he thought it dangerous. I laughed at the idea. A little later a man came to me with some more of my letters which he

said he had found in an old suit of clothes Bosie had given him. I gave the man some money for them, but I noticed afterwards that the original of the letter sent to Tree was not amongst them. That is all I know.

HARRIS

And where do you suppose the original of that letter is?

WILDE

I haven't the slightest idea.

HARRIS

Does it occur to you that some blackmailer may be awaiting his opportunity to sell it?

WILDE

I should think that is very probable.

HARRIS

And if it should fall into the hands of the defense at the Queensberry trial, what will you do?

WILDE

I shall not mind in the least. It is a perfectly harmless and beautifully written letter. In fact, I think I shall insist upon its being used for the prosecution. That will make it utterly useless for the defense.

HARRIS

Since you're determined to bring this absurd case, I have nothing more to say. I came to warn you, Oscar, and I have done what I can. I am sorry you won't listen to me.

WILDE

Believe me, Frank, I appreciate your intentions. But Bosie and I have decided that what we are doing is for the best.

HARRIS

Then good night, Oscar. (*He goes out.* WILDE *rises and puts out a lamp by the sofa. He then crosses the stage, and is about to put out the lamp on the desk, when the* BUTLER *enters.*)

BUTLER

Excuse me, sir.

WILDE

I thought I told you not to wait up, Charles. What is it?

BUTLER

A person called to see you, sir. He was very insistent, sir. I asked him to wait in the kitchen until Mr. Harris had gone.

WILDE

What's his name?

BUTLER

He wouldn't give his name. (*Lowering his eyes*) I think it would be wise to see him.

WILDE

Oh, very well. (*The* BUTLER *leaves and returns in a moment to usher in* ALLEN, *a cunning youth, shabbily dressed. The* BUTLER *goes out, and* ALLEN, *after watching him go, crosses slowly to* WILDE.)

WILDE

This is an absurd hour to call upon anybody.

ALLEN

I waited till the other gentleman had gone. I wanted to see you alone.

WILDE

Well, what is it you wish to see me about?

ALLEN

I've got a letter of yours here with me.

WILDE

Indeed? I don't remember ever having written to you.

ALLEN

Oh, the letter ain't written to me. (*Grinning*) I 'aven't got rose-leaf lips, *or* a slim-gilt soul!

WILDE

I suppose you have come about my beautiful letter to Lord Alfred Douglas.

ALLEN

You're right. I 'ave.

WILDE

If you had not been so foolish as to send a copy of it to Mr. Beerbohm Tree, I would gladly have paid you a very large sum of money for the letter, as I consider it to be a work of art.

ALLEN

A very curious construction can be put on that letter.

WILDE

Art is rarely intelligible to the criminal classes.

ALLEN

A man offered me sixty pounds for it.

WILDE

If you take my advice you will go to that man and sell my letter to him for sixty pounds. I myself have never received so large a sum for any prose work of that length; but I am glad to find that there is someone in England who considers a letter of mine worth sixty pounds.

ALLEN

(*Slightly taken aback*)

Trouble is, the man's out of town just now.

WILDE

He is sure to come back. It will undoubtedly pay you to wait until he does.

ALLEN

(*Changing his attitude*)

Fact is, I'm broke to the wide. I 'aven't a penny. I've been trying to find you for a long time.

WILDE

I'm afraid I cannot guarantee your cab expenses, but I shall be happy to give you half a sovereign for your trouble. (*Gives it to* ALLEN, *who takes it without a word, and goes to the door*) By the way, it may interest you to know that the letter is a prose poem, and will shortly be published as a sonnet in a delightful magazine. I will send you a copy of it. (ALLEN *turns back into the room and holds out the letter.*)

ALLEN

You can 'ave it.

WILDE

(*Not taking it*)

Why do you give it to me?

ALLEN

It's no good trying to rent you. You only laugh at me.

WILDE

(*Taking the letter*)

Very well, I will accept it. (*Seeing how soiled it is*) I think it quite unpardonable that better care was not taken of this original manuscript of mine.

ALLEN

I'm sorry, but it's been in so many hands.

WILDE

Well, we'll say no more about it. (*As they leave the room*) I am afraid you are leading a wonderfully wicked life.

ALLEN

There's good and bad in every one of us.

WILDE

You are a born philosopher! (*They go out. The sound of their "Good nights" is heard, and the closing of the front door.* WILDE *comes wearily into the room and sits at the desk. He glances at the letter in his hand and reads:*)

WILDE

"My own boy. . . . It is a marvel that those red rose-leaf lips of yours should be made no less for music of song than for madness of kisses. . . ." (*He turns the letter over*) What a mess they've made of it!

Curtain

ACT TWO

ACT TWO

SCENE I

SCENE: *The Old Court at the Old Bailey. The dock is not visible to the audience in this scene.*

SIR EDWARD CLARKE, MR. E. H. CARSON *and* MR. JUSTICE HENN COLLINS *are in Court.*

CLARKE

The libel charged against the Defendant was published in the form of a visiting card left by Lord Queensberry at the club to which Mr. Wilde belongs. On that card his lordship wrote: "Oscar Wilde, posing as sodomite."

The accusation contained in those words does not suggest guilt of the actual offense, but that Mr. Wilde appears to be, or desires to appear to be, a person guilty of or inclined to the commission of the gravest offense.

The defendant by his plea has raised a much graver issue. In that plea there is a series of allegations, mentioning the names of several persons and impugning Mr. Wilde's conduct with those persons.

Between eighteen ninety-two and eighteen ninety-four, Mr. Wilde became aware that certain statements were being made against his character. A man named Allen called on Mr. Wilde, and said he possessed a letter which Mr. Wilde had written to Lord Alfred Douglas, and asked Mr. Wilde to

give him something for it. Mr. Wilde absolutely and peremptorily refused. He sent Allen away, giving him ten shillings for himself. But before he left, Allen said he so much appreciated Mr. Wilde's kindness that he was willing to return the letter, and he did so.

Mr. Wilde looks upon this letter as a sort of prose poem. Here it is:

"My own Boy,

"Your sonnet is quite lovely, and it is a marvel that those red rose-leaf lips of yours should have been made no less for music of song than for madness of kisses. Your slim-gilt soul walks between passion and poetry. I know Hyacinthus, whom Apollo loved so madly, was you in Greek days.

"Why are you alone in London, and when do you go to Salisbury? Do go there to cool your hands in the gray twilight of Gothic things, and come here whenever you like. It is a lovely place—it only lacks you; but go to Salisbury first.

"Always, with undying love,

"Yours,

Oscar."

The words of that letter may appear extravagant to those who are in the habit of writing commercial correspondence; but Mr. Wilde is prepared to produce it anywhere as the expression of a poetical feeling, and with no relation whatever to the hateful suggestions put to it in the plea in this case.

There are two counts at the end of the plea which are extremely curious. It is said that Mr. Wilde has published a certain indecent and immoral work with the title of "The Picture of Dorian Gray." And, secondly, that in December, eight-

een ninety-four, was published a certain immoral work in the form of "The Chameleon," and that Mr. Wilde had contributed to it under the title of "Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young."

Those are two very gross allegations. Directly Mr. Wilde saw a story in "The Chameleon," called "The Priest and the Acolyte," he communicated with the editor, and upon Mr. Wilde's insistence the magazine was withdrawn. The volume called "The Picture of Dorian Gray" is one that can be bought on any bookstall in London. It has been published five years. My learned friend has the task of satisfying you that the excuses made by the defendant are true. (WILDE *is called to the witness-box. He wears a tight-fitting frock-coat of a dark material, a collar with wide points, and a black tie. His hair is banked on the top of his head and carefully parted down the center. His manner is confident, and he leans over the rail in front of him toying with a pair of gloves, while answering questions. He retains his equanimity until he makes the fatal slip when* CARSON *is cross-examining him about Walter Grainger.*)

CLARKE

Are you the prosecutor in this case?

WILDE

I am.

CLARKE

Are you a dramatist and author?

WILDE

I believe I am well known in that capacity.

THE JUDGE

Only answer the questions, please.

CLARKE

How old are you?

WILDE

Thirty-nine.

CLARKE

In eighteen ninety-two, did you make the acquaintance of Lord Alfred Douglas?

WILDE

Yes.

CLARKE

When did you meet Lord Queensberry?

WILDE

In November, eighteen ninety-two.

CLARKE

When did you see him again?

WILDE

In eighteen ninety-four. On both occasions I was lunching with Lord Alfred Douglas at the Café Royal, when Lord Queensberry joined us.

CLARKE

Shortly after the second meeting, did you become aware that he was making suggestions with regard to your character and behavior?

WILDE

Yes. At the end of June, eighteen ninety-four, Lord Queensberry called upon me at my house; not by appointment. The interview took place in the library. Lord Queensberry was standing by the window. I walked over to the fireplace, and he said to me, "Sit down." I said to him, "I do not allow anyone to talk to me like that in my house or anywhere else. I suppose you have come to apologize for the statements you have been making about me." Lord Queensberry repeated several lies he had heard about Lord Alfred Douglas and myself. Then I asked, "Lord Queensberry, do you seriously believe these lies?" He said, "I do not say you are it, but you look it. . . ." (*Laughter in Court.*)

THE JUDGE

I shall have the court cleared, if I hear the slightest disturbance again.

WILDE

". . . but you look it, and you pose as it, which is just as bad." Then I told Lord Queensberry to leave my house.

CLARKE

Before you sent your contribution to "The Chameleon," had you anything to do with the preparation of that magazine?

WILDE

Nothing whatever.

CLARKE

Did you approve of the story "The Priest and the Acolyte"?

WILDE

I thought it bad and indecent, and I thoroughly disapproved of it.

CLARKE

Your attention has been called to the plea and to the names of the persons with whom your conduct is impugned. Is there any truth in these allegations?

WILDE

There is no truth whatever in any one of them. (CARSON *cross-examines.*)

CARSON

You stated that your age was thirty-nine. I think you are over forty. You were born on October the sixteenth, eighteen fifty-four?

WILDE

I had no wish to pose as being young. I am thirty-nine to forty.

CARSON

But being born in eighteen fifty-four makes you more than forty?

WILDE

Ah! Very well.

CARSON

How old was Lord Alfred Douglas when you first knew him?

WILDE

Between twenty and twenty-one years of age.

CARSON

There were two poems by Lord Alfred Douglas in "The Chameleon" in which your article appeared?

WILDE

There were. I thought them exceedingly beautiful poems.

CARSON

Did you think they made any improper suggestions?

WILDE

No, none whatever.

CARSON

You read "The Priest and the Acolyte"?

WILDE

Yes.

CARSON

You have no doubt whatever that *that* was an immoral story?

WILDE

It was worse—it was badly written.

CARSON

Wasn't the story that of an acolyte who was discovered by the rector in the priest's room, and a scandal arose?

WILDE

I have read it only once and nothing would induce me to read it again.

CARSON

Do you think the story blasphemous?

WILDE

I think it violated every artistic canon of beauty.

CARSON

That is not an answer.

WILDE

It is the only one I can give.

CARSON

I want to see the position you *pose* in. Did you think the story blasphemous?

WILDE

It filled me with disgust. The end was wrong.

CARSON

Answer the question, sir. Did you or did you not consider the story blasphemous?

WILDE

I did not consider the story blasphemous. I thought it disgusting.

CARSON

I am satisfied with that. As regards your own works, you *pose* as not being concerned with morality or immorality?

WILDE

I do not know whether you use the word "pose" in any particular sense.

CARSON

It is a favorite word of your own.

WILDE

Is it? I have no pose in this matter. In writing a play or a book, I am concerned entirely with literature—that is, with art. I aim not at doing good or evil, but in trying to make a thing that will have some quality of beauty.

CARSON

Listen, sir. Here is one of the "Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young," which you contributed to "The Chameleon": "Wickedness is a myth invented by good people to account for the curious attractiveness of others." You think that is true?

WILDE

I rarely think that anything I write is true.

CARSON

Did you say "rarely"?

WILDE

I might have said "never."

CARSON

"Religions die when they are proved to be true." Do you think that was a safe axiom to put forward for the philosophy of the young?

WILDE

Most stimulating.

CARSON

"If one tells the truth, one is sure, sooner or later, to be found out?"

WILDE

That is a pleasing paradox.

CARSON

Is it good for the young?

WILDE

Anything is good that stimulates thought at whatever age.

CARSON

Whether moral or immoral?

WILDE

There is no such thing as morality or immorality in thought. There is immoral emotion.

CARSON

"Pleasure is the only thing one should live for?"

WILDE

I think that the realization of one's self is the prime aim of life, and to realize one's self through pleasure is finer than to do so through pain. I am, on that point, entirely on the side of the ancients—the Greeks. It is a pagan idea.

CARSON

"There is something tragic about the enormous number of young men there are in England at the present moment who start life with perfect profiles, and end by adopting some useful profession?"

WILDE

I should think the young have enough sense of humor.

CARSON

You think that is humorous?

WILDE

An amusing play upon words.

CARSON

This is in your introduction to "Dorian Gray": "There is no such thing as a moral or immoral book. Books are well written or badly written." That expresses your view?

WILDE

My view on art, yes.

CARSON

Here is a passage from the book. The artist is speaking to Dorian Gray. "From the moment I met you, your personality had the most extraordinary influence over me. I quite admit that I adored you madly." Have you ever adored a young man madly?

WILDE

No, not madly; I prefer love—that is a higher form.

CARSON

Never mind that. Let us keep down to the level we are at now.

WILDE

I have never given adoration to anybody but myself.

CARSON

I suppose you think that a very smart thing?

WILDE

Not at all.

CARSON

Then you have never had that feeling?

WILDE

No. The whole idea was borrowed from Shakespeare, I regret to say—yes, from Shakespeare's sonnets.

CARSON

"I have adored you extravagantly?"

WILDE

Do you mean financially?

CARSON

Oh, yes, financially. Do you think we are talking about finance?

WILDE

I don't know what you are talking about.

CARSON

Don't you? Well, I hope I shall make myself very plain before I have done. Where was Lord Alfred Douglas staying when you wrote that letter which my learned friend read in court just now?

WILDE

At the Savoy; I was at Torquay.

CARSON

Why should a man of your age address a boy nearly twenty years younger as "My own boy"?

WILDE

I was fond of him.

CARSON

Did you adore him?

WILDE

No, but I have always been fond of him. I think it is a beautiful letter. It is a poem, I was not writing an ordinary letter. You might as well cross-examine me as to whether "King Lear" or a sonnet of Shakespeare was proper.

CARSON

Suppose a man who was not an artist had written this letter?

WILDE

A man who was not an artist could not have written that letter.

CARSON

"Your slim-gilt soul walks between passion and poetry." Is that a beautiful phrase?

WILDE

Not as you read it, Mr. Carson.

CARSON

I do not profess to be an artist; and when I hear you give evidence, I am glad I am not.

CLARKE

(*Rising*)

I don't think my friend should talk like that. (*To* WILDE) Pray, do not criticize my friend's reading again.

CARSON

Is not this a very exceptional letter?

WILDE

I should say it is unique.

CARSON

Have you often written letters in the same style as this?

WILDE

I don't repeat myself in style.

CARSON

Here is another letter which I believe you also wrote to Lord Alfred Douglas. Will you read it?

WILDE

No; I decline. I don't see why I should.

CARSON

Then I will.

"Dearest of all boys,

"Your letter was delightful, red and yellow wine to me; but I am sad and out of sorts. I must see you soon. You are

the divine thing I want, the thing of grace and beauty. Why are you not here, my dear, my wonderful boy?

"Your own Oscar."

Is that an ordinary letter?

WILDE

Everything I write is extraordinary. It was a tender expression of my great admiration for Lord Alfred Douglas. It was not, like the other, a prose poem.

CARSON

How long have you known Wood?

WILDE

I think I met him at the end of January, eighteen ninety-three.

CARSON

Who was Wood?

WILDE

He had no occupation. He was looking for a situation.

CARSON

The first time you met Wood, did you take him to supper in a private room at a restaurant?

WILDE

Yes. I had been asked to be kind to him.

CARSON

How much money did you give Wood on that occasion?

WILDE

Two pounds.

CARSON

Why?

WILDE

Because I had been asked to be kind to him.

CARSON

I suggest that you had another reason for giving him money?

WILDE

It is perfectly untrue.

CARSON

Did you consider that he had come to levy blackmail?

WILDE

I did; and I determined to face it.

CARSON

And the way you faced it was by giving him fifteen pounds to go to America?

WILDE

No. I gave him the money after he had told me the pitiful tale about himself; foolishly perhaps, but out of pure kindness.

CARSON

Had you a farewell lunch at a restaurant?

WILDE

Yes.

CARSON

In a private room?

WILDE

Yes.

CARSON

Did Wood call you Oscar?

WILDE

Yes.

CARSON

What did you call Wood?

WILDE

His name is Alfred.

CARSON

Didn't you call him "Alf"?

WILDE

I never use abbreviations.

CARSON

When you were staying at the Albemarle Hotel in eighteen ninety-two, did you become fond of your publisher's office-boy?

WILDE

That is not the proper form for the question to be addressed to me. I deny that that was the position held by Mr. Edward Shelley, to whom you are referring.

CARSON

What age was *Mister* Shelley?

WILDE

About twenty. I met him when arranging for the publication of my books.

CARSON

Did you ask him to dine with you at the Albemarle Hotel?

WILDE

Yes.

CARSON

Was that for the purpose of having an intellectual treat?

WILDE

Well, for him, yes.

CARSON

On that occasion, did you have a room leading into a bedroom?

WILDE

Yes.

CARSON

Did you become intimate with a young man named Alphonse Conway at Worthing?

WILDE

Yes.

CARSON

He sold newspapers at the kiosk on the pier?

WILDE

This is the first I have heard of his connection with literature.

CARSON

Did you take the lad to Brighton and provide him with a suit of blue serge?

WILDE

Yes.

CARSON

And a straw hat with a band of red and blue?

WILDE

That, I am afraid, was his own unfortunate selection.

CARSON

Have you been to afternoon tea-parties at Alfred Taylor's rooms in Little College Street?

WILDE

Certainly.

CARSON

Did you get Taylor to arrange dinners at which you could meet young men?

WILDE

No.

CARSON

But you have dined with young men?

WILDE

Often.

CARSON

Always in a private room?

WILDE

Generally. I prefer it.

CARSON

Now, did you not know that Taylor was notorious for introducing young men to older men?

WILDE

I never heard that in my life. He has introduced young men to me.

CARSON

How many?

WILDE

About five.

CARSON

Have you given money to them?

WILDE

Yes, I think to all five—money and presents.

CARSON

Did they give you anything?

WILDE

Me? Me? No!

CARSON

Among these five, did Taylor introduce you to Charles Parker?

WILDE

Yes.

CARSON

You became friendly with him?

WILDE

Yes.

CARSON

Did you know that he was a groom out of employment?

WILDE

No.

CARSON

How old was he?

WILDE

Really, I do not keep a census.

CARSON

Never mind about a census. Tell me how old he was.

WILDE

About twenty.

CARSON

How much money did you give Parker?

WILDE

During the time I have known him, I should think about four or five pounds.

CARSON

Why? For what?

WILDE

Because he was poor and I liked him. What better reason could I have?

CARSON

Did you invite Parker and his brother to dinner?

WILDE

Yes.

CARSON

Did you know that one Parker was a groom, and the other a gentleman's valet?

WILDE

I did not know it, but if I had, I should not have cared. I have a passion to civilize the community.

CARSON

Was there plenty of champagne?

WILDE

Well, I did not press wine upon them.

CARSON

You did not stint them?

WILDE

What gentleman would stint his guests?

CARSON

What gentleman would stint the valet and the groom?

CLARKE

(*Jumping to his feet*)

I object!

THE JUDGE

I cannot allow that objection.

CARSON

Do you drink champagne yourself?

WILDE

Yes; iced champagne is a favorite drink of mine—strictly against my doctor's orders.

CARSON

Never mind your doctor's orders, sir.

WILDE

I never do.

CARSON

How many times did Charles Parker have tea with you at your rooms in St. James's Place?

WILDE

Five or six times.

CARSON

What did he do all the time?

WILDE

What did he do? Why, he drank his tea, smoked cigarettes, and, I hope, enjoyed himself.

CARSON

What was there in common between this young man and yourself? What attraction had he for you?

WILDE

I delight in the society of people much younger than myself. I like those who may be called idle and careless. I recog-

nize no social distinctions of any kind; and to me youth, the mere fact of youth, is so wonderful that I would rather talk to a young man for half an hour than be even—well, cross-examined in court by an eminent Irish Queen's Counsel.

CARSON

When did you first meet Fred Atkins?

WILDE

In October, eighteen ninety-two.

CARSON

You called him Fred and he called you Oscar?

WILDE

I have a passion for being addressed by my Christian name.

CARSON

You took him to Paris?

WILDE

Yes.

CARSON

When you were in Paris, did you suggest that he should have his hair curled?

WILDE

I should have been very angry if he had had his hair curled. It would have been most unbecoming.

CARSON

Did Taylor introduce you to a man named Ernest Scarfe?

WILDE

Yes.

CARSON

Did you give him any money?

WILDE

Never.

CARSON

Did you give him any presents?

WILDE

Yes, a cigarette case. It is my custom to present cigarette cases.

CARSON

When did you first know Sidney Mavor?

WILDE

In September, eighteen ninety-two.

CARSON

Did you give him anything?

WILDE

I don't think I even gave him a cigarette case.

CARSON

On October the third, did you not order Thornhill's in Bond Street to send him one of the value of four pounds, eleven shillings and sixpence?

WILDE

Well, if it is there, perhaps I did.

CARSON

Why did you give him a cigarette case when you had known him only a month?

WILDE

I give what presents I like to anybody I like. I found pleasure in his society.

CARSON

Did you find pleasure in his society when he stayed with you at the Albemarle Hotel for the night?

WILDE

Yes, in the evening, and at breakfast.

CARSON

Do you know Walter Grainger?

WILDE

Yes.

CARSON

Have you dined with him?

WILDE

Never. He was a servant at a house in Oxford where Lord Alfred Douglas had rooms.

CARSON

Did you ever kiss him?

WILDE

Oh, dear, no. He was a peculiarly plain boy. He was, unfortunately, extremely ugly. I pitied him for it.

CARSON

Was that the reason why you did not kiss him?

WILDE

Mr. Carson, you are pertinently insolent.

CARSON

Did you say that in support of your statement that you never kissed him?

WILDE

No. It is a childish question.

CARSON

Did you ever put that forward as a reason why you never kissed the boy?

WILDE

Not at all.

CARSON

Why, sir, did you mention that the boy was extremely ugly?

WILDE

For this reason: If I were asked why I did not kiss a door-mat, I should say because I do not like to kiss door-mats. I do not know why I mentioned that he was ugly, except that I was stung by your insolent question.

CARSON

Why did you mention his ugliness?

WILDE

It is ridiculous to imagine that any such thing could have occurred under any circumstances.

CARSON

Then why did you mention his ugliness, I ask you?

WILDE

You insulted me by an insulting question.

CARSON

Was that a reason why you should say the boy was ugly? (WILDE's *unfinished replies are incoherent and almost inaudible.*)

WILDE

It was the reason why . . . that . . .

CARSON

Why did you say he was ugly?

WILDE

Because you said . . . because I wasn't . . .

CARSON

Why did you add that?

WILDE

I was . . . I was . . .

CARSON

Why? Why?

WILDE

You sting me and insult me and try to unnerve me; and at times one says things flippantly when one ought to speak more seriously. I admit it.

CARSON

Then you said it flippantly?

WILDE

Oh, yes, it was a flippant answer.

CARSON

That is my last question.

(*The curtain falls. When it rises again,* CARSON *is opening the case for the defense, and addressing the jury.* WILDE *is not in court.*)

CARSON

(*Speaking as the curtain rises*)

I hope I have sufficiently demonstrated to the jury already that Lord Queensberry was absolutely justified in bringing to a climax the connection of Mr. Oscar Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas.

I am not here to say that anything has ever happened between Lord Alfred Douglas and Mr. Oscar Wilde. God forbid! But everything shows that the young man is in a dangerous position.

There is a startling similarity in all the cases that have been raised against Mr. Wilde. In each we find no equality in age, education, or position with Wilde. But on the other hand there is a curious similarity in the ages of the young men themselves.

Who are these young men? There is Wood. Of his history Mr. Wilde has told you that he knew nothing. Who was Parker? Mr. Wilde professed the same ignorance as to that youth. Who was Scarfe? Exactly in the same way Mr. Wilde knew nothing about him.

Parker will be called to tell his unfortunate story. If Mr.

Wilde wanted to assist Parker, was it doing the lad a good turn to take him to a restaurant and prime him with champagne and a good dinner? Parker will tell you that when he dined with Mr. Wilde he had whiskies and sodas and iced champagne—that iced champagne in which Mr. Wilde indulged, contrary to his doctor's orders.

CLARKE

(*Rising*)

May I claim your lordship's indulgence while I interpose to make a statement? (CARSON *resumes his seat.*)

CLARKE

Those who represent Mr. Wilde in this case cannot conceal from themselves that the judgment that might be formed on the literary questions might not improbably induce the jury to say that Lord Queensberry in using the word "posing" was using a word for which there was sufficient justification to entitle him to be relieved of a criminal charge in respect of his statement. And I, and my learned friends associated with me in this matter, have to look forward to this—that a verdict, given to the defendant on that part of the case, might be interpreted outside as a conclusive finding with regard to all parts of the case.

We feel that we cannot resist a verdict of "Not Guilty"—having regard to the word "posing." I trust that this may make an end of the case.

CARSON

(*Rising*)

If there is a plea of Not Guilty, a plea which involves that the defendant has succeeded in his plea of justification, I am

satisfied. Of course, the verdict will be that the plea of justification is proved, and that the words were published for the public benefit.

THE JUDGE

I shall have to tell the jury that justification was proved; and that it was true in substance and fact that the prosecutor had "posed as a sodomite." (*To the jury*) Your verdict will be—Not Guilty.

Curtain

ACT TWO

Scene II

Scene: *The Old Court at the Old Bailey. A different view of the court. The dock, in which* Wilde *stands, is now visible to the audience.*

Others in court: The Solicitor-General, Sir Edward Clarke, *and* the Judge.

When the curtain rises the Solicitor-General *is concluding his opening speech for the prosecution.*

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Gentlemen, It has been necessary for me to go through the case in detail, because I must assume, as you are an entirely fresh jury, that you are totally ignorant of all the facts previously elucidated. I have endeavored to limit myself to a plain and simple statement of testimony which the prosecution is in a position to call before you. In conclusion, I can only invite your very earnest and careful attention to the evidence, for it is upon this evidence that the defendant must be judged. Call Charles Parker. (Charles Parker *called to the witness-box. He gives his evidence with impudent self-assurance, and does not appear to be in the least ashamed of the incidents which he relates.*)

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

What is your name?

PARKER

Charles Parker.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

How old are you?

PARKER

Nineteen.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

You have been employed as a groom?

PARKER

Yes.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Were you out of employment in March, eighteen ninety-three?

PARKER

Yes.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Without means?

PARKER

Not absolutely.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Did you go with your brother one evening to the St. James's restaurant?

PARKER

Yes.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

And a man spoke to you?

PARKER

Yes; Taylor spoke to us.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

What did he say?

PARKER

He offered us drinks.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

What happened then?

PARKER

He spoke about men.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

In what way?

PARKER

I think he asked us if we ever went out with men. He said there was some good money to be made in that way.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Did he mention any names?

PARKER

He mentioned Mr. Wilde and said he would like to introduce him to us.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

For what purpose?

PARKER

He said he was a good man.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

But for what purpose?

PARKER

He meant he was a good man for money.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

But did he say why he wanted to introduce Wilde to you?

PARKER

Because he liked meeting boys.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Later, did you go by appointment to Taylor's rooms in Little College Street?

PARKER

Yes.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

What passed there?

PARKER

I forget.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Think now; you went there by appointment and you saw Taylor. What passed?

PARKER

I forget.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

What was said?

PARKER

Oh—he said he had arranged to introduce us to Mr. Wilde that evening at a restaurant.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Did you go?

PARKER

Yes.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

What happened?

PARKER

We were shown upstairs into a private room with a table laid for four. After a while Mr. Wilde came in. Then we all sat down to dinner. Mr. Wilde sat on my left.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Was it a good dinner?

PARKER

Yes. The table was lighted with pink-shaded candles.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

What did you have to drink?

PARKER

Champagne, and brandy and coffee afterwards.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Did you see who paid for the dinner?

PARKER

I saw Mr. Wilde write out a check.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Now, after dinner, did Mr. Wilde say anything to you?

PARKER

Yes. He said, "This is the boy for me." Then he asked me to go back to his hotel with him.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Did you go?

PARKER

Yes. We went in a hansom.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

What happened at the hotel?

PARKER

First of all, we went up to a sitting-room on the second floor, and Mr. Wilde ordered some more drink—whisky and soda.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

After the waiter who brought it had gone, what did Wilde say to you?

PARKER

He asked me to stay with him. And I did. I was there about

two hours. Before I left Mr. Wilde gave me two pounds and told me to come again next week.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Did you go?

PARKER

Yes. He gave me three pounds the second time.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Did you see Wilde at other places?

PARKER

Yes, from time to time. He took me to the Crystal Palace, and to the Pavilion—we had a box there. We dined at restaurants, and I went to his rooms in St. James's Place seven or eight times. And once he visited me at my room in Chelsea. He kept his cab waiting. After that there was some unpleasantness with my landlady, so I left.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

When did you last see Wilde?

PARKER

About nine months ago. He drove past me in Trafalgar Square and stopped his cab. We shook hands, and he said, "You're looking as pretty as ever." (*Laughs.*)

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Until Taylor introduced you to Wilde, had you ever been mixed up with this kind of thing before?

PARKER

No, never. And I've given it up now. I've joined the army.

(*The curtain falls. When it rises again,* WILDE *is in the witness-box, being cross-examined by the* SOLICITOR-GENERAL. WILDE *looks haggard and worn. His hair is untidy. He gives his answers wearily.*)

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

(*Speaking as the curtain rises*)

Why did you go to Taylor's rooms?

WILDE

Because I used to meet amusing people there.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

A rather curious establishment, wasn't it?

WILDE

I didn't think so.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Did you notice that no one could see in through the windows?

WILDE

No; I didn't notice that.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Did it strike you that this place was at all peculiar?

WILDE

Not at all.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Not the sort of street you would usually visit in? Rather a rough neighborhood?

WILDE

(*With a momentary flash of the old humor*)

Perhaps—it was very near the Houses of Parliament.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

You have given away a large number of cigarette cases?

WILDE

Yes. I have a great fancy for giving cigarette cases.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

To young men?

WILDE

Yes.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Was the conversation of these young men literary?

WILDE

No: but the fact that I had written a successful play seemed to them very wonderful, and I was gratified by their admiration.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

The admiration of these boys?

WILDE

Yes. I am fond of praise. I like to be made much of.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

By these boys?

WILDE

Yes.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

You like bright boys?

WILDE

I like bright boys.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Did you not pause to consider whether it would be of the slightest service to lads in their position to be entertained in such style by a man in your position?

WILDE

No. They enjoyed it as schoolboys would enjoy a treat. It was something they did not get every day.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

You looked on them as schoolboys?

WILDE

They were amused by the little luxuries at the restaurants I took them to. The pink lampshades and so forth.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

When you wrote letters to Lord Alfred Douglas, why did you choose the words "My own boy" as a mode of address?

WILDE

It was a fantastic, extravagant way of writing. It does not seem to me to be a question of whether a thing is right or proper, but of literary expression.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

I did not use the words proper or right. Was it decent?

WILDE

Oh, decent? Of course; there is nothing indecent in it.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Do you think that was a decent way for a man of your age to address a man of his?

WILDE

It was a beautiful way for an artist to address a young man of culture and charm. Decency does not enter into it.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Doesn't it? Do you know the meaning of the word?

WILDE

Yes.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Did Lord Alfred Douglas read you his poem, "Two Loves"?

WILDE

Yes.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

It contains these lines:

"I am true love, I fill
The hearts of boy and girl with mutual flame."
Then sighing said the other, "Have thy will,
I am the love that dare not speak its name."

Was that poem explained to you?

WILDE

I think it is clear.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

There is no question as to what it means?

WILDE

Most certainly not.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Is it not clear that the love described relates to natural and unnatural love?

WILDE

No.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

What is "The love that dare not speak its name"?

WILDE

The love that dare not speak its name in this century is such a great affection of an elder for a younger man as there was between David and Jonathan, such as Plato made the very basis of his philosophy, and such as you find in the son-

nets of Michael Angelo and Shakespeare. It is that deep, spiritual affection that is as pure as it is perfect. It dictates and pervades great works of art like those of Shakespeare and Michael Angelo, and those two letters of mine, such as they are. It is in this century misunderstood, so much misunderstood that it may be described as "The love that dare not speak its name," and on account of it I am placed where I am now. It is beautiful, it is fine, it is the noblest form of affection. There is nothing unnatural about it. It is intellectual, and it repeatedly exists between an elder and a younger man, when the elder man has intellect, and the younger man has all the joy, hope and glamour of life before him. But that it should be so the world does not understand.

(*The curtain falls. When it rises again,* WILDE *is in the dock.*)

THE JUDGE

Oscar Wilde, the crime of which you have been convicted is so bad that one has to put stern restraint upon one's self to prevent one's self from describing, in language which I would rather not use, the sentiments which must rise to the breast of every man of honor who has heard the details of these two terrible trials. That the jury have arrived at a correct verdict in this case I cannot persuade myself to entertain a shadow of doubt; and I hope, at all events, that those who sometimes imagine that a judge is half-hearted in the cause of decency and morality because he takes care no prejudice shall enter into the case, may see that this is consistent with the utmost sense of indignation at the horrible charges brought home to you.

It is no use for me to address you. People who can do these things must be dead to all sense of shame, and one cannot hope to produce any effect upon them. It is the worst case I have ever tried. That you, Wilde, have been the center of a circle of extensive corruption of the most hideous kind among young men, it is impossible to doubt.

I shall, under the circumstances, be expected to pass the severest sentence that the law allows. In my judgment it is totally inadequate for such a case as this.

The sentence of this court is that you be imprisoned and kept to hard labor for two years.

Curtain

ACT THREE

ACT THREE

SCENE I

SCENE: *The study of Wilde's House in Chelsea. The room is seen in the light of early morning. Dust-sheets cover most of the furniture.*

EUSTACE *is arranging flowers in a vase on the desk, and* DIJON *is watching him. They wear overcoats, as the room is cold.*

EUSTACE

(*Standing back from the flowers*)

There! I think that makes the room a little less somber. We want it to look as gay as possible.

DIJON

These dust-sheets aren t very gay. Hadn't we better remove them?

EUSTACE

Yes, we had better. They look too ghostly. (*As they talk they remove the dust-sheets, folding them with the proficiency of chambermaids.*)

DIJON

Is Oscar coming by himself?

EUSTACE

No. Frank Harris has gone to the prison to meet him. They should be here quite soon.

DIJON

Harris has behaved very well. He went several times to Reading to see Oscar.

EUSTACE

I can't help feeling that Harris did it more out of journalism than friendship. No doubt he'll publish the whole story some day.

DIJON

Perhaps. (*After a pause*) Where do you think Oscar will go? To France?

EUSTACE

If he does, he'll find simply heaps of his friends there. On the day after he was sentenced the continental express was packed with people who thought it advisable to leave England for a while.

DIJON

How do you know?

EUSTACE

My dear, I was on it myself.

DIJON

In France we were very shocked when Oscar was sent to prison. The newspapers said, "This is how the English behave to their poets."

EUSTACE

The American papers said, "This is how the English poets behave."

DIJON

I feel that this reunion is going to be rather awkward.

EUSTACE

That will depend upon Oscar. He used always to manage any situation with marvelous tact.

DIJON

In the old days, yes. But it won't be too easy for him—taking up the threads again. By the way, where is Bosie?

EUSTACE

He's abroad. Somewhere in Italy, I think.

DIJON

I thought he would have been the first to welcome his friend home.

EUSTACE

That is because you don't know what has been going on since Oscar went away. The disciples—as his so-called friends style themselves—have decided to keep him and Bosie apart. They say Bosie is a bad influence on Oscar. Really, of course, they're desperately jealous of the friendship. And now they think their master's body should belong entirely to them.

DIJON

You talk as if Oscar were dead.

EUSTACE

It's a wonder he isn't, after what he's been through. (*The front-door is heard closing*) What's that?

DIJON

It must be Oscar. (*After a moment* WILDE *comes in with the dignity of a king returning from exile. He is smoking, and wears a flower in his buttonhole.*)

EUSTACE *and* DIJON

Oscar!

WILDE

Louis! Eustace! (*To* EUSTACE) How marvelous of you to know exactly the right tie to wear at eight o'clock in the morning to meet a friend who has been—away.

DIJON

It's wonderful to see you again, Oscar; and looking so well, too.

WILDE

Thank you, dear boy. It is charming of you both to be here to welcome me at such an early hour. You can't possibly have got up. You must have sat up.

DIJON

(*Laughing*)

Oscar!

WILDE

But you must not call me Oscar. I have chosen a new name for my new life. A beautiful name—because it is going to be a beautiful new life. Sebastian Melmoth.

EUSTACE

Oh, it's a divine name, Oscar! I mean—Sebastian. (FRANK HARRIS *comes in.*)

HARRIS

I shan't be more than a few minutes, Oscar. The place is quite near and the cab's waiting. I shall deliver your note myself, and bring back an answer.

WILDE

Thank you, Frank. I shall be perfectly happy here with my friends until you return. I do hope there will be no difficulty about my admission.

HARRIS

You must not worry. (*He goes out.*)

WILDE

(*Walking up and down, as he does throughout the scene*)

For a while, to collect my thoughts, I am going into a Catholic retreat. At least, I have written to ask them if they will receive me at once. I should like to remain there for quite six months.

DIJON

(*Surprised*)

You are going to shut yourself away again—of your own free will?

EUSTACE

That doesn't sound like you, Oscar. You were always so fond of life.

WILDE

You forget—prison has completely changed me. I am Sebastian Melmoth now. My life is like a work of art. An artist never begins the same work twice, or else it shows that he has

not succeeded. My life before prison was as successful as possible. Now all that is finished and done with.

DIJON

But you are going to write again?

EUSTACE

You must write a new play. In Paris!

WILDE

I don't want to show myself until I have written a new play. So I must hide while I am writing it. The public is so dreadful that it knows a man only by the last thing he has done. If I were to go to Paris now, people would see in me only the convict. (*After a pause*) Scandals used to lend charm, or at least interest, to a man. Now they crush him.

DIJON

You must not think about prison any more.

EUSTACE

Forget it, Sebastian.

WILDE

Even if I could forget what was done to me there, I could never forget the others. During the first six months I was dreadfully unhappy—so utterly miserable that I wanted to kill myself. But what prevented me from doing so was looking at *the others,* and seeing that they were as unhappy as I was, and feeling sorry for them. It's a wonderful thing—pity. I never knew.

EUSTACE

You were allowed to read while you were . . . away?

WILDE

Yes, I have been reading. The governor was a charming man, and most considerate to me. You cannot imagine how much good it did me in prison that "Salome" was being played in Paris just then. In prison it had been entirely forgotten that I was a literary person; but when they saw that my play was a success in Paris, they said to one another, "Well, but this is strange; he has talent, then." And from that moment they let me have all the books I wanted. At first I couldn't think what to ask for. And suddenly I thought of Dante. His "Inferno." I could read that. You see—I was in hell too.

DIJON

Poor Oscar.

EUSTACE

It must have been dreadful for you.

WILDE

It was—dreadful (*in his story-telling voice*). One day a warder came into my cell. "Take off your boots," he said. Of course I began to obey him, then I asked: "What is it? Why must I take off my boots?" He would not answer me. As soon as he had my boots, he said: "Come out of your cell." "Why?" I asked again. I was frightened. What had I done? I could not guess; but then I was often punished for nothing. As soon as we were in the corridor he ordered me to stand with my face to the wall, and went away. There I stood in my stocking

feet waiting. The cold chilled me through; I began standing first on one foot and then on the other, racking my brains as to what they were going to do to me, wondering why I was being punished like this, and how long it would last. After what seemed an eternity, I heard him coming back. I did not dare to move or even look. He came up to me; stopped by me for a moment; my heart stopped; he threw down a pair of boots beside me, and said: "Go to your cell and put those on," and I went into my cell shaking. That's the way they give you a new pair of boots in prison. That's the way they are kind to you.

DIJON

Everybody will be kind to you now, Oscar. In future you will be always amongst friends. You need never feel lonely again. (WILDE *makes no response*) Where is Bosie?

WILDE

He is in Italy, I think. (*Regretfully*) It seems we are not allowed to see each other. His mother threatens to cut off his allowance if he tries to see me, and my friends say they cannot help me if I go to him.

EUSTACE

Why should you be kept apart? I'm sure Bosie wants to see you as much as you want to see him.

WILDE

I am sure, too. It is jealousy on the part of certain people—that is all. But we shall come together again, I know. Bosie would never desert me.

DIJON

(*Encouragingly*)

You will see him directly you come out of your retreat.

WILDE

I hope so. (*Purposely changing the subject*) Do you know one of the punishments that happen to people who have been "away"? They are not allowed to read "The Daily Chronicle"! Coming along I begged to be allowed to read it in the train. "No!" Then I suggested I might be allowed to read it upside down. This they consented to allow, and I read all the way "The Daily Chronicle" upside down, and never enjoyed it so much. (*They laugh. Enter* FRANK HARRIS. *It is impossible to tell from his manner if the news he brings is good or bad.*)

WILDE

(*Seeing* HARRIS)

Oh, Frank, you are soon back. What did they say?

HARRIS

They said nothing to me, Oscar; but gave me this note for you. (*Holds it out.*)

WILDE

(*Is about to take it, but changes his mind*)

No, you open it, and tell me what is in it, Frank. (HARRIS *opens and reads the note to himself*) Well, Frank, what do they say? Are we to start at once?

HARRIS

(*Avoiding a direct answer*)

It seems, Oscar, that these matters take some time to decide. They would need—some months—in which to think it over.

WILDE

(*Takes the letter and crumples it in his hand*)

They won't receive me. Even they won't receive me. (*He sinks into a chair*) I thought my punishment was ended. It has just begun. . . . (*He buries his face in his hands and sobs.*)

Curtain

ACT THREE

SCENE II

SCENE: *Outside a Paris café.*

An orchestra is playing inside the café. One or two tables are placed on either side of the café entrance, which is in the center. A WAITER *is cleaning one of the tables when* FRANK HARRIS *comes out of the café and looks up and down the street.*

WAITER

Is monsieur looking for somebody?

HARRIS

I had expected to meet a gentleman here. But he is either late, or has forgotten the appointment.

WAITER

An English gentleman, monsieur?

HARRIS

Yes. Man by the name of Melmoth, know him at all?

WAITER

(*Shaking his head*)

I have not heard the name. (*Pause*) At first, when you said English gentleman, I thought you meant Monsieur Oscar Wilde. Excuse my mistake. He often meets his friends here.

HARRIS

(*Embarrassed*)

Really? Then you know him?

WAITER

I know him very well. (*Smiling*) Too well! Perhaps that is why he does not come here this evening.

HARRIS

I don't follow. Speak plainly, man.

WAITER

Monsieur Wilde drinks much. But he has not much money. Because of what he owes me, he stays away. When he can pay, he will come back.

HARRIS

(*Shocked*)

Mr. Wilde owes *you* money?

WAITER

But yes. For myself, I do not mind. Mr. Wilde is a nice gentleman. But I have a wife, and three little . . .

HARRIS

(*Taking out his purse*)

How much is the debt?

WAITER

(*After calculation*)

Twenty francs.

HARRIS

(*Holding out the money*)

The debt is paid!

WAITER

Many thanks, monsieur.

HARRIS

(*Brushing the thanks aside*)

How is Mr. Wilde these days? I have not seen him for some months.

WAITER

He is always the same. He talks. And he drinks. He is a nice gentleman. But some people—the English tourists—do not like to see him here. When he sits down, they get up and go.

HARRIS

Indeed! And what does Mr. Wilde do then?

WAITER

He does not mind. So long as he can pay for something to drink, he is quite happy I think.

HARRIS

Yes, yes. Bring me a bock.

WAITER

Certainly, monsieur. (*Exit.* HARRIS *has just sat down, when* LORD ALFRED DOUGLAS *enters from the right. As he is about to sit at another table he notices* HARRIS *and goes over to him.*)

LORD ALFRED

That's curious, Harris, meeting you here!

HARRIS

(*Distantly*)

May I ask, Lord Alfred Douglas, why my presence here should seem curious to you?

LORD ALFRED

Because I came here to look for somebody you know. (*Pause*) I came to look for Oscar.

HARRIS

Indeed!

LORD ALFRED

Is that very surprising?

HARRIS

(*Dramatically*)

When Oscar came out of prison there were familiar faces to greet him. The faces of his *friends*. I do not remember yours amongst them, Lord Alfred.

LORD ALFRED

How could I have been there? You know quite well why it was impossible for me to be present.

HARRIS

I have been told several stories by friends of Oscar's.

LORD ALFRED

Friends of Oscar's. I've no doubt you've been told a lot of lies. I can hear the shrill little voices—denouncing me as the

man who left a friend in his hour of need. But Oscar won't tell you that. It is for his sake that we are not living under the same roof now. The allowance made him by his wife carries with it the condition that we shall not do that. But we meet each other constantly. You wouldn't know of our meetings. What business is it of yours, or anybody else?

HARRIS

Strictly speaking, I suppose it is not my business. But, unfortunately, circumstances have made your friendship with Oscar a piece of public property. It will remain that now, I'm afraid.

LORD ALFRED

You're right there. A friendship is something between two people which belongs only to them. It cannot be understood by others. Nor have others the right to try and understand it. People won't leave Oscar and me alone. When he came out of prison he stayed with me at my villa in Naples and we could have remained there perfectly happy, if his family and mine hadn't separated us. But of course they had to interfere. Lately, though, I've come into some money and I'm able to help Oscar. I have always been his friend and I shall remain his friend so long as he needs me.

HARRIS

(*Changing his attitude*)

Well spoken, young man. Oscar has need of friends to stand by him. He knows he can count on me.

LORD ALFRED

Are you meeting Oscar here?

HARRIS

Yes, by appointment. We have some business to discuss. (*Looking at his watch*) He's very late.

LORD ALFRED

I won't interrupt you then.

HARRIS

But isn't *your* business with Oscar important?

LORD ALFRED

Not important. Oscar still loves talking to me, and I still love listening to him. He talks as wonderfully as ever. And tonight I have a surprise for him—a present.

HARRIS

Tell me, in confidence, how badly is Oscar in need of money?

LORD ALFRED

So long as I'm alive he'll be provided for. I have made up my mind on that. But Oscar was always extravagant, and after what he has suffered it is a pleasure for me to give him what luxuries I can. A horse of mine has won a race this afternoon. That is why there is a special present for Oscar. I will leave you now, and return later.

HARRIS

Shall I tell him you've been here?

LORD ALFRED

Please say nothing. But if your business with him won't take too long, I'll look in again later.

HARRIS

I shan't keep him long. It's just a little matter of business that . . . (*Seeing* OSCAR *in the distance*) Why, that is Oscar, getting out of the cab. He's grown much stouter. (LORD ALFRED *glances in the direction indicated, then goes quickly out. The* WAITER *brings* HARRIS' *drink.*)

WAITER

Your bock, monsieur. (*Enter* WILDE.)

HARRIS

Ah, here you are at last, Melmoth.

WILDE

My dear Frank!

HARRIS

What will you drink?

WAITER

Absinthe, monsieur? (WILDE *nods and the* WAITER *goes into the café.*)

HARRIS

I have settled your little account with the waiter, Melmoth.

WILDE

That is very kind of you, Frank. But please do not call me Melmoth. Oscar Wilde is not a name of which to be ashamed.

HARRIS

I thought you preferred to be known as Melmoth now.

WILDE

I only use that name to spare the blushes of the postman. To my friends, and to posterity, I am always Oscar Wilde. Tell me, Frank, how do you think I am looking?

HARRIS

Oh, very well, Oscar; very well, indeed.

WILDE

Honestly, Frank?

HARRIS

No. To be honest, I think you looked far better when you came out of prison.

WILDE

(*Reproachfully*)

You always say what you think.

HARRIS

(*Pompously*)

I hope I do. To say what we think is the nearest we mortals can attain to truth.

WILDE

Truth can be dangerous and so cruel. We should never tell people the truth. It is kinder to tell them the little lies which they would like to believe. That is the highest form of charity.

HARRIS

I have a great deal to discuss with you, Oscar. And I haven't much time.

WILDE

I am sorry I am so late, Frank. But what could you expect? In your letter you told me you wanted to see me on business. Now if you had said pleasure. . . . (*The* WAITER *brings* WILDE'S *drink.*)

WAITER

Absinthe, monsieur. (*He pours the absinthe out and puts the perforated spoon on the glass.* WILDE *removes the spoon and pours water into the glass.*)

WILDE

But, even then, I fear I should have been late today. You see, today is Thursday.

HARRIS

What has that got to do with it?

WILDE

Thursday is the one day of the week for which I live. You don't know, Frank, what a great romantic passion is.

HARRIS

Is that what you are suffering from?

WILDE

The suffering hasn't begun yet. That comes . . . afterwards. Such an ugly word—afterwards. Do you remember once in the summer you wired me from Calais to meet you at Maire's restaurant and I was very late?

HARRIS

You're always late, Oscar.

WILDE

I drove up to the restaurant, in time, and I was just getting out of the cab when a little soldier passed, and our eyes met. He had great dark eyes and an exquisite olive-dark face—a Florentine bronze, Frank, by a great master. I got out hypnotized and followed him down the boulevard as in a dream. I overtook him and asked him to come and have a drink; and he said to me in his quaint French way: *"Ce n'est pas de refus!"* (*He beckons to the* WAITER, *who brings the absinthe bottle and refills* WILDE'S *glass.*)

We went into a café, and we began to talk. I was in a hurry to meet you, but I had to make friends with him first. He began by telling me all about his mother, Frank—(*Smiling*) —yes, his mother. But at last I got from him that he was always free on Thursdays. And I found out that the thing he desired most in the world was a bicycle; he talked of nickel-plated handle-bars—and finally I told him it might be arranged. He was very grateful, and so we made a rendezvous for the next Thursday, and I came on at once to dine with you.

HARRIS

Good heavens! A soldier, a nickel-plated bicycle, and a great romantic passion!

WILDE

If I had said a brooch, or a necklace, or some trinket which would have cost ten times as much, you would have found it quite natural.

HARRIS

Yes; but I don't think I'd have introduced the necklace the first evening, if there had been any romance in the affair. And as for a nickel-plated bicycle. (*He laughs.*)

WILDE

Only the handle-bars were nickel-plated. He comes to see me on it! Rides to and fro from the barracks. You have no idea how intelligent he is. I lend him books, and his mind is opening like a flower. Once, when you were in Paris, you asked me to a dinner-party one Thursday night—you always seem to choose Thursday, Frank.

HARRIS

(*Laughingly*)

I'll remember to make it another day next time!

WILDE

Don't laugh at me; I am quite serious. I told him I had to go and dine with you. He didn't mind. He was glad when I said that I had an English editor for a friend, glad that I should have someone to talk to about London and the people I used to know. If it had been a woman, she would have been jealous of my past. He asked me if he might come and leave his bicycle outside and look through the window of the restaurant, just to see us at dinner. He would be so happy to see me in dress-clothes talking to gentlemen and ladies. He came, but I never saw him. The next time we met he told me all about it; how he had picked you out from my description; he was delightful about it all. Such unselfish devotion. . . .

(HARRIS *looks at* WILDE *for a moment with tolerant amusement.*)

HARRIS

Oscar, have you been writing anything lately?

WILDE

Oh, Frank, I cannot. You know my rooms; how can I write in such miserable poverty? (*He beckons to the* WAITER, *who again replenishes his glass.*)

HARRIS

You could easily gain thousands, and live like a prince again. Why not make the effort?

WILDE

If I had pleasant, sunny rooms, I'd try . . . It's harder than you think.

HARRIS

Nonsense, it's easy for you. Your punishment has made your name known in every country in the world. A book of yours would sell like wildfire; a play would draw in any capital.

WILDE

When I take up my pen all the past comes back. I cannot bear the thoughts . . . did you know that when I was arrested the police let the reporters come to the cell and stare at me? As if I had been a monster on show.

HARRIS

I think it would be finer, instead of taking the punishment lying down, to trample it under your feet, and make it a rung

of the ladder. That is what you were going to do when you came out of prison.

WILDE

That talk about reformation, Frank, was all nonsense. No one ever really reforms or changes. I am what I always was.

HARRIS

The only thing that will ever make you write is absolute, blank poverty. That's the sharpest spur of all—necessity.

WILDE

You don't know me. I would kill myself.

HARRIS

Suicide is the natural end of the world-weary. You love life as much as you ever did.

WILDE

Yes, that's true. Life delights me, still. The people passing on the boulevards, the play of the sunshine in the trees; the noise, the quick movement of the cabs, the costumes of the *cochers* and *sergents-de-ville;* workers and beggars, pimps and prostitutes—all please me to the soul, charm me—and if you would only let me talk instead of bothering me to write, I should be quite happy. Why should I write any more? I have done enough for fame.

HARRIS

You ought to work, Oscar. After all, why should anyone help you, if you will not help yourself?

WILDE

I was born to sing the joy and pride of life, the pleasure of living, the delight in everything beautiful in this most beau-

tiful world, and they took me and tortured me till I learned pity and sorrow. Now I cannot sing the joy, because I know the suffering, and I was never made to sing of suffering.

HARRIS

We must get down to business.

WILDE

Ah . . . business. . . .

HARRIS

It is not going to be pleasant.

WILDE

Business never is.

HARRIS

I wrote and told you that I had sold the play "Mr. and Mrs. Daventry" to Mrs. Patrick Campbell.

WILDE

Really, Frank, I never thought you would take my scenario; you had no right to touch it!

HARRIS

But, Oscar, you refused to write the play yourself, or to collaborate with me, and you accepted my £50 for the story.

WILDE

No man could write a play on another's scenario! *C'est ridicule.*

HARRIS

I told you that if I made anything out of the play, I would send you some more money.

WILDE

It is sure to be a failure. Plays cannot be written by amateurs. It's quite absurd of you, Frank, who hardly ever go to the theater, to think you can write a successful play straight off. (*Complete change of tone*) You ought to get a good sum down in advance of royalties from Mrs. Patrick Campbell, and at once send me half of it.

HARRIS

You have already had £50, Oscar. And immediately the play was announced Mrs. Brown Potter wrote to tell me that she paid you £100 for this scenario some years ago. Is it true?

WILDE

I am a dramatist and you are not. How can you meddle with my scenario! *C'est ridicule!*

HARRIS

And now it appears that Horace Sedger, Beerbohm Tree, George Alexander, Ada Rehan and Olga Nethersole have all bought the same scenario! What does it mean, Oscar?

WILDE

It means that you have deprived me of a steady income.

HARRIS

What?

WILDE

I was just about to start selling that play to the French managers, and when I had exhausted them, I should have tried the German managers. Now your interference has ruined everything! Therefore, you owe me more than you will ever get from the play, which in any case is bound to fall flat!

HARRIS

Oscar, I don't know what to say! We have been friends. . . .

WILDE

(*Almost in tears*)

I thought you were my friend. When you gave me that paltry £50 I thought you were taking the scenario as a—as a formality. So that it shouldn't seem like charity. In order not to hurt my feelings.

HARRIS

I don't think I need ever have any fear of hurting your feelings. You are obviously not in a condition to discuss the matter any further at present. (*He turns to go.*)

WILDE

Frank!

HARRIS

What is it?

WILDE

The waiter . . . the drinks. . . . (HARRIS *gives the* WAITER *a coin and goes. With a sigh of relief,* WILDE *opens his newspaper The* WAITER *is sprinkling the sawdust with water.* LORD ALFRED *appears and watches* WILDE, *who does not see him.*)

WILDE

(*After looking at the* WAITER *for a few moments*)

What beautiful flowers you are watering. Tulips, lilies, and roses. . . . (*The* WAITER *looks mystified*) Don't you see them?

WAITER

Yes, monsieur; they are beautiful flowers. (WILDE *pushes his empty glass across the table to the* WAITER, *who refills it.*)

WILDE

Beautiful flowers! (LORD ALFRED *remains in the background looking at* WILDE.)

WILDE

(*Holding the glass*)

Absinthe . . . it helps you to see things as you wish they were. Then you see them as they are not. Finally, you see them as they really are. And that is the most horrible thing in the world. (*The* WAITER *goes into the café.* LORD ALFRED *comes up to* WILDE's *table. Seeing him*) Things as you wish they were.

LORD ALFRED

Oscar. (LORD ALFRED *sits at the table.*)

WILDE

Sh! This is a dream. I am telling one of my stories, and all the stars have come out to listen.

When Jesus returned to Nazareth, Nazareth was so changed that He no longer recognized His own city.

The Nazareth where He had lived was full of lamentations and tears; this city was filled with outbursts of laughter and song. . . .

In the street He saw a woman whose face and raiment were painted and whose feet were shod with pearls, and behind her came slowly, as a hunter, a young man who wore a cloak of two colors. The face of the woman was the face of an idol, and the eyes of the young man were bright with lust. And Jesus followed swiftly, and touched the hand of the young man, and said to him: "Why do you look at this woman in such-wise?" And the young man turned round, and recognized Him, and said: "But I was blind once and you gave me my sight. At what else should I look?"

And Jesus ran forward and touched the painted raiment of the woman, and said to her: "Is there no other way in which to walk save the way of sin?" And the woman turned round and recognized Him, and laughed, and said: "But you forgave me my sins, and the way is a pleasant way."

When Jesus had passed out of the city, He saw, seated by the roadside, a young man who was weeping. He went towards him, touched the long locks of his hair, and said to him: "Why are you weeping?" The young man looked up, recognized Him, and made answer: "But I was dead once,

and you raised me from the dead. What else should I do but weep?" (*He makes an attempt to get up, finds that he is too unsteady, and sinks back into his chair. He speaks without looking at* LORD ALFRED.)

I perceive that I am drunk! I find that alcohol, taken persistently, and in sufficiently large quantities, produces all the effects of intoxication! (*After a pause*) I have had my hand on the moon. What is the use of trying to rise a little way from the ground! (WILDE *is apparently no longer conscious of* LORD ALFRED'S *presence.* LORD ALFRED *goes to the door of the café and beckons to the* WAITER, *who comes out.*)

LORD ALFRED

(*Gives the* WAITER *a roll of notes*)

When I have gone, I want you to give this to Mr. Wilde. It's some money I won on a horse for him this afternoon.

WAITER

(*Glances at the notes, very respectfully*)

Certainly, monsieur. (LORD ALFRED *goes. The* WAITER *looks after him, and at the notes in his hand.* WILDE *beckons to the* WAITER.)

WILDE

Will you ask the orchestra to play something gay?

WAITER

Something gay? Yes, monsieur. (*He goes into the café. The* ORCHESTRA *plays "See Me Dance the Polka," the tune which was played at the end of the scene when* WILDE *dined with* CHARLIE PARKER. *As he hears it,* WILDE *bursts into a horrible laugh, which ceases abruptly as the* WAITER *returns.*)

WAITER

The gentleman who was here asked me to give monsieur this—your winnings from the race. (*Gives him the notes.*)

WILDE

(*Looks at the notes; then he turns to the chair in which* LORD ALFRED *has been sitting and speaks as though he is still there*)

Thank you, Bosie. Thank you.

Curtain