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# The Development and Debut of Adam Esquenazi Douglas' Play "Murder and the English Gentleman"

Adam Esquenazi Douglas  
*University of Arkansas, Fayetteville*

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THE DEVELOPMENT AND DEBUT OF ADAM ESQUENAZI DOUGLAS' PLAY  
MURDER AND THE ENGLISH GENTLEMAN

THE DEVELOPMENT AND DEBUT OF ADAM ESQUENAZI DOUGLAS' PLAY  
MURDER AND THE ENGLISH GENTLEMAN

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts in Drama

By

Adam Esquenazi Douglas  
University of Arkansas  
Bachelor of Arts in Drama, 2008

May 2012  
University of Arkansas

## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the development process of the creation of a new playscript, “Murder and the English Gentleman”, an adaptation of the short story “Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime” by Oscar Wilde. The play is a wild, comedy-of-manners presented in classic Wildean 19<sup>th</sup> century drawing room style. The document details the process of getting this script from short story to script to stage. Also included are some of the play’s most significant drafts, the original short story by Wilde, production and rehearsal journals, and production photos. The play was presented by the University of Arkansas' Boar's Head Players for the *2010 New Play Showcase* at Nadine Baum Studios at the Walton Arts Center in Fayetteville, Arkansas.

This thesis is approved for  
Recommendation to the  
Graduate Council

Thesis Director:

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Roger D. Gross, Ph.D.

Thesis Committee:

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Prof. Patricia Martin, MFA

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Prof. Patrick Stone, MFA

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## **DEDICATION**

My thesis is dedicated to Miss Lauren Anderson. Thanks for talking me down in the parking lot. And to Sean Phillip Mabrey, for giving me the courage to put a man in a dress. And to Brandi Hoofnagle, for everything else.



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## INTRODUCTION

As part of the MFA Playwriting program at the University of Arkansas, playwriting candidates are allowed at least one fully realized production of their original work to be presented before an audience. Since theatre is a highly collaborative art, this is a multi-faceted endeavor, with many efforts coming from many disciplines.

But it all begins with the script. What this thesis will do is document the layered journey *Murder and the English Gentleman* underwent at the University of Arkansas, and offer insight on where its future will be. This thesis will showcase my attempt to understand two critical aspects necessary to make this playscript: the art of adaptation and the exploration of the intent of writer Oscar Wilde through his satirical short story that I chose for this project.

This thesis will begin with my initial purpose of writing the script, how this perspective shifted, and how it was reflected in the script. Along with this, the script development, auditioning, casting, rehearsal, and performance of the playscript will be examined through journals kept at the time, and commented upon afterwards. Finally, this thesis will take a critical look at lingering issues with the script and what more I can do to make it not just a successful play, but, more importantly, an acceptable adaptation of one of the works of one of the world's greatest writers.

This thesis will examine the many facets, obvious and hidden, that a dramatist must consider when making this literary leap. Hopefully, from my many pitfalls and surprise successes, dramatists hoping to brave this style will be given a clearer map of what their journey will truly be like.

## I. HISTORY, DEVELOPMENT, AND THE FIRST DRAFT

### PURPOSE: WHAT IS ADAPTATION & WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Adaptation is a most challenging artistic endeavor. The task, ideally, is to take an outstanding work (be it story, song, painting, etc.) in a particular medium and find a way to make it as skilled a work in another. It's the artistic equivalent of making lightning strike twice in the same spot.

Given the grandness of this task, it is stunning that adaptation has become the norm in popular entertainment. Film is rife with it. Theatre is well on its way if Disney has anything to say about it. However, many of these adaptations fail. This goes beyond the fans of the original work complaining that a minor character in chapter two got the axe. Most of the trouble stems from one simple, basic, critical error: poor storytelling.

When approaching adaptation, one must wear many hats. One must wear the hat of honor and respect for why people remember the work to begin with. This means, for example, that the Wolfman must transform by moonlight, Mary Poppins must fly using an umbrella, and Batman better have the Batmobile. These are crucial aspects of the original, but problems arise when they become the most important aspect. Spectacle has its place in drama, but that place is hardly at the front of the line.

What is too often missing from adaptations are the heart and soul of the pieces, the real reasons we fell in love with them. Too many creators focus so strongly on the *clothing* of pieces, the beautiful surfaces and textures, that they ignore what brings the work to life. And, in doing so, with one parent being the source material, the other the adapter, this artistic progeny is stillborn.

Adaptation is becoming quite the rage on stage. Audiences flock to a preexisting product, so it's wise for any rising dramatist to have one familiar piece in his or her pocket. At the time

of this writing, *The Importance of Being Earnest* has been revived to sold-out crowds and rave reviews on Broadway. Wilde remains one of the world's most produced playwrights, which is stunning considering how relatively brief his theatrical library really is with only eight published play scripts.

The brevity of Wilde's theatrical work list is exactly why I decided to devote my time and efforts to producing a new piece of Wildean theatre. There is simply a treasure trove of Wilde's non-theatrical work, especially his short prose, waiting on tip-toes to hop on stage. Wilde deserves to survive in an increasingly illiterate world, and theatre is prime real estate for his work. And with adaptation proving to be such a lucrative avenue it's foolish to ignore him. With all of this in mind, I decided to plunge head-first.

## CONCEPTION: “WILDE”LY FUNNY PROBLEMS

One does not commit himself to adapting Oscar Wilde without knowing that he will have to create a comedic *tour de force*. True, Wilde’s writings had many serious sides as well, but his best known, and most commercially successful, were and are his comedies. I knew from the moment pen hit paper that I could leave no breathing room for audiences to be anything but completely entertained. Oscar Wilde was the soul of wit and all of his work, from plays to poetry, reflected that. I knew I would have to be at the top of my game, and then some.

Of course, placing a piece in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century is never an easy task. Setting it in London becomes a hurdle as well. Period pieces, as this would have to be, are complicated on stage for multiple reasons. Costuming is the first struggle that comes to mind, as dress of the time wasn’t known for its simplicity. Actors have to be ready to master entirely new ways of speaking, behaving, and even walking. Set designers do not have the convenience of placing modern furniture around the space and instead have to endeavor to affordably obtain period furniture. The list is nearly endless.

Perhaps the reason Wilde’s works aren’t adapted could simply be due to the difficulty of mounting a production. But, nothing ventured and all that. If there was ever a time to develop such a high-maintenance piece, it is when resources are more readily available, and a thesis production is just that. Challenges should be appreciated for their depth, not shied away from because of their height. Otherwise, how would we get anywhere?

Comedy can be an art form as deeply rewarding as it is deeply difficult. It can be a potent tool in not only holding a mirror to society’s face, but also in wielding a hammer with which to shape it. To me, comedy is magical.

In my fascination with the field I, of course, came across the works of Oscar Wilde. Unfortunately, my first foray into Wilde led me to his acclaimed novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* which I liked, but didn't love. It was beautifully written, and obviously the work of a first-class poet. But I was a student of George Carlin, not Chaucer, and poetry was of little interest. I was unable to see the celebrated comedic genius so many claimed Wilde to be.

It wasn't until years later and a chance encounter with *The Importance of Being Earnest* that I realized what everyone was talking about. This is a sublime comedy and a satire so sharp, so brave that I was alternating between holding my breath in awe of its accomplishment and bursting out with deeply deserved belly laughs. I became a fan if not fanatic overnight.

While I found a wealth of Wilde's work in prose and poetry, Wilde's theatrical library left something to be desired. Simply put, it was pretty skimpy. This, in my opinion, is terribly unfortunate. So much work in so many other fields, but a relatively brief catalogue for my favorite entertainment form.

Entering my graduate playwriting program, I knew there was a semester dedicated to adaptation. There was no question in my mind as to who I would want to adapt. However, early in the semester, we were encouraged to write nature-themed plays to be submitted for a nature-themed arts festival happening in Fayetteville

Originally my full-length for the class was to be an adaptation of a public-domain superhero very cleverly named "Nature Man". The further I got in planning the script, the worse it got. To avoid having to plow through a mediocre story to create an equally mediocre play, I trashed the concept (or set it aside as writers are taught to do), and reconsidered.

Finding my greatest success thus far in writing comedy, I considered my options. Finding works in public domain was the tricky part. I had to turn away from comic books and look to

literature. I thought of my favorite dead writers. Sadly, I am too much of a contemporary literature fan, so my choices were slim. Vonnegut's work isn't available yet, and Shakespeare has been done to death on stage. And none of them were nature-themed. A tough decision came when I decided to ditch any attempt to be a part of the approaching nature festival and, instead, follow my initial passion. That left positively only one man of words: Oscar Wilde.

Years ago, I came across a book of Mr. Wilde's work, promptly bought it, added it to the reading stack, and never looked at it again. For this project, I dusted off the tome and cracked it open. I shied away from the fairy tales: too costly and technically demanding for the stage; and children's theatre is an entirely different universe of dramatic writing, one I was not at all familiar with.

Looking at the titles of the stories only, I was drawn to a particular yarn: *The Sphinx without a Secret*. Highlighter in hand, I was ready to find my perfect play.

Sadly, it wasn't there. The story was a fine bit of prose with excellent dialogue, but lacking in drama. I'd have to search elsewhere. The next most exciting title, *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime*, would prove to be my Victorian remedy.

The story was crisp, witty, and insightful. It read and felt like classic, comedic Wildean work. But, to my surprise, the story contained a very compelling side of darkness. Murder was the crime of titular fame, and by story's end, Lord Arthur was indeed guilty of it. At last, I had it.

Only, there were about twenty-plus characters, and the resolution of the climax was achieved via a letter Arthur received. I knew resources would not be that extravagant, and the ending was simply too tame for theatre. Keeping the main points of the story intact, I made it my duty to hammer out an acceptable dramatic story, complete with thrilling turn-arounds,

incendiary satire, and a stunning conclusion with no mention of a letter whatsoever. I recognized that this would be no easy task and the most daunting stretch of my skills as a dramatist to date.

It was this recognition that told me that this was the project to pursue.



## **THE FIRST DRAFT: KEEP OR KILL?**

A full-length script was our final project in Graduate Playwriting: Adaptation class and I decided Wilde would be mine. We had a little over a month to create a final product. I reread the story and took inventory. The first, biggest problem was who in the story to include and who to cut. The cast of the short story was enormous and, to make matters worse, most were essential to the story's plot. Issues were numerous.

I decided to boil down the main components of the story and cherry-pick characters suited to the various absolutely needed aspects. The play, of course, needed a protagonist. I stayed with the story and made the protagonist the affluent Englishman Lord Arthur Savile. The play required a fortune-teller; I assigned this task to the character of Dr. Podgers who was also the fortune-teller in the short story. The play needed an accessory to murder and since Arthur was, for the most part, a bumbling, rather incompetent would-be murderer, he would require a compass to point him in the right direction. This was one of my first lessons in proper adaptation.

A good portion of the short story's comedy came from the various ways different cultures responded to the subject of death and murder. The English were morbidly interested in hearing about it, but terribly befuddled when actually considering it. The Russians were cold and ambivalent towards the subject. The Germans were smooth, calculating, and stoic, particularly the character of Winckelkopf: an amateur bomb maker who assisted Arthur in his bloody quest. Winckelkopf seemed the best suited to fill the role of Arthur's accomplice, but would require me to brave the depths of appropriate adaptation.

An amateur bomb maker does not have a place in distinguished English society, so to have Winckelkopf be more than a one-scene character, I decided to make him Arthur's personal man-servant. This seemed more in line with the situation at hand. Arthur would feel more

comfortable in sharing his personal, private woes with a trusted source, such as a man-servant, especially in this particular matter. It seemed an apt transformation of Winckelkopf's character, and would lend to the cross-cultural comedy of the show.

*Lord Arthur Savile's Crime*, like so much of Wilde's work, dealt with secrets, and what really lives inside the stuffy, pampered mask so many of the British elite wore. To incorporate the theme into the show I gave Winckelkopf (later nick-named Winky), the somewhat hidden back story that he was, in fact, an escaped convict who had been sent to prison in Germany for multiple homicides hiding out in London as a professional man-servant. Hints of his brutal past would leak out here and there but the full story would, intentionally, remain a mystery. This, I felt, gave the character layers as well as justified his useful assistance in helping Arthur deal with his need to murder. The theme of secrets would return to visit (or haunt) every character in the play eventually.

The conflict of the play needed an objective. Why did Arthur absolutely *have to* commit murder? The story justified it by having Arthur feel guilty about marrying his fiancé, Sybil, with the looming threat of him having to commit murder hanging over him. It was unfair to her he thought and this is why he pressed on. This deceptively satirical impetus was successful in the story and would, I decided, work for the play. Thus the character of Sybil was included.

The play had the characters needed for the main story points, but it felt light. Only so much could be gained from these four figures, and, more importantly, none of them had any of the best lines in the short story. This was a comedy, this was Wilde, it needed some larger-than-life personalities. Two of the more interesting characters were a pair of women: Lady Windermere and Lady Clementia. Windermere, in the story, was a 19<sup>th</sup>-century party girl who delighted in debauchery and made sure everyone knew it. Clementia was a bitter, old crow,

dismissive of romance, quick to judge harshly, and always happy to receive presents. They were irresistible characters and potentially unwise to not utilize. The question became how to make them more essential to the story.

Thankfully, this task proved easier than I initially thought. Lady Windermere, I decided, would be Sybil's mother rather than just an acquaintance of Arthur's family. This gave her presence more justification, added extra depth to Sybil, and helped increase the conflict by adding more urgency to Arthur's getting married, and, ultimately, to his need to commit murder.

In the story, Lady Clementia was Arthur's first botched attempt at murder, and so she would be in mine. I really wanted to experiment with as many styles of comedy as I could with the piece and decided that an attempted murder could be best suited to physical comedy. In the story, Lady Clementia simply accepted a disguised poison capsule, not aware of its true nature, from Arthur, which she ultimately did not ingest. In my story I would make the task considerably more difficult for Arthur, making it a physical gauntlet to, hopefully, the audience's delight. This allowed me to stretch my comedic wings, as well as push the conflict and story forward.

However, it's hard to not immediately regard a character as a bad person if they try to commit murder, so Lady Clem would not do as an innocent bystander. I made it my task to take the brief character traits exhibited in the story, and elevate them to something truly appalling. I wanted the audience to not be sad if she died. Lady Clem was stubborn, rude, and blunt in the story but, strangely enough, calmly so. She reminded me of Lady Bracknell from *The Importance of Being Earnest*, a character whose venom was as brutal as it was hilarious, only subdued. I decided to remove the character's filter completely, and let her viciousness soar.

The play was feeling much more complete and fun, but I was still unable to reach an ending. Looking back at the completed pages I found myself laughing out loud, but not much

else, and the sentiment was echoed in class workshops. I was praised for my simulation of Wildean dialogue and wit and pushing the story forward, but the play was feeling hollow. The advice I received was that trouble was coming from the protagonist: Arthur.

His drive lacked fuel. Sure, he wanted his wedding to go well and his life to be happy, but there needed to be more. An actor would be looking for more, particularly in terms of objectives. Why did Arthur value propriety and duty? I turned to the story, but, unfortunately, it wasn't much help either. I would have to make the choice to deviate from the story, and create something wholly original to give this character the depth and heart he was lacking.

Duty, a prominent theme in the story, is learned, not inherent. Arthur is driven by his sense of duty, but its origins are never really examined. Since bloodlines were so valued by British aristocracy, I decided that Arthur's drive would come from familial roots. In the story Arthur's father was deceased, but his mother was still alive. The answer appeared.

I decided it would be beneficial to the story, and a very believable circumstance, that Arthur was taught the value of duty by his father, and that it was this lesson that he clung to following his death to honor him. A nice, acceptable circumstance, but intangible. I wanted to personify it a bit more. Arthur's mother, The Duchess of Paisley, would be the final member of the cast. She would be the reminder of Arthur's past, while also an active figure in his present.

The addition of The Duchess to the story aided me in finding an ending. By giving Arthur the extra objective, and secondary conflict, of adhering to duty in the face of such madness, I was able to present and bring two conflicts full circle. One was the external conflict: Arthur's need to murder. Second was the internal conflict: Arthur's battle with the concept of duty and the ways it can, sometimes uncomfortably and tragically, evolve.

The script was my most expensive show to date. Though I kept the playing space limited

to one room in one building, the cast was my largest to date, and the time period and status of the characters would call for some costly costumes. It would not be easy to produce. This was an unfortunate evil I accepted.

The story was as follows: Arthur, a well-meaning but naïve English Lord, who, while at a surprise party thrown by his mother and future-mother-in-law to celebrate his recent engagement to the love of his life, Sybil Windermere, has his palm read and future told. In the future, he discovers, he will be forced to commit murder, the details of the incident not available. Arthur's world was turned upside-down by this news. He decided that he would be unable to marry Sybil as dutifully as he hoped, giving her all the love and attention she deserved, if he had to worry about committing murder, so he decided to find a way to kill someone as quickly as he could. He turned to his man-servant, Winckelkopf, for advice, who recommends slow-acting poison: a less bloody and harder to trace back to means of murder.

Arthur invites a distant relative, Lady Clementia, a spitting, scathing shell of a human being to try and feed her the poison by means of a Turkish Delight, which, after repeated efforts, she doesn't eat, but eventually takes with her as she leaves. Relieved, Arthur waits to hear news that Lady Clem has died. Weeks pass, though, and she still hasn't, and Arthur is a total wreck. Even the surprise arrival of his lady-love, Sybil, who has been in Italy working with doctors to cure her of her narcolepsy, doesn't boost his spirits, especially when he finds out Lady Clem has indeed died, but not because of him. Desperate, Arthur takes to the streets with a knife to kill whoever he can, promising to kill himself if he fails, as he sees that as dutiful.

He fails, and returns, ready to commit his final act. Winckelkopf, though, offers an alternative. He will tell Arthur's family that Arthur was murdered, allowing Arthur to escape to Germany to live out his life in hiding. This, Arthur decides, is acceptable and he runs off.

Winckelkopf delivers the “news”, but Arthur returns, realizing that what he is doing is the most undutiful thing of all, that being lying. At the moment before he confesses, Dr. Podgers interrupts and clears the room, subtly offering Arthur the option of killing him (Podgers), thus fulfilling Arthur’s “duty” to commit murder, and putting Podgers out of his misery, the stresses of being a fortune teller causing a rather unpleasant life.

Arthur agrees, pushes Podgers off the building, and the final scene we see him happy, married, and ready to move on with life, but, without his or anyone else’s knowledge, the poison disguised in the Turkish Delight is given to Sybil as a wedding gift, with Sybil excited to enjoy the Delight on the train ride to their honeymoon.

The play adhered to the short story for the most part, with a notable departure occurring at the moment of murder. In the story, Arthur, at wit’s end, sees Podgers standing on the edge of a bridge, possibly about to commit suicide by jumping off of it (the story never makes clear what exactly Podgers was doing there, but hints at suicide), and decides to take the initiative and push Podgers over the edge. Since there was no real justification or examination of this moment in the short story, I took it upon myself to give it depth, as it is arguably the turn-around of the entire story, and deserving of a bigger, more meaningful moment.

I felt this decision was positive in a few ways. One, it added drama to such a wildly comedic piece and reminded the audience that we were still dealing with dark subjects. Also, it gave depth to Arthur, and promoted Podgers from a functionary secondary figure in the story, to a more full-realized, three-dimensional character, beset with his own, terrible conflict. Most importantly, though, I feel this decision helped in making this piece more than just a translation from book to theatre. This decision through its deviation established the play as its own entity

and made it a truer *adaptation*. It was a bold choice, but one that needed to be made if the story was ever going to work on stage.

I presented the first draft of the script in class, our final project for the semester, and the piece felt acceptable. However, I had already started considering making this my thesis show, so I knew acceptable would not be acceptable. I asked for brutal honesty and got it.

Length was a concern, as it often is for me, so cutting would definitely be needed. The play had a lot of fun, but I was encouraged to find even more. There is an unofficial rule in comedy that something funny should happen every seven lines or so, and I was urged to find wit where it could organically happen. Arthur's monologues, of which there were around four or so of note, were dragging, especially considering nothing else was happening when he delivered them. Roger suggested I find something for him to do. On a whim I suggested he plays piano. To my surprise, Roger agreed, though he encouraged me to find a way to connect the music played to the state of Arthur's mind, as well as trim the monologues where I could.

The points of most criticism were the objectives of Arthur and Podgers, Podgers in particular. Arthur's obsession with duty needed to be further developed, and since Duchess also needed a little extra something, this I figured would not be so difficult. It was Podgers that was the tricky part. My task, ultimately, was to find a reason that a fortune-teller would want to commit suicide out of fear for the future. This would not be a simple objective to create, so I decided to tackle the other issues first.

## II. STAGED READING

### REWRITES: WALKING THE STREETS OF LONDON

Over the next few months I churned out three drafts. They were mostly cosmetic: tightening scenes, fixing errors, adding jokes. To get a more substantial rewrite, I revisited my highlighted version of the short story hoping to find any particularly juicy bits of prose I had neglected to include. As fate would have it, I did. In they went. I watched various recorded productions of other Wildean plays such as *An Ideal Husband*, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, and, of course, *The Importance of Being Earnest* to get properly in tune with the style of late 19<sup>th</sup> century British class comedies. They were certainly helpful. I researched quotes from Wilde himself to see if there were any to lend not only a more credible voice to the piece, but support the themes in general. As Wilde is quite one of the most quoted men in history, I found whole books of them.

The third draft came along well: gags polished, drama upped, and two pages reduced. The piece felt sharper, quicker, and more gripping all around. However, the changes were still mostly surface. I was having trouble finding depth. To aid in my research, I watched a 1997 biopic of Oscar Wilde entitled *Wilde* with British comedian Stephen Fry in the lead role. In his other life, Fry is considered a Wilde scholar, so I assumed the film would be a credible source of insight into the man whose work I was adapting.

The film was extremely well-made, acted, and written. I was exposed to Oscar in a way I had only heard or read about. Seeing it come to life in this way only added to the love, admiration, and sympathy I had for the man already.

However, one bit of insight unnerved me and has left me in that state since. In one of the film's scenes, Wilde is discussing *Lady Windermere's Fan* with Lord Alfred Douglas (a



prominent figure in Wilde's life) and the piece's effect. While everyone else had been lavishing praise on Oscar for the show's excellent humor (as well they should!) Douglas (and, no, the irony is not lost on me) pointed out another positive feature:

*"I loved your play. The audience didn't know if you meant your jokes or not. You shocked them...But the more frivolous you seem the more serious you are, aren't you?...We need shocking. People are so banal and you use your wit like a foil. You cut through all those starched shirt fronts. You draw blood."*

As long as I've read Wilde, I've been aware of his skill at being a social satirist and commentator, but when I heard this skill put into this context, it caused me to reconsider everything of his I've ever read. And, for better or worse, it's true. Oscar is having fun with us, sure, but there are deep lessons of morality within his work. Deeper than I'm sure his contemporary audience realized, and certainly more than I ever did.

I worried about whether or not my piece caught on to this Wildean tenet. There's certainly satire and strong satire at that, but whether or not it reached that depth Wilde himself achieved, I'd have to pay strict attention. Whether this observation would prove to be my salvation or undoing remained to be seen. I decided to take a hard look at the script and see where I stood and attempt another draft.

The fourth draft arrived, and, unfortunately, was not the scathing, subtle societal commentary I was hoping for. Mostly it was another overall polish: taking care of inconsistencies, tuning up dialogue, finding wit. A better draft, but not the one I needed.

I took another look at the story, trying to find the clues, the little prods, whatever bit of cleverness Oscar was able to weave within. There were spots I missed: character observations

rife with wryness, bits and pieces taking their jabs at Wilde's world, and some wordplay I had overlooked.

They were not as easy to fit in as I hoped. Many were in regards to characters I decided not to include, and with seven characters already the economist playwright in me wouldn't dare add another. A few found themselves strictly in the narration, which was third-person. Hard to incorporate these naturally from the character's mouths, as none of them are as intelligent as it would take for such outlooks to exist. I relinquished nearly all of them, and focused on finding the depth I knew was sorely lacking. The task became all the more urgent when I made the decision early in the Spring of 2010 semester that I wanted this play to be my summer production. The standard process once this decision is made is to have a staged reading of a completed script to get a better sense of the script on its feet, and what an audience might think of it.

I had to prepare my script for the public, and was still plagued with my biggest problem since my first draft.

## **THE READING: CROSS-DRESSING AND CALAMITIES**

It was relieving to put on a different hat for a bit and switch from playwright to assistant director. Dr. Roger Gross decided to direct the staged reading of the play, with me acting in a playwright/assistant director capacity. The first part of this process was auditioning, which went well with the exception of finding someone just right for Arthur. Roger wanted to include Arthur's piano playing into the reading so the search began for a combination actor/musician.

In the end, we found Joseph Portello, a relative newcomer to the department, but one with experience as he had stage managed a play of mine in the past fall. Drama majors David Michael Seals, Emily Tomlinson, Sean Phillip Mabrey, and Shannon Rolle were cast as Winkcelkopf, Lady Windermere, Dr. Podgers, and Sybil respectively, and non-Drama major (but funnily enough one of my past Theatre Lecture students) Rachel Holt was cast as Duchess.

However, this left one role uncast: Lady Clementia. Roger and I agreed that none of the women who auditioned were suitable for the role (consensus being that they were all too nice) and we decided to ask around to see if anyone who hadn't auditioned might've been interested. Our efforts were fruitless, however, and time was running out. It was this crunch that led to one of my favorite moments in the development of this script.

Sean Phillip Mabrey suggested that he play Lady Clementia. Not instead of playing Podgers, but, in fact, to make the two parts played by the same actor. I instantly loved it and asked Roger if this was acceptable. It was, Sean was double cast, and I knew my next draft would ask that the two roles be played by the same actor regardless of gender.

Rehearsals commenced. They were three a week, though frequently cancelled, as inclement weather continued plaguing campus. Initially the reading was to be staged with blocking, but despite many efforts, this was not feasible given the compressed amount of time

we had. Instead, we opted for a traditional seated staged reading, with brief bits of blocking when characters would enter or exit, or whenever Arthur played the piano. Piano playing, unfortunately, was also reduced given the time crunch, but not removed from the script.

With the reading fast approaching, I was shaking a bit. I had the utmost faith in my actors and my director, but we definitely hadn't been able to rehearse as much as we should. Whenever it seemed as if we would get time, more snow would start to fall. It was nerve-wracking.

Another unfortunate set of circumstances was the abundance of departmental issues. Most notable being Joseph's availability during rehearsal. Joseph was doubling as actor in our show, and stage manager for the Directing program's production of *Dead Man's Cell Phone*. Before auditioning, Joe got clearance from his director that it would be okay if he was in the reading, and provided a rehearsal schedule just to make double sure. However, Joseph frequently had to leave our rehearsals to go assist *Dead Man's Cell Phone*, and we were left without an actor who was, unfortunately, in every scene. Pressure from within the department forced us to reschedule our rehearsal schedule so that Joe could help out.

That was not too much of a problem for me. It's unfortunate, but these things happen, and we were able to find, if not the best, an at least mildly acceptable alternative. This not being my first time at the theatrical rodeo, I know things like this happen, and often.

I used our all-too-frequent off time to get the script to its next draft: draft five. I decided to forsake any cosmetic changes and focus directly on Podgers, as at the time he seemed the most glaring problem. The moment in particular I focused on was his final scene with Arthur at the end of Act Two Scene One. His motivations had been too hushed. His conflict had been too subtextual. If there was any time to bring it out in the open, it was now, and I decided to make his reasoning apparent.

Love, of course, was the answer. Since Podgers could see the future, he would be incapable of finding love, as it is something never planned. Earlier in the play, when we first meet Podgers, we see him as constantly wooing and dazzling the various women, awash with affection. Now, though, he takes the turban off and confesses. I found exploring the effects of being clairvoyant a fascinating topic, and decided to examine them here, on stage. It was most definitely to the character's, and the script's, benefit, and would be something I was excited to follow up with in subsequent drafts.

However, the reading was approaching and I could make no more edits. With Roger's permission and the cast's compliance I rehearsed the cast on our nights off. It was decided that I would read stage directions for the reading, so this was a rehearsal for me as a performer as well.

The day of the reading arrived with a major crisis. Rachel Holt, our actor cast as the Duchess, dropped out of the reading that day. It was distressing to say the least. I thought back on our initial auditions as to who might be suitable for the role. Thankfully, my first choice, Frances Wilson, was available and willing. That afternoon she sat down with me and Roger and we proceeded to give her a three-hour crash course on the script. A risky move, but an only option as well.

The reading was well received. Frances took to the script extremely well, giving a performance that was better than any we had seen with our previous actor in rehearsals. The audience reacted well to the script, even despite our limitations due to a seated script-in-hand reading. The jokes hit, the characters flowed, and everyone seemed to have a great time. Though the show was lengthy, clocking in a little over two-hours. Written audience responses, though, were highly positive. Some of those that did raise concerns were most certainly accurate.

The responses definitely revealed that Arthur's insistence on committing the murder really needed to be explored more. Despite a lengthy monologue detailing his reasons, any audience member that tuned out of that moment, which was dangerously possible, given its length and diction, would miss out on what his exact motivations were. For better or worse, the majority of the monologue's text is owed entirely to Oscar. So, in subsequent drafts, it would be up to me to clarify. To be more specific: a justified reinforcement of his motivations would be needed.

One audience member was curious as to how Arthur and Sybil met. This threw me for a bit of a loop. It had never been an issue before in any previous draft with any readers. In fact, it's not even explored in the short story itself. I wondered, though, if this piece of history was really all that necessary. If this becomes such an issue that it takes more audience members out, I would have failed at my job as playwright. This is an issue I would ask about throughout the process to see if this one audience member was an anomaly or a legitimate statistic.

Pacing of the first scene was criticized, and I agreed. I had hoped the bits of activity I had included as well as some strong humor would have made it more palatable, but apparently not. I'd see where I could tighten and brighten.

Overall, motivation of Arthur seemed to be the main sticking point, as well as that of Podgers. I suspected these would be issues going in. These were two such critical issues, particular Podgers', as the believability of the story hinges on both. I decided I would focus more on why Arthur found duty so important, and further delve into the bad fortune being a fortune teller can bring for Podgers.

Also, I had to come up with a new title. *The Crime of Lord Arthur Savile* was far too stuffy, and didn't evoke the style and sense of the story whatsoever. It was lovely and Victorian,

but wouldn't get much mileage as far as advertising goes. I toyed with *The Crime of Lord Arthur Savile: A Very English Comedy About A Very English Murder* and *Murder!: A Comedy*. Neither particularly struck me. The search continued.

I was extremely grateful for the experience of the reading. It was as enlightening as it was uplifting, and gave birth to a very strong sense of excited anticipation for the upcoming summer's production. But, as always, the script comes first, and I had miles and pages to go.

### **III. FROM PAGE TO STAGE: THE PRODUCTION PROCESS FROM CONCEPTS TO CURTAIN CALLS**

#### **NEW PLAY DEVELOPMENT JOURNALS**

I kept a journal detailing the thorough rewriting gauntlet of the summer New Play Development Class. I was given the choice whether or not I wanted my mentor, Dr. Roger Gross, or first year MFA Directing candidate Esteban Arévalo Ibáñez instead as director of this project. Last summer Dr. Gross directed a script of mine to great success, but I thought it a better learning experience to try someone different and went with Esteban. Esteban was a participant in the class, as was fellow MFA Playwriting candidate Justin Blasdel, MFA Actor Brandi Hoofnagle, and an assortment of actors who came to read whenever available.

The class met Monday through Friday for three hours each day for the first three weeks of the first summer session. Justin and I were constantly revising our respective summer scripts, as well as our full-length from the spring semester Non-Realism Playwriting course. Roger's initial task for me in regards to my script was to reduce it by twenty minutes. The actors encouraged me to explore, of course, the motivations of Podgers and Arthur. I thought both to be wise choices, and worked towards addressing them.

The class took me from my fifth draft to my eleventh, with varying levels of edits between them. The journal begins with the preliminary production meeting held at the end of the spring semester

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and are presented as faithfully and glamorous and unglamorous as the spirit of the moment called forth:

**5/6/2010**

A new title was decided! *Murder and the English Gentleman: A Comedy*. Less snobbish, more exciting, and fairly well informative. I'm very proud of me. I just got out of meeting with my director following the second preliminary production meeting for the summer shows. Both meetings today, I'm happy to report, were extremely beneficial, but in diametrically opposite ways. The production meeting was an interesting romp. I'm thrilled to have the costume and setting designers that we do, as they both express clear enthusiasm for the project, and, even better, a very strong understanding of our intention of the piece. I say "our" as I mean mine and my director's, Esteban Arévalo Ibáñez.

Quickly: Esteban is a godsend. As cooperative as he is engaging as he is extremely imaginative. There are wonderfully exciting potential elements of the script that I didn't pick up on that he has, and I fully support them. For example, his decision that Dr. Podgers be a faux-occultist, complete with exotic dress suggesting "dark arts", and Lady Windermere hoping to emulate him. Genius. I'm extremely fortunate to have the production team that I do. Certainly they will make this a smooth, thoroughly enjoyable experience, and who doesn't like those? The faculty expressed concern in regards to the tone and approach of the piece. Not that they found anything inappropriate or any problems of that nature, they were just unsure. Esteban has urged me to search the text to find why this problem may exist (and I will), but I hypothesize that the answer lies on page one. Or, really, page i. To be more specific: the character page.

For the version of the script that I distributed to the faculty, I included the request that Dr. Podgers and Lady Clementia be played by the same actor. In other drafts I have left this as

optional, but for this one I had it so that it was required. I did this as I thought it would be helpful in terms of being economical with casting, as the summer talent pool is, usually, sadly small. Also, I felt that this rule could add a fun spot of theatricality to the piece. In the reading we did this very thing with a male actor and the results were (no pun intended) wildly successful. I thought in doing so that I would appease both the artistic and business side of theatrical production. Hoorays all around, yes? It seems I've unknowingly crafted quite the conundrum.

This request has, I think, caused the faculty to view the play in a context that I never, ever would have wanted. The perception seems to be that they think I envisioned this character to be a guy in very ludicrous drag with massive breasts and horrible drag-queenesque makeup. The word "caricature" is scarily thrown around. This is completely contradictory not just to the intent of this piece, but any of Oscar Wilde's work. The success of Wilde came out of just how realistic his pieces were. Like all proper, accomplished satire, the humor comes strictly out of reality. The vanity and crudeness and opulence in characters that makes us laugh, was never done in too highly an exaggerated manner. Instead, he showed us how exactly how things were, and why they were so ridiculous. This brought the humor to even greater heights giving it much deeper substance. He brought us in under the guise of entertainment, but also wanted to teach us as well. It was never humor for humor's sake. And it certainly isn't here, either.

Unfortunately this spark of a problem has ignited a potential forest fire of misunderstanding. With the belief that Clementia will be a funny guy in drag, all bets seem to be off. The moment in act two with Podgers body falling from the roof is then thrown into question. If we've got a big silly cross-dressing scene earlier, then why isn't this moment just as farcical? It seems the mentors either skipped over or forgotten the darker moments of this admittedly dark comedy such as when Arthur, unable to complete his task, legitimately contemplates suicide, and

so on. As pressing as these matters are, I think the solution is fairly simple.

I'll double-check the text for moments that may be a bit too over-the-top. Also, a playwright's note in regards to tone should certainly be helpful. I'm reminded of Tony Kushner's note for the Angel in *Angels of America*, to be played completely straight, and that this straightness will get plenty of laughs. That is what Esteban and I decided, after the production meeting today, is the most successful way of approaching this piece. The ridiculousness of reality. This will keep it from getting too out of hand, and make the satire more apparent, and make the overall experience deeper and more worthwhile.

We both desire to have Podgers and Clementia played by the same actor, and, preferably, a male actor. Finding justification for this in context of satire will be tricky, but I think I have a starting point. The argument of the irony that a *woman* so obsessed with appearance and purity of identity with no reason beyond vanity is played by a man. A nice touch, I think. How obvious this will be to the audience and the faculty, though, remains to be seen. But I am confident. We will see if this lasts.

**5/27/2010**

New Play Development class is in gear, and it's been no easy ride. An experimental assignment of reducing the script by twenty minute, a reexamination of the character of Podgers, and that terribly sticking problem of making the realization of the prophecy understandable. An uphill battle, certainly, but how else does one expect to reach higher levels? The twenty minute reduction was a frightening suggestion, and, even worse, one I was able to find little justification for. But I was reminded that the script didn't necessarily *need*, Roger was just suggesting I try it. Once again, the good doctor's prescription proved effective.

The draft I have now is tighter, cleaner, and much more digestible. True, I had to, quite

sadly, forsake some of the more flowery language (AKA the Oscar sections) in favor of dramatic storytelling, but I suppose that is the price one pays when adapting for the stage. Just don't inform the Wilde estate. While I've been commended on making the plot line more streamlined and enjoyable, the problem that's been in existence since the very, very first reading of the full playscript is still present: how exactly does Podgers' prediction work? Various readers have been confused, not too much but enough to merit a rewrite, by various aspects of it.

My multiple attempts at solving this have yet to prove completely effective. There is the obvious answer of just being out with it, having Podgers explain it all, but that's far too cheap. I'd never forgive myself. And while the audience might appreciate it more immediately, I think the effect would be more entertaining if they figure it out themselves either right then or eventually. It's this mystery aspect to the playscript that makes this problem so...problematic.

Mystery is such a terribly subjective style, what with dime-store Sherlock Holmes seeing right through any red herrings and distractions and knowing absolutely everything from curtains rise, to the clueless patron scratching his head at the dead body falling. It's hard to gauge the appropriate balance of indirect talk to flat out revelation. And as we read with the same group continuously, a group who knows all the secrets going in, the right path becomes all the more muddled.

I'm stuck in a mystery of how to solve the mystery of the mystery.

**6/01/2010**

Art imitates life, it seems, as I have found fortune to eventually be in my favor. A thorough reexamining of Dr. Podgers as well as a deeper evaluation of the themes of the show has seemed to cure what's ailed me. By more clearly identifying the character's motivation (love, of course, as is so common in everything I write) as well as making his arc (his inability to

properly find love) more apparent, it seems I have offered enough clarity without having to sacrifice the puzzle of the play.

A bonus: in fixing this, I have given a new level of depth to Podgers and, perhaps inadvertently, made him just as compelling a character as our protagonist. He is just as much as on a journey as Lord Arthur, and goes through just as dramatic a change. I dare say that this is the goal of any playwright attempting rewrites, that is to say not just fixing a problematic script but enhancing it as well, and I'm quite lucky to have done it. A most pleasant domino effect has also occurred. Solving the Podgers' mystery has solidified the overall themes of the piece, and has allowed me to trim and modify throughout to make sure all aspects are reflective of it.

Gone are needless passages or purely functionary actions. In their place are strictly parts that inform on characters, push the narrative forward, or echo themes. Okay, maybe an extraneous gag or two here and there, but if Oscar did it, so can I. It seems a tiny trifle has popped up, though: The Duchess. As it stands she is a mostly functionary, though fun, character. I'd like to give her more depth and relevance. I know the actor would appreciate it. I'm considering her to be the source of Arthur's sense of duty, but also a symbol of how to more properly realize that sense without getting over encumbered. Lofty goals, perhaps, and I wonder if the audience would really *really* notice, but any actor doing their homework most certainly would and should. Let's hope I write it well enough.

I've also deeply been considering an earlier problem: the level of satire in the piece. I've thought heavy on the subject and have found that the satire of the story and that of mine are not too different. The short story calls itself "A study of duty", and that is where the satirical genius lies. Arthur's "duty" is to commit murder to absolve him of a terrible prophecy. That is his concern: the prophecy. Not the result of solving it, committing murder, just the problem of

having the prophecy itself. Oscar is showing us the skewed sensibilities of the upper class yet again. I'd very much like to think I'm tapping into this idea as well as expanding upon it.

In addressing the Podgers problem, I used the concept of duty and its meanings and means in many forms. I feel like my script discusses the satirical point Oscar was trying to make, as well as offer, not necessarily a counter to it, but at least another point of view that could be inferred from the subject. Either way, I think I've made a fun bit of social commentary into a dramatically satisfying storyline, hopefully fulfilling *my* duties as both playwright and adapter.

## **END OF NEW PLAY DEVELOPMENT JOURNALS**

Through a lot of sweat and just as much ink, I found a draft I was comfortable to submit for production. I turned Arthur's insistence on duty into an obsession, one that plagued his father to his grave. Arthur's grief at the loss of his father had found itself transformed into an incessant battle for rightness. This also allowed me to go further with Duchess, having her be aware of the dangers of duty and making her arc an act of trying to make Arthur see the light.

Arthur struggling with the concept of duty, what it means exactly and how it can be altered, has become a metaphor of a sort for growing up. At the start of the play, Arthur is naïve, thinking that paying the rent and not speaking out-of-turn is the absolute definition of duty. When he sees all the world's problems can't be solved with an open checkbook and a closed mouth, he panics, lashes out, fails, falls, but, ultimately, makes it through by accepting that some things will always be out of our hands and that it is most undutiful to try and make them otherwise. Love, of course, being chief among them.

Podgers also took a turn for the better. I decided to tie his biggest conflict, the problems incurred when playing carelessly with fate, to the overall theme of. The results were successful. Instead of these conflicts running parallel, I brought them together, making the play feel more

cohesive and giving Podgers' character that depth I had been looking for for so many drafts. The next step, though, would be the biggest effort of all: production.

## **PRODUCTION COMPANY/PLAN**

As stated before, I chose MFA director Esteban Arévalo Ibáñez for this project.

Thankfully Esteban and I were of a similar mind as to how to best approach the script. There was a proposal to design the show in a more presentational style, akin to the recent University of Arkansas production of Moliere's *The Learned Ladies*. I was firmly against this idea, as *The Learned Ladies* is an extreme satire bordering on Absurdist, and Wilde's satire, while just as clever as Moliere is, benefited most from setting it in a purely Realistic setting. That is how satire succeeds best, when you almost don't even notice it.

Esteban, efficient and effective director that he is, managed to talk the team out of the presentational approach, and a realistic design style was approved. This applied to both costume and setting, thankfully, and, also, to acting. Esteban recognized that the best jokes come out of honesty and not playing for laughs.

The focus for the future was one of Realism, one I thought most effective. Comedy will be that much more comedic, magic that much more magical. Wilde was never terribly Non-realistic (ignoring the fairy tales), nor will we be.

Casting was a concern but fortune favored us in a very capable group of performers including the most opportune casting of MFA actor and workshop participant, Brandi Hoofnagle as Lady Windermere. Recent University of Arkansas graduate with a Bachelor's Degree in Drama David Michael Seals would be stepping out of the moderately-sized shoes of Winckelkopf, whom he played in the reading, and into the much larger shoes of our lead, Lord Arthur. Emily Tomlinson and Frances Wilson, both also actors in the reading, were cast as the Duchess and Sybil respectively. Drama undergraduates Forrest Jessing and Caden Worley would be playing Winckelkopf and Dr. Podgers respectively. Caden will be doubling in the show,



actually, playing Lady Clementia as well. My off-the-wall, never-thought-I'd-see-it-in-a-million-years idea was actually happening, and I was thrilled. This was a solid cast and I appreciated my luck.

MFA designers Latricia Reichman, Ashleigh Burns, and Justin Ashley would handle costumes, scenery and props, and lighting and sound respectively. Undergraduate Carley Tisdale would be stage managing. Latricia agreed with me and Esteban on proceeding in a more realistic style rather than presentational and her early designs reflected that. Ashleigh proposed the idea of an ornate, perhaps cramped drawing room, one that would suit our sometimes wildly staged play well. She lobbied for a mirror to be included, as this was common in drawing rooms, but Esteban nixed it, saying it would be too distracting for the audience who would be seeing themselves. I agreed. Justin came in later in the process and my dealings with him were minimal. This was just as solid a crew and again I was quite appreciative of my good fortune.

## REHEARSAL JOURNALS

Rehearsals began in the second summer session. We worked primarily in the University Theatre while Justin Blasdel's show, *Your Last Friend, Inc.*, worked at the Nadine Baum Studios.

The following is my journal detailing the rehearsal experience. My part in the rehearsal process was certainly a much more truncated one than in script development. Still, I played my part, and the script did nothing but benefit from the process.

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**07/01/2010**

One week into rehearsals and I'm not feeling even slightly homicidal. This, I do believe, is good news. Really, it's been nothing but an incredibly positive experience. Auditions were strong if sparse (the stigma of summer shows), but a very solid cast emerged. I am confident and, dare I say it, enthusiastic regarding this production. Rewrites were rigorous though rewarding. I didn't increase page size...much...but making the puzzle plausible was a tricky task.

A problem I neglected to mention earlier was Esteban's hesitancy with Sybil. Basically, he feared she was being portrayed as a vapid, and, as such, much less compelling and potentially useless character. And given where the character was in the draft Esteban read, I cannot disagree. It certainly wasn't my intention, just the opposite actually, but the girl was reading as an airhead. A redundant human being bereft of any dramatic qualities. A casualty of the "reduce by twenty" experiment was an interesting cluster of lines between Sybil and Arthur during a scene where Arthur is lying directly to dear Sybil's face.

As it was before I cut it, Sybil had suddenly shifted from a narcoleptic nightmare to a Victorian Columbo in a matter of milliseconds, and then right back to dreamy and ditzzy. This was unbelievable and didn't work, so cut it was. However, for the eleventh(!) draft, which is the one we're using for the production, I decided to revisit this moment, only this time padding it sufficiently early on with so that it was logical.

A fun, subtle bit of irony in the show is that Arthur fell for Sybil as she had, in Arthur's words, "...affected me like no other person ever has. I can't explain it." Arthur, paragon of propriety, was a happy victim of inexplicable, *magical* circumstances, and was completely unaware of it. It was this already present condition that prompted me to take it further. I added that, for Arthur, Sybil is "Able to see my deepest thoughts and furthest feelings when looking in my eyes. When she can keep *hers* open, that is" With these lines I had my solution.

By giving Sybil this quality, it made her scene of suspecting Arthur's deception much weightier. Turning this endearing quality on its head in an awful, heartbreaking manner. Drama, baby.

Best news of all: I was able to give depth to Duchess (finally), by presenting her as the partial impetus for Arthur's desire for flawless duty. Her, and Arthur's father: Lord Arthur Savile I. No, I did not create a new character, poor Arthur senior is dead. Recently, too, poor fellow. Our Arthur lacked an element of motivation. Sure, he was dutiful, but why? Duty for duty's sake? Up until this draft, yes. It worked, but I have no wish for my scripts to simply work. I recognized this problem and set out to set it straight and also needed to give Duchess a little oomph as well. Why not combine them? A new aspect to the draft is that Arthur's father has recently passed, explaining Arthur being the new owner of the building (a plot point never explained in earlier drafts), why Duchess was shown single, and, best of all, why Arthur acts as

he does.

His father, you see, was a gentleman of perfect rightness. Ever dutiful, to a fault, actually, as his persistent propriety was finally too stressful, and killed the man. Duchess, recognizing this and having enabled it in the past, has decided to try living looser to avoid the grave. Now, I had a motivation for Duchess past just wanting to have fun, as well as a deeper reason for Arthur's superobjective (you're welcome, actors), and a brand spanking new conflict because of it: what exactly is the right way to act.

This "new" character inclusion of Arthur's passed parent has taken the script higher than ever. The full-circle of the story is so much more comfortable, meaning not forced or clunky. There's clarity abounds and nothing feels wasted. Spot work here and there is certainly in the cards (a couple more lines reinforcing the father theme might help), but an overall feeling of great satisfaction is glowingly present. I look forward to rehearsals.

Now there's a sentence I rarely find myself saying.

Some honesty: as much as I did enjoy this script and was proud of it before, there was always something clicking in the back of mind with each draft. Something amiss or just unexamined. To calm myself, I would say it would all be fixed in the next draft.

I think I've found that draft.

**07/02/2010**

It seems as if I've shifted from playwright to dramaturg, with a bit of dialect coach thrown into the mix. This past week has consisted mainly of me keeping Esteban abreast of certain story elements that may help in "figuring out" a scene as well as reminding everyone how to say "been" properly. It is a secondary position, and one that I actually enjoy taking. It's fascinating to watch cast and crew dissect the script.

A particular issue is (again) the motivation of Arthur. It was slightly distressing that neither the actor or director was able to immediately identify and incorporate it, but after some digging, it was uncovered. This is good news, as it was a sticking point throughout New Play Development and in the reading. The difference now, though, is that the motivation is there if not immediately on the surface.

Drama is an art of discovery, and I'm glad these capable artists were able to do so. I remain seated, happily, in the back.

**07/05/2010**

I knew it would haunt me. Dialect training is a taxing, slippery endeavor. Try as I might, I just can't seem to make it work with certain actors in particular. I openly admit that I am not trained in this field and the struggle is a daunting one. Winckelkopf's German accent is a particular problem, and through no fault of Forrest, the actor playing the part. This was done purposefully, however. Winky's accent is meant to be an acting feat in itself. I wrote it to be an acrobatic act of words and word sounds. Wilde loved language but not nearly as much as he loved playing with it. I would be quite remiss to not experiment with it as well.

But, like Dr. Frankenstein, my tinkering may have gone too far. Time will tell. As far as the script goes, while I am quite confident in the content, a surprising situation has arisen. The show runs long. Fascinating considering the massive cuts I made to the piece. It never felt as long as it does now during the reading, but that was, of course, sans blocking and significant scene shifts. Another experiment in cutting ten pages or so would be nice, but circumstances render that possibility impossible.

Hopefully, with rehearsal and familiarity, the pace will quicken. Everyone is aware of the issue and I think we're all working towards fixing it. I don't mind if they all blame me if this doesn't work. Brevity is the soul of wit, after all.

**07/06/2010**

I've made up a dialect cheat-sheet for the cast (and a separate one for Forrest). While they are undoubtedly growing more comfortable with the R.P. style, this sheet should prove all the more helpful. And Forrest, God bless him, is trying with everything he has. A tactic Esteban used in the early stages has proven to be quite effective. During these initial rehearsals he would sit down with them one-on-one and ask them about their character. Who they are, what they want, etc. This seems basic and actors are already encouraged to do this on their own ahead of time, but I think there's something to be said for vocalizing it. It puts you on the spot and makes you say what's really on your mind concerning the subject. It's sneaky, but clever. And I think it has resulted in some blossoming from the actors.

Frances, for instance, has struggled in finding motivation for her character, Sybil when put on stage. It's tricky given that Sybil's narcolepsy is such a prevailing characteristic that one might be more inclined to focus on that than discovering depth. Esteban noticed this and discussed the issue with her. The initial discussion regarding the character was brought up, and Frances reminded herself of what Sybil wanted most: love. Cheesy, I know, but it's led to a radical transformation for the actor on stage. Simple solutions can go a long way. Hopefully this one is in the right direction. And, even more hopefully, this confusion came out of the actor's unfamiliarity with the script and not the script itself.

**07/07/2010**

I once read a note in a list concerning playwrights that encouraged playwrights to “Include one impossible thing in a play and don’t let your director talk you out of it.” I took that note to heart. It may have become a stake in my heart instead.

While two things I have requested are certainly not “impossible”, they’re most definitely difficult, and, apparently, now traipsing on the edge of impossibility. In earlier drafts, Arthur had some rather luxurious monologues. All very nicely composed, if I do say so myself (with a heaping of help from Oscar), with elegant speech, wit, and depth. The problem was they were monologues without foundation. Good stuff, but not great. To give it extra oomph, I had it that Arthur would turn to his piano in times of trouble. Thus, these monologues would be scored with music, given wings, and be much more palatable.

The notion was approved in workshop and many a back was patted. Now it seems as if this is becoming a rather enduring endeavor. Thankfully, we have an actor who can play the piano with skill and it is a joy to hear. Finding an available piano in various rehearsing spaces is not as easy. Staging a piano is yet another task. Having an actor follow along in his script while playing piano is verging on impossibility.

I figured it’d be a problem, but not this much of one. I still believe in the idea. It’s exciting, adds dramatic quality, and is very much in line with the rest of the script. Esteban was always a firm believer in it as well so I don’t feel as if I’m forcing anything on anyone. But now I wonder if our dreams got the better of us. A terrible realization to have, but one that I can’t help but consider. We’re still early in the process so I haven’t lost all hope yet. However, this will be my last instrumental play. Unless someone talks me out of it.

The second issue is Podgers' body falling off the roof in the second act. Again, not impossible, but difficult. The issue now being timing. It's hard to get the mood and feel of the scene and moment without the body falling on stage, I think. Right now the sequence runs sluggish and slightly confused. Despite whatever your parents might think, it's hard to play pretend sometimes. Hopefully the addition of the body prop will help, but who knows when that will arrive.

Dialects are coming along, but I'm still making lists of mistaken words throughout, and it's been a sizable one every night. Maybe I have a future as a dialect coach. Though if the list isn't getting any shorter, I probably won't get much work.

**07/08/2010**

I've been told that next week Esteban would prefer if I didn't come to every rehearsal. This isn't due to animosity or any creative differences, he just feels it's a natural part of the process and that more can come out of actors when the playwright isn't present. I'm happy to honor it and interested in seeing what happens. Dialect work will be handled by our stage manager Carley.

Length of the show is officially an issue. Try as we might we just can't get performance time down. Only so much can be put on the production, so I am accepting the blame. Had I known this going in I'd have done at least one more rewrite, though I wonder how significant a rewrite.

It's an odd predicament. The story of the play is next to flawless at least in the context of the "rules" of playwriting. It's a complete, justified script with any loose ends or inconsistencies virtually non-existent. On the page, it's crisp, flowing, fun, and well paced. But it's just not coming across on stage like that. The pace does get better every night, but I wonder if the rate of



improvement is good enough. This play is a lot of work for the actors from nailing comedic timing to perfecting their dialogue and so on. It's a struggle and I'm sure they're far too busy to be watching the clock.

This is how Wildean scripts work, though, and, hopefully, some will recognize that. Until then, fingers crossed.

**07/09/2010**

For my last rehearsal for a little while, I revised the dialect cheat sheet and included a few standard RP warm-ups to the side. I erred on the side of safety and included any words the cast has had trouble with. Pip pip cheerio. While I'm sad to leave the production for a few days (what can I say? I have fun with my plays) I'm excited to see what will come out of my absence. Occasionally, Esteban has turned to me to ask my opinion on certain sequences. I trust him very much, though, and think it'll be good for him and the show not to have this safety net. I discussed running time of the show with Esteban and he agreed it needs tightening. I suggested me possibly taking another crack at the script, but he feels and I agree it'd be detrimental to the process. He says he's going to work on getting the time down and feels that rehearsing will accomplish this. I'm agreeing...and praying.

**07/15/2010**

What a difference a week makes. I can happily say that everything is better. Dialects are flowing, pace is quickened, and everyone knows what they're doing in the scene. The overall mood is just so...comfortable. The enlightenment that occurs in the rehearsal process where everyone has just gathered so much familiarity with the play they're working on has blossomed and is flourishing nicely. Now, granted, tonight I only saw act one and it might all come crashing down with the second half. But I won't know until tomorrow. While the length of scenes has

shortened considerably, there is a bit of a problem with scene transitions. One that is, most regrettably, out of our control.

The production has been informed that it will not have any stagehands. There simply aren't any. Justin's show, we're told, is utilizing their cast as crew as well. Unfortunately, the demands of our shows costuming prohibits this. Women in corsets and bustles can't be depended upon to move tables and chairs. But men can and poor Forrest is our mover extraordinaire.

Esteban explained that with Forrest's character being a man-servant, it fits in terms of tone which should benefit the audience in terms of them understanding the convention. So I'm not particularly worried about this somewhat unorthodox method. But I am disheartened, and considerably so. These transitions are chewing time to bits. They drag and understandably so...it's just one guy doing it! And beyond the time issue it's creating, it's just tragic that it's been impossible to assemble a crew. Not even one person!

I understand it's summertime and resources are scarce, but I refuse to believe they're barren. I know more could be done in encouraging students to participate in the summer shows. As it stands, I see nothing. I myself had to personally create and promote the New Play Development and summer show opportunities. Me. Independently. The cast I have is due in large part to me approaching the actors face-to-face, discussing the project with them, and hoping they try out. A few weren't even aware that this project was happening. I don't know what to do other than push ahead and call in favors. Maybe there's someone willing to sacrifice a couple weeks out of their vacation to help move tables and preset knives.

Although if tables were turned and someone asked *me* to do so during my summer vacation...I wonder if I'd say yes.

**07/16/2010**

Got to see Act Two and am glad to report it's benefitted considerably as well. Pacing in the scenes is the best in the show altogether and this is a very good thing to have post-intermission. No sign of Podgers' falling body yet, but everyone's used to that and acts accordingly. Dialect is better all over. Carley's been monitoring as I once did but told me that she's been unable to more and more as her responsibilities as stage manager grow. I assumed my old position in checking to make sure everyone was adhering to the RP properly. Almost everyone was. Hooray.

I really got to assess a perennial problem since draft one tonight: Podgers. As I've said before, his motivation and the mystery of his prediction have been, perhaps, the biggest problem with the script. In the original text of the short story, Arthur just happens upon Podgers and throws him in a river. Seriously. That's the conclusion. No set-up, no motivation. Just luck. Or fate, perhaps. Maybe there's a deeper message there than at first appearance, but, either way, I felt that that story element was unsatisfying and wanted to give it more depth. It's been my plight. But I'm glad I pursued it, as I feel the work has proven fruitful.

Podgers, I believe, has evolved past the entertaining though purely functional figure in the short story, to a fleshed-out, well-rounded dramatic character. He's pitiable now and his melancholy resonates. This is proven particularly in act two, and I'm proud of it. Making these character traits inexorably tied to the story and plot at large makes it all the sweeter. While bumps remain, there are miles to go until opening night. I predict great things. Can't get enough of those puns.

**07/23/2010**

Tonight I was met with two very different feelings of shock. First of all, I finally got to see the cast in costume and they are absolutely gorgeous. The Wilde fanboy in me wants to leap from his seat and sing songs of joy for all time. I never expected this level of quality. Not that I don't trust the very capable hands of our costume department, I just didn't think I'd be treated to such quality. They're works of art all, and I'm far too fortunate.

But then the inverse. In running the second act there was hesitancy in a moment and no one knew what was going on at that moment in the script so the run paused. Nothing out of the ordinary. While things were being figured out I mentioned what was happening at that moment in the script. The moment of confusion was when Podgers is supposed to, finally, check his own palm with the magnifying glass (as he, from fear of what it might say, did not in the first act), confirm his ensuing death, accept it, and go upstairs. This was a very carefully constructed moment when I was writing the script. Esteban decided to move ahead in the run, which ran smoothly.

Following rehearsal I received a phone call from Carley, our stage manager. During it she proceeded to inform me how shocked everyone apparently was that I simply said what happened in the script they'd been working on for the past month. She proceeded to give me the usual "cuts will happen" speech I've heard before and which I completely understand.

The shock occurred when I considered who the source was. If there is such an issue, such a shock with me simply saying one sentence, then this is the responsibility of the director to inform me. If Esteban felt that threatened, then I would hope that my relationship with him is strong enough that he could discuss it with me. I still feel this way and wonder if Carley's calling me was based more out of her feeling threatened by me. The instance that is supposedly under so

much fire was such a piddling occurrence that I'm sitting here bewildered by why I received the call at all. Bewildered, leaning towards insulted.

I'm a theatre artist as well as a student of and participant in theatre. Simply stated, I know how the process goes and would never try to impede anyone's creative process. I was merely informing. One sentence. Surely, it was not deserving of such ire. I most definitely didn't feel any from anyone. I will admit some worry concerning the hand-reading sequence in general, though. If confusion happened because the sequence has been overlooked from the beginning...then I worry. To me, it's a fairly important moment. Perhaps not completely critical, but deserving of being done. Besides, it's a fairly simple gesture. A twenty-second sequence at max. I do believe it's the stage manager's duty to ensure all stage directions are met, is it not?

Other than this positively perplexing phonecall, I'm in good spirits. The play looks gorgeous, sounds lyrical, and is a hoot altogether. It runs longer than hoped (just shy of two-and-a-half hours including intermission), but hopefully it won't turn too many people off. We open in less than a week. I'm excited to share this wild and weird adventure with the world.

**07/27/2010**

Final dress. On Sunday we finally got to move into Nadine Baum (*Your Last Friend, Inc.* went up first), and I was concerned as to the cast's ability to adapt to the space. This concern quickly dissipated. The cast took to the space like ducks to water. In fact, I think finally being in the proper performance place brought new found gusto to the show altogether. And the space is very pretty, that always helps.

The "magnifying glass" incident has not been brought up at all and no ill feelings have been felt. I question the legitimacy of the phone call I received, but have decided to put it all behind me. There's enough drama in the theatre, yes? Interestingly though: Podgers has not

been doing the final check of his hand with the magnifying glass. I've decided not to bring this missed moment up for fear of...well, who knows what? It's too late to be throwing things in I suppose, even though it's plainly printed on the script and has been in drafts long before the production version. I'm keeping my peace, as that is prudent, but I won't deny my disappointment at its exclusion. *C'est la vie au theatre.*

But this really is the only problem I have. I love this play and I think others will too. A compliment I've received a number of times is that it really does feel like Oscar Wilde. This, for me, is the highest compliment I could receive in regards to this show. I accept it humbly and gratefully. The show borders between two and two-and-a-quarter hours long. This is a bit weightier than preferred, but much better than three as some more skeptical people theorized. Scene transitions still drag, but I know Forrest, and everyone, is doing the best they can. It's a bullet we're just going to have to bite. Things could be worse.

In retrospect, this has been an incredibly enlightening rehearsal process. Between my many jobs, my time with and away from the play, and the peculiar problems that have arisen, I know I've grown and the script along with me. Theatre, at its heart, is collaboration and I feel as if I've worked with many sides of myself to get to where I am. I know that no matter how tomorrow night goes, I happily, proudly, and justifiably stand by my art, and I believe there's nothing else artists should hope to say when they are where I am. On with the show.

**END OF REHEARSAL JOURNALS**

## **PERFORMANCE JOURNALS**

Disclaimer: Finally, the following are journal entries, this time created during the performances at the Nadine Baum Studios. They are presented as primary historical documents in hopes of getting as close as possible to the actual creative process. Thus, once again, they have not been altered for academic propriety.

**07/28/2010**

Opening night and a perfect crowd for it. Just a few seats shy of a full house. One that included the Chancellor of the University might I add. Holy moley. The jokes were hitting and I enjoyed watching the play almost as much as I enjoyed watching the audience. Always a happy development. Given my familiarity with the script, I did notice a few issues.

A couple gaffs occurred in terms of line omissions from the actors, and a particularly intriguing instance of an actor forgetting his prop. These things happen. Volume was a noticeable problem as well. I suspect since everyone in the production is so used to the script, that we always know what's being said even if we don't hear it all. But for fresh ears, this can be problematic. Add in the various dialects in the show and the issue grows. More than once I heard an audience member say to another "What'd they say?" Esteban recognized it as well and the cast was informed.

The play ran a little over two hours, and even with me knowing every line, twist, and turn, didn't feel too long, with the exception of the scene transitions. But energy always returned in the scenes following these unfortunate in-betweens, so, hopefully, no one minded too much. Thrilled to see this show again.

**07/29/2010**

Cast took the volume issue to heart and toes. Their voices boomed and it'd be near impossible to ask what was just said unless you just weren't paying attention. The kinks from the night before were ironed out and the show tonight just felt more prepared and flowed nicely. I'm still missing the moment of Podgers' final magnifying glass check. Not that the scene feels confusing or anything like that, I just know that that moment holds a lot of potential and I'm sad to see it squandered. Oh, well, we still got a standing ovation.

**07/30/2010**

Our smallest house to date. The audience had that funny little problem that happens in comedic plays where they feel almost afraid to laugh until someone else does. The first act had its chuckles, but didn't hit near as much as usual. I blame this odd instance that comedies can face. I think the actors felt it, too, and really upped their game in scene two. To success and laughs, I'm happy to report. Podgers body falling got laughs tonight. I was warned this might happen. I never had a problem with the possibility before, and, having it happen, I still don't. It is funny, in a dark, kinky way, and I doubt Oscar Wilde would mind any of those adjectives. I certainly don't.

**07/31/2010**

Tonight I say goodbye to "Murder and the English Gentleman: A Comedy" and I admit, parting really is such sweet sorrow. A big house, but opening night still remains champ. The cast put on their best performance yet, and it's so heartrending to see it all go when they've mastered it so. But that's the price we pay to do theatre, and I accept it. As sad I am for the show to be over, I do feel as if a great weight has been lifted from my shoulders.



This was a play of many demands. On stage and off. This was my thesis play. The play that, in part, determines whether or not I deserve to be in the field. The culmination of many hours of study, crafting, crafting again, and hope. A whole lotta hope. It's no easy burden to bear and a very long and winding road. But I feel much stronger for it. And while I know there is, and will always be, miles to go, I know I'll be able to look back and know this was a trip worth taking.

**END OF PERFORMANCE JOURNALS**

#### **IV. RESPONSES, RESPONDING, AND REWRITING**

##### **CRITIQUES OF THE SHOW**

The standard process following the MFA playwright's summer shows is to have the audience fill out a brief survey of their thoughts and feelings in regard to the show they just saw. They are encouraged to write honestly for better or worse. Having read the audience responses, one problem is thematic: length. It's been our bane since first read-through and cannot seem to be quelled. A number of people who commented on the length mentioned it in conjunction with the scene shifts. But most did not. A few reviewers noted Act One Scene One as the biggest culprit and I could not agree more.

Seeing "length" come up as a persistent issue is helpful, but not specifying where makes it hard to know where to focus. Since there's no way of knowing, one must assume that work needs to be done in every scene to decrease length. Perhaps that's overcompensating, but knowing my own habits for over-writing, it is most likely a wise choice.

The second biggest issue brought up was difficulty in understanding the character's dialect, which has nothing to do with the script. Given the shortness of rehearsal time and me being only an amateur dialect coach, this is an unsurprising note, but an unfortunate one nonetheless.

An issue of logic that I took note of (and chuckled at) was someone questioning why anyone would want a Turkish Delight found in a river in the bag of a woman who drowned to death. I'm amazed that no one had ever brought this issue up to me before. This is both a hilarious mistake on my part, and an easy fix, thankfully.

One particularly apt reviewer mentioned that Podgers' motivation and explanation of his motivation are legitimate, but more hints of it could be seen earlier. Initially I thought that seeds

were planted in the first scene, but thinking back I think my over-familiarity with the script is clouding my judgment and I will work on bringing more of these to the surface.

On a positive note, the comedy, blessedly, got high marks consistently, particularly the "pantsless" scene, the Turkish Delight fiasco, the end twist, and anything Winckelkopf. A note that brought me considerable comfort was that one audience member couldn't believe this was written by a local playwright. Another complimented me on crafting a successful Wildean play. This was my intent since draft one and I'm glad it worked. The majority of the reviews, actually, were very positive, and while I know there is still work to be done, this reaffirmation is comforting.

I feel very texturally satisfied by the responses. The language and wit are clicking, and in Wilde, that's a critical necessity. I assumed going in and am certain now that any lingering issues rest in the structure. In writing the piece, I think I put flavor above composition, which is hard to avoid in adaptation. Now that I know better, I'll focus on tightening the loose ends.

## **PRODUCTION AS A REPRESENTATION OF THE SCRIPT**

Despite a missing sequence or two and the need for a much more skilled dialect coach, I am extremely satisfied with the production. It was illuminating, as well, to the next steps I should take, and what to look out for if I ever decide to direct the show myself in the future. Pacing must be airtight and comfortableness with the script cannot sacrifice clarity of speech. Comedy is the art of timing and all must be done with precise accuracy. Not that there weren't some sublime moments of comedy presented by exceptional performers, I just now know where to give special attention.

The show was, for the most part, extremely faithful to the script, and I am fortunate for this. But this means that everything, good and bad, about the script was on display. The laughs and the lows were finally, inarguably, presented. I was shown a sobering representation of my work, and many truths were revealed.

Time was this show's main issue and I will strive to eliminate this issue from any future productions. Production notes stressing speed in scene shifts will be in there, as well as, most likely, a personal note urging the production to consider the tempo of the piece. It may seem like I'm directing the play from afar, but since there were a couple nights where I feared I had lost the audience forever because things were dragging just too long, this is a necessary evil.

Looking back at my journals following each performance night, it is easy to see that one can view their work through rose-colored glasses if they are not careful. I suppose I was caught up in the rush of seeing a script I had spent such considerable time with finally brought to life that I neglected to mention the lesser points though I know they were there. I am aware of them now, and ready to combat them.

Problems aside, I still think the shows were very successful. But we're not quite to the Promised Land yet. The production did most certainly prove that my work is far from over. If I truly hope for this play to enter the Wildean pantheon, I have a rigorous endeavor ahead of myself. But with this production I know that the show is an effort worth undertaking. I return to my notebook engaged and excited.

## WHERE THE SCRIPT NOW STANDS

Post-production rewriting proved to be rewarding as it was arduous. I knew Scene One was the biggest problem of the play for many reasons. After numerous attempts to cut or condense, I took a left turn and just started it all over from scratch. Some lines here and there and a good portion of the end of the scene found their way back, but most of the fat of the scene hasn't been cut, it has undergone liposuction. Trims throughout the rest of the play are also there and also help, but nothing as drastic as the first scene rewrite.

Perhaps the biggest enhancement of the new scene one is its more immediate establishment of comic tone. In comedy you must get them chuckling and fast. Audiences must grow comfortable with the fact that they may laugh. It's an odd aspect of theatre, one you would never realize until you sat through it. To aid in their ease, a comedic script needs to be firing off on all comedic cylinders from curtain's rise.

This was an issue I noticed with the production draft. All the audiences eventually wound up laughing, but none with the immediacy I'd prefer. The problem was that the true wit was too far in, maybe five pages or so, and that's far greater a distance than comedy audiences should have to travel. With the new draft, wit comes in flying fast, and stays in the air throughout. As it should be. As Oscar would want it.

In earlier drafts I also committed the cardinal sin of theatrical writing. I *told* rather than *showed*. It's a rule that's, understandably, beaten into us early on. It's a dreadful habit and deadly to theatre. I felt as if I committed the crime with a fairly substantial piece of exposition: Arthur's marriage proposal to Sybil. It was discussed briefly and then the scene proceeded.

Since Arthur's engagement is a fulcrum to so much of the action of the play, this act needed to be seen on stage. With this draft, I've included Sybil in scene one (I hate having

characters make their first entrance late in the play), and put the proposal before the audience. This, I think, has given Arthur a more endearing quality, and will cause the audience to want their marriage, and, slyly, Arthur successfully committing murder to happen; a fun, kinky bit of manipulation, I think.

I've decided to drop the "A Comedy" in the title. It never sat quite right with me and was done, admittedly, to sell the play more. I more enjoy the chaos of the title, with murder being put alongside gentleman, and feel "A Comedy" is superfluous and too blatant. Nothing like the satire and wit I'm attempting. Thus, it has vanished.

The last significant part of the rewrite is a production note at the beginning stressing swiftness in scene shifts. It is essential. Maybe we were an anomalous production that won the unlucky lottery in terms of not being able to get a crew, but either way I am playing it safe and adding this reminder. I do not want to see this script suffer from something so avoidable.

I know this rewrite is what the script needed and I am sad I was not able to share this version with the world. But progress is the purpose of this project and I would not be where I am, a happy spot, without the lessons learned.

## CONCLUSION

Adaptation is a liquid form, and it must be. To properly solidify in one medium or another, its source and whatever it's adapted into, is against the purpose, and to evaporate into neither is deadly. Instead, the product must find a way to exist in many worlds equally and, hopefully, easily. Finding this balance is the essential and fundamental aspect of proper adaptation.

Throughout this project I've been making my way across a theatrical tightrope, stopping and starting, judging the proper path, and watchfully progressing. It's been a peculiar process and one I don't know if I'd be so eager to attempt again. Not that the results have not been satisfactory, quite the opposite, but that I had no idea what a behemoth true adaptation is.

In theatre you're encouraged to know your script completely. All things said, unsaid, done, or implied. Top to bottom, you must have it down. It's your map after all. In adaptation, this work is doubled. You must have absolute understanding of the work you're adapting. You must have an understanding not only of its meaning, but its effect, its history, its creator's history, and so on. The knowledge must be there. To surmount the past, we must first understand the past. Within that sentence is a word that should be paramount in any adaptation journey: understand.

It isn't enough to speak prose language out loud. It isn't enough to kill the character on stage. Blues musicians don't just know the notes they're playing; they *understand* why they must be played. Understanding is not something gleaned from a first, second, or third reading. It is a seed to be planted within you, growing and sprouting slowly and delicately, so that once it is in full bloom there are no words to properly describe it, only means by which to show it. Showing is the essence of theatre, and is even more so important in the field of adaptation.



I chose this thesis for many reasons, one of the biggest being my desire to help future dramatists in their quest to adapt a work to the stage themselves. Along the way I've accumulated much knowledge: lessons I never thought I'd learn, regrets I wish I never had to make, joys I never thought I'd realize. Were I to weave these many wild and wonderful awakenings into one wisp of wisdom it would be very simple: In adaptation, first be willing to adapt yourself.

From a philosophical point-of-view, before you adapt you must sign a contract of trust. Before the Muses allow you to take someone else's art, you must agree that you will, above all, strive to bring the original artist's vision, and, most importantly, soul to whichever field your adapting their work. Without agreeing to this, you have no right to adapt. It is *always* your work second, and as well it should be. There is no room for ego or superiority. Create your own story if that is what you want. In adaptation, as stated before, it is a balance between many disciplines, many forms, and many artists.

But when it works, it's truly an accomplishment of merit. It's an artistic anomaly, difficult to procure, but a delight to discover. I hope I have done justice to the spirit and work of Oscar Wilde, and, also, to myself. History will ultimately prove whether or not I've balanced the scales properly with my work, but, personally, I believe *Murder and the English Gentleman* has a very bright future, even if its characters do not.

## REFERENCES

Wilde, Oscar, Robert G. Davis, and James Hill. *The Short Stories of Oscar Wilde*. Burlington, Vt.: Printed at the Lane Press for the members of the Limited Editions Club, 1968. Print.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A.

First draft of the play submitted in Fall of 2009 as my final for Adaptation Playwriting class.

This draft still contained the original title of the play: *The Crime of Lord Arthur Savile*.

The Crime of Lord Arthur Savile  
adapted by Adam E. Douglas  
from the short story "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime" by Oscar Wilde.

Draft One  
12/14/09

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## CHARACTERS

**LORD ARTHUR SAVILE-** Young, handsome, noble, professional, and a number of other positive adjectives. Dedicated, most surely. And a skilled piano player. Isn't he impressive?

**THE DUCHESS OF PAISLEY-** Arthur's mother. Serene, though stunning. A sweet woman with a very strong heart, and an even stronger bank account. Though you'd never guess it. Propriety, after all.

**LADY WINDERMERE-**Sibyl's mother. A curious psychological study. Early in life she had discovered the important truth that nothing looks so like innocence as an indiscretion and by a series of reckless escapades, half of them quite harmless, she had acquired all the privileges of a personality. She is also wealthy, and you can tell.

**DR. SEPTIMUS PODGERS-** Cheiromantist to the affluent ennu-encapsulated English. A man of fine tastes and deep debts. Should have learned better by now, but shouldn't all of us?

**LADY CLEMENTIA-** Distant relative of Arthur and Lady Windermere in both relation and age. No one visits her much, and there is a reason why. You'll understand, I promise.

**SIBYL WINDERMERE-** Lady Windermere's daughter. Love of Arthur's life. A ceaseless ray of light in dreary, foggy London town. Sadly afflicted with random sleeping spells. Poor girl.

**WINCKELKOPF-** Arthur's manservant. Curt. Bearded. German.

## SETTING

**LOCATION-** A posh London flat drawing room in a building owned by Arthur.

**TIME-** 1890. A proper year. Beginning of autumn. An equally proper season.

**PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES:** Though I'd never compare myself to the man (well, at least not with this script), a company might benefit from utilizing a Shakespearean style of casting. That is to say all men in the women's roles. So long as the actors are convincing and not going strictly for the gag, the effect could be tremendously successful. Just think less drag show, more Monty Python sketch.

Also, the actor playing Winckelkopf needs to make use of the traditional pronunciation style of native Germans speaking English. That is with "W" words being pronounced with a "V", ex. "We" would be pronounced "Ve", "Wait" would be "Vait" and so on. Also, "S" words should be like "Z" words. "See" would be "Zee", etc. though this is less strict than the "W" words. "That"s might be "Zat"s, and there are a few others in the script to play with.

The Crime of Lord Arthur Savile

adapted by Adam E. Douglas from the short story "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime" by Oscar Wilde.

*AT RISE: A posh, late 19th century English apartment building drawing room. There is a very large, upstage window looking out into the London street. Perhaps shoppes dot the other side of the street. Perhaps the Thames.*

*The sun is setting, ending the day outside, but the night inside has just begun. Laughter and general chatter and carousing is heard from off, within the apartment building.*

*A piano rests serenely on stage. As does an elegant sofa with a high back. The piano is polished and prim. If only someone was playing.*

*Well, someone with skill at least. Plunking down random keys, talking in bad French at the top of their voices, and laughing immoderately at near-about everything said are LADY GLADYS WINDERMERE and the DUCHESS OF PAISLEY.*

*LADY WINDERMERE and the DUCHESS continue THEIR melodic misalignment as WINCKELKOPF, a gruff, quick, and (oh, so preferably if possible) outrageously bearded manservant passes by the window. HE's dressed as well as a foreign, (also, if possible) helplessly short, German manservant can be. That is to say mildly uncomfortable, and majorly emasculating.*

*HE enters the building and then the drawing room. The WOMEN do not take notice of HIM. HE stands in the doorway.*

*A beat.*

WINCKELKOPF

LORD ARTHUR SAVILE!

*The WOMEN jump. A number of keys are hit. A noisy, out-of-tune chorus.*

LADY WINDERMERE

Ah!

WINCKELKOPF

*(indicating the window)* Mein Lord.

*LORD ARTHUR SAVILE passes by the window. HE is a handsome, tall (or at least taller than WINCKELKOPF), young man, and dressed appropriately. Fine clothes. Not a wrinkle.*

*ARTHUR enters. HE sees the WOMEN in distress.*

ARTHUR

*(to WINCKELKOPF)* Did you shout again, Winckelkopf?

WINCKELKOPF

I did.

*ARTHUR waps WINCKELKOPF on the head.*

ARTHUR

That's a bad Winky! Bad!

WINCKELKOPF

*(through the wapping)* Ja, mein Lord.

DUCHESS

Arthur, love, really, that's not necessary. You act so rashly with things you have no control over. I shudder at the memory of our evening at the magician's show.

*ARTHUR ceases.*

ARTHUR

Sorry to make you two witness to such savagery, but it is my duty as Lord and employer to Winckelkopf to ensure *his* duties as man-servant are met soundly.

LADY WINDERMERE

Sound is there, it's volume that's the problem.

DUCHESS

Really. And besides, why beat a man when you can just sack him?



ARTHUR

After I found Winckelkopf stranded outside that prison in Berlin where he had lost all of his possessions and clothing and was wearing a prison uniform he blessedly found a nearby shrubbery after he survived a very, very tragic donkey accident Winky tells me, I've yet to find better help. Winckelkopf costs very little and asks even less. Why, if he had slightly longer hair and a much shorter beard I'd marry him.

DUCHESS

*(smiling knowingly with LADY WINDERMERE)* I doubt that...

ARTHUR

Hm?

DUCHESS

Oh, nothing. I must've misheard you. My ears are ringing "God Save the Queen". In German.

ARTHUR

I did apologize and shall again if needed mother. Proper action of any grateful son. But you must understand his behavior, of course...

ARTHUR

Germans.

DUCHESS

Germans.

DUCHESS

I know, love. And I shall forgive you from toe to nose if you would grace my cheek.

*The TWO share pecks.*

ARTHUR

And my dear Lady Windermere. Do you approve of my renovations to the building?

LADY WINDERMERE

I can hardly smell the mold anymore.

*And now THEY peck.*

ARTHUR

Just want as clean a space as possible for dear Sibyl's return. With her sleeping spells I'd say she gets enough dust from the Sandman.

LADY WINDERMERE

She is very fond of your surprises as you can only hope most women are.

*ARTHUR has been admiring a framed photograph. HE smiles, and turns to the WOMEN.*

ARTHUR  
You haven't received post from our dear girl have you?

DUCHESS  
*(small smile)* Oh, we haven't.

*ARTHUR notices the noise from off. LADY WINDERMERE follows HIS movement and notices...WINCKELKOPF.*

ARTHUR  
Mother, why do I hear voices in the other room?

DUCHESS  
Probably because there are people in it.

ARTHUR  
Good to know I'm not going mad yet.

DUCHESS  
We were wanting to put on a musical revue for our guests but then realized neither of us have a note of musical talent.

LADY WINDERMERE  
Er...yes. I'm physically incapable of whistling.

*SHE tries. It's true.*

DUCHESS  
I hoped maybe the fates would intervene and grant us the ability, but, alas...

*SHE touches a key. Then another. They are horribly mismatched.*

ARTHUR  
Putting stock in such lunacy as the whims of chance. It truly is the excellent foppery of the world. Work. That is what pushes us into the future. What we do. Or don't. It is against our task as members of humanity to put responsibility on anything we cannot see. Blame it on the moon if you will, either way you shant have any piano music.

DUCHESS  
Lest I give birth to a very handsome son and make him take piano lessons from the moment he can sit up.

ARTHUR  
Indeed. Excuse me.

*HE politely excuses the WOMEN out of the way and sits to play. Which HE does. A simple tune. Charming. Lovely.*

DUCHESS

Charming. Lovely.

ARTHUR

What else should a charming gentleman play in the company of such lovely women?

LADY WINDERMERE

You already have my daughter, don't try to woo me as well. Because you will.

ARTHUR

Why the occasion for guests, mother?

DUCHESS

A party, love.

ARTHUR

For whom?

DUCHESS

For you.

ARTHUR

For what? The renovations? I'll admit seeing the new wallpaper did make me do a little dance.

DUCHESS

No. To celebrate your engagement to Sibyl.

*ARTHUR messes up several notes and ceases playing.*

LADY WINDERMERE

You really should get that tuned.

ARTHUR

How--...you said you hadn't received word.

DUCHESS

We hadn't. But you didn't ask about yourself, such a selfless boy.

*ARTHUR stands up suddenly.*

ARTHUR

But who did--er, where, when did you--why was it...What? (*sits down suddenly*) Oh.

*HE accidentally presses a few piano keys and jumps at it. LADY WINDERMERE pats HIS head.*

LADY WINDERMERE

Easy, boy.

ARTHUR

I've just needed an answer for so long and I--I--I--I--I...

LADY WINDERMERE

(to DUCHESS) We broke him.

ARTHUR

How did you know? Please, my pulse is tangoing fiercely.

DUCHESS

No need for alarm, love, this is happy news.

LADY WINDERMERE

You should be thankful for this bit of mystery now. I assure you, it's more rare a commodity in a marriage than flying orangutans.

*ARTHUR is completely on edge. DUCHESS and LADY WINDERMERE notice and are having fun exacerbating HIM.*

DUCHESS

He simply can't stand the unknown. Makes his nose twitch. Look.

*ARTHUR hastily covers HIS nose with HIS hand.*

ARTHUR

It's just...there's not need for the unknown if there are those in the know unless they knowingly say no to being asked what is known.

DUCHESS

And the more overcome he is, the wordier he gets.

ARTHUR

Please. Please, I'd do anything for certainty.

LADY WINDERMERE

Now, now, no more teasing. Even I know when enough's enough.

*DUCHESS laughs heartily at this statement.*

*SHE gets a letter from off the armrest of the sofa and hands it to ARTHUR, laughing the entire time, so much so that SHE'S unable to tell him what it is.*

*HE inspects it.*

ARTHUR

You read the post Sibyl sent me?

LADY WINDERMERE

Look look look, even if I didn't let's say casually brush her letter accidentally on the floor and it unfolded open and my eyes glossed over it and read the entire first paragraph twice, it is, despite your reservations on the topic, fate. It is meant to be. Easier to tell than your imitation leather belt. Why you withheld your proposal from us it I have my own very violent suspicions.

ARTHUR

It wasn't that I weren't going to let either of you know, it's just, well, what if she declined? It wouldn't be proper to get hopes up prematurely.

LADY WINDERMERE

Oh, I assure you, that's a problem with many men...

ARTHUR

I just wish so dearly for everything to be perfectly...perfect. As Sibyl is to me. It's what she deserves and I owe it to her. She's affected me like other person ever has. I can't explain it. (*slight beat, small smile*) I won't allow a single piddling iota out of place. The slightest push in the wrong direction and you can totally lose your way. Powerful things, pushes.

LADY WINDERMERE

(*off-hand, maybe to WINCKELKOPF*) You're telling me...

ARTHUR

And had she said no...

DUCHESS

But she didn't.

ARTHUR

No.

DUCHESS

(*smiling*) Yes.

*ARTHUR can't withhold HIS joy.*

ARTHUR

Oh, splendid! Splendid!

*HE hops up and goes to hug HIS mother, but stops. Propriety.*

ARTHUR

We simply must celebrate.

LADY WINDERMERE

And lo and behold, a party awaits. Send your...*(with a look)* man...to fetch a celebratory bottle of wine for us to enjoy away from the talons of those vultures within. They'd drink the cork if they could.

ARTHUR

Uh, Winky?

*With a lasting look at the LADY WINDERMERE, WINCKELKOPF nods curtly and goes to exit within, nearly crashing into an entering DR. SEPTIMUS PODGERS.*

*PODGERS. Gold-rimmed glasses, funny, bald head, something between a family doctor and a country attorney. HE carries an unopened bottle of wine.*

PODGERS

*Mein Gott!* Watch your step, sir. You nearly crushed the *LaFite*. Not to mention *my* feet.

LADY WINDERMERE

Dr. Podgers!

PODGERS

My good lady! I sensed high spirits and figured what better way to meet them than with another. 1837 *Lafite*. From my own personal, ever-growing, arguably spiraling-dangerously-out-of-control personal collection. Seeing as how payment from our sessions afforded it, it's only proper to share. Any *connoisseur* knows the only thing more desirable than a fine bottle is showing others that you have it. And might I add it will delectably compliment the roast goose. The best wines make for the best endings.

*HE presents HER the bottle. THEY peck lightly. WINCKELKOPF looks...sad.*

LADY WINDERMERE

And how are you?

*HE holds HIS hands up. Wiggles HIS fingers.*

PODGERS

All ten still attached firmly and securely. Cannot complain.

LADY WINDERMERE

Dr. Podgers, my dearest dear, the Duchess of Paisley. And her son, Lord Arthur Savile.

DUCHESS

Good day.

ARTHUR

Hello.

*PODGERS is instantly deeply intrigued by ARTHUR. Fascination takes over momentarily. HE snaps back to reality.*

PODGERS

Uh--good day to you all.

DUCHESS

Thank you. Who are you?

LADY WINDERMERE

Dr. Podgers is my cheiromantist.

DUCHESS

Your what?

ARTHUR

I believe she said Praying Mantis. Quite perplexing.

LADY WINDERMERE

*Cheiromantist.* I can't live without him at present.

*SHE sees NEITHER has the foggiest about what SHE's speaking.*

LADY WINDERMERE

He is a sort of chiropodist. He comes to see my hand twice a week, regularly. And is most interesting about it. I wouldn't have the first wink of a dream of giving a party without hiring him to stop by. And always showing such excellent timing.

PODGERS

With fate, there always is.

*PODGERS notices WINCKELKOPF's looks to LADY WINDERMERE.*

PODGERS

(to WINCKELKOPF) Sir, if you could fetch us a corkscrew. My molars aren't what they once were. And do beware of Lady Scanlan. You'd think her hands were made of jam.

*Reluctantly, WINCKELKOPF exits to within. PODGERS turns to ARTHUR.*

PODGERS

And congratulations I believe?

ARTHUR

(*smiling*) Oh, is there not a secret left in London?

PODGERS

*Ah-heh-heh.* I felt it before I arrived. My tea leaves told of good tidings today for a handsome, young gentleman, and my mirror hasn't reflected that since the last monarch.

ARTHUR

Oh, Heavens, you're a believer of that balderdash, too?

LADY WINDERMERE

Believer? Why the man practices it.

DUCHESS

I thought he was a chiropodist.

LADY WINDERMERE

He is in that he looks at hands but who doesn't? Besides the blind, I suppose. The good doctor here studies hands and is able to divine the future from them.

*THIS draws in the DUCHESS' attention, ARTHUR stands off, rolling HIS eyes.*

DUCHESS

Really?

ARTHUR

No...

LADY WINDERMERE

Yes. He tells me I have a pure psychic hand, and that if my thumb had been the least little bit shorter, I should have been a confirmed pessimist, and gone into a convent.

*LADY WINDERMERE holds HER right hand up, wiggles the fingers.*

DUCHESS

Oh, I see! He tells fortunes, I suppose?



PODGERS

And misfortunes, too, any amount of them.

LADY WINDERMERE

Next year, for instance, I am in great danger, both by land and sea, so I am going to live in a balloon, and draw up my dinner in a basket every evening. It is all written down on my little finger, or on the palm of my hand, I forget which.

DUCHESS

But surely that is tempting Providence, Gladys.

LADY WINDERMERE

My dear Duchess, surely Providence can resist temptation by this time. I think every one should have their hands told once a month, so as to know what not to do. Of course, one does it all the same, but it is so pleasant to be warned.

*LADY WINDERMERE and PODGERS chuckles. This comment perturbs the DUCHESS slightly. ARTHUR, wanting nothing to do with the lot, goes to the piano and plays. A dismissive tune.*

LADY WINDERMERE

Now, Dr. Podgers, I want you to tell the Duchess of Paisley's hand. Duchess, you must take your glove off. No, not the left hand, the other.

*DUCHESS slowly takes off HER left glove.*

DUCHESS

Dear Gladys, I really don't think it is quite right.

LADY WINDERMERE

Nothing interesting ever is, *on a fait le monde ainsi*. Now Dr. Podgers if you say that she has a smaller tunnel of Venus than I have, I will never believe in you again.

DUCHESS

I am sure, Gladys, there is nothing of the kind in my hand.

*PODGERS takes the DUCHESS' hand, examining it thoroughly. Like a jeweler. HE pokes, prods, sniffs. Anything HE can to discern any information. DUCHESS is a bit uneasy.*

PODGERS

Your Grace is quite right, the mountain of the moon is not developed. The line of life, however, is excellent. Kindly bend the wrist. Thank you.

PODGERS (cont'd)

Three distinct lines on the *rascette*! You will live to a great age, Duchess, and be extremely happy. Ambition very moderate, line of intellect not exaggerated, line of heart...

LADY WINDERMERE

Now, do be indiscreet, Dr. Podgers.

PODGERS

Nothing would give me greater pleasure, if the Duchess ever had been, but I am sorry to say that I see great permanence of affection, combined with a strong sense of duty.

LADY WINDERMERE

Like mother like son then? More more, please please. I'd love to know what rumbles around my dear Duchess' dome.

PODGERS

You speak as though I'm a mind reader. A *wine* reader, perhaps, but the future most certainly does not come from the cranium...

*PODGERS takes the hand in even closer. It almost seems as if HE's about to bite it in half. Freezes. Reads it.*

PODGERS

Hmmm. Yes. Very reserved, very honest. And very delicately fingered.

DUCHESS

Excuse me?

PODGERS

Your hands. Soft and narrow. Like warm breadsticks. A pleasure.

*HE releases HER hand, smiling.*

DUCHESS

It's an exhilarating procedure. Can it be learned?

PODGERS

I do give lessons. One could be scheduled. Or perhaps I'll just arrive one afternoon and teach. A little bit of mystery for the future, eh? Can't give it all away at once. As far as the skill I can tell you the best way to learn is through practice. Like most great skills. (to ARTHUR) Such as piano.

DUCHESS

I'm tempted to ask you to read mine again, but I doubt it'd be as exciting.

LADY WINDERMERE

I've found the only way to rid of temptation is to yield to it. But I was read...thoroughly...just yesterday. Come, Arthur, show the good doctor your hand.

ARTHUR

Absolutely not. You know I refuse to consent to such abhorrent foolishness.

LADY WINDERMERE

If you are to be my son-in-law then you hereby revoke your ability to utter the word "refuse". As well as "too", "busy", and "you can't have my potatoes, I'm still eating them".

*HER aura annihilates ARTHUR.*

ARTHUR

You don't mind, Doctor?

LADY WINDERMERE

Of course, he won't mind, that is what he is here for. But I must warn you beforehand that I shall tell Sybil everything. I am writing to her tomorrow to talk about marriage and bonnets, and if Dr. Podgers finds out that you have a bad temper, or a tendency to scurvy, or a wife living in Bayswater, I shall certainly let her know all about it.

ARTHUR

I am not afraid. Sibyl knows me as well I know her. I keep nothing hidden.

LADY WINDERMERE

Ah! I am a little sorry to hear you say that. The proper basis for marriage is a mutual misunderstanding. No, I am not at all cynical, I merely have experience, which, however, is very much the same thing. Dr. Podgers, Arthur is dying to have his hand read. Don't tell him that he is engaged to one of the most beautiful girls in Europe, because we all just found that bit of news out. But do be sure to tell us something nice. Arthur is one of my special favorites.

*ARTHUR stops playing, stands, goes to PODGERS and offers HIS hand. PODGERS goes through near about the same motions as HE did with the DUCHESS.*

*However, halfway through PODGERS grows curiously pale. A shudder passes through him, and his eyebrows twitch convulsively, in an odd, irritating way as if HE'S darkly puzzled. HE wipes HIS brow and reads deeper, saying nothing.*

*ARTHUR notices these strange signs of agitation and feels the impulse to run from the room, but restrains HIMSELF.*

ARTHUR

I am--*heh*--waiting, Dr. Podgers.

LADY WINDERMERE

*(quickly, impatiently)* We are all waiting.

*Suddenly, PODGERS drops ARTHUR's right hand and seizes HIS left, bending extremely low to examine.*

*For a moment, PODGERS's face becomes a white mask of horror, but he soon recovers. HE adopts a forced smile.*

PODGERS

It is the hand of a charming young man.

DUCHESS

Of course it is! But will he be a charming husband? That is what I want to know.

PODGERS

All charming young men are.

LADY WINDERMERE

How wretchedly dull.

DUCHESS

I don't think a husband should be too fascinating. It is so dangerous.

LADY WINDERMERE

My dear, they never are too fascinating. But what I want are details. Details are the only things that interest. What is going to happen to Lord Arthur?

*ARTHUR is cautiously curious HIMSELF. PODGERS is obviously trying to cover.*

PODGERS

Well...within the next few months Lord Arthur will go a voyage--

LADY WINDERMERE

On his honeymoon, of course!

PODGERS

And...lose a relative.

DUCHESS

Not his mother I hope!

PODGERS

No, certainly not his mother. A distant relative, merely.

*DUCHESS sighs deeply with relief. LADY WINDERMERE sighs with equally deep disappointment.*

LADY WINDERMERE

Well, I am dreadfully disappointed I have absolutely nothing to tell Sybil. No one cares about distant relatives nowadays. They went out of fashion years ago. What a bust. A party is not only suitable now, but damn near necessary.

DUCHESS

Well I have enjoyed myself immensely. I found it most interesting. But let's join within. They are sure to have eaten everything up, but we may find some hot soup.

LADY WINDERMERE

If not cold brandy shall suffice. Doctor?

PODGERS

Er...I believe I'll be retiring for the evening.

LADY WINDERMERE

But there's celebrations to be had! Cake!

PODGERS

I've always fancied myself a man of cobbler.

LADY WINDERMERE

Wine?

PODGERS

I'd never be able to live down the shame of being unable to match you both glass for glass. My father's grave would implode.

LADY WINDERMERE

Well, I'm out of excuses and full of hunger.

PODGERS

I must depart immediately. You may keep the bottle. A good night and a good fortune to the both of you.

LADY WINDERMERE

*(walking, not really listening)* Beware, buffet...

*LADY WINDERMERE and DUCHESS exit to within. Laughing and yelling loudly in French as they enter the party.*

PODGERS

Well, sir, it--it was a pleasure. Congratulations again on your forthcoming nuptials. I remember my first marriage. Very brief. She criticized my glasses frequently. And then died. Seeing as you're spectacle-free you're well better off. Good evening, sir.

*PODGERS goes to exit to outside, but ARTHUR quickly approaches HIM, blocking HIS path.*

ARTHUR

Dr. Podgers, I must insist on your giving me a straightforward answer to a question I am going to put to you.

*PODGERS is uneasy. This isn't the first time such things have happened.*

PODGERS

*(not meeting HIS eyes)* Another time, Lord Arthur...

ARTHUR

Tell me what you saw there. I must know it. I am not a child. Tell me the truth. As a doctor it is your duty.

*PODGERS fumbles with a pocketwatch.*

PODGERS

What makes you think that I saw anything in your hand, Lord Arthur, more than I told you?

ARTHUR

I know you did, and I insist on your telling me what it was. I'm not fond of secrets being kept from me.

PODGERS

Though you have the capacity?

ARTHUR

Why would you say that?

PODGERS

My skills extend far beyond mere sooth-saying.

ARTHUR

What did you see?

PODGERS

Lord Arthur...I--I cannot...

*PODGERS puts HIS watch away.*

PODGERS

You have a party awaiting. Believe me it is a far better choice of action.

*PODGERS heads steadfastly for the door.*

ARTHUR

I will pay you. I will give you a cheque for a hundred pounds.

*PODGERS freezes.*

PODGERS

A hundred?

ARTHUR

A hundred and five. Your wealth cannot be much if your evenings are spent sniffing the skin of wealthy widows.

*ARTHUR has struck a nerve. Calmly, PODGERS turns. Sighs.*

PODGERS

It will take a little time. You had better sit down.

*ARTHUR does. PODGERS withdraws a large magnifying glass from HIS coat and polishes it vigorously.*

PODGERS

Lord Arthur, what would you say is your greatest flaw?

ARTHUR

Flaw? Hmm. (*beat*) Bugger, now there's a question. Ah...poor penmanship?

PODGERS

Hmph. Undoubtedly, I'm sure.

ARTHUR

You're being paid a question, doctor. And being paid for one. Not myself.

PODGERS

A precautionary measure. I have found those more willing to see bad qualities in themselves are even more willing to accept bad tidings ahead. Or, rather, I someday hope to find.

ARTHUR

Would you begin this poppycock?

PODGERS

Poppycock, eh? You're willing to shed a quid or two.

ARTHUR

A *grotesque* curiosity fuels me, nothing further. Now do go on. My dear future-mother-in-law might be easily enchanted by men who wiggle their fingers particularly, just ask her past four husbands, but I myself am not. Not for many years at least. Quit hiding and come out with it. Like a gentleman?

*PODGERS who has indeed been withholding suddenly rushes into action. HE quickly goes to ARTHUR and grabs both HIS hands and holds them out.*

*PODGERS inspects them, swiftly and expertly with HIS magnifying glass. Then, travels across ARTHUR's body: ARTHUR's heart, mind, eyes, perhaps lower, but always seemingly tethered to the hands. PODGERS recites as HE inspects...*

PODGERS

You have lived the delicate and luxurious life of a young man of birth and fortune, a life exquisite in its freedom from sordid care, its beautiful boyish insouciance. And now for the first time you are conscious of the terrible mystery of Destiny, of the awful meaning of Doom.

*PODGERS quickly breathes twice on the glass, polishes it and sets it on the sofa, all done exquisitely swift.*

*ARTHUR is perturbed and on HIS feet.*

ARTHUR

How mad and monstrous a dissection.

PODGERS

Inaccurate?

ARTHUR

Unrelated. I pay for my future.

PODGERS

Don't we all?

*An ominous beat.*



*PODGERS is apprehensive of ARTHUR.  
PODGERS knows. With an appropriate,  
worried distance and a deep breath...*

PODGERS

I would say your greatest flaw is that you have lived too good a life. Such a flaw, I know. All the same, a good life, monetarily and moralistically. Such behavior is awarded, obviously, and rewarded, as it should be. You have never been denied.

ARTHUR

I'm withdrawing my cheque...

PODGERS

No. I know that you are not. I inspect hands only because I cannot hearts. But, could I, I would. That is where the future truly lies. What we love, what we desire, that leads us. It is the only thing that can.

ARTHUR

And...my heart. Sibyl?

PODGERS

The present is not my speciality. (*beat*) You will have a desire...someday...for murder. (*beat*) Your heart lands what it wants. As it has your entire life. As it should for such a dutiful individual. It should come to pass that you shant be denied this time either.

*It festers.*

ARTHUR

And. (*slight beat*) And of my...distant relative?

PODGERS

Ah, yes. I saw no relation of the two. But, also, no non-relation. (*slight beat*) Though perhaps it'd be...better...to combine them.

*Another moment. Eternal for one,  
briefer for the rest.*

ARTHUR

...sir?

PODGERS

Yes?

ARTHUR

D-doctor...is there a possibility you could be wrong?

PODGERS

There's always a possibility, my boy. But I've not seen it. Though I hope I do. I wish it. Especially in this case...

ARTHUR

Why?

PODGERS

Uh...because you are a special favorite of a special favorite of mine. (*off-hand, quiet*) Yes...

*A beat.*

*ARTHUR's victimized nature melts. The Englishman in HIM stands, defiantly.*

ARTHUR

You have no evidence.

PODGERS

I never claimed to.

ARTHUR

This is a fabrication. You'd as well say I have seven arms.

PODGERS

Well, were that the case, I *would* have evidence.

ARTHUR

I will not pay. This is heresy and chicanery. I demand results for my money. I never tossed a shekel in a wishing well and I shant start such nonsense now. My cheque is invalidated.

PODGERS

Quite improper. Going against your word.

ARTHUR

And what of it?

PODGERS

It doesn't suit you, and you know it. Even such a mere trifle would drive you mad. (*slight beat*) I'll make one final prediction. An immediate one, not my usual style. The near future being the most unavoidable. Regardless, write me the cheque for two days from now and if my prediction does not occur before then, you'll have ample time to have it cancelled. (*slight beat*) Be the proper man of his word that we both know you are.

ARTHUR

(*accepting*) You're an enterprising fellow.

PODGERS

The best doctors are excellent businessmen. (*slight beat*)  
Tomorrow you will lose something extremely dear to you.  
*Something*. Not *someone*. No need to be alarmed there. It is an  
item many of us take for granted but our day would most  
certainly be adversely affected by its absence.

ARTHUR

I can't wait to see.

PODGERS

I thought you didn't believe.

ARTHUR

Exactly. Who doesn't love being proven right?

PODGERS

You would be surprised...

*A most uncomfortable beat.*

ARTHUR

I...I need not be here. I disturbingly tingle. I'll accompany  
you home and write the cheque at your flat

PODGERS

But your party.

ARTHUR

You know better than I the den of middle-aged rattlesnakes  
I'd be entering. Grasp sort. Best to keep my trousers  
attached.

PODGERS

*A-heh-heh*. Certainly.

ARTHUR

I'll call for my carriage.

PODGERS

Ever the proper gentleman.

ARTHUR

Even if amongst the newly renovated my foundations shall  
remain. There is nothing I can see that would change that.

*ARTHUR exits out the door to the  
outside, perhaps more brisk than usual.  
Passes by the window, hailing a  
carriage as HE does.*

*A final moment. PODGERS looks to the  
door. Walks to it slowly.*

*PODGERS follows, uneasy. Right before HE's outside, HE reenters. HE forgot HIS magnifying glass HE gets it and goes again, but stops by the window.*

*It is as if a sudden, bone-chilling gust of wind passed. PODGERS doesn't allow it another moment and races out the door.*

*As HE passes in the street, HE keeps a considerable distance away from the window.*

**END ACT ONE SCENE ONE**

ACT ONE SCENE TWO

*The next day. Bright, sobering morning sunlight drowns the room.*

*The aftermath. Scattered sundries are about the building. LADY WINDERMERE and THE DUCHESS are beached on the sofa sort of on top of each other. THEY rest like the living dead. Dresses are ruffled. Perhaps a glove on a foot.*

*A beat.*

*ARTHUR staggers from off the street behind the window. HE peers in, eyes wild from grief. HE knocks lightly on the window.*

*Also, HE is pantsless.*

*WINCKELKOPF appears from behind the sofa. HE considers returning to sleep.*

*HE is also pantsless.*

*ARTHUR gestures wildly to the door, which WINCKELKOPF opens. ARTHUR enters.*

ARTHUR

*(hushed)* Five thousand thank yous, Winky. Now there isn't a need...

WINCKELKOPF

LORD ARTHUR SAVILE!

*LADY WINDERMERE and DUCHESS are violently thrust awake. ARTHUR runs to get out of THEIR view.*

ARTHUR

...to announce me.

LADY WINDERMERE

Bloody bugger bollocks bastard...

DUCHESS

Gladys...

LADY WINDERMERE

Oooo, biscuit.

*SHE picks up a biscuit off the ground and eats it.*

*ARTHUR tries, continuously, to hide HIS...state. Running behind and between various items when eyes aren't upon HIM.*

DUCHESS

Good morning, Arthur, love. Your manservant is trouserless.

ARTHUR

*Afternoon*, mother. And, believe me, it happens. Shall I send him away?

DUCHESS

*(shrugging)* Just don't tell your father. And afternoon already? My word, Gladys, *(rubbing HER nose)* tell Sir Thomas...bravo.

*LADY WINDERMERE sits up.*

LADY WINDERMERE

...where are we? *(sees WINCKELKOPF)* Ahh! A bear!

DUCHESS

Gladys, you need a large cup of coffee. And perhaps a long trip to the confessional. Arthur, be a dear?

*SHE holds HER hand out. Still trying to hide, ARTHUR awkwardly helps HER up. LADY WINDERMERE grabs ARTHUR and claws HER way to HER feet. SHE is shoeless. WINCKELKOPF stands guard near the door, ever the man-servant, though with longing stares towards LADY WINDERMERE.*

DUCHESS

*(to ARTHUR)* You were missed last night.

LADY WINDERMERE

I was here.

DUCHESS

Arthur.

LADY WINDERMERE

Oh. *(beat)* He was missing?

DUCHESS

Indeed.

LADY WINDERMERE

How rude.

ARTHUR

I'm right here, madam.

*SHE turns to HIM.*

LADY WINDERMERE

How rude. You look ghastly.

ARTHUR

Well I've never been one to break from the group.

LADY WINDERMERE

Hm?

ARTHUR

Nothing. I shall say nothing more than an apology. I had accompanied the...fascinating Dr. Podgers to his flat and...was unable to find my way home. I've never been the sort to navigate by the stars. It wasn't until I was nearly squashed to death by an early morning taxi carriage that I was able to return. A second apology if I stink of horse. I think it had influenza.

*LADY WINDERMERE sniffs HIM.*

LADY WINDERMERE

No. Do check me.

*ARTHUR sniffs HER. WINCKELKOPF is unhappy with this. LADY WINDERMERE notices. THEIR game continues.*

ARTHUR

Amber and laundry. I still need to pay the man. I used my final cheque last night.

DUCHESS

He's out there? Now?

ARTHUR

*(looking out the window)* Wiping the horse's nose as we speak.

DUCHESS

We'll take it and pay. I've yet to see the viral strain that can affect our dear Gladys. Come on then, dearie. Let's away to breakfast.

ARTHUR

Lunch.

LADY WINDERMERE

My shoes have vanished.

*Indeed they have.*

DUCHESS

What better reason to buy a new pair, then? Arthur, do come with.

ARTHUR

Oh, I'm miserable shoe-shopping company, mother. Right, Winky?

WINCKELKOPF

*Nein.*

*ARTHUR gives WINCKELKOPF a meaningful look.*

WINCKELKOPF

*Nein* is German for...yes.

LADY WINDERMERE

All the better. The only thing more useless than a man's opinion is a man's opinion on footwear.

DUCHESS

I need eggs.

LADY WINDERMERE

A common, hopeless desire for most women our age. (to ARTHUR) Ta.

*THEY leave. WINCKELKOPF staring wistfully as THEY do. As THEY pass by the window, LADY WINDERMERE falls down. DUCHESS helps HER up. THEY exit.*

*ARTHUR exhales deeply, as if HE has been unable to breathe since HE entered.*

ARTHUR

Winky?

WINCKELKOPF

*Mein* lord?

*A beat.*

ARTHUR

AAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!



WINCKELKOPF  
(*joining*) AAHHHHHHHHHHH!

ARTHUR  
What are you doing?

WINCKELKOPF  
Helping you?

ARTHUR  
Oh, no. No, no, no.

*ARTHUR flings HIMSELF on the sofa.*

ARTHUR  
Are we no better than chessmen, Winky? Moved by an unseen power, vessels the potter fashions at his fancy, for honour or for shame?

WINCKELKOPF  
I prefer checkers.

ARTHUR  
Winky, you are my most faithful and trusted manservant since I had to let Jimmy go. I know anything I say is kept in strictest confidence. Yes?

WINCKELKOPF  
Yes.

ARTHUR  
And that is not German for anything else?

WINCKELKOPF  
*Ja.*

ARTHUR  
Well then, would you pace with me? I must return circulation to my near-frostbit thighs. And pace briskly, otherwise I am liable to explode and your afternoon would be ruined.

*THEY do, around the sofa.*

ARTHUR  
Actors, Winky, are so fortunate. They can choose whether they will appear in tragedy or in comedy, whether they will suffer or make merry, laugh or shed tears. But in real life it is different. Most men and women are forced to perform parts for which they have no qualifications. Our Guildensterns play Hamlet for us, and our Hamlets have to jest like Prince Hal. The world is a stage, but the play is badly cast. (*Stops pacing. Slight beat.*) I'm not making a millimeter of sense am I?

Englishmen rarely do.

WINCKELKOPF

*ARTHUR grabs WINCKELKOPF by the shoulders.*

Murder!

ARTHUR

Now we are talking.

WINCKELKOPF

Murder, murder, murder...

ARTHUR

*ARTHUR lets go, is carried away by HIS fear, keeps repeating "murder", as though iteration could dim the horror of the word. It grows in scale of ghastliness until HE falls to the ground. WINCKELKOPF shrugs.*

That is what the cheiromantist had seen in me. Murder! The very night seemed to know it! The dark corners of the streets were full of it! It grinned at me from the roofs of the houses! I've not slept since I heard! Perhaps I should! *(closes eyes. A beat)* I cannot!

ARTHUR

*ARTHUR sits up. Looks worried at WINCKELKOPF.*

You are unperturbed.

ARTHUR

Murder can be a part of life. At the end, usually, for half. You said the doctor was false. You did not believe.

WINCKELKOPF

I didn't.

ARTHUR

Well...

WINCKELKOPF

*WINCKELKOPF sits on the sofa. Crosses a leg.*

Tell me what is wrong.

WINCKELKOPF

*ARTHUR notices WINCKELKOPF's similar state.*

ARTHUR

Where are your trousers, Winky?

WINCKELKOPF

The Lady Windermere er...is washing them? They got a...stain on them during the party. Lady Windermere insisted on removing them.

ARTHUR

You have no idea of your fortune.

WINCKELKOPF

*(nodding)* Pfft, ja...Er--why?

ARTHUR

I've no idea where mine have gone! When I left they were on me, and somehow, somewhere, something must have taken them. I hope! I have no recollection beyond my horror. Maybe I removed them to donate to a freezing tramp? Or perhaps that blasted carriage driver with his infected steed nicked them while in my state of confusion. They did have such finely tailored seems...

WINCKELKOPF

Pants, much like people, go missing often.

ARTHUR

My sorts are sorted across London. I took a fetid taxi carriage, Winky! Where did my carriage driver even go? Did I send him away...or...or could I have murdered him in my quest for fulfillment? No...no, surely not. Hopefully not. *(beat)* This *(indicating HIS pantslessness)* is what that dastardly doctor divined for the near future. My trousers. Disappeared like a dream and I'm left in a nightmare. Though it may be that I wouldn't be exposed to this drafty drawing room had Dr. Podgers not said it, it has given birth to a nagging sense of doubt. Like a hair caught on the back of your throat. It never comes loose. It disrupts my equilibrium. I couldn't find my way back, Winky. Dr. Podgers lives less than seven blocks away.

WINCKELKOPF

I will buy for you maps.

ARTHUR

No. No, no...

*ARTHUR looks to the window. Sadly, HE goes to it, beckoning WINCKELKOPF, who follows.*

ARTHUR

What do you see, Winky?

WINCKELKOPF

Outside.

ARTHUR

Look at the square. The children flitting about like white butterflies. They live with nature. She has taught them peace. I wonder if life ever seems lovelier than during childhood. (*beat*) I am unwell, Winky. That mad doctor. I am unwell.

*A beat.*

WINCKELKOPF

You can fix this.

ARTHUR

How?

WINCKELKOPF

He said to murder. That is not impossible.

ARTHUR

You think so?

WINCKELKOPF

I know so.

ARTHUR

The thought had crossed my mind...

WINCKELKOPF

As all actions must at first.

*ARTHUR considers. Debates it. Steps away.*

ARTHUR

Winky, it's...no. One good guess is hardly reason enough. (*beat*) Though...were someone to...how should they?

WINCKELKOPF

Depends. How much I like them. If they are male or female. Breakfast.

*ARTHUR draws in.*

ARTHUR

What if it were, say, an elderly person well past their prime and having forgotten how to even spell happy. Perhaps a woman.

WINCKELKOPF

Hands. Or stairs. Or dogs.

ARTHUR

Something more subtle.

WINCKELKOPF

Dogs can be subtle. They leave no evidence. Well, not any you would want to investigate.

ARTHUR

You know I'm allergic.

WINCKELKOPF

This is not for you though, yes?

ARTHUR

Of course not. Purely making conversation.

WINCKELKOPF

A poison is good for a woman. Easy to hide. Tea, perfume, eye drops.

ARTHUR

Poison. Where would one find some?

WINCKELKOPF

Private poison collections?

ARTHUR

And where by God would one find such a thing?

WINCKELKOPF

Come upstairs, I will show you.

*WINCKELKOPF goes, ARTHUR follows. Then stops.*

ARTHUR

No. No! NO!

*ARTHUR briskly walks away.*

ARTHUR

There is no reason to this. To any of this! *(beat)* I cannot see one. If I cannot see it, I will not will it.

*HE goes to exit to within, but freezes when HIS eyes catch a framed photograph. HE picks it up.*

ARTHUR

Sibyl...

WINCKELKOPF

She has gotten small.

ARTHUR

It is a photograph. Oh, Sibyl. Look at her small, exquisitely-shaped head drooped slightly to one side, as though the thin, reed-like throat could hardly bear the burden of so much beauty. The lips slightly parted, seemingly made for sweet music. The tender purity of love looked out in wonder from those dreaming eyes.

*HE holds the photograph close. But is unable to keep it there.*

ARTHUR

Winky, do you know what this means?

WINCKELKOPF

*(hurt)* You do not want to see my collection...

*ARTHUR walks, darkly, to the piano. HE plays, the music fitting the mood. HE sets the photo of SIBYL in the holder usually reserved for sheet music.*

ARTHUR

I cannot marry Sibyl. With the doom of murder hanging over my head, it would be a betrayal like that of Judas. What happiness could there be for us, when at any moment I might be called upon to carry out the awful prophecy written in my hand? What manner of life would be ours while Fate still held this fearful fortune in the scales? The marriage must be postponed, at all costs. Of this I am quite resolved. Ardently though I love the girl, and the mere touch of her fingers, when we sat together, makes each nerve of my body thrill with exquisite joy, I recognize none the less clearly where my duty lay, and am fully conscious of the fact that I have no right to marry until I have committed the murder. This done, I could stand before the altar with Sybil and give my life into her hands without terror of wrongdoing. This done, I could take her to my arms, knowing that she would never have to blush for me, never have to hang her head in shame. But done it must be first; and the sooner the better for both.

WINCKELKOPF

So...no collection?

ARTHUR

Soon...

*HE ceases playing. Pockets the photograph. Regains composure, finally.*

ARTHUR

Winky, as soon as you find and change into your own trousers, I will need you to devise a list of my most distant relatives within same-day carriage travel and send for them for tea this evening. You have an hour. Until then I must run water over my face. And then I must vomit.

*Quite resolved, ARTHUR briskly exits to within the apartment.*

*WINCKELKOPF is alone. HE looks around. HE picks up a writing utensil and a pad of paper. And then a pair of trousers. HE withdraws LADY WINDERMERE'S shoes from them. And, HER stockings.*

*HE exits to within.*

**END ACT ONE SCENE TWO**

ACT ONE SCENE THREE

*Same day. Later. Tea time.*

*ARTHUR, now properly pantsed stands staring straight out. It's kind of uncomfortable.*

*WINCKELKOPF's foot appears onstage from within.*

ARTHUR

*(tersely)*Not yet!

*WINCKELKOPF's foot exits. ARTHUR looks out again. Then, HE sits. A beat.*

ARTHUR

*Now.*

*WINCKELKOPF enters carrying a covered silver tray.*

ARTHUR

Yes. That's a good Winky.

*WINCKELKOPF stops beside the sofa.*

ARTHUR

And what shall you say? *(silence)* Precisely. Lady Clementia's distaste for any other Europeans is well known from here to several Italian housekeeper's early-death-due-to-work-related-stress gravestones. So long as you keep quiet she won't suspect and thus shant run out prematurely. Now, after I deftly maneuver Lady Clem to the sofa, step two.

*WINCKELKOPF lifts the tray lid. It's empty.*

ARTHUR

It's empty. Where are the *bonbons*? *(beat)* Open your mouth.

*WINCKELKOPF does. Nothing.*

ARTHUR

Nothing. Is my eyesight deteriorating along with my mind? Did I even request *bonbons*?

*WINCKELKOPF nods.*

ARTHUR

Well, where are they? Out with it.



WINCKELKOPF

I cannot speak, *Mein Lord*. (*realizes*) Oh, no.

ARTHUR

Oh, bugger, you *Germans*. You'd follow any orders implicitly no matter how moronic, ridiculous, uncouth, nonsensical, or purely, truly idiotic they are. We're simply rehearsing. You may talk. The first thing you may tell me is the location of the *bonbons*.

WINCKELKOPF

They cool from cooking as you--we speak.

ARTHUR

And the poison capsule?

WINCKELKOPF

It will be in the lemon *bonbon*.

ARTHUR

And that one shall be?

WINCKELKOPF

Delicious. But deadly.

ARTHUR

The color. Yellow, I can assume?

WINCKELKOPF

Absolutely. Definitely yellow.

ARTHUR

Splendid. Step three?

*WINCKELKOPF covers the tray again.*

ARTHUR

Excellent. I think we have figured it all out, Winky. Poison is a good route. Safe, sure, and quiet, and does away with any necessity for painful scenes, to which, like most Englishmen, I have a rooted objection. And it is slow acting you say?

WINCKELKOPF

Like a sloth in syrup.

ARTHUR

Lady Clem should thank us. Given her penchant towards the drink and American literature, both such hard, hard endurances on the human body and mind, it wouldn't have ended well.

*ARTHUR is assured in his conviction and stands accordingly. However, sadness lingers. WINCKELKOPF takes notice, sets down the tray, and takes one of ARTHUR's hands.*

WINCKELKOPF  
*(genuinely concerned)* You do not have second thoughts do you, Mein Lord.?

ARTHUR  
Oh...no. Lady Clem is a fine choice. There will be no suspicion of me as I have nothing to inherit from the woman. Except perhaps a collection of American dramatic writing, and I'd be better off using that as fire tinder.

WINCKELKOPF  
Then why you worry?

ARTHUR  
The poor woman has done nothing. She is being punished for being merely convenient. Is that right?

WINCKELKOPF  
It is when red dots appear on the skin.

ARTHUR  
What?

WINCKELKOPF  
*(looking out the window)* She comes!

*The MEN scramble. WINCKELKOPF grabs the tray and cover and rushes to the kitchen.*

*ARTHUR, panicked, tumbles across the apartment. HE stands and opens the door, sticking HIS head out.*

ARTHUR  
*(sing-song)* Lady Clementia! *(calling)* Do come in my dear, sweet, lovely, beauty's beauty!

*HE opens the door fully, smiling broadly.*

*LADY CLEMENTIA passes by the window. SHE has a cane in HER hand and looks as if HER heart is in a wheelchair. HER demeanor is best compared to spoiled milk: pungent and biting. And perhaps a bit chunky.*

*SHE hobbles across scowling and enters the apartment building. SHE is carrying an unnecessarily large handbag which SHE thrusts into ARTHUR's hand. HE sets it beside the sofa.*

*SHE sniffs the air in short, sharp inhales.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

I can finally breathe in here. I take it you fired that Spaniard?

ARTHUR

Yes, madam.

LADY CLEMENTIA

It's by God's lily-white beard that your chandelier didn't go missing before you did. Give us a kiss.

*ARTHUR kisses HER on the cheek, beaming.*

*SHE curtly inspects the space, poking and prodding at various things with HER cane, including ARTHUR.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

Why haven't you been to see me all this time? No one in the family does and I haven't the slightest inclination as to why. The buggerers...

ARTHUR

My dear Lady Clem, I never have a moment to myself.

LADY CLEMENTIA

I suppose you mean that you go about all day long with Miss Sybil, buying *chiffons* and talking nonsense? I cannot understand why people make such a fuss about being married. In my day we never dreamed of billing and cooing in public, or in private for that matter.

ARTHUR

I assure you I have not seen Sybil in weeks, Lady Clem. As far as I can make out, she belongs entirely to her doctors and her hatmakers.

LADY CLEMENTIA

Hats. Ruddy sordid business that is. You know who wears hats? Jews.

ARTHUR

So I've heard. You must be absolutely tuckered, ma'am.  
Please, sit.

*HE gestures gracefully to the sofa.  
LADY CLEMENTIA pokes at it, as one  
would to discern a dead skunk's gender.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

Where is the sofa from?

ARTHUR

Persia, I believe. Or Greece. Perhaps, actually, China.

*LADY CLEMENTIA spits on the sofa.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

For decades I have refused to sit on anything constructed by non-english speakers for fear of tainting and I stand by it. Figuratively and literally.

ARTHUR

Well--erm, if we cannot rest our rumps let us settle our stomachs, eh? (*calling*) Winck(*catching himself*)...Smith?!

LADY CLEMENTIA

Winksmith?

ARTHUR

Yes, my...northern England manservant.

LADY CLEMENTIA

How queer of a name. (*suddenly*) Oh, no, you don't reckon he's a Catholic do you? I refuse to be in their heretical presence.

ARTHUR

I assure you not, ma'am. No, I believe his ancestors simply crafted...spectacles. Or perhaps dreams? *Ha ha*. He should be coming. (*whispered*) *Please, God of Germany.*

*WINCKELKOPF enters with the covered tray. HE expected them sitting. The plan being slightly thrown off balance affects him. HE approaches tentatively.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

What's this then? Not Goose, I pray. Hate Goosemeat.

ARTHUR

*Bonbons*, ma'am. Homemade, though, I assure you. French in name only. And perhaps in decadence as well.

ARTHUR (cont'd)  
I expected us to sit and take these at the table but if we are to stand. Winck...Winck can hold them for us.

*WINCKELKOPF strongly shakes HIS head.*

LADY CLEMENTIA  
No? What kind of help have you hired? (to *WINCKELKOPF*, *suspecting*) You're Lithuanian aren't you?

ARTHUR  
Simply a nervous tick, dear Lady Clem. Winck only gets this way near powerful women. Poor glandular faculties the man has.

LADY CLEMENTIA  
Hmph. Most men find themselves with a weak gland around me.

ARTHUR  
Well I assure you my mandibles are as strong as ever. Now I must insist you start with the lemon *bonbon*. It's simply...heavenly. Winck?

*WINCKELKOPF lifts the cover off the tray.*

*All the bonbons (or just their frostings) are varying shades of yellow. ARTHUR's eyes go wide.*

LADY CLEMENTIA  
Lemon, you say? And which one is it?

ARTHUR  
(*to the tray, panic*) Which one is it? (*to WINCKELKOPF, asking, panic escalating*) Which one is it? (*to LADY CLEMENTIA, plan rapidly formulated. Playfully*) Which one is it? Why, ma'am, that's the fun of the dish! Sample 'til you find it! Go ahead. As many as you'd like. All if you wish.

LADY CLEMENTIA  
Ucch, certainly not. Do you see me draped in an Irish flag? I'm not that crude and needy. And certainly not as befreckled. Have one with me. Go on. I demand it.

*LADY CLEMENTIA picks one out. ARTHUR hesitates.*

LADY CLEMENTIA  
I highly doubt this is the first decision you've ever made in your life and, most likely, it shant be your last. Pick.

*ARTHUR looks to WINCKELKOPF. No help there. Hopeless, HE picks one up.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

There you are. *(beat)* Now it goes in your mouth.

*ARTHUR is frozen. LADY CLEMENTIA takes the hand with the bonbon and puts it to ARTHUR's mouth. HE slowly opens it, and SHE pushes it in. SHE pops HER's into HER mouth and munches.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

Mmm. Custard. What's yours?

*ARTHUR sweats. HE has nowhere to run. Resigned, HE takes the teensiest of bites. The flavor comes to him, then a jubilated relief.*

ARTHUR

*(almost crying with joy, mouthful)* BANANA! Oh, what a long, divine fruit...

*HE swallows.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

Never much cared for it. Far too mushy.

*SHE picks another.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

And you.

ARTHUR

Oh, no. I'm...stuffed.

*Pats HIS tummy.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

Here. One more won't kill you.

*ARTHUR opens HIS mouth to protest as SHE picks one up, and quickly puts it into HIS open, now surprised mouth. SHE puts one hand on the top of HIS head and the other below HIS chin and forces HIM to chew. SHE casually grabs another for HERSELF.*

*ARTHUR gloomily chews. Oh, no...*

LADY CLEMENTIA

What? Not butterscotch I hope for the Lord's sake. No more foul a flavor.

*ARTHUR continues to chew, resigned to Doom. But then...*

ARTHUR

*(mouthful)* No, it's maybe...*(gasps)* poppy! Is it poppy?!  
*(looks to WINCKELKOPF)* Was there poppy? *(WINCKELKOPF nods)*  
It's poppy!

LADY CLEMENTIA

Well don't *pop* because of it.

*HE swallows, relieved. SHE eats HERS. HER face becomes mortified. ARTHUR and WINCKELKOPF get excited. SHE swallows, grimacing sharply.*

ARTHUR

Is it lemon?

LADY CLEMENTIA

UFF! BUTTERSCOTCH! IT'S LIKE THE DEVIL'S URINE! I must wash this flavor out immediately! Do you have any extremely hard liquor?!

ARTHUR

Uh, in the kitchen, ma'am.

*LADY CLEMENTIA swiftly exits to the kitchen, scraping HER tongue with HER fingers to rid HERSELF of the taste.*

*ARTHUR hotly turns to WINCKELKOPF. BOTH speak hushed throughout.*

ARTHUR

Yellow?!

WINCKELKOPF

I know.

ARTHUR

How could you make such a grievous error?! *Et tu, Brute?! Are you trying to kill me as well?!*

WINCKELKOPF

Not today.

ARTHUR

Explain yourself promptly or I'll make you eat two!

WINCKELKOPF

It was the yellow, *Mein* Lord!

ARTHUR

They're all as bloody, bright yellow as the sun's smelly, linty navel!

WINCKELKOPF

No. The lemon was yellow. The custard was canary. The banana was gold. The poppy was wheat. And the butterscotch was rotten *sauerkraut*.

ARTHUR

Well I obviously can't tell the difference, can you?!

WINCKELKOPF

I could.

ARTHUR

Then do!

WINCKELKOPF

No, I could. I cannot anymore.

ARTHUR

What?!

WINCKELKOPF

You are standing! When we rehearsed you sat! I was going to point to it but my fingers are enslaved if I stand! I'm improvising! I forgot which is which. This acting business is very, very hard!

ARTHUR

*(sighs)* It is no matter. We shall send the rest home with her and then I shall punch you in the bracket until your face is yellow...somehow.

WINCKELKOPF

You might have known. The capsule very well may still be intact inside. You could feel it.

ARTHUR

Well couldn't she then?

WINCKELKOPF

She is old. With age the palette becomes less...refined.

*LADY CLEMENTIA reenters, long, heavy liquor bottle in hand. SHE'S chugging. SHE leaves about half a teaspoon.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

If there were two things I could permanently remove in this world it would be butterscotch and Italians. And Scots.



LADY CLEMENTIA (cont'd)

And the Welsh. And Swiss. And the Germans, ooo I'd save them for last.

*ARTHUR excessively yawns and stretches HIS arms.*

ARTHUR

Well, dear, darling Lady Clem, I'm afraid I must retire to bed.

LADY CLEMENTIA

I just arrived.

ARTHUR

And soon as I wake I will promptly begin work on enhancing my meeting scheduling skills. By all means feel free to take the remainder of the *bonbons*. After all, I am trying to be slim for my upcoming tuxedo. *A-ha-ha*.

LADY CLEMENTIA

Well I'd like another before I leave to erase that positively torturous gustatory experience.

ARTHUR

Pick away. Lemon remains...

LADY CLEMENTIA

No, no.

ARTHUR

Yes, yes. Please, please.

LADY CLEMENTIA

Not alone. Would you simply make someone watch you eat your dinner in front of them like some damned Luxembourgian?

ARTHUR

Well, ma'am, truly, I cannot eat another. Just take them with you. Please.

LADY CLEMENTIA

Compounding gluttony? I'll have nothing of it. Either you have one with me now I'll leave them here when I exit.

*A weighty beat.*

ARTHUR

*(resigned)* You are a very difficult woman. Perhaps I chose even more correctly than I thought.

LADY CLEMENTIA

What?

ARTHUR

Nothing. Nothing at all. Let's get this sodding business finalized.

*Not caring anymore, ARTHUR just picks one up. Beckons to LADY CLEMENTIA who does as well.*

ARTHUR

To long life. Cheers.

*HE "toasts" HIS bonbon with HER's and tosses it in HIS mouth, lightly grimacing, chewing slowly.*

*A beat.*

*Oh, no. Most certainly this time...*

ARTHUR

*(whispered, mouthful)* Lemon.

LADY CLEMENTIA

Oh, lucky you.

ARTHUR

*(mouthful)* Lemon. Definitely lemon.

*ARTHUR chews, slowly, terrified. WINCKELKOPF is trying to say something, but cannot audibly communicate due to the circumstances.*

ARTHUR

*(to WINCKELKOPF, mouthful)* Oh, just say it.

WINCKELKOPF

*(a very poor attempt of a German imitation of an English accent)* The...lemon...might still be intact *mein...mind* you.

LADY WINDERMERE

*(to WINCKELKOPF)* Which part of England were you from again?

*ARTHUR chews. HE's right!*

ARTHUR

*(to WINCKELKOPF, mouthful)* You're right! You're right!

*Relief.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

Well, go on and swallow now.

*Fear.*

ARTHUR

*(chewing exquisitely slowly. mouthful)* Oh, but I just love the...lemon...y goodness. I have to keep chewing. Mmmmm.

*Abject panic. WINCKELKOPF, behind LADY CLEMENTIA has nothing.*

ARTHUR

*(chewing still, desperately slowly. mouthful)* Just simply adore the...tanginess. Not a man alive who doesn't love...tang. Mmmmmmm-mmmmmmm...

*Horror. Then! An idea!*

ARTHUR

MMMM!

*Flinging out HIS arms as if propelled by the joy of taste, ARTHUR knocks LADY CLEMENTIA's cane out from under HER, causing HER to fall, hard.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

Ahhh!

*ARTHUR looks furtively to WINCKELKOPF, violently beckoning HIM with a head gesture. WINCKELKOPF rushes over.*

*With one hand, ARTHUR helps LADY CLEMENTIA to HER feet. In the other, HE spits the remains of the bonbon and hands them to WINCKELKOPF.*

*WINCKELKOPF withdraws the still-intact poison capsule from the mess.*

*LADY CLEMENTIA is standing, balancing on ARTHUR. HE grabs HER cane for HER.*

ARTHUR

Terribly sorry, Lady Clem. So overcome with such a radiant taste explosion!

LADY CLEMENTIA

I haven't been struck by a man like that since before my grandfather passed.

*As SHE says this, WINCKELKOPF is gesturing to ARTHUR that THEY still need to place the pill in another bonbon so that LADY CLEMENTIA can eat it and later die.*

*ARTHUR nods HIS head in worried agreement. HE is unsure what to do, as LADY CLEMENTIA would surely see them place the pill.*

ARTHUR  
*(snapping back to attention to LADY CLEMENTIA) Er--what's that?*

*LADY CLEMENTIA has finally regained total balance with HER cane.*

LADY CLEMENTIA  
I said...

*Ah-HA! Another idea!*

ARTHUR  
MMMM!

*Once again, ARTHUR's arms go flying, knocking LADY CLEMENTIA's cane out from under her. SHE falls, again. Even harder.*

*While SHE's down, WINCKELKOPF tosses ARTHUR the capsule, who catches it and swiftly places it in another bonbon.*

ARTHUR  
After-taste! Just as thrilling as the previous! Oh, Lady Clem, do forgive me. If my mother were to see my behavior she'd kill me where I stood.

*SHE struggles to get up. There is little help.*

LADY CLEMENTIA  
Seems you're the only one standing round here.

ARTHUR  
Here, please.

*LADY CLEMENTIA extends HER hand for HELP, but ARTHUR completely ignores it and grabs HER handbag and the tray of bonbons, right before WINCKELKOPF was going to take one for HIMSELF.*

*ARTHUR pours all the bonbons into LADY CLEMENTIA's handbag.*

ARTHUR

Please, take them all, I insist. For my bitter actions you deserve a sweet compensation.

*LADY CLEMENTIA returns to HER feet and assumes a safe distance from ARTHUR.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

If you're really apologetic, get me the bloody hell out and call me a coachmen. Many of them are Dutch and I refuse to make eye contact.

ARTHUR

As you wish.

*THEY start to exit.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

I don't even know why you called on me to begin with. Flinging your arms like some Portuguese drunkard.

ARTHUR

Oh, Lady Clementia, why would I ever want to be without your charming company? And I'm sure I'll see you again very, very soon in the coming days.

*THEY leave out the door, ARTHUR calling to a coachmen as THEY pass the window and exit.*

*Alone and with the bonbons gone, WINCKELKOPF rubs HIS stomach. HE's hungry. HE shrugs.*

*HE eats the remains of ARTHUR's lemon bonbon.*

**END ACT ONE SCENE THREE**

**ACT ONE SCENE FOUR**

*A foggy, gray afternoon. The drafty, lonely drawing room. Seemingly empty. As if its heart has been dashed out and tossed on the street.*

*WINCKELKOPF enters from within. Stands.*

WINCKELKOPF

*Mein Lord?*

ARTHUR

*Mein man?*

*ARTHUR is lying behind the sofa.*

WINCKELKOPF

There is news.

ARTHUR

Isn't there always? And yet, is any of it really new? It has all happened when we tell it. It's aged. Only while it's happening is it news, and even then it is immediately transformed into history. So, no, Winky, there is no news.

WINCKELKOPF

So I should...go?

ARTHUR

No. *(sighs)* Were there such a thing as news what would it be?

WINCKELKOPF

Your mother is here.

ARTHUR

That is as much shocking news as saying my nose is on my face.

WINCKELKOPF

And the...*(wistfully)* Lady Windermere.

ARTHUR

And my nostrils below it. Date?

WINCKELKOPF

No, your mother is married.

ARTHUR

The day's date, Winky.

WINCKELKOPF

Fourteenth, September.

ARTHUR

That makes it a fortnight to the day since we set Lady Clem with those treacherous treats and nothing. Nothing.

WINCKELKOPF

Perhaps you would like to consider changing clothes, *Mein* Lord? You have had on the same set.

ARTHUR

For one fortnight...

WINCKELKOPF

You smell vaguely of old turnips.

ARTHUR

My heart, Winky, is an old turnip. Purple and rotting. Dreadfully rotting. My trousers can manage.

WINCKELKOPF

Shall I send madams in?

ARTHUR

Has there ever been a woman alive you would be able to stop doing what they want without extensive use of elbows?

WINCKELKOPF

Alive? No.

ARTHUR

Seems to be the only sort I know. Let them in. Do alert them to my odor.

*WINCKELKOPF exits to within.*

*ARTHUR rises, finally, revealing HIS pitiful self. Carries over to the otherside of the sofa. Sits. Slumps. Lies down. Falls to the floor. Stays.*

*A beat.*

*HE sniffs HIMSELF. Closes HIS eyes.*

ARTHUR

I'd say cabbage.

*LADY WINDERMERE and DUCHESS enter. BOTH are dressed in black. THEY both see ARTHUR on the ground.*

LADY WINDERMERE

Is he asleep?

No.

ARTHUR

DUCHESS  
Arthur, love, you're on the floor.

ARTHUR  
Is that what that is?

*DUCHESS is concerned. LADY WINDERMERE is preoccupied with looking into other rooms containing certain Germanic servants.*

DUCHESS  
Well, we're back.

ARTHUR  
Shoe-shopping went smashingly?

DUCHESS  
What?

*ARTHUR peeks an eye open, tilts HIS head up slightly to inspect THEIR feet.*

ARTHUR  
Apparently not.

*HE lies back down. DUCHESS approaches, worried.*

*WINCKELKOPF reenters. HE and LADY WINDERMERE briefly stare at each other longingly, then, quickly, ruefully, look away. Such a dance continues throughout.*

DUCHESS  
We've returned from Venice.

ARTHUR  
Italy?

LADY WINDERMERE  
Erm, uh...is there another?

ARTHUR  
I suppose there's just the one. Just the one for me. Only one wonderful one whose heart was won on a...Monday.

DUCHESS  
Did you fall, love?



ARTHUR

From the pure, pink, puffy clouds of heaven.

DUCHESS

I suppose you knocked your head as well.

*SHE bends over HIM to investigate.*

ARTHUR

Mother I--I think you should leave. (*HE sits up*) I am obviously odorously not for company at the moment.

DUCHESS

I did detect a whiff of rutabaga. What's the matter, love?

ARTHUR

Love. (*beat*) Love indeed, mother. It holds me so tightly I can hardly breathe. And yet, it is as intangible as air. Or fate. Hmm.

DUCHESS

Arthur...

*HE stands. Gathers HIMSELF. HE is, after all, a gentleman.*

DUCHESS

I'd heard you were out of sorts.

ARTHUR

(*off-hand, to WINCKELKOPF*) Loose lips sink German ships...

*WINCKELKOPF, so desperately trying to withhold his desire to passionately ravage LADY WINDERMERE ignores the remark.*

DUCHESS

But why? Mild incontinence? Your father suffers from it occasionally. Perhaps it's hereditary. Like your chin.

ARTHUR

No. Not yet at least. (*stretches lightly*)

DUCHESS

I'm positively flummoxed. Unless...

*SHE approaches HIM slyly.*

DUCHESS

It's Sibyl.

ARTHUR

*(looking around)* Where?

DUCHESS

On your mind. My word, vegetables aren't the only thing of which you reek. And they say there's only one way to tell when a man's thinking of a woman. It is her, yes?

ARTHUR

Yes. *(realizing)* It *is* her. If she was only here it wouldn't matter would it? My joy would just be a huge, massive...eraser to this bleak scribbling.

DUCHESS

Well, then, I think I found you the perfect *souvenir* from Venice. Gladys?

*LADY WINDERMERE and WINCKELKOPF have now drawn so close THEY're sniffing each other excitedly. DUCHESS sees.*

DUCHESS

What on Earth is going on?

LADY WINDERMERE

I'm *(panicked, looks to WINCKELKOPF)*...denying his advances!

*SHE slaps WINCKELKOPF.*

LADY WINDERMERE

Dreadful Deutschlander. *(to DUCHESS)* Yes, dearie?

DUCHESS

Would you fetch Arthur's...present?

LADY WINDERMERE

Now? I thought we were waiting until dinner.

*DUCHESS gives a concerned look to ARTHUR, then a smiling one to LADY WINDERMERE.*

DUCHESS

And with perfect timing. As always with fate.

*LADY WINDERMERE exits. WINCKELKOPF is sad. DUCHESS sniffs ARTHUR.*

DUCHESS

Just say you were making stew and failed.

ARTHUR

Hm?

*LADY WINDERMERE* reenters. Beckons to *WINCKELKOPF*. Whispers in *HIS* ear. Lingers, then stands away.

WINCKELKOPF

LADY SIBYL WINDERMERE!

*LADY SIBYL WINDERMERE* enters. Tender. Pure. Beaming. *ARTHUR* melts. Metaphorically, preferably. *SIBYL* rushes to *HIM*. *THEY* hold hands. *THEN* relinquish.

SIBYL

I knew I would see you again soon, Artie. Even before the planned trip.

ARTHUR

Sibyl...

*SHE sniffs.*

SIBYL

Has someone left a squash out in the sun?

ARTHUR

Uh...

DUCHESS

Well, I am quite peckish! Gladys, you?

LADY WINDERMERE

*(looking intensely at WINCKELKOPF)* Starved.

DUCHESS

To the kitchen then. I've found it to be the most suitable place for such impulses. *(Smiling)* Excuse us.

*DUCHESS* exits to within. *LADY WINDERMERE* and *WINCKELKOPF* follow for a bit then pause, frozen in each other's views. *DUCHESS'* arms pull *THEM* within.

*ARTHUR* and *SIBYL* gaze. Too proper to properly share *THEIR* love, and yet too loving to not make *THEIR* love properly, squishingly obvious.

ARTHUR

I don't believe I'm seeing you. With all the madness that's followed me home of late, I still cannot.

SIBYL

You always were dismissive of the unbelievable. How you ever enjoyed Christmas as a lad I'll never know.

ARTHUR

You look wonderful.

SIBYL

You do not. What's happened?

*ARTHUR smiles. A relief. A beat.*

ARTHUR

May I just hold you? For a moment? I'll trade you an answer for it?

*A beat. Silence.*

ARTHUR

Alright then.

SIBYL

*(as if suddenly coming to)* Hm?

ARTHUR

Did you not hear me?

SIBYL

Was I not the last to speak?

ARTHUR

No, lovely.

SIBYL

Oh, fiddlee-dee. And I'd been doing so well...

ARTHUR

Your sleeping spells, of course.

SIBYL

Really, I've been better. The doctors were so impressed they let me ride the bicycle for nearly twelve minutes! It just must be seeing you. I'm all a-twitter.

ARTHUR

Well, it's no matter.

SIBYL

Good. Good.

ARTHUR

Nothing is...

SIBYL

Hm?

ARTHUR

Nothing is the matter. With you in this room and your eyes in mine I am...untroubled. I cannot even remember the troubles I had. How do you do that?

SIBYL

It's inexplicable. Though with my afflictions my memory is as reliable as snow on the sun.

ARTHUR

Inexplicable. Yes. Yes...

*A beat. It's a nice one.*

SIBYL

I've missed you. Deeply. At night. Under the stars. (*slight beat*) Would you...care to sit with me? Discuss Italian architecture?

ARTHUR

No...

SIBYL

French, then?

ARTHUR

Neither of us shall sit. Come close to me.

*SHE does. HE embraces HER. So tightly.*

SIBYL

Artie! Pr--propriety!

ARTHUR

It's been of little use to me. All of it. All plans. All possessions. Everything I see has misled me and all I hear makes misery. I am so lost. I didn't know one could get so lost. But here you are. Another mad and magical moment. It's most perplexing that all I need is to be in two such delicate, right-slightly-shorter-than-the-left if I remember correctly, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful arms. I hardly understand it. (*beat*) I do hope you're awake.

SIBYL

I am.

ARTHUR

Good. So good. (*beat*) Lovely?

Hm?

SIBYL

*HE lets go. SHE shakes fully awake. THEY stand a proper distance. Small smiles.*

ARTHUR

Enough of me and my misalignments. What on Earth are you doing back?

*SIBYL, worried, remembers.*

SIBYL

Oh. Time?

ARTHUR

You came back for seasoning?

SIBYL

What time is it, Artie?

ARTHUR

Oh.

*ARTHUR pats at HIS pockets, finally finds and procures HIS pocketwatch.*

ARTHUR

2:37 in the PM.

SIBYL

Oh, Lord, well, come along or we'll be late.

ARTHUR

But to what?

SIBYL

Artie, have you forgotten the news as well as soap?

ARTHUR

I've been...preoccupied.

SIBYL

The funeral.

ARTHUR

*(struck, excited)* A funeral? Someone died?

SIBYL

Typically the case in such matters, yes.

ARTHUR

Whom?

SIBYL

A relative of your mother. Aunt? Second aunt? Perhaps third? Maybe a cousin? The Lady Clementia.

ARTHUR

(*joyous*) SHE DIED?!

SIBYL

Sadly, yes.

*ARTHUR rushes to SIBYL, takes HER in HIS arms, and kisses HER very, very well.*

SIBYL

Artie!

ARTHUR

After the funeral let's ask the priest to marry us immediately.

SIBYL

What?

ARTHUR

You're awake. You heard that.

SIBYL

But, Artie, isn't it our duty to respect our families' wishes for a proper wedding ceremony?

ARTHUR

Isn't it our duty as humans to love as much as we can as soon as possible? We can have a ceremony later. We'll do it for ourselves. Like Romeo and Juliet did. (*mostly to HIMSELF*) *Heh*, though I certainly shant be buying any more poisons...

*SIBYL might have heard this remark. SHE'S confused. ARTHUR notices.*

ARTHUR

Er--wouldn't want to disrespect the...good Lady Clem.

SIBYL

What's that mean?

ARTHUR

Well the woman was accidentally poisoned, yes? Yes?

SIBYL

No.

ARTHUR

No?

SIBYL

No. No, terrible accident all the same, though. Ruddy cane of hers gave out, apparently it had been recently damaged. Just so happens it was beside the Thames and the old girl fell and drowned.

ARTHUR

She...drowned? In water?

SIBYL

For what passes for it in that septic nightmare. How grisly an end...

ARTHUR

*(growing desperate)* And nothing else?

SIBYL

Well the fall may have dislocated her shoulder but she'dve healed. I can't believe you hadn't heard correctly. Did you not receive the telegram?

ARTHUR

I...I have been busy.

SIBYL

With what?

ARTHUR

Oh.

*HE turns away. Struggles. Decides.*

ARTHUR

You remember. Our wedding postponement. I...I just told you of it when you entered. Of my concerns. Said you understand. I've been busy with...delaying. You agreed it was for the best.

SIBYL

I...I did?

ARTHUR

Twice, I believe.

SIBYL

I can't remember...



ARTHUR

Oh, no, another spell.

SIBYL

I...suppose. Though I normally don't speak during them. But they do...they do afflict my memory.

ARTHUR

Well, it's done.

SIBYL

Oh. (*beat*) But didn't you just ask me to marry you today?

ARTHUR

Today? Absolutely not. When would we? After the funeral? How shockingly uncouth.

SIBYL

It seems my time in Venice has not been as helpful as I thought.

ARTHUR

Stiff upper lip. We'll get there.

*SHE stares at HIM.*

SIBYL

Artie?

ARTHUR

...yes?

SIBYL

If we're to be man and wife there can be no secrets.

ARTHUR

I'm fully aware.

SIBYL

None.

ARTHUR

I have nothing I want to hide from you, Sibyl.

SIBYL

Good.

*An uneasy beat.*

ARTHUR

Well, we cannot be late. Nor peckish when we arrive. Why don't you pack us some cucumber sandwiches in the kitchen for the ceremony?

SIBYL

Alright, lovely.

ARTHUR

Oh, and do send in Winky. I need to reprimand him for...Berlin. It was terribly cold when I went.

SIBYL

Yes, Artie, lovely.

ARTHUR

Lovely.

*SHE exits. ARTHUR quickly exhales. Then, HE screams, silently.*

*WINCKELKOPF enters, flustered. Sees ARTHUR's stance.*

WINCKELKOPF

Lockjaw?

*ARTHUR immediately snaps into action. Goes to WINCKELKOPF.*

ARTHUR

Winky, when a man meets a mountain how does he conquer it?

WINCKELKOPF

Climb?

ARTHUR

And if it is simply too high?

WINCKELKOPF

Dynamite.

ARTHUR

Dynamite.

*ARTHUR calculates. Formulates. Goes to HIS piano. Sits. Plays. It is beautiful. There is resolve to it. Though tragic.*

ARTHUR

Yes. I will see this through. Solve it. As is my obligation. As is right. As it was for Hamlet with a father slain and a mother stained, so is mine to find in life a peaceful...refrain. But I am no prince. I am a Lord and the most famous to hold that title was a creator, as I shall be. For Sibyl. Sweet, simple Sibyl.

ARTHUR (cont'd)

To take in a man with no faith in those things which required it, and prove to him the existence of that inexplicable pixie, love. But were circumstances to remain hanging by the wicked, black widow's web of uncertainty and unwanted anticipation, I would deny her the love needed. The love deserved. The love I have. And such action would damn me deeper than a thousand murders a day for a thousand years. There is one thing worse than an absolutely loveless marriage. A marriage in which there is love, but on one side only. By the end of the night I shall end the life of another.

*HE stops playing.*

ARTHUR

Or, rightly, take my own. But my thoughts are nothing worth with my hands not bloody. Give me your dagger, Winky, I know you carry one.

*WINCKELKOPF withdraws seven daggers from various locations in HIS clothing (and perhaps one in HIS beard). HE presents them to ARTHUR.*

ARTHUR

Good God, man, how do you not jingle like a walking xylophone? I am away. Hopefully, under cover of stars above shall I find my target. Hopefully, and dreadfully.

*ARTHUR grabs a dagger and goes to exit.*

WINCKELKOPF

*Mein Lord?*

ARTHUR

*(stopping)* Make no move to stop me, Winky, or perhaps the life will be yours.

*WINCKELKOPF approaches ARTHUR who holds the dagger up ready to attack. Closer. Closer. Closer...*

*WINCKELKOPF deftly removes the blade from ARTHUR's hand. Replaces it with another.*

WINCKELKOPF

This will cut human flesh faster. Trust me.

*ARTHUR considers the dagger and WINCKELKOPF.*

ARTHUR

My dearest good thoughts are of thanks to you. My deepest apologies if my earlier behavior was harsh. It takes violent thought to recognize cruel action.

WINCKELKOPF

Just make sure to clean and polish with water and wax. It is my favorite weapon.

ARTHUR

Accompany my mother, the Lady Windermere, and darling Sibyl to the funeral. I know you like those events. I hope it is their last one for this century. If questioned tell them I was struck by a sudden bout of food poisoning due to deceptively rotten eggplant. Let us hope we both return breathing.

*ARTHUR admires the dagger. Holds it to HIS left hand and presses lightly. Pulls it away and into HIS pocket.*

*THEY exit.*

*A beat.*

*DR. PODGERS passes by window outside. Enters.*

PODGERS

*(calling)* Dear Duchess! I sensed your return! I've come for your training session! I know it's a surprise, but I did warn you, and don't we all like those from time to time? Reminds us there's more to come that we never expected. A jolly mystery. But hopefully with right timing. However with fate that's all there is. For the time it happens is the only time it can, and, thus, can only be right. And--

*PODGERS is struck by a sudden sensation.*

*Worried, HE goes to the window. Touches it lightly. Looks away suddenly.*

PODGERS

Today? Oh, dear. Today...

**END ACT ONE SCENE FOUR**

**END ACT ONE**

**INTERMISSION**

ACT TWO SCENE ONE

*AT RISE: The apartment building. Darker than ever, as nighttime has a tendency to do so. Still. Silent. Shrouded.*

*ARTHUR goes suddenly running past the window, overwhelmed. HE trips. Picks HIMSELF up, using the window for support, leaving a bloody handprint on the glass.*

*HE enters, breathing heavily. HE is only in HIS white undershirt and trousers. The undershirt is deeply stained red, as is ARTHUR's face, arms, and hands. Blood red, you might say...*

*HE withdraws something wrapped from HIS trouser pocket. HE opens it. A dagger. Bloody. Wipes it on HIS already bloody shirt. Breathes. Breathes. Breathes.*

*SFX: (O.S.) WAM!*

*Surprised, ARTHUR looks to the direction of the sound, remembers the blade in HIS hand. Frets. Hides it under a sofa cushion. Remembers HIS appearance. Grabs the cushion to cover HIMSELF. Uncovers the dagger. Replaces the cushion and grabs a different one. Covers HIMSELF. Realizes it looks very odd to not have a cushion on a sofa, especially if it is because you're holding it. Returns it.*

*Remembers now that HIS clothing is still unsuitable. Plops on the sofa, on HIS stomach. Pained look. Adjusts slightly for the covered dagger.*

*WINCKELKOPF enters. HE is also down to HIS undershirt and trousers. HIS undershirt is also stained, though perhaps a bit more purple than red. HE is also breathing heavily.*

ARTHUR What  
happened? I  
almost died. How?

WINCKELKOPF  
What happened? I  
almost died. How?

*A beat.*

*THEY both start to talk again at the same time but catch THEMSELVES. THEY stop. WINCKELKOPF points at ARTHUR to go.*

ARTHUR

A dagger. You?

WINCKELKOPF

Worse. A woman. Is it done, *Mein* Lord?

ARTHUR

Oh, how it is. It is all done.

*ARTHUR sits up.*

WINCKELKOPF

You were successful?

ARTHUR

In that I have reached a conclusion.

WINCKELKOPF

And so has someone else?

ARTHUR

Why not me, Winky? Why for any reason other than a definite personal preference otherwise should it not be I who die? Snuffing out one's own life is as much a form of murder as any other. What composes a man's life but his heart and his brain? Perhaps his fortitude as well. These removed would end a man, or make himself wish he were ended.

WINCKELKOPF

What is on your shirt?

ARTHUR

Life. But not near as much as needed. And you?

WINCKELKOPF

Wine. But not near as much as needed as well, apparently. English women need much coaxing to share affections.

ARTHUR

You're German. We're afraid you'll rip our bedposts off and beat us with them.

WINCKELKOPF

What happened?

*ARTHUR stands. Remembers it's WINCKELKOPF, takes the dagger out from under the cushion.*

ARTHUR

It cuts true, but aim it does not improve. Must've stabbed the man's left arm a dozen and a half times. Damned thing fell out of my hands and he picked it up to turn on me! The blade was blissfully slippery like a walrus' tail. He dropped it and I recovered. Certainly didn't end his life, but most definitely crippled his future in row boating.

*ARTHUR's actions are nearly too much to bear. The gentleman inside fights tears. HE cannot look at WINCKELKOPF. Struggles with the world in general.*

WINCKELKOPF

Who was it?

ARTHUR

A man in a corner. The irony is not lost. I failed and ran. And ran. And ran. Here is your dagger.

*HE hands it to WINCKELKOPF.*

ARTHUR

I have no need. I cannot kill anyone. Nor myself. I've grown too afraid of the future for it. It has unmade me. To my word and to my duty I have no success.

*ARTHUR flings HIMSELF on the sofa.*

ARTHUR

I have done my best to commit this murder, but on both occasions I have failed. I have tried to do...right...but it seems as if Destiny herself has turned traitor. I am oppressed with the sense of the barrenness of good intentions, of the futility of trying to be decent. Perhaps, it would be better to break off the marriage altogether. Sybil would suffer, it is true, but suffering could not really mar a nature so noble as hers. As for myself, what does it matter? There is always some war in which a man can die, some cause to which a man can give his life, and as life has no pleasure for me, so death has no terror. Let Destiny work out my doom. I will not stir to help her. (*Sits up. Ragdoll. Defeated. Lost.*) I'm almost tempted to ask you to do it for me, Winky. End my life. But that would be...improper.

WINCKELKOPF

I would.

ARTHUR  
Your *food*?

WINCKELKOPF  
I would get rid of you. If you asked.

*ARTHUR rises, morbidly intrigued.*

ARTHUR  
Really?

WINCKELKOPF  
I serve you. Whatever you wish I will do. It is *my* duty.

*A beat.*

ARTHUR  
For Sibyl. Do it.

*WINCKELKOPF nods. Grasps the blade.*

WINCKELKOPF  
Take off your shirt.

*ARTHUR is puzzled.*

WINCKELKOPF  
Please.

*ARTHUR does. WINCKELKOPF gestures for it. ARTHUR gives it to HIM. ARTHUR starts to remove HIS own trousers.*

WINCKELKOPF  
What are you doing?

ARTHUR  
I assumed this was the logical progression? Somehow?

WINCKELKOPF  
Why?

ARTHUR  
Well, such actions usually follow one another.

WINCKELKOPF  
No. No, no no, why would you--no. No.

ARTHUR  
I don't understand your course of decision.

WINCKELKOPF  
What else could it be?



*ARTHUR is thoroughly clueless.  
WINCKELKOPF scoffs at ARTHUR's  
ignorance.*

*WINCKELKOPF then wildly, vigorously,  
and with an ever-stretching smile stabs  
the shirt multiple times.*

Winky?

ARTHUR

SILENCE!

WINCKELKOPF

*HE ceases stabbing. HIS bloodlust  
lingers, but is subsiding.*

Now, you go.

WINCKELKOPF

Well I'd rather not go like that if it's alright. A single  
swift heart puncture will suffice.

ARTHUR

No.

WINCKELKOPF

Please?

ARTHUR

No. You will go...away. Away from England. Live another life.  
I will tell them you were attacked. Killed. Your body taken.  
All I was able to recover was your shirt. You are dead. And  
it won't be a lie. Because when you leave, Lord Arthur Savile  
stays. I recommend Munich, it's wonderful this time of year.

WINCKELKOPF

*ARTHUR accepts the circumstances.*

You are a clever and compassionate man, Winky. For a German.

ARTHUR

And you are a good man with nice teeth. For a Brit.

WINCKELKOPF

*Resolved, though shaky, ARTHUR starts  
to go. Stops.*

Tell Sibyl my last words were of love to her. I know they  
would have been, as I'm sure someday they will be.

ARTHUR

Will do.

WINCKELKOPF

And do well.

ARTHUR

*ARTHUR goes. Actually makes it outside this time. Exits. Is gone.*

*A moment.*

*Sadly, WINCKELKOPF looks at the shirt. Stabs it feebly a few more times.*

*LADY WINDERMERE enters, carrying and swigging heavily a bottle of wine. WINCKELKOPF quickly tosses the dagger away so SHE doesn't see it. Not like SHE probably would, or could, anyway...*

Winky-Tinky take a drinky...

LADY WINDERMERE

*SHE offers the bottle. HE shakes HIS head.*

I'm feeling much more in tune with my inner German bar wench. Come to bed, my Kaiser of Canoodling. You can even bring your bloody undershirt. (*laughing*) A bloody undershirt. You Germans should add comedy alongside chocolate and clockwork to your list of accomplishments. Honestly, a bloody undershirt. (*slight beat. Realizing*) A bloody undershirt? Bloody hell! A bloody undershirt!

LADY WINDERMERE

*SHE takes a deep swig and backs away.*

Mein Lady Windermere.

WINCKELKOPF

*HE draws near to HER. SHE slaps at HIS arm.*

Very, VERY bad Winky!

LADY WINDERMERE

*DUCHESS and PODGERS enter. Then, SIBYL.*

What's the matter, Gladys?

DUCHESS

*THEY rush over.*

SIBYL

(to *PODGERS*) What are you doing here? (noticing *ARTHUR's* shirt) Artie!

LADY WINDERMERE

No, it's his manservant! German vermin!

*SIBYL* grabs the shirt from *WINCKELKOPF* who withdraws from *LADY WINDERMERE*.

SIBYL

(to *WINCKELKOPF*) What is the meaning of this?

LADY WINDERMERE

I was just walking and got...thirsty. Alone!

SIBYL

(to *WINCKELKOPF*) Answer me.

*WINCKELKOPF's* panic overwhelms briefly, then, *HE* remembers *HIS* heritage. Boldly regains confidence and composure.

WINCKELKOPF

I was watching outside and saw *Mein* Lord walking when a wandering gang of weapon-wielding wrongdoers attacked. I went to waive them away but was withheld. I was made to watch. (Looks to *LADY WINDERMERE*, then to *ALL*) That is why my undershirting is wet. The only thing I was able to wrestle away was *Mein* Lord's undershirting. They took the body. Not a whisper of to where. Wistfully I wish I wasn't the one weighted with this work. I understand if you need a while to weep. This story is so...wild. All wild.

A moment. *SIBYL* fingers the shirt while staring intently at *WINCKELKOPF*. To *HER* surprise, *SHE* drops the shirt. *SHE* bends over to pick it up, but remembers something and stops. *SHE* withholds emotion as much as *SHE* can.

SIBYL

M---mother?

LADY WINDERMERE

(beat) Uh...yes, dear?

SIBYL

Could you please pick up the shirt for me? If...if I allow my head to drop below the height of my knees it automatically triggers a sleep spell. (beat) Please.

*LADY WINDERMERE nods. Heads over. Trips. Gets up. Goes. Picks up the shirt. Hands it to SIBYL.*

SIBYL

(quietly) Thank you.

LADY WINDERMERE

You're welcome, dear.

SIBYL

Mother.

LADY WINDERMERE

Dear?

*SIBYL looks to LADY WINDERMERE, needing. LADY WINDERMERE holds HER. SIBYL moves HER head to be out-of-the-way of LADY WINDERMERE's breath. LADY WINDERMERE sips while holding SIBYL.*

DUCHESS

No. (beat) No.

*DUCHESS is dizzy with despair. LADY WINDERMERE and SIBYL continue holding.*

*PODGERS glares at WINCKELKOPF. PODGERS wants to say something very, very badly but is struggling internally with its ramifications. Seeing the terribly drab scene, though, HE cannot withhold.*

PODGERS

(to ALL) No is right. (to WINCKELKOPF) And wild is even better.

*WINCKELKOPF is unnerved.*

DUCHESS

What do you mean?

PODGERS

I believe we're all suffering from a...mistake in translation. A common error. Believe me. Our German friend here might be blaming someone inaccurately for a problematic situation. A future trend for his people, I assure you.

DUCHESS

What?

What? SIBYL

What? WINCKELKOPF

The good Lord Arthur is not dead. PODGERS

*Gasps.*

Yes, he is. WINCKELKOPF

PODGERS  
*(sternly to WINCKELKOPF)* I know he is not. *(softer, to ALL)* A simple matter of mistranslation I hypothesize. A moment.

*PODGERS pulls WINCKELKOPF aside.*

PODGERS  
*(loudly, for ALL to hear)* Guten tag! Weinerschnitzel!  
*(hushed, stern, to WINCKELKOPF)* Follow along with me or I'll tell the real, complete truth and you'll be back in Berlin to that prison you escaped from faster than you can say Schnitzel with mustard.

WINCKELKOPF  
*(hushed)* I was wrongly imprisoned. It was only six who died, not eight. Okay, maybe seven. But, yes, alright.

PODGERS  
*(hushed)* Very wise choice. *(Loudly, for ALL)* Willkommen! Ha ha. There, you see? Herr Winckelkopf confused the word "weapon" with "tomato". Seems Arthur was a victim of that dreadful Vegetable Vagrant gang they wrote of in the London Times. Tomato and weapon, German homonyms.

WINCKELKOPF  
 ...*Ja*. Did I say weapon? Whoops.

So Artie *is* alive? SIBYL

...yes. PODGERS

*Relief washes over. LADY WINDERMERE joyfully drinks.*

What a terrible fright. DUCHESS

LADY WINDERMERE  
(to *PODGERS*) You speak German?

PODGERS  
Lady Windermere, you know better than most of my many hidden skills.

*HE stares distinctly at HER.*

SIBYL  
Well where is he then?

PODGERS  
Uh...(to *WINCKELKOPF*) Where indeed?

WINCKELKOPF  
He...did not say. But I would report the situation to a night watchmen? It would be proper.

SIBYL  
If the man is anything he is dutiful.

WINCKELKOPF  
*Ja...*

PODGERS  
I'm certain he'll return shortly. (*beat*) Quite certain. (*beat*) Lady Windermere?

LADY WINDERMERE  
Who--er, what?

PODGERS  
(*indicating bottle*) If you wouldn't mind?

*Surprised, LADY WINDERMERE hands the bottle to PODGERS who sips, savoring the liquid.*

PODGERS  
Exquisite. A perfect end.

*HE returns it to HER.*

*A shivering ARTHUR appears at the window, still shirtless. HE is alarmed at the presence of ALL, though no one sees HIM but WINCKELKOPF. HE enters.*

SIBYL  
Artie!

DUCHESS

Darling!

*SIBYL runs and embraces HIM.*

ARTHUR

Oh, Sibyl, lovely, no, I'm covered in--

SIBYL

Tomato. I'm aware and don't care.

ARTHUR

Tomato?

PODGERS

Yes, Arthur, we all heard.

ARTHUR

Did...you?

DUCHESS

Those blasted Bobbys. They've gone as soft as some sort of cold, juicy vegetable.

LADY WINDERMERE

Or fruit depending on who you ask.

ARTHUR

*(quite confused)* Winky?

WINCKELKOPF

*Mein* Lord, we were worried for your well-being.

ARTHUR

Had you talked to them, Winky?

PODGERS

He told them everything he should as is the charge of any proper manservant. Now to fulfill mine. Being the only doctor in the house with the exception of Johnson in 37D but he is a dentist, it is my recommendation that we all rest. It has been a pulse-quickenning evening and if we allow it to continue the lot of us might expire. And we don't all deserve such a fate tonight. Duchess, I am confident in your cheiromancy ability progress following our sessions. If you require further information you may consult my book.

DUCHESS

I wasn't aware there was one published.

PODGERS

There shall be. Soon. *(beat)* To bed now. All of you.

ARTHUR

Oh, but do wait, Sibyl. We must talk.

SIBYL

I wouldn't dare leave you. Never again. As I know you wouldn't.

*ARTHUR looks to SIBYL sweetly. Gratefully.*

DUCHESS

Do be wary when you walk, Arthur. These sidewalks seem to attract all sorts of ill fortunes. First the Lady Clem and now you. I can only imagine what's next. Goodnight, darling.

*SHE exits to within.*

LADY WINDERMERE

Uh...well, I need some...translation help from *Herr Winckel-Toes*.

ARTHUR

*Winckel*-what?

LADY WINDERMERE

*Kopf*. Do you have tomato in your ears? Come along, *Winck*...you.

*SHE grabs WINCKELKOPF, quite forcefully, and THEY exit to within.*

ARTHUR

If you would allow us a spot of privacy, doctor?

PODGERS

I must have words with you, Arthur. Concerning your reading? A check-up if you would.

ARTHUR

Will you be outside?

PODGERS

No. Not yet. I'll go to the kitchen. I spied an unopened *Riesling*. I'd love to admire the bottle. (*carefully*) You don't always have to drink to appreciate the wine, Arthur. Remember it.

*PODGERS exits to within.*

*SIBYL looks to ARTHUR, smiling. Almost devilishly.*



ARTHUR

Oh, and what could you possibly be smiling for?

SIBYL

I've just never seen you without a shirt before.

ARTHUR

Oh...(embarrassed) Oh.

SIBYL

Now don't get redder than you have already been tonight. I love your ability to surprise me. It's one of your most endearing qualities. That and now apparently your shoulders.

ARTHUR

Sibyl, I--I must come clean.

SIBYL

I'd hope so after the evening's tomatoing.

ARTHUR

No, I...I need to tell you something.

SIBYL

Me first. Please. I can't bear to hear much more tragedy from you or in regards to you so...please. Allow me first?

*ARTHUR nods.*

SIBYL

I have yet to fall asleep even once today since--since we decided on our postponement. Though the circumstances are hazy, my resolve is clear. Whatever it takes to make you mine, I'll do. No matter how mad or enduring it may be. You opened my eyes to love and woke my heart. Whatever it is that must be done, whatever, I'll understand. And I'll wait. Always. That is the duty of one in love. (*beat*) There. I've said all I need and quite succinctly. That wasn't so bad, eh? Now what did you have to say?

*ARTHUR looks at SIBYL, then, HIS hand.*

SIBYL

Tomato stain?

*HE looks up.*

ARTHUR

Plan the wedding, Sibyl. As soon as you want. However you want.

SIBYL

(*beat*) Really, Artie?

Yes. ARTHUR

You're sure? SIBYL

Yes. ARTHUR

I'm not...asleep, right? SIBYL

*ARTHUR grabs HER. Kisses HER quite well.*

ARTHUR  
Well you're definitely awake now. Plan the wedding. And I'd say don't listen to me if I try to say otherwise, but I won't. Everything else be damned, plan it.

SIBYL  
Oh, Artie! You see? I'm always surprised with you!

*SHE hugs HIM.*

SIBYL  
Oooo, and your back skin is so delightfully smooth and hairless.

*ARTHUR takes HER by the hands. Puts HERS over HIS.*

ARTHUR  
To bed now, lovely. You have a busy day ahead of planning and cake selection and if it is coconut I'll never be able to forgive you.

*THEY peck on the lips.*

*ARTHUR guides HER to the exit to within.*

Goodnight, Artie. SIBYL

Always with you. ARTHUR

I love you. SIBYL

ARTHUR

And you know I you. Why, I dare say it was...written in the stars.

*HE kisses HER hand. Looks at it. Then HER. Smiles.*

*SHE exits to within.*

*ARTHUR sighs. Takes in the space. Notices the dagger. Goes and picks it up.*

*PODGERS enters. Sees the dagger. Is alarmed, then remembers.*

PODGERS

No. Not like that.

ARTHUR

Don't worry. I'm quite ill-suited with it.

PODGERS

Certainly couldn't fend off the Garden Gang.

ARTHUR

What was that?

PODGERS

I would ask you the same. Committing to your marriage in spite of your mental malady?

ARTHUR

How are you aware of all of this?

PODGERS

I would say your second greatest flaw is memory.

ARTHUR

What?

PODGERS

My skills extend far beyond mere sooth-saying, my boy. Fat lot of good they've done me...

ARTHUR

What do you have to say to me?

PODGERS

Oh, very little. Actions speak louder being the axiom, I believe.

ARTHUR

Doctor, like many in your profession you have a remarkable ability to never say exactly what it is we wish to hear. (*slight beat*) Some similarities aside I must say you're a very poor proper doctor. You have caused me nothing but extreme discomfort and now loss of wardrobe.

PODGERS

There is something I prescribed.

ARTHUR

And I shant be following doctor's orders. Not presently at least. If someone's life is to be ended at my hands then so be it. I will not give power to the worries of anticipation. Instead, I will focus myself on another great intangible: love. For that power is greater than any you wield. It is the only one everyone believe in. I cannot run away simply out of uncertainty. No one would get anywhere were that the acceptable case. The questions I have may not be answered for some time, but love will see that I'm at least adequately satisfied with existence until they are.

PODGERS

Adequately satisfied? A poor way to live with love.

ARTHUR

It will have to do. I'll make it a new duty to see it work.

PODGERS

Hmph. And there is your greatest strength: your adherence to duty. As uncomfortable as it may be.

ARTHUR

I've had to learn to understand that which seems not understandable.

PODGERS

The duty of life perhaps?

ARTHUR

That and also to love.

PODGERS

Yes, to that as well.

*A beat.*

ARTHUR

What do you have to say? Please, I'm exhausted.

PODGERS

I'll be on the roof.

ARTHUR

What? Whatever for? It's scathingly cold outside. Parts of my chest nearly snapped off frozen stiff.

PODGERS

To look at the stars. God's hands, you know. It is where I am meant to be. Perhaps I should rather have taken to astronomy than cheiromancy. It's very difficult to ruin the life of a planetoid.

ARTHUR

And whose life have you ruined?

PODGERS

Oh, my boy, whose haven't I? Knowledge of what's to come shouldn't be ours until it is here. The future is always ahead of us and thus will always be greater. It is unwise to experiment with. Unethical, maybe. Improper, definitely. Look at you. Working at love instead of it washing over and drifting you blissfully away. That is not how it should be. How it should ever be. *(beat)* Come look at them with me. Perhaps find an answer there. Or relief.

ARTHUR

I wouldn't know how.

PODGERS

Do you not see it, Arthur? What I'm saying you...must do?

ARTHUR

No.

PODGERS

A mere push. You lost your way with a word. It put you off course and you are constantly compelled to return to order. An issue common with the young, and harder for the good. So easy a problem. For us all. But there can be just as easy a solution. Fortune favors you in this, Arthur. *(directly)* A push. It can be the most powerful thing. *(off-hand)* Just ask Lady Windermere. *(back to seriousness)* Here is my final prediction: I know it doesn't seem it, I can only imagine how hard it is to believe, but everything will be alright. Have faith.

*PODGERS looks at ARTHUR. The poor man.*

PODGERS

I sense your doubt. Predictable. *(beat)* Come along, then. Time to prove it all to you. It's right. Dutiful. Heh. You've inspired me, Lord Arthur.

*A beat.*

Arthur

Alright.

Podgers

Good boy. Upstairs then.

*ARTHUR exits to within.*

*PODGERS withdraws HIS magnifying glass. Leaves it on the table. Exits to within.*

*A very extended beat.*

*PODGERS' body quickly drops in front of the window, landing on the sidewalk.*

*It does not rise.*

**END ACT TWO SCENE ONE**

ACT TWO SCENE TWO

*Daytime. Lovely, vibrant, and, above all, lively piano music. ARTHUR is playing, of course. HE is smiling broadly and wearing a tuxedo.*

*There is a large curtain in front of the window.*

*SIBYL quickly enters from within dressed in a wedding gown. SHE sees ARTHUR playing and shakes HER head.*

SIBYL

*(calling)* He's in here! Again! *(to ARTHUR)* Your fingers are going to fall off.

ARTHUR

From these blessed hands? They'd be fools!

SIBYL

*Artie, we must depart immediately! The train to Venice is off in less than thirty minutes and we still haven't put all our wedding gifts in the carriage.*

ARTHUR

Ask Winky. Germans have the strength of ten men. They're like gorillas.

SIBYL

I don't have the heart to ask our new father-in-law to work on his wedding day.

ARTHUR

Well, thankfully, I have heart enough for both of us.

*With a flourish, ARTHUR stops playing. HE jubilantly hops up.*

ARTHUR

*(sing-song)* Winky!...

*WINCKELKOPF enters, as well as LADY WINDERMERE. THEY are hand-in-hand and wearing a tuxedo and wedding gown respectfully. LADY WINDERMERE carries a small, giftwrapped package.*

WINCKELKOPF

*Mein son-in-law? We must welcome our wagon or the train will be wheeling without the recently wed!*

ARTHUR

Oh, do us one tiny favor on our mutual wedding day, you Kooky Kraut.

WINCKELKOPF

What?

ARTHUR

Grab the last of the gifts. I know Sibyl won't sleep if there's the potential to unwrap something. And the newly-made Mrs. Winckelkopf would appreciate it, too, I can only with the utmost certainty speculate.

LADY WINDERMERE

This is the last one, Arthur.

*SHE holds up the package.*

LADY WINDERMERE

And for some, I'm almost certain conspiratorial reason, it's for Sibyl.

ARTHUR

(to SIBYL) Now I see why you're so insistent, lovely.

SIBYL

But we really must go. I do hate being late.

LADY WINDERMERE

Uch, don't even say the word. Delivers me right back to that terrible business with Dr. Podgers. Me and my digestive system. And with the hillock of cake I've consumed today...

ARTHUR

We have the curtain up, ma'am. And the sidewalk shall be cleaned before our return.

LADY WINDERMERE

The poor man. Will the Horticultural Hooligans ever be stopped? Chucking pineapples was it, Arthur, when the Doctor went to the roof to inspect your newly reinstalled lightning rod? What a crime.

ARTHUR

Oh, yes. Simply terrible.

WINCKELKOPF

We are better off. He was...weasly.

SIBYL

No more piano, Artie. I know you've been so immersed of late.



ARTHUR

I only play when emotion overwhelms me and how couldn't it with you?

*HE kisses HER hand.*

ARTHUR

Your hand. What a wonderful future it shall be with it in mine. Let's be off. Only where's mother?

*DUCHESS enters, nose buried in a book.*

ARTHUR

Speak of the preoccupied devil. Still with that book.

DUCHESS

I can't stop. Dr. Podgers--

LADY WINDERMERE

Boughff.

DUCHESS

Oh, please. I've seen your stomach handle buckets worse. He recommended it for my continued cheiromancy training.

ARTHUR

But you've been at it non-stop. My God, you nearly missed the vows.

DUCHESS

I'd find it disrespectful to the man's spirit. He meant it to be published posthumously so the practice wouldn't die along with him. I've made it my duty. And since I shant be enjoying a night of newly wedded bliss, I might as well find a different source to pick up new tricks.

ARTHUR

And now I will fight a weak stomach. No matter. Go about it, if you must.

LADY WINDERMERE

Sordid business.

DUCHESS

You disapprove of cheiromancy?

LADY WINDERMERE

I disapprove of its practitioner. He was a dreadful imposter. Of course, I didn't mind that at all, and even when he wanted to borrow money I forgave him, but I could not stand his making love to me. He has really made me hate cheiromancy.

*WINCKELKOPF is a bit off-put by these comments.*

SIBYL

You mustn't say anything against cheiromancy here, mother; it is the only subject that Arthur does not like people to chaff about. I assure you he is quite serious over it.

LADY WINDERMERE

You don't mean to say that he believes in it?

ARTHUR

I am right here. And of course I do.

LADY WINDERMERE

But why?

ARTHUR

Because I owe to it all the happiness of my life.

LADY WINDERMERE

My dear Lord Arthur, what do you owe to it?

ARTHUR

Sibyl.

*HE looks into SIBYL's eyes.*

LADY WINDERMERE

What nonsense! I never heard such nonsense in all my life.

DUCHESS

You really should listen to yourself more at cocktail parties then.

WINCKELKOPF

*(to ARTHUR) Mein son-in-law, we should work with the wagoner for our wedding voyage.*

ARTHUR

*Jawvohl, Winky. You lovely ladies and lovely stay inside where it's warm. We'll knock when ready.*

SIBYL

Alright, Artie. Lovely.

ARTHUR

Lovely. Lovely, lovely, lovely.

*ARTHUR and WINCKELKOPF exit to outside, ARTHUR holding the door for WINCKELKOPF.*

LADY WINDERMERE

Well, shall we spend the time making fun of absolutely every other woman there? And her dress? Because you wouldn't believe the insults I've created involving the color puce. It's a tricky one.

DUCHESS

It is a happy day, Gladys. Retract the claws.

LADY WINDERMERE

Bugger. Very well.

DUCHESS

Allow me to make perfect. Sibyl?

SIBYL

Yes, new mother?

DUCHESS

Let me see your hand.

LADY WINDERMERE

Oh, Lord.

DUCHESS

Shut it. It fascinated you plenty weeks ago.

LADY WINDERMERE

My interest in subjects certainly can't be expected to last that long.

DUCHESS

Or husbands, Fivey? Now, I'm no expert but I do have the basics. Let's see.

*SHE takes SIBYL's hand. Inspects it. Then the book. Then the hand. Then the book. Then the hand.*

*Then SHE remembers and withdraws PODGERS' magnifying glass from HER handbag. SHE inspects SIBYL's hand thoroughly.*

DUCHESS

Line of beauty...extensive. Of course. Line of intellect...eh, s--solid. Wealth, oh, recently raised. Growing girl. And let's see....line of life...line of life. Hmm. Turn the hand around?

*SHE does. DUCHESS inspects.*

DUCHESS

Peculiar. The other?

*SIBYL gives HER the other hand, which DUCHESS inspects just as thoroughly.*

DUCHESS

Huh...odd.

SIBYL

What's that?

DUCHESS

I...can't seem to find it.

SIBYL

My line of life?

DUCHESS

I'm...sorry, love. I'll need to read more carefully. I did only skim that third chapter. There were muffins cooking.

LADY WINDERMERE

*(off-hand)* There's a surprise...

*DUCHESS puts away the magnifying glass. SIBYL rubs HER hand slightly perturbed.*

DUCHESS

Well, while my cheiromancy skills might be dull, my womanly instincts are razor-sharp. We'll make it all up by opening presents.

SIBYL

Oh, but wouldn't Artie want to be here?

LADY WINDERMERE

It'll be our secret. No good marriage should be without one. Or thirty. Open it or I will and I'll keep it. And burn it if it's ill-fitting clothing.

*Lightly smiling, SIBYL takes the small package and unwraps it. It's a small elegant silver case. What kind exactly?*

SIBYL

Ooo, a *bonbonniere*! I've been wanting one.

DUCHESS

You see? Fate works in your favor.

LADY WINDERMERE

See who its from. That way we know who to secretly spite if it's imitation silver.

*SIBYL opens it. Inspects the card inside.*

SIBYL

It's from Artie's uncle, Dean Chichester Beauchamp.

DUCHESS

Oh, Lady Clem's brother. The one with the bad skin at the wedding.

*LADY WINDERMERE looks at HER unsure.*

DUCHESS

The very bad skin.

LADY WINDERMERE

Ah. Oh. Ew.

SIBYL

It's from Lady Clem's estate. The only item they were able to recover from her purse following the accident.

LADY WINDERMERE

A bit unsettling.

SIBYL

Perhaps. Oh, but look. They included a *bon-bon* with it. How considerate. I'm sure the family is still reeling with grief.

LADY WINDERMERE

If they gave you that I'm sure their wealth of misery is nothing compared to their deficit of taste.

*SIBYL takes out the bon-bon. It seems as if something has been shoved in the middle of it.*

SIBYL

A bit oddly shaped. Bulbous. Too much *creme*-filling perhaps? Never the matter, it'll make for a fitting train ride snack. I'm sure it will be to die for. Have faith. That's what Artie always says.

*SHE puts the bon-bon back in the case.*

*There is a knock at the window.*

SIBYL

Suppose it's time.

DUCHESS

With fate it always is. Or something. That's what the doctor always says. *Said*, I suppose.

LADY WINDERMERE

Shame about the gift. Disappointing if you ask me and you should. Hopefully the honeymoon will be more in your favor.

SIBYL

I'm sure there will be plenty of surprises. With Artie it's miraculously guaranteed nowadays. I'm just so glad he withdrew from that rueful depression and had these days of happiness. One could ask for little more.

LADY WINDERMERE

Except, perhaps, standard size *bon-bons*.

DUCHESS

I do hope there's more happiness for all of us.

SIBYL

Have faith, new mother. And even if there is not, we had this.

*ARTHUR enters.*

ARTHUR

*Italia awaits!*

DUCHESS

We're just now leaving. Come along, Gladys.

LADY WINDERMERE

Oh, but we weren't even allowed a moment of snark together. And unlike women, men are too lunk-headed to appreciate the finer points of true insult. It's like wine.

DUCHESS

And if it gets better with age, you are unparalleled in skill, Gladys.

*Smiling at each other, LADY WINDERMERE and DUCHESS exit to outside. NEITHER try to hold the door for the OTHER.*

*ARTHUR points inquisitively at the bonbonniere.*

ARTHUR

What's that?

SIBYL

*(smiling sneakily)* Nothing. A quick question: are you hungry?

ARTHUR

An even quicker answer: yes.

SIBYL

Then do I have a treat for us both.

ARTHUR

A surprise then?

SIBYL

You're not the only one, you know.

ARTHUR

You are all the treat I need now, Sibyl.

SIBYL

Well, who knows what the future holds?

ARTHUR

Most thankfully, not I.

*Smiling, lovingly, arm-in-arm, love-with-love, THEY exit to outside.*

**END ACT TWO SCENE TWO**

**END ACT TWO**

**END**

## APPENDIX B.

Eleventh draft of the play following edits made after the staged reading and after the summer workshop. This draft was the production draft.



**Murder and the English Gentleman: A Comedy**

by Adam E. Douglas

Adapted from the short story  
"Lord Arthur Savile's Crime"  
by Oscar Wilde.

Draft Eleven for 2010 New Play Festival  
06/17/10

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## CHARACTERS

**LORD ARTHUR SAVILE** (*rhymes with 'GRAVEL'*) **II** - Young, handsome, noble, professional. Like most men of inherited wealth of the time. And a bit helplessly hapless. Like most men of inherited wealth of the time.

**THE DUCHESS OF PAISLEY**- Arthur's mother. Serene, though stunning. A sweet woman with a very strong heart, and an even stronger bank account. Though, normally, you'd never guess it. Propriety, after all. However, since the recent death of Arthur's father, has decided to try living a little, much to Lady Windermere's approval.

**LADY GLADYS WINDERMERE**- Sibyl's mother. A curious psychological study. Early in life she had discovered the important truth that nothing looks so like innocence as an indiscretion and by a series of reckless escapades, half of them quite harmless, she had acquired all the privileges of a personality. She is also wealthy, and you can tell.

**DR. SEPTIMUS PODGERS**- Cheiromantist to the affluent ennui-encapsulated English. A man of fine tastes and deep debts. Should have learned better by now, but shouldn't all of us? (*to possibly be played by the actor playing LADY CLEMENTIA*)

**LADY CLEMENTIA**- Distant relative of Arthur and Duchess in both relation and age. No one visits her much, and there is a reason why. You'll understand, I promise. (*to possibly be played by the actor playing DR. SEPTIMUS PODGERS*)

**SYBIL WINDERMERE**- Lady Windermere's daughter. Love of Arthur's life. A ceaseless ray of light in dreary, foggy London town. Sadly afflicted with random sleeping spells. Poor girl.

**WINCKELKOPF**- Arthur's manservant. Curt. Bearded. German.

## SETTING

**LOCATION**- A posh London flat drawing room in a building owned by Arthur.

**TIME**- 1890. A proper year. Beginning of autumn. An equally proper season.

**PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES:** As you'll have noticed, PODGERS and CLEMENTIA could be played by the same actor. This is entirely gender-neutral and it is left at your discretion. It's fun, I promise. And don't worry, there's plenty of time for costume changes.

A strong suggestion: The actor playing Winckelkopf needs to make use of the traditional Vaudevillian pronunciation style of native Germans speaking English. That is with "W" words being pronounced with a "V". Ex: "We" would be pronounced "Ve", "Wait" would be "vait" and so on. Also, "s" words should be like "z" words. "See" would be "Zee", etc., though this is less strict than the "w"

words. "That's" might be "Zat's", "still" would be "shtill" and others throughout, similar and otherwise. Please find them. And, please, even more so, have a good time.

**Murder and the English Gentleman: A Comedy**

adapted by Adam E. Douglas from the short story "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime" by Oscar Wilde.

**ACT ONE SCENE ONE**

*AT RISE: A posh, late 19th century English apartment building drawing room. There is a very large, upstage window looking out into the London street. Perhaps shoppes dot the other side of the street. Perhaps the Thames.*

*The sun is setting, ending the day outside, but the night inside has just begun. Laughter and general chatter and carousing is heard from off, within the apartment building. A piano rests serenely on stage. As does an elegant sofa with a high back. The piano is polished and prim.*

*The room is dark. Too dark. Someone has turned off the light. Or rather, someones...*

*LADY GLADYS WINDERMERE and the DUCHESS OF PAISLEY enter, giggling like girls much younger than THEY. THEY are dressed elegantly, though extravagantly. THEY sit on the floor in front of the sofa.*

*DR. SEPTIMUS PODGERS enters shortly after. Funny little outfit. Cloak. Turban with a large, unearthly colored feather sticking out the top. HE makes HIS way across strangely and mystically. The WOMEN are completely entertained and entranced. With a flourish, PODGERS sits between THEM.*

*HE withdraws a pack of tarot cards, shuffles them, then lays a few out. HE then withdraws three candles and a matchbook. HE lights THEIR candles and has THEM hold them. Covers HIS candle with HIS hands. When he removes HIS hands, the candle is lit. The WOMEN clap at the trick. HE shushes THEM, then puts HIS hands on THEIR shoulders. Closes HIS eyes, sways, and hums. THEY join in.*

PODGERS

*(ethereal)* Candles lit and evening comes. Here we sit, floor beneath our bums. *(WOMEN laugh. PODGERS winks, then gets immediately back in character)*. Though two bright beauties within arms reach, darkness slithers, a hungry leech. *(As if HE is seeing great danger approaching)* Trials and troubles, approaching swift. A poison, a dagger, a forgotten gift...

*HE frowns. Sways harder. Hums Harder. The WOMEN completely buy it and are totally enthralled.*

*WINCKELKOPF, a gruff, quick, and (oh, so preferably if possible) outrageously bearded manservant passes by the window. HE's dressed as well as a foreign, (also, if possible) helplessly short, German manservant can be. That is to say mildly uncomfortable, and majorly emasculating. HE enters the building and then the drawing room. The TRIO does not take notice of HIM. HE stands in the doorway.*

PODGERS

*A figure nears to hear fate's gavel. The figure's name--*

WINCKELKOPF

*(very quickly)* LORD ARTHUR SAVILE!

*The WOMEN and PODGERS jump.*

LADY WINDERMERE

My Lord!

WINCKELKOPF

*(indicating the window)* Mein Lord.

*LORD ARTHUR SAVILE passes by the window. HE is a handsome, tall (or, at least, preferably, taller than WINCKELKOPF), young man, and dressed appropriately. Fine clothes. Not a wrinkle. ARTHUR enters. Notices the darkness but not the TRIO.*

ARTHUR

Lights, Winckelkopf. You know I dislike mysteries so. Far too mysterious usually.

*WINCKELKOPF turns on the lights. THEY come on much to ARTHUR's approval.*

ARTHUR

Ah, sweet, bright certainty.

*HE sees the TRIO on the carpet.*

ARTHUR

Mother. Lady Windermere. Funny...Hat...Wearing Man. You're on the floor.

LADY WINDERMERE

Observant as ever, Lord Arthur.

*THEY start to stand. ARTHUR rushes to help his mother, the DUCHESS. PODGERS helps LADY WINDERMERE up. THEY beam at EACH OTHER.*

ARTHUR

Did you all trip?

DUCHESS

Manners, Arthur, darling. Ladies' questions first. How was the curtain maker?

ARTHUR

Costly.

DUCHESS

Good. Sorry to make you leave so late in the day, but peace of mind is ever so peaceful don't you think?

ARTHUR

The most. And it's no trouble. Anything to complete the renovations on time for Sybil's return. Want as clean a space as possible. With her sleeping spells I'd say she gets enough soot from the Sandman. The renovations should hopefully prove a pleasant shock. The only kind I tolerate.

LADY WINDERMERE

I believe she will be very fond of your secret here, as you can only hope most women are with your surprises.

ARTHUR

And, most hopefully, the time will have helped in fixing her of that narcoleptic nightmare. Could hardly have a wedding with her still afflicted. Why, she could be on the ground when asked to say "I do", and that would be a most unacceptable answer.

LADY WINDERMERE

Don't blame me for that, she most certainly inherited it from her father. He was often falling asleep earlier than preferred, though I've found that a common misalignment in males.

DUCHESS

It is a...fair reason to postpone proposing, Arthur, darling.

ARTHUR

Oh...yes...first the first step must be taken...of course...

*ARTHUR has been admiring a framed photograph. HE smiles, and turns to the WOMEN, but checks the photo often.*

ARTHUR

You haven't received post from our lovely girl today have you?

DUCHESS

*(small smile)* Oh, we haven't.

*ARTHUR finally breaks concentrating on the photo and sees the peculiar scene before HIM: Cards and candles and turban.*

ARTHUR

Well this is more positively perplexing than the species of bird that feather was plucked from.

DUCHESS

Arthur, darling, remember your duty as new owner of the building. Think of what your father would have said: hello.

ARTHUR

*(to LADY WINDERMERE and PODGERS quickly)* Hello. *(to DUCHESS)* Who is he?

DUCHESS

You could ask.

ARTHUR

He speaks English?

PODGERS

And understands it as well.

*PODGERS steps forward. Bows grandly, arms opened wide. HIS turban falls off. Scrambles to put it back on.*

PODGERS

Septimus Podgers.

*LADY WINDERMERE quickly steps up next to HIM.*

LADY WINDERMERE

*(proud)* Doctor Septimus Podgers.

PODGERS

(to LADY WINDERMERE) Oh, you.

LADY WINDERMERE

Oh, me. (to ARTHUR) Hello, Arthur.

ARTHUR

Lady Windermere. And Dr. Podgers...greetings. Do forgive my initial rash behavior. Unsureness is ever so uncomfortable, don't you find?

PODGERS

Oh, it's been some time since I was afforded *that* little luxury.

ARTHUR

Hm?

DUCHESS

(on the sofa, shuffling and practicing with the tarot cards)  
Oh, don't even bother.

ARTHUR

Why does it seem that everyone here knows more than I know?

LADY WINDERMERE

Do you really want us to answer that?

*THEY ALL chuckle. Except ARTHUR. HE shakes HIS head, dismissive. Slowly realizing THEY might be playing with HIM.*

ARTHUR

I will shed some light on this all. But first to put out these candles. Winky! Candles! Kitchen!

DUCHESS

You're very capable of doing it yourself, Arthur, darling.

ARTHUR

And I'm just as capable of asking Winky to. It would be undutiful for me to act when he could. I could never see myself allowing it.

DUCHESS

Undutiful to whom?

ARTHUR

Either, neither, or both. Whichever way he's still taking them.

*ARTHUR snaps to WINCKELKOPF, then the candles.*



WINCKELKOPF comes and blows out the candles. Nods. Goes to take the candles away. While walking, sniffs them. A most offensive odor. Nearly crashes into LADY WINDERMERE and PODGERS who have been chatting quietly over a bottle of wine PODGERS brought.

PODGERS

Mein Gott, man! You nearly crushed the LaFite. Not to mention my feet.

WINCKELKOPF

Mein apologies. I'll watch mein step more steadfastly. Sir...  
(Noticing LADY WINDERMERE in a particular way) Madam.

Bows to EACH. LADY WINDERMERE is suddenly quite intrigued by the MAN. Watches HIM exit. PODGERS notices all of this. Isn't too happy.

ARTHUR

Oh, do forgive the man, doctor. He's German. Constantly stepping into other people's personal space unasked.

PODGERS

Why not sack him? I sense...a problematic past from the man.

ARTHUR

After I found Winky stranded outside that prison in Berlin where he had lost all of his possessions and clothing and was wearing a prison uniform he blessedly found on a nearby shrubbery after he survived a very, very, very tragic donkey accident--Winky tells me--I've yet to find better help. Winky costs very little and asks even less. Why, if he had slightly longer hair and a much shorter beard I'd marry him.

DUCHESS

(smiling knowingly with LADY WINDERMERE and PODGERS) I doubt that...

ARTHUR

Hm?

PODGERS

(drawing attention away) Lord Arthur! You now know me and yet I not you--...wait...one moment...

Is as if PODGERS is suddenly receiving information from a mystical, unseen force. Really sells it. The WOMEN get giddy over the activity again.

PODGERS

Lord Arthur Savile, the second...Recently made owner of this fine building...(with a wink to *DUCHESS*) From a good, strong bloodline...And I sense...beauty.

ARTHUR

...thank you?

PODGERS

No...A young woman in your life...Quite stunning...(now with a wink to *LADY WINDERMERE*) Almost as beautiful as her mother...But still...A rare dream of an individual...

ARTHUR

Do you speak of my Lovely, Sybil? How could you know all this?

LADY WINDERMERE

Dr. Podgers is my Cheiromantist, Arthur.

ARTHUR

Your *what*? Praying mantis?

LADY WINDERMERE

*Cheiromantist.*

ARTHUR

Pretend I have absolutely no idea whatsoever what that word means.

LADY WINDERMERE

The future, Arthur.

ARTHUR

He's your future?

PODGERS

(*smiling at LADY WINDERMERE*) One can only hope.

LADY WINDERMERE

He *tells* the future, dear. The good doctor studies auras and, much more specifically, hands, and is able to divine the future from them. I wouldn't have the first wink of a dream of giving a party without hiring him to stop by. But I don't even need to invite the man at all! Always sensing our celebrations beforehand. Dr. Podgers is so fantastically, magically mystical at appearing at the most unexpected moments. Always showing such excellent timing.

PODGERS

(*smiling, with a mystical hand gesture to LADY WINDERMERE*)  
With fate, there always is.

LADY WINDERMERE

A teller of fortunes and *misfortunes* both. Next year, for instance, I am in great danger, both by land and sea, so I am going to live in a balloon, and draw up my dinner in a basket every evening. It is all written down on my little finger, or on the palm of my hand, I forget which. I think everyone should have their hands told once a month, so as to know what not to do. Of course, one does it all the same, but it is so pleasant to be warned. That was what we were doing on the floor, you see. Dr. Podgers was showing us how to divine. After a few more lessons, I am going to positively dominate at the dog races. *Oh, yes...*

ARTHUR

Incredible.

LADY WINDERMERE

Isn't it?

ARTHUR

That you would ever give credence to lunacy such as the power of the whims of chance? *Oh, yes.* Truly the excellent foppery of the world. *Work. That* is what pushes us into the future. What we do. Or don't. It is against our task as members of humanity to put responsibility on any things we cannot see. (*notices DUCHESS with the tarot*) Or things we can. (*taking the cards from HER*) Mother, it is less than hardly a surprise Lady Windermere is so easily enchanted by such elaborate eccentricities, but you? Think of what my father would have said. (*flipping some cards over*) Be flipping in his grave...

*An old argument is resurfacing.*

DUCHESS

I've found my reservations on more superfluous subjects have passed along with him. Perhaps if Arthur the first had been willing to do the same he'd be here still. Rules, rightness, rigidity: those were his undoing, Arthur, darling.

ARTHUR

(*indicating the apartment building*) But look at his doing, mother! It's the finest flat building in London. How high he reached.

DUCHESS

And how far he fell. Two meters below the ground to be exact. These walls may as well have been a coffin the stress they caused him, enhanced by his dense decision of flawless correctness. I'd hate to see that happen again to anyone. Certainly you, and most definitely me. And that is the last time we shall revisit this discussion. (*beat*) Now, as I have no desire to join my departed darling Arthur any time soon--and I hope Dr. Podgers can positively predict such--I'm going to have fun.

LADY WINDERMERE

For once.

ARTHUR

Fun is fun...I suppose...but you cannot truly, properly believe the doctor.

DUCHESS

Oh? And how was he able to know such things about you?

ARTHUR

I never claimed to have all the answers.

LADY WINDERMERE

And neither would anyone else.

ARTHUR

But I'm sure there's a perfectly logical reason.

PODGERS

Smarter than he looks. Correct, Lord Arthur. I knew of your recent acquisition through your conversation with your mother, the resemblance between you two being readily apparent leading to my second assessment. And the most elegant resemblance between Sybil and her mother leading to my third.

ARTHUR

And explain how you knew Sybil is...so very dear to me? And her appearance?

PODGERS

If your eyes weren't perpetually pasted to that photograph of the girl, I couldn't. Yes, it is true, at times, the simplest solution stares right at you. But those can, true and paradoxically enough, be the hardest to see. Though my Cheiromancy skills are not entirely without merit.

*ARTHUR gives a scoff of disbelief.*

*PODGERS decides to counter this.*

PODGERS

*(to ARTHUR)* Play us a song on the piano. You can, yes? And your father could, too, couldn't he? Taught you, didn't he?

*ARTHUR is surprised PODGERS has this knowledge.*

PODGERS

Ooooo, how could I know *that*?

*The WOMEN giggle at the "magic".*

ARTHUR

*(dismissive)* A good guess...

PODGERS

My favorite kind. Now, do play. You're very good.

*ARTHUR takes the photograph out of the frame. Goes to the piano. Plays. A light, proper tune.*

PODGERS

Told you.

ARTHUR

*(rolling HIS eyes)* Another ethereal evaluation.

PODGERS

Yes...yes, very skilled. Why not pursue a career in it? Such apparent ability should never be ignored with the possibility for payment.

ARTHUR

My father. He found piano a most paltry profession. Hardly suitable.

PODGERS

A very influential person. Even his name brushed off.

ARTHUR

He was a true gentleman. *(finally noticing the sound from off)* Mother, why do I hear voices in the other room?

DUCHESS

Probably because there are people in it.

ARTHUR

Why the occasion for guests?

DUCHESS

A party, love.

ARTHUR

For whom?

DUCHESS

For you.

ARTHUR

For what? The renovations? I'll admit seeing the new wallpaper did make me do a little dance. Very little.

DUCHESS

No. To celebrate your engagement to Sybil.

*ARTHUR messes up several notes and ceases playing.*

LADY WINDERMERE

You really should get that tuned.

ARTHUR

How--...you said you hadn't received word.

DUCHESS

We hadn't. But you didn't ask about yourself, such a selfless boy.

*ARTHUR stands up suddenly. DUCHESS stops messing with the tarot cards, and gets a letter from off the armrest of the sofa. Gives it to ARTHUR who inspects the envelope.*

ARTHUR

*(slightly aghast)* You read the post Sybil sent me?

LADY WINDERMERE

Look look look, even if Duchess did let's say casually brush Sybil's letter accidentally onto the floor and it unfolded open and my eyes glossed over it and read the entire first paragraph...twice...it is, despite your reservations on the topic, fate. It is meant to be. Easier to tell than your imitation leather belt. Why you withheld your proposal from us, I have my own very violent suspicions.

*WINCKELKOPF returns. LADY WINDERMERE happily notices. PODGERS, unhappily, does as well.*

ARTHUR

It wasn't that I weren't going to let either of you know; it's just, well, what if she declined? It wouldn't be proper to get hopes up prematurely.

LADY WINDERMERE

Oh, I assure you, that is a problem with many men...

*PODGERS and WINCKELKOPF give EACH OTHER quick looks.*

ARTHUR

I just wish so dearly for everything to be perfectly...perfect. As Sybil is to me. It's what she deserves and I owe it to her. She's affected me like no other person ever has. I can't explain it. Able to see my deepest thoughts and furthest feelings when looking in my eyes. When she can keep hers open that is. *(slight beat, small smile)* As she is working for my sake, I have for hers. I won't allow a single piddling iota out of place. The slightest push in the wrong direction and absolutely, positively everything can be completely, utterly tarnished. Powerful thing, a push.

LADY WINDERMERE

*(off-hand, maybe to WINCKELKOPF)* You're telling me...

ARTHUR

And, also, I had to see to the completion of the renovations. Wouldn't be proper to bring a new wife to such a spotty...spot.

LADY WINDERMERE

You'd be amazed at what many women would tolerate. My third husband, for instance, bathed but once every five years. Or, so I heard. We were married for minutes, really...

ARTHUR

And if her sleeping spells persist or...or if she had said no to my proposal...

DUCHESS

But did she?

*HE reads. Massive smile growing.*

ARTHUR

No.

DUCHESS

*(smiling)* Yes.

*ARTHUR can't withhold HIS joy.*

ARTHUR

Oh, splendid! Splendid!

*HE hops up and goes to the piano.  
Plays. A vibrant, boisterous song.*

ARTHUR

We simply must celebrate!

DUCHESS

And lo and behold, a party awaits. I sent you to the curtain maker as a distraction to let our guests arrive. Thought I'd try my hand at a spot of deception for our reception. Sometimes secrecy can be necessary. And it's ever so delectably jitter-inducing.

LADY WINDERMERE

I would send your...*(with a look)* man...to fetch a celebratory bottle of wine for us to enjoy away from the talons of those vultures within...they'd suck the moisture from the cork if they could...but I believe Dr. Podgers might yet have another trick up his sleeve.

*PODGERS withdraws from giving WINCKELKOPF the evil eye. Turns to the group, holding the wine bottle up.*

PODGERS

My tea leaves told of good tidings today for a handsome, young gentleman, and my mirror hasn't reflected that since the last monarch. Sensing these future high spirits I figured what better way to meet them than with another. 1837 *LaFite*. From my own personal, ever-growing, arguably spiraling-dangerously-out-of-control collection. Lady Windermere, seeing as how payment from our sessions--and please don't forget it is double for parties--afforded it, it's only proper to share. Any *connoisseur* knows the only thing more desirable than a fine bottle is showing others that you have it. And, might I add, it will crisply compliment the roast goose. The best wines make for the best endings.

LADY WINDERMERE

Oh, Dr. Podgers, you are always dropping such smashing surprises on us all!

*SHE embraces HIM lightly. WINCKELKOPF sees this and is...sad.*

PODGERS

It is...a gift. As is this. Congratulations, Lord Arthur.

*Sets the bottle on the piano. ARTHUR nods, continues playing, still admiring the letter which HE placed beside the photo on the space usually used for sheet music.*

LADY WINDERMERE

And seeing as how Sybil is absent and she is my daughter, I will gladly accept anything you would have given her.

PODGERS

Er...I have nothing left to share but my skills.

LADY WINDERMERE

*(taken aback by the possible suggestion)...here?*

PODGERS

My...*Cheiromancy* skills, dear lady.

LADY WINDERMERE

Oh...yes...of course. Er, well, just yesterday I was read...thoroughly...by Dr. Podgers. And seeing as I already know all of Duchess' dirty little secrets--though there are *many*--the perfect puzzle in this parlor is playing a piano quite properly. Come, Arthur, show the good doctor your hand.



ARTHUR

Absolutely not. You know I refuse to consent to such abhorrent foolishness.

LADY WINDERMERE

You act as if that was a question. How endearing. I can see why Sybil said yes. If you are to be my son-in-law you hereby revoke your ability to utter the word "refuse". As well as "too", "busy", and "you can't have my potatoes, I'm still eating them".

*HER aura annihilates ARTHUR.*

ARTHUR

You don't mind, Doctor?

LADY WINDERMERE

Of course, he won't mind, that is what he is here for. But I must warn you beforehand that I shall tell Sybil everything. Duchess and I are leaving in two days time to go on holiday to visit her, and if Dr. Podgers finds out that you have a bad temper, or a tendency to scurvy, or a wife living in Bayswater, I shall certainly let her know all about it.

ARTHUR

I am not afraid. Sybil knows me as well as I her. I keep nothing hidden.

LADY WINDERMERE

Ah! I am a little sorry to hear you say that. The proper basis for marriage is a mutual misunderstanding. No, I am not at all cynical, I merely have experience, which, however, is very much the same thing. Dr. Podgers, Arthur is dying to have his hand read. Don't tell him that he is engaged to one of the most beautiful girls in Europe, because we all just found that little bit of news out. But do be sure to tell us *some* thing nice. Arthur is one of my special favorites.

*ARTHUR stops playing, stands, goes to PODGERS and offers HIS hand. PODGERS takes it, and makes grand, sweeping gestures with it in HIS hands. Leading ARTHUR around, swooping, pulling turning. Completely ludicrous activity. The WOMEN are, of course, again, positively thrilled.*

*However, halfway through PODGERS freezes and holds ARTHUR's hand delicately. PODGERS grows curiously pale. A shudder passes through HIM, and HIS eyebrows twitch convulsively, in an odd, irritating way as if HE's darkly puzzled.*

*HE holds ARTHUR's hand close to HIS eyes and reads it. HE wipes HIS brow and reads deeper, saying nothing.*

*ARTHUR notices these strange signs of agitation and feels the impulse to run from the room, but restrains HIMSELF.*

ARTHUR

I am--*heh*--waiting, Dr. Podgers.

LADY WINDERMERE

(*quickly, impatiently*) We are all waiting.

*Suddenly, PODGERS drops ARTHUR's right hand and seizes HIS left, bending extremely low to examine. For a moment, PODGERS's face becomes a white mask of horror, but he soon recovers. HE adopts a forced smile.*

PODGERS

It is the hand of a charming young man.

DUCHESS

Of course it is! But will he be a charming husband? That is what I want to know.

PODGERS

All charming young men are.

LADY WINDERMERE

How wretchedly dull.

DUCHESS

I don't think a husband should be too fascinating. It is so dangerous.

LADY WINDERMERE

My dear, they are *never* too fascinating. But what I want are details. Details are the only things that interest. What is going to happen to Lord Arthur?

*ARTHUR is cautiously curious HIMSELF. PODGERS is obviously trying to cover.*

PODGERS

W--within the next few months, er--Lord Arthur will go on a *voyage*--

LADY WINDERMERE

On his honeymoon, of course!

PODGERS

But, before that, he will...uh--lose a relative.

DUCHESS

Not his mother I hope!

PODGERS

No, certainly not his mother. A distant relative, merely. I see Arthur beset with grief over it.

*DUCHESS sighs deeply with relief. LADY WINDERMERE sighs with equally deep disappointment.*

LADY WINDERMERE

I am dreadfully disappointed I have absolutely nothing to tell Sybil. No one cares about distant relatives nowadays. They went out of fashion years ago. What a bust. A party is not only suitable now, but damn near necessary.

DUCHESS

I have enjoyed myself immensely. I found it most interesting. Ooooo, perhaps future Cheiromancy training sessions could be scheduled. Yes, that'd be a capital good time. Doctor?

*PODGERS, still wrapped in concern, does not acknowledge.*

DUCHESS

Doctor? Podgers? Funny-Hat-Wearing Man?

PODGERS

*(snapping back to reality)* Er--yes? Yes, ma'am?

DUCHESS

A lesson?

PODGERS

A lesson?

DUCHESS

Could we schedule one? Perhaps after mine and Gladys' voyage?

PODGERS

Uh--certainly. *(suddenly remembering)* Though my fee is not cheap.

DUCHESS

And neither am I. Very good, then. Everyone gets a special surprise today. Hooray.

PODGERS

*(offhand, quiet, quick glances to ARTHUR)* Indeed...

DUCHESS

Let's join within. They are sure to have eaten everything up, but we may find some hot soup.

LADY WINDERMERE

If not, cold brandy shall suffice. Doctor?

PODGERS

Er...I believe I'll be retiring for the evening.

LADY WINDERMERE

But there's celebrations to be had! Cake!

PODGERS

I've always fancied myself a man of cobbler.

LADY WINDERMERE

Wine?

PODGERS

I would never live down the shame of being unable to match you both glass for glass. My father's grave would implode.

LADY WINDERMERE

Well, I'm empty of excuses and full of hunger.

PODGERS

I must depart immediately. Enjoy the bottle. A good night and a good fortune to the both of you. Er--*three* of you. (*quickly scans the room. Counts*) *Four*, I mean. Of course. Yes...

LADY WINDERMERE

(*walking, not really listening*) Beware, buffet...

*LADY WINDERMERE and DUCHESS go to exit. As LADY WINDERMERE passes by WINCKELKOPF, SHE lightly grabs HIS beard and pulls HIM into the party room with it with HER.*

*ARTHUR stares at PODGERS, cautiously unsure. PODGERS maintains a nervous distance from HIM.*

PODGERS

S-sir, it--it was a pleasure. Congratulations again on your forthcoming nuptials. I remember my first marriage. Very brief. She criticized my glasses frequently. And then died. Seeing as you're spectacle-free you're well better off. Good evening, sir.

*PODGERS quickly goes to exit to outside, but ARTHUR swiftly approaches HIM, blocking HIS path.*

ARTHUR

Dr. Podgers, I must insist on your giving me a straightforward answer to a question I am going to put to you.

PODGERS

*(uneasy, not meeting HIS eyes)* Another time, Lord Arthur...

ARTHUR

Tell me what you saw there. I must know it. I am not a child. Tell me the truth. As a doctor it is your duty.

PODGERS

*(fumbling with a pocketwatch)* What makes you think that I saw anything in your hand more than I told you?

ARTHUR

I know you did, and I insist on your telling me what it was. I'm not fond of secrets being kept from me.

PODGERS

Though you have the capacity?

ARTHUR

Why would you say that?

PODGERS

My skills extend far beyond mere sooth-saying.

ARTHUR

What did you see?

PODGERS

Lord Arthur...I--I cannot...

*PODGERS puts HIS watch away. Finally is able to make eye contact.*

PODGERS

You have a party awaiting. Believe me it is a far better course of action.

*PODGERS heads steadfastly for the door.*

ARTHUR

I will pay you. I will give you a cheque for a hundred pounds.

*PODGERS freezes.*

PODGERS

A hundred?

ARTHUR

A hundred and fifty. Your wealth cannot be much if your evenings are spent sniffing the skin of wealthy widows. (*pointing to the turban*) And if you are forced to wear that...that...well, would you even call it a hat?

*ARTHUR has struck a nerve. Calmly, PODGERS turns. Sighs. Takes the turban off. Holds it, ashamed. HIS vocal quality becomes much less showman, and much more somber.*

PODGERS

(*ashamed*) Call it what it is...a daft embarrassment. A cheap, colorful tool in cultivating cheaper, colorful tales.

ARTHUR

Whatever do you mean?

PODGERS

Funny. You yourself questioned the validity of my ability. And here you are, right and not able to see it. I suppose certainty *is* intangible. And yet how strongly you grasp for it. Ever proper.

ARTHUR

So you admit your falsity? I shall inform mother posthaste.

PODGERS

I do no such thing, Lord Arthur, nor could I. It's only...propriety...*duty* if you will...can take on many forms. Some more clandestine than others. (*twirling the turban*) Some more shameful.

ARTHUR

Your hat-twirling, hibbity jibbity, mumbo jumbo neither impresses nor convinces me, doctor.

PODGERS

I am aware. And that is why I am putting my theatrics aside. You are far too straight-minded for such distractions. Far too...dutiful. (*sets the turban down*) It will take a little time. You had better sit down.

*ARTHUR does. PODGERS withdraws a large magnifying glass from HIS trousers and polishes it vigorously.*

PODGERS

Lord Arthur, what would you say is your greatest flaw?

ARTHUR

Flaw? Hmmm. (*beat*) Bugger, now there's a question. Ah...poor penmanship?

PODGERS

*Hmph.* Undoubtedly, you believe, I'm sure.

ARTHUR

My patience grows thinner than your feather, doctor.

PODGERS

A precautionary measure. I have found those more willing to see bad qualities in themselves are even more willing to accept bad tidings ahead.

ARTHUR

Would you begin this poppycock?

PODGERS

Poppycock, *hm?* You're willing to shed a quid or two.

ARTHUR

A *grotesque* curiosity fuels me, nothing further. Now do go on. My dear future-mother-in-law might be swiftly swayed by men who wiggle their fingers particularly...just ask her past four husbands...but I myself am not. Quit hiding and come out with it.

*PODGERS who has indeed been withholding suddenly rushes into action. HE quickly goes to ARTHUR and grabs both HIS hands and holds them out.*

*PODGERS inspects them, swiftly and expertly with HIS magnifying glass. Then, travels across ARTHUR's body: ARTHUR's heart, mind, eyes, perhaps lower, but always seemingly tethered to the hands. PODGERS recites as HE inspects:*

PODGERS

You were offered the delicate and luxurious life of a young man of birth and fortune, a life exquisite in its freedom from sordid care, its beautiful boyish insouciance. But remarkably and inexplicably, you declined. Preferring the steep heights of duty as a means of seeing things through and avoiding unwanted surprises. But now for the first time you are conscious of the terrible mystery of Destiny, of the awful meaning of Doom.

*PODGERS quickly breathes twice on the glass, polishes it and sets it on the sofa, all done exquisitely swift.*

*ARTHUR is perturbed and on HIS feet.*

ARTHUR

How mad and monstrous a dissection.

PODGERS

Inaccurate?

ARTHUR

Unrelated. I pay for my future.

PODGERS

Don't we all?

*An ominous beat.*

*PODGERS is apprehensive of ARTHUR. With an appropriate, worried distance and a deep breath...*

PODGERS

I would say your greatest flaw is your infallible commitment to duty. Propriety. To what is right. Such a flaw, I know. But when one observes your circumstances, how could they think otherwise? Why would a man so steeped in fortunes not dive into them? Why not enjoy an easier life when one is right in front of you?

ARTHUR

I'm withdrawing my cheque...

PODGERS

No. I know that you are not. I inspect hands only because I cannot hearts. But, could I, I would. *That* is where the future truly lies. What we love, what we desire. *That* leads us. It is the only thing that can.

ARTHUR

My heart. Sybil?

PODGERS

The present is not my particular speciality. *(beat)* You will...someday...commit murder. *(beat)* That is the fate I read.

*It festers.*

ARTHUR

*(worried confusion)* But...why?

PODGERS

The reason was not written. The fact is all that is there. And I sense you, a man of flawless duty, now tasked with this shall not shirk your responsibility, as terrible as it is. Your flaw will be someone's...fall.



ARTHUR

And...and who is it I am meant to murder?

PODGERS

You pay for your own future, Arthur. I can only read what is to come for the hand's owner. Yours says nothing of anyone else's.

ARTHUR

*(troubled)* You spoke of the passing of my distant relative. Perhaps...that is the one?

PODGERS

Perhaps. But I will not offer unfounded speculation. That could be...even deadlier.

*A most awful beat.*

*ARTHUR's victimized nature melts. The Englishman in HIM stands, defiantly.*

ARTHUR

You have no evidence.

PODGERS

I never claimed to.

ARTHUR

This is a fabrication. You'd as well say I have seven arms.

PODGERS

Well, were that the case, I *would* have evidence.

ARTHUR

I will not pay. This is heresay and chicanery. I demand results for my money. I never tossed a shekel in a wishing well and I shan't start such nonsense now. My cheque is invalidated.

PODGERS

Quite improper. Going against your word.

ARTHUR

And what of it?

PODGERS

It is against your nature, and you know it. Even such a tiny trifle would drive you mad. *(slight beat)* I'll make one final prediction. An immediate one, not my usual style. The near future being the most unavoidable. Regardless, write me the cheque for two days from now and if my prediction does not occur before then, you'll have ample time to have it cancelled. *(slight beat)* Be the gentleman of his word that we both know you are.

*PODGERS extends HIS hand. ARTHUR looks at HIS own for a moment, then takes PODGERS' and shakes.*

ARTHUR  
(*accepting*) You're an enterprising fellow.

PODGERS  
The best doctors are excellent businessmen. (*slight beat*)  
Tomorrow you will lose something extremely dear to you.  
*Something*. Not *someone*, no need to be alarmed there. It is an  
item many of us take for granted but our day would most  
certainly be adversely affected by its absence.

ARTHUR  
I cannot wait to see.

PODGERS  
I thought you didn't believe.

ARTHUR  
Exactly. Who doesn't love being proven right?

PODGERS  
You would be surprised...

*LADY WINDERMERE pokes HER head in.*

LADY WINDERMERE  
Arthur, we've begun pre-celebrations already and are waiting  
for you for celebration celebrations! You wouldn't believe  
what's happening in here!

ARTHUR  
(*eyeing PODGERS*) I'm sure I wouldn't.

LADY WINDERMERE  
(*to the room SHE entered from*) *Ja, darling, ja...*(*to ARTHUR*)  
*er--come along, it would be a most fabulous idea for you to  
join.*

ARTHUR  
I was going to accompany Dr. Podgers to his flat and pay for  
my...er, that is to say, our session today, future mother.

LADY WINDERMERE  
An even fabulouser idea.

*WINCKELKOPF's arms pull HER back  
inside. PODGERS notices this and sighs,  
disappointed.*

*A most uncomfortable beat.*

ARTHUR

I...I need to not be here. I disturbingly tingle. I'll accompany you home and write the cheque at your flat

PODGERS

But your party.

ARTHUR

You know better than I the den of middle-aged wolverines I'd be entering. Grasp sort. Best to keep my trousers attached.

PODGERS

*A-heh-heh.* Certainly.

ARTHUR

I'll call for my carriage.

PODGERS

Ever the gentleman aren't you?

ARTHUR

Even amongst the newly renovated my foundations shall remain. There is nothing I can see that would change that.

*ARTHUR exits out the door to the outside, perhaps more brisk than usual. Passes by the window, hailing a carriage as HE does.*

*PODGERS follows, uneasy. Right before HE's outside, HE reenters. HE forgot HIS magnifying glass and turban. HE picks up the magnifying glass and holds it. Considers reading HIS own hand. Shakes HIS head. Decides against it.*

*HE takes the two items and goes to exit again, but stops, suddenly, by the window. It is as if a sudden, bone-chilling gust of wind passed. PODGERS doesn't allow it another moment and races out the door.*

*As HE passes in the street, HE keeps a considerable distance away from the window.*

**END ACT ONE SCENE ONE**

ACT ONE SCENE TWO

*The next day. Bright, sobering morning sunlight drowns the room.*

*The aftermath. Scattered sundries are about the building. LADY WINDERMERE and THE DUCHESS are beached on the sofa sort of on top of each other. Dresses are ruffled. Perhaps a glove on a foot.*

*A beat.*

*ARTHUR staggers from off the street behind the window. HE peers in, eyes wild from grief. HE knocks lightly on the window.*

*Also, HE is pantsless.*

*WINCKELKOPF appears from behind the sofa. HE considers returning to sleep.*

*HE is also pantsless.*

*ARTHUR gestures wildly to the door, which WINCKELKOPF opens. ARTHUR enters.*

ARTHUR

*(hushed)* Five thousand thank yous, Winky. Now there isn't a need...

WINCKELKOPF

*(very quickly)* LORD ARTHUR SAVILE!

*LADY WINDERMERE and DUCHESS are violently thrust awake and fall off the sofa. ARTHUR runs to get out of THEIR view.*

ARTHUR

...to announce me.

*ARTHUR tries, continuously, to hide HIS state. Running behind and between items when eyes aren't upon HIM.*

DUCHESS

Good morning, Arthur, darling. *(noticing)* Oh, my. Your manservant is trouserless.

ARTHUR

*Afternoon,* mother. And, believe me, it happens. Shall I send him away?

DUCHESS

Oh, I wasn't complaining.

*LADY WINDERMERE sits up.*

LADY WINDERMERE

...where are we? (*sees WINCKELKOPF*) Ahh! A bear!

DUCHESS

Gladys, you need a large cup of coffee. And perhaps a long trip to the confessional. Arthur, be a dear?

*SHE holds HER hand out. Still trying to hide, ARTHUR awkwardly helps HER up. LADY WINDERMERE grabs ARTHUR and claws HER way to HER feet. SHE is shoeless. WINCKELKOPF stands guard near the door, ever the man-servant, though with longing stares towards LADY WINDERMERE.*

LADY WINDERMERE

(*to ARTHUR*) You look ghastly.

ARTHUR

Well, I've never been one to break from the group.

LADY WINDERMERE

Hm?

ARTHUR

Nothing. I shall say nothing more than an apology for my absence last night. I had accompanied the...*fascinating*...Dr. Podgers to his flat and...was unable to find my way home. I've never been the sort to navigate by the stars. It wasn't until I was nearly squashed to death by an early morning taxi carriage that I was able to return. A second apology if I stink of horse. I think it had influenza. I still need to pay the man. I used my final cheque last night.

DUCHESS

He's out there? Now?

ARTHUR

(*looking out the window*) Wiping the horse's nose as we speak.

DUCHESS

We'll take it and pay. I've yet to see the viral strain that can affect our dear Gladys. Come on then, dearie. Let's away to breakfast.

ARTHUR

*Lunch.*

LADY WINDERMERE

My shoes have vanished.

*Indeed they have.*

DUCHESS

What better reason to buy a new pair, then? Arthur, do come with.

ARTHUR

Oh, I'm miserable shoe-shopping company, mother. Right, Winky?

WINCKELKOPF

*Nein.*

*ARTHUR gives HIM a meaningful look.*

WINCKELKOPF

*Nein is Deutsch for...yes?*

LADY WINDERMERE

All the better. The only thing more useless than a man's opinion is a man's opinion on footwear.

DUCHESS

I need eggs.

LADY WINDERMERE

A common, hopeless desire for most women our age. Ta.

*THEY leave. WINCKELKOPF staring wistfully as THEY do. As THEY pass by the window, LADY WINDERMERE falls down. DUCHESS helps HER up. THEY exit. ARTHUR exhales deeply, as if HE has been unable to breathe since HE entered.*

ARTHUR

Winky?

WINCKELKOPF

*Mein Lord?*

*A beat.*

ARTHUR

AAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!

WINCKELKOPF

*(joining) AAHHHHHHHHHHH!*

ARTHUR

What are you doing?

WINCKELKOPF

Helping you?

ARTHUR

*(grief ridden)* Oh, no. No, no, no.

*ARTHUR flings HIMSELF on the sofa.*

ARTHUR

Are we no better than chessmen, Winky? Moved by an unseen power, vessels the potter fashions at his fancy, for honour or for shame?

WINCKELKOPF

I prefer checkers.

ARTHUR

Winky, you are my most faithful and trusted manservant since I had to let Jimmy go. I know anything I say is kept in strictest confidence. Yes?

WINCKELKOPF

Yes.

ARTHUR

And that is not German for anything else?

WINCKELKOPF

*Ja.*

ARTHUR

Well then, would you pace with me? I must return circulation to my near-frostbitten thighs. And pace briskly, otherwise I am liable to explode and your afternoon would be ruined. *(THEY pace)* Actors, Winky, are so fortunate. They can choose whether they will appear in tragedy or in comedy, whether they will suffer or make merry, laugh or shed tears. But in real life it is different. Most men and women are forced to perform parts for which they have no qualifications. Our Guildensterns play Hamlet for us, and our Hamlets have to jest like Mercutio. The world is a stage, but the play is badly cast. *(Stops pacing. Slight beat.)* I'm not making a millimeter of sense am I?

WINCKELKOPF

Englishmen rarely do.

*ARTHUR grabs HIM by HIS shoulders.*

ARTHUR

Murder!

WINCKELKOPF

Now we are talking.

ARTHUR

Murder, murder, murder...

*ARTHUR lets go, is carried away by HIS fear. It grows in scale of ghaſtlineſſ until HE falls to the ground. WINCKELKOPF shrugs.*

ARTHUR

That is what the Cheiromantist had ſeen in me. Murder! The very night ſeemed to know it! The dark corners of the ſtreets were full of it! It grinned at me from the roofs of the houſes! I've not ſlept ſince I heard! Perhaps I ſhould! *(Closes eyes. A ſhort beat. Opens them)* I cannot!

*ARTHUR ſits up. Looks worried at WINCKELKOPF.*

ARTHUR

You are unperturbed. *(noticing)* And trouserleſſ.

WINCKELKOPF

The Lady Windermere er...is waſhing them? They got a...ſtain on them during the party. Lady Windermere inſiſted on removing them.

ARTHUR

You have no idea of your fortune.

WINCKELKOPF

*(nodding)* Pfft, ja...Er--why?

ARTHUR

I've no idea where mine have gone! When I left they were on me, and ſomehow, ſomewhere, ſomething muſt have taken them. I hope! I have no recollection beyond my horror. Oh, my ſorts are ſorted acroſſ London. I took a fetid taxi carriage, Winky! Where did my carriage driver even go? Did I ſend him away...or...or could I have murdered him in my queſt for fulfillment? No...no, ſurely not. Hopefully not. *(beat)* *This (indicating HIS pantsleſſneſſ)* is what that daſtardly doctor divined for the near future! My trouſers. Diſappeared like a dream and I'm left in a nightmare. It has given birth to a nagging ſenſe of doubt. Like a hair caught on the back of your throat. It never comes looſe. It diſrupts my equilibrium. I couldn't find my way back, Winky. Dr. Podgers lives leſſ than ſeven blocks away.

WINCKELKOPF

I will buy for you maps.

ARTHUR

No. No, no...



*ARTHUR looks to the window. Sadly, HE goes to it. Hopeless.*

WINCKELKOPF

You can fix this.

ARTHUR

How?

WINCKELKOPF

He said to murder. That is not impossible.

ARTHUR

You think so?

WINCKELKOPF

I *know* so.

ARTHUR

The thought had crossed my mind...

WINCKELKOPF

As all actions must at first.

*ARTHUR considers. Debates it. Steps away.*

ARTHUR

Winky, it's...no. One good guess is hardly reason enough. (*beat*) Though if someone were to...how should they?

WINCKELKOPF

Depends. How much I like them. If they are male or female. Age. What I had for breakfast that day...

*ARTHUR draws in.*

ARTHUR

What if it were, say, an elderly person well past their prime and having forgotten how to even *spell* "happy". Perhaps a woman.

WINCKELKOPF

Hands. Or stairs. Or dogs.

ARTHUR

Something more subtle.

WINCKELKOPF

Dogs can be subtle. They leave no evidence. Well, not any you would want to investigate.

ARTHUR

You know I'm allergic.

WINCKELKOPF

This is not for you though, yes?

ARTHUR

Of course not. Purely making conversation.

WINCKELKOPF

A poison is good for a woman. Easy to hide. Tea, perfume, eye drops.

ARTHUR

Poison. Where would one find some?

WINCKELKOPF

Private poison collections?

ARTHUR

*(horrified)* And where, by God, would one find such a horrid thing?!

WINCKELKOPF

Come upstairs, I will show you.

*WINCKELKOPF goes, ARTHUR follows. Then stops.*

ARTHUR

No. No! NO! *(Walks briskly away)* There is no reason to this. To any of this! I cannot see one. If I cannot see it, I will not will it. It would be improper and that is no way to achieve certainty.

*HE goes to exit to within, but freezes when HIS eyes catch a framed photograph. HE picks it up.*

ARTHUR

Sybil...Oh, Sybil...sweet, simple Sybil. To take in a man with no faith in those things which required it, and prove to him the existence of that inexplicable pixie: love.

*HE holds the photograph close. But is unable to keep it there.*

ARTHUR

Winky, do you know what this means?

WINCKELKOPF

*(hurt)* You do not want to see *mein* collection?...

*ARTHUR walks, darkly, to the piano. HE plays, the music fitting the mood. HE sets the photo of SYBIL in the holder usually reserved for sheet music.*

ARTHUR

I cannot marry Sybil. Not yet. With the doom of murder hanging over my head, it would be a betrayal like that of Judas. What happiness could there be for us, when at any moment I might be called upon to carry out the awful prophecy written in my hand? What manner of life would be ours while Fate still held this fearful fortune in the scales? Were circumstances to remain hanging by the wicked, black widow's web of uncertainty and anticipation, I would deny her the love needed. The love deserved. The love I have. And such action would damn me deeper than a thousand murders a day for a thousand years. The marriage must be postponed, at all costs. I recognize where my duty lies, and am fully conscious of the fact that I have no right to marry until I have committed the crime. This done, I could stand before the altar with Sybil and give my life into her hands without terror of wrongdoing. This done, I could take her to my arms, knowing that she would never have to blush for me, never have to hang her head in shame. But done it must be first; and the sooner the better for both.

WINCKELKOPF

So...no collection?

ARTHUR

Soon...

*HE ceases playing. Pockets the photograph. Regains composure, finally.*

ARTHUR

Winky, as soon as you find and change into your own trousers, I need you to decide my most distant and oldest relative within same-day carriage travel and send for them for tea this evening. You have an hour. Until then I must run very cold water over my face. And then I must vomit.

*Quite resolved, ARTHUR briskly exits to within the apartment. WINCKELKOPF is alone. HE looks around. Remembers. From under a sofa cushion, HE withdraws HIS trousers. HE then withdraws LADY WINDERMERE'S shoes from them. And, HER stockings. HE exits to within.*

**END ACT ONE SCENE TWO**

**ACT ONE SCENE THREE**

*Same day. Later. Tea time.*

*ARTHUR, now properly pantsed stands staring straight out.*

*WINCKELKOPF's foot appears onstage from within. ARTHUR sees it.*

ARTHUR

*(tersely)* Not yet!

*WINCKELKOPF's foot exits. ARTHUR looks out again. Then, HE sits. A beat.*

ARTHUR

*Now.*

*WINCKELKOPF enters carrying a covered silver tray.*

ARTHUR

Yes. That's a good Winky.

*WINCKELKOPF stops beside the sofa.*

ARTHUR

And what shall you say? *(silence)* *Precisely.* Lady Clementia's distaste for any other Europeans is well known from here to several Italian housekeeper's early-death-due-to-work-related-stress gravestones. So long as you keep quiet she won't suspect and thus shan't run out prematurely. Now, after I deftly maneuver Lady Clem to the sofa, step two.

*WINCKELKOPF lifts the tray lid. It's empty.*

ARTHUR

It's empty. Where are the Turkish Delights? *(beat)* Open your mouth.

*WINCKELKOPF does. Nothing.*

ARTHUR

Nothing. Is my eyesight deteriorating along with my mind? Did I even request Turkish Delights?

*WINCKELKOPF nods.*

ARTHUR

Well, where are they?

WINCKELKOPF

I'm not supposed to speak *mein* Lord. (*realizes*) Oh, no.

ARTHUR

Oh, bugger, you *Germans*. You'd follow any orders explicitly no matter how moronic, ridiculous, uncouth, nonsensical, or purely, truly idiotic they are. We're simply rehearsing. You may talk. The first thing you may tell me is the location of the Turkish Delights.

WINCKELKOPF

They cool from cooking as you--we speak.

ARTHUR

And the poison capsule?

WINCKELKOPF

It will be in the *lemon* Turkish Delight.

ARTHUR

And that one shall be?

WINCKELKOPF

Delicious. But deadly.

ARTHUR

The *color*. Yellow, I can assume?

WINCKELKOPF

Absolutely. Definitely yellow.

ARTHUR

Splendid. Step three?

*WINCKELKOPF covers the tray again.*

ARTHUR

Excellent. I think we have figured it all out, Winky. Poison is a good route. Safe, sure, quiet, and does away with any necessity for painful scenes, to which, like most English gentlemen, I have a rooted objection. And it is slow acting you say?

WINCKELKOPF

Like a sloth in syrup.

*ARTHUR is assured in HIS conviction and stands accordingly. However, sadness lingers. WINCKELKOPF takes notice, sets down the tray, and takes one of ARTHUR's hands.*

WINCKELKOPF

(*genuinely concerned*) You do not have second thinkings do you, *mein* Lord?

ARTHUR looks to HIM, worried. ARTHUR is about to speak...

WINCKELKOPF

(looking out the window) She comes!

The MEN scramble. WINCKELKOPF grabs the tray and cover and rushes to the kitchen. ARTHUR, panicked, tumbles across the apartment. HE stands and opens the door, sticking HIS head out.

ARTHUR

(sing-song) Lady Clementia! (calling) Do come in my dear, sweet, lovely, beauty's beauty!

HE opens the door fully, smiling broadly. LADY CLEMENTIA passes by the window. SHE has a cane in HER hand and looks as if HER heart is in a wheelchair. HER demeanor is best compared to spoiled milk: pungent and biting. And perhaps a bit chunky.

SHE hobbles across scowling and enters the apartment building. SHE is carrying an unnecessarily large handbag which SHE thrusts into ARTHUR's hand. HE sets it beside the sofa. SHE sniffs the air in short, sharp inhales.

LADY CLEMENTIA

I can finally breathe in here. I take it you fired that Spaniard?

ARTHUR

Yes, ma'am.

LADY CLEMENTIA

It's by God's lily-white beard that your chandelier didn't go missing. Give us a kiss.

ARTHUR kisses HER on the cheek, beaming. SHE curtly inspects the space, poking and prodding at various things with HER cane, including ARTHUR.

LADY CLEMENTIA

Why haven't you been to see me all this time? No one in the family does and I haven't the slightest inclination as to why. The buggerers...

ARTHUR

My dear Lady Clem, I never have a moment to myself.

LADY CLEMENTIA

I suppose you mean that you go about all day long with Miss Sybil, buying *chiffons* and talking nonsense? I cannot understand why people make such a fuss about being married. In my day we never dreamed of billing and cooing in public. Or in private for that matter...

ARTHUR

I assure you I have not seen Sybil in weeks, Lady Clem. As far as I can make out, she belongs entirely to her doctors and her hatmakers.

LADY CLEMENTIA

*Hats.* Ruddy sordid business that is. You know who wears hats? Jews.

ARTHUR

So I've heard. Now, I'm sure you've been told of my recent engagement.

LADY CLEMENTIA

*Oh, God, yes. Ucch.* I cannot understand why people make such a fuss about being married. In my day we never dreamed of billing and cooing in public. Or in private for that matter...

ARTHUR

You and my father both. As such, I have decided against a traditional, frightfully garish multi-leveled wedding cake.

LADY CLEMENTIA

Cannot blame you. I insisted upon a strict reception menu of tripe and onions for my second wedding. No, third. No, no, fourth. (*beat*) *Seventh.* That was the tripe.

ARTHUR

It was my memory of that...distinctive delicacy that prompted my calling on you. I'd like to have your opinion on my possible choice of cuisine, as with your very...*impressive* marriage experience you'd have the perfect palette. Now, you must be absolutely tuckered, ma'am. Please, sit.

*HE gestures gracefully to the sofa.*

*LADY CLEMENTIA pokes at it, as one might to discern a dead skunk's gender.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

Where is this sofa from?

ARTHUR

Persia, I believe. Or Greece. Perhaps, actually, China.

*LADY CLEMENTIA spits on the sofa.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

For decades I have refused to sit on anything constructed by non-english speakers for fear of tainting and I stand by it. Figuratively and literally.

ARTHUR

*(cleaning the spit)* Well--erm, if we cannot rest our rumps let us settle our stomachs, eh? *(calling)* Winckelk*(catching himself)*...jones...ington...smith?!

LADY CLEMENTIA

Winckelkjonesingtonsmith?

ARTHUR

Er--yes, my...northern English manservant.

LADY CLEMENTIA

A most queer name. *(suddenly)* Oh, no, you don't reckon he's a Catholic do you? I refuse to be in their heretical presence.

ARTHUR

I assure you not, ma'am. The man's deadly allergic to Holy Water. *Ha ha.* He should be coming. *(whispered)* Please, God of Germany...

*WINCKELKOPF enters with the covered tray. HE expected them sitting. The plan being slightly thrown off balance affects HIM. HE approaches tentatively.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

What's this then? Not Goose, I pray. Hate Goosemeat.

ARTHUR

Turkish Delights, ma'am. My dessert decision for the reception. These are homemade, though, I assure you. Turkish in name only. And perhaps in decadence as well. I expected us to sit and take these at the table but if we are to stand, Winckelk...Winck can hold them for us.

*WINCKELKOPF strongly shakes HIS head.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

No? What kind of help have you hired? *(to WINCKELKOPF, suspecting)* You're Lithuanian aren't you?

ARTHUR

Simply a nervous tick, dear Lady Clem. Winck only gets this way near powerful women. Poor glandular faculties the man has.

LADY CLEMENTIA

*Hmph.* Most men *do* find themselves with a weak gland around me.



ARTHUR

Well I assure you my mandibles are as strong as ever. Now I must insist you start with the *lemon* Turkish Delight. It's simply...delightful. Or, better yet, heavenly. Winck?

*WINCKELKOPF lifts the cover off the tray. All the Turkish Delights (or just their frostings) are varying shades of yellow. ARTHUR's eyes go wide.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

Lemon, you say? And which one is it?

ARTHUR

*(to the tray, panic)* Which one is it? *(to WINCKELKOPF, asking, panic escalating)* Which one is it? *(to LADY CLEMENTIA, plan rapidly formulated. Playfully)* Which one is it? Why, ma'am, that's the fun of the dish! Sample 'til you find it! Go ahead. As many as you'd like. All if you wish.

LADY CLEMENTIA

Ucch, certainly not. Do you see me draped in an Irish flag? I'm not that crude and needy. And certainly not as befreckled. Have one with me. Go on. I demand it.

*LADY CLEMENTIA picks one out. ARTHUR hesitates.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

I highly doubt this is the first decision you've ever made in your life and, most likely, it shan't be your last. Pick.

*ARTHUR looks to WINCKELKOPF. No help there. Hopeless, HE picks one up.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

There you are. *(beat)* Now it goes in your mouth.

*ARTHUR is frozen. LADY CLEMENTIA takes the hand with the Turkish Delight and puts it to ARTHUR's mouth. HE slowly opens it, and SHE pushes it in. SHE pops HER's into HER mouth and munches.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

Mmm. Custard. What's yours?

*ARTHUR sweats. HE has nowhere to run. Resigned, HE takes the teensiest of bites. The flavor comes to him, then a jubilated relief.*

ARTHUR

*(almost crying with joy, mouthful)* BANANA! Oh, what a long, glorious fruit...*(HE swallows)*

LADY CLEMENTIA

Never cared for it. Far too mushy. *(SHE picks another)* And you.

ARTHUR

*(patting HIS stomach)* Oh, no. I'm...deadly full.

LADY CLEMENTIA

Here. One more won't kill you.

*ARTHUR opens HIS mouth to protest as SHE picks one up, and quickly puts it into HIS open, now surprised mouth. SHE puts one hand on the top of HIS head and the other below HIS chin and forces HIM to chew. SHE casually grabs another for HERSELF.*

*ARTHUR gloomily chews. Oh, no...*

LADY CLEMENTIA

What? Not butterscotch I hope for the Lord's sake. No more foul a flavor.

*ARTHUR continues to chew, resigned to Doom. But then...*

ARTHUR

*(mouthful)* No, it's maybe...*(gasps)* poppy! Is it poppy?! *(looks to WINCKELKOPF)* Was there poppy? *(WINCKELKOPF nods)* IT'S POPPY!

LADY CLEMENTIA

Well don't *pop* because of it.

*LADY CLEMENTIA cackles at HER own joke. ARTHUR swallows, relieved. SHE eats HERS. HER face becomes mortified. ARTHUR and WINCKELKOPF get excited. SHE swallows, grimacing sharply.*

ARTHUR

Is it lemon?

LADY CLEMENTIA

UFF! BUTTERSCOTCH! IT'S LIKE THE DEVIL'S URINE! I must wash this flavor out immediately! Do you have any extremely hard liquor?!

ARTHUR  
Uh, in the kitchen, ma'am.

*LADY CLEMENTIA swiftly exits to the kitchen, scraping HER tongue with HER fingers to rid HERSELF of the taste.*

*ARTHUR hotly turns to WINCKELKOPF. BOTH speak hushed throughout.*

ARTHUR  
Yellow?!

WINCKELKOPF  
*Ja*, I know.

ARTHUR  
How could you make such a grievous error?! *Et tu, Wincke?*!  
Are you trying to kill me as well?!

WINCKELKOPF  
Not today.

ARTHUR  
Explain yourself promptly or I'll make you eat two!

WINCKELKOPF  
It was the yellow, *Mein* Lord!

ARTHUR  
They're all as bloody, bright yellow as the sun's smelly, linty navel!

WINCKELKOPF  
No. The *lemon* was yellow. The custard was canary. The banana was gold. The poppy was wheat. And the butterscotch was rotten *sauerkraut*.

ARTHUR  
Well, I obviously can't tell the difference, can you?!

WINCKELKOPF  
I could.

ARTHUR  
Then do!

WINCKELKOPF  
No, I *could*. I cannot anymore.

ARTHUR  
What?!

WINCKELKOPF

You are standing! When we rehearsed you sat! I was going to point to it but my fingers are enslaved if I stand! I'm improvising! I forgot which is which! This acting business is very, very hard!

ARTHUR

*(sighs)* It is no matter. We shall send the rest home with her and then I shall punch you in the bracket until you *bleed* yellow...somehow.

WINCKELKOPF

You might have known. The capsule very well may still be intact inside. You could feel it.

ARTHUR

Well couldn't she then?

WINCKELKOPF

She is old. With age the senses become less...refined.

*LADY CLEMENTIA reenters, long, heavy liquor bottle in hand. SHE's chugging. SHE leaves about half a teaspoon.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

If there were two things I could permanently remove in this world it would be butterscotch and Italians. And Scots. And the Welsh. And Swiss. And the Germans, ooooo I'd save them for last.

*ARTHUR excessively yawns and stretches HIS arms.*

ARTHUR

Well, dear, darling Lady Clem, I'm afraid I must retire to bed.

LADY CLEMENTIA

I just arrived.

ARTHUR

And as soon as I wake I will promptly begin work on enhancing my meeting scheduling skills. By all means feel free to take the remainder of the Turkish Delights. After all, I am trying to be slim for my upcoming tuxedo. *A-ha-ha.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

Well I'd like another before I leave to erase that positively torturous gustatory experience.

ARTHUR

Pick away. Lemon remains...

LADY CLEMENTIA

No, no.

ARTHUR

Yes, yes. Please, please.

LADY CLEMENTIA

*(aghast)* Not alone.

ARTHUR

Truly, I cannot eat another. Just take them with you. Please.

LADY CLEMENTIA

Compounding gluttony? I'll have nothing of it. Either you have one with me now or I'll leave them here when I exit.

*A weighty beat.*

ARTHUR

*(resigned)* You are a very difficult woman. Perhaps I chose more correctly than I thought.

LADY CLEMENTIA

What?

ARTHUR

Nothing. Nothing at all. *(quietly)* Let's get this sodding business finalized.

*Not caring anymore, HE just picks one up. SHE does as well.*

ARTHUR

To long life. Cheers.

*HE "toasts" HIS Turkish Delight with HER's and tosses it in HIS mouth, lightly grimacing, chewing slowly. A beat.*

*Oh, no. Most certainly this time...*

ARTHUR

*(whispered, mouthful)* Lemon.

LADY CLEMENTIA

Oh, lucky you.

ARTHUR

*(mouthful)* Lemon. Definitely lemon.

*ARTHUR chews, slowly, terrified. WINCKELKOPF is trying to say something, but cannot audibly communicate due to the circumstances.*

ARTHUR

(to WINCKELKOPF, mouthful) Oh, just say it.

WINCKELKOPF

(a very poor attempt of a German imitation of an English accent) The...lemon...might still be intact *mein...*mind you.

LADY CLEMENTIA

(to WINCKELKOPF) Which part of England were you from again?

*ARTHUR chews. HE's right!*

ARTHUR

(to WINCKELKOPF, mouthful, relieved) You're right! You're right!

LADY CLEMENTIA

Well, go on and swallow now.

ARTHUR

(chewing exquisitely slowly, mouthful, fear) Oh, but I just love the...lemon...y goodness. I have to keep chewing. Mmmmm.

*Abject panic. WINCKELKOPF, behind LADY CLEMENTIA has nothing.*

ARTHUR

(chewing still, desperately slowly. mouthful) Just simply adore the...tanginess. Not a man alive who doesn't love...tang. Mmmmmmm-mmmmmmm...

*Horror. Then! An idea!*

ARTHUR

MMMM!

*Flinging out HIS arms as if propelled by the joy of taste, ARTHUR knocks LADY CLEMENTIA's cane out from under HER, causing HER to fall, hard.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

Ahhh!

*ARTHUR looks furtively to WINCKELKOPF, violently beckoning HIM with a head gesture. WINCKELKOPF rushes over. With one hand, ARTHUR helps LADY CLEMENTIA to HER feet. In the other, HE spits the remains of the Turkish Delight and hands them to WINCKELKOPF. WINCKELKOPF withdraws the still-intact poison capsule from the mess.*

*LADY CLEMENTIA is standing, balancing on ARTHUR. HE grabs HER cane for HER.*

ARTHUR

So sorry, Lady Clem! Suddenly overcome with such a radiant taste explosion!

LADY CLEMENTIA

I haven't been struck by a man like that since before my first husband passed.

*As SHE says this, WINCKELKOPF is gesturing to ARTHUR that THEY still need to place the pill in another Turkish Delight so that LADY CLEMENTIA can eat it and later die. ARTHUR nods HIS head in worried agreement. HE is unsure what to do, as LADY CLEMENTIA would surely see them place the pill.*

ARTHUR

*(snapping back to attention to LADY CLEMENTIA)* Er--what's that?

*LADY CLEMENTIA has finally regained total balance with HER cane.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

I said...

Ah-HA! Another idea!

ARTHUR

MMMM!

*Once again, ARTHUR's arms go flying, knocking LADY CLEMENTIA's cane out from under HER. SHE falls, again. Even harder. While SHE's down, WINCKELKOPF tosses ARTHUR the capsule, who catches it and swiftly places it in another Turkish Delight.*

ARTHUR

After-taste! Just as thrilling as the previous! Oh, Lady Clem, do forgive me. If my mother were to see my behavior she'd kill me where I stood.

*SHE struggles to get up. There is little help.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

Seems you're the only one standing around here.

ARTHUR

Here, please.

*LADY CLEMENTIA extends HER hand for HELP, but ARTHUR completely ignores it and grabs HER handbag and the tray of Turkish Delights, right before WINCKELKOPF was going to take one for HIMSELF. ARTHUR pours all the Turkish Delights into LADY CLEMENTIA's handbag.*

ARTHUR

Please, take them all, I insist. For my bitter actions you deserve sweet compensation.

*LADY CLEMENTIA returns to HER feet and assumes a safe distance from ARTHUR.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

If you're really apologetic, get me the bloody hell out and call me a coachmen. Many of them are Dutch and I refuse to make eye contact.

*THEY start to exit.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

No, no, no! Maintain your distance! Flinging your arms like some Portuguese drunkard. Find my wedding invitation and drown it!

ARTHUR

Oh, Lady Clementia, why would I ever want to be without your charming company? I'm sure I'll see you again very, very, very soon in the coming days.

*THEY leave out the door, ARTHUR calling to a coachmen as THEY pass the window and exit.*

*Alone and with the Turkish Delights gone, WINCKELKOPF rubs HIS stomach. HE's hungry. HE shrugs.*

*HE eats the remains of ARTHUR's lemon Turkish Delight.*

**END ACT ONE SCENE THREE**



ACT ONE SCENE FOUR

*A foggy, gray afternoon. The drafty, lonely drawing room. Seemingly empty. As if its heart has been dashed out and tossed on the street.*

WINCKELKOPF enters from within. Stands.

WINCKELKOPF

Mein Lord?

ARTHUR

Mein man?

*ARTHUR is lying behind the sofa. And is miserable.*

WINCKELKOPF

*(trying to boost spirits)* I have a surprise for you.

ARTHUR

You should start a club...

WINCKELKOPF

Your mother is here.

ARTHUR

That is as much a surprise as saying my nose is on my face.

WINCKELKOPF

And the...*(wistfully)* Lady Windermere.

ARTHUR

And my nostrils below it.

WINCKELKOPF

And...er--well, *ja*. They are here. Now. Would you like to stand up?

ARTHUR

The day's date?

WINCKELKOPF

Fourteenth, September.

ARTHUR

That makes it a fortnight to the day since we set Lady Clem with those treacherous treats and nothing. Nothing.

WINCKELKOPF

Perhaps you would like to consider changing clothes, *mein* Lord? You have had on the same set.

ARTHUR

For one fortnight...

WINCKELKOPF

You smell vaguely of old turnips.

ARTHUR

My heart, Winky, is an old turnip. Purple and rotting. Dreadfully rotting. My trousers can manage.

WINCKELKOPF

Shall I send madams in?

ARTHUR

Has there ever been a woman alive you could stop doing exactly what she wants without extensive use of elbows?

WINCKELKOPF

Alive? (*light chuckle*) No.

ARTHUR

Seems to be the only sort I know. Let them in. Do alert them to my odor.

*WINCKELKOPF exits to within.*

*ARTHUR rises, finally, revealing HIS pitiful self. Carries over to the other side of the sofa. Sits. Slumps. Lies down. Falls to the floor. Stays.*

*A beat.*

*HE sniffs HIMSELF. Closes HIS eyes.*

ARTHUR

I'd say cabbage.

*LADY WINDERMERE and DUCHESS enter. BOTH are dressed in black. THEY both see ARTHUR on the ground.*

DUCHESS

Is he asleep?

ARTHUR

No.

LADY WINDERMERE

Arthur, you're on the floor.

ARTHUR

Observant as ever, Lady Windermere.

*DUCHESS is concerned. LADY WINDERMERE is preoccupied with looking into other rooms containing certain Germanic servants. DUCHESS approaches, worried.*

WINCKELKOPF reenters. HE and LADY WINDERMERE briefly stare at each other longingly, then, quickly, ruefully, look away. Then, THEY move slightly closer to EACH OTHER. Such a dance continues throughout.

DUCHESS  
We've returned from Venice.

ARTHUR  
Italy?

LADY WINDERMERE  
Erm, uh...is there another?

DUCHESS  
Did you fall?

ARTHUR  
From the pure, pink, puffy clouds of heaven.

DUCHESS  
I suppose you knocked your head as well.

*SHE bends over HIM to investigate.*

ARTHUR  
Mother, while I am happy to see you again if at a distinctly different angle than usual I...I think it best you leave for now. (*HE sits up*) I am obviously odorously not fit for company.

DUCHESS  
I did detect a whiff of spoiled rutabaga. What's the matter, darling? I'd heard you were out of sorts.

ARTHUR  
Loose lips sink German U-boats...

DUCHESS  
I'm positively flummoxed. Unless...(SHE approaches HIM slyly)  
It's Sybil.

ARTHUR  
(*looking around*) Where?

DUCHESS  
On your mind. My word, vegetables aren't the only thing of which you reek. And they say there's only one way to tell when a man's thinking of a woman. It is *she*, yes?

ARTHUR

Yes. (*realizing*) It *is* she. If she were only here it wouldn't matter would it? My joy would just be a huge, massive...eraser to this bleak scribbling.

DUCHESS

Well, then, I think I found you the perfect *souvenir* from Venice. Gladys?

*LADY WINDERMERE and WINCKELKOPF have now drawn so close THEY'RE sniffing each other excitedly. DUCHESS sees.*

DUCHESS

What on Earth is going on?

LADY WINDERMERE

I'm (*panicked, looks to WINCKELKOPF*)...denying his advances!

*SHE slaps WINCKELKOPF.*

LADY WINDERMERE

Dreadful Deutschlander. (*to DUCHESS*) Yes, dearie?

DUCHESS

Would you fetch Arthur's...present?

LADY WINDERMERE

Now? I thought we were waiting until dinner.

*DUCHESS gives a concerned look to ARTHUR, then a smiling one to LADY WINDERMERE.*

DUCHESS

Now, I believe, is perfect timing. As always with fate. A sublime surprise. I'm growing to enjoy those.

*LADY WINDERMERE exits. WINCKELKOPF is sad. DUCHESS sniffs ARTHUR.*

DUCHESS

Just say you were making stew and failed.

ARTHUR

Hm?

*LADY WINDERMERE reenters. Beckons to WINCKELKOPF. Whispers in HIS ear. Lingers, then stands away.*

WINCKELKOPF

LADY SYBIL WINDERMERE!

*LADY SYBIL WINDERMERE enters. Tender. Pure. Beaming. SYBIL rushes to ARTHUR. THEY hold hands. THEN relinquish.*

Artie...  
SYBIL

Sybil...  
ARTHUR

*SHE sniffs.*

SYBIL  
Has someone left a squash out in the sun?

ARTHUR  
Uh...

DUCHESS  
Well, I am quite famished! Gladys, you?

LADY WINDERMERE  
*(looking intensely at WINCKELKOPF)* Starved.

DUCHESS  
To the kitchen then. I've found it to be the most suitable place for such impulses. *(Smiling)* Excuse us.

*DUCHESS exits to within. LADY WINDERMERE and WINCKELKOPF follow for a bit then pause, frozen in each other's views. DUCHESS' arms pull THEM within. ARTHUR and SYBIL gaze at EACH OTHER.*

ARTHUR  
I don't believe I'm seeing you. Even with all the madness that's followed me home of late, I still cannot.

SYBIL  
You always were dismissive of the unbelievable. How you ever enjoyed Christmas as a lad I'll never know. And speaking on the subject of beyond belief, Artie, the apartment building is simply spotless!

ARTHUR  
Oh...oh...yes, of course. I'd forgotten happier news. Surprise.

SYBIL  
That is so unlike you. To see to such secretive services.

ARTHUR  
It has been a most backwards past two weeks. Though some things remain unchanged. You look wonderful.

SYBIL

You do not. What's happened?

*ARTHUR smiles. HE stands a bit away, almost unable to face such joy. SYBIL's eyes close. A beat.*

ARTHUR

May I hold you? For a moment? Trade you an answer for it? (A beat. Silence.) Alright then.

SYBIL

*(as if suddenly coming to)* Hm?

ARTHUR

Did you not hear me, Lovely?

SYBIL

Was I not the last to speak?

ARTHUR

No, Lovely.

SYBIL

*(deeply disappointed)* Oh, fiddlee-dee. And I'd been doing so well...

ARTHUR

Your sleeping spells, of course.

SYBIL

Really, I've been better. Really. The doctors were so impressed they let me ride the bicycle for nearly twelve minutes! I've been working ever so diligently. Dutifully, like you asked. I do wish so to make you happy. I hoped I could prove it in person. It must be seeing you. I'm all a-twitter.

ARTHUR

It's no matter.

SYBIL

*(surprised)* Really? You were so overly concerned with its continuance.

*(realizing)* Nothing is.

SYBIL

What's that?

ARTHUR

Nothing is the matter. All is irrelevant with you in this room and your eyes in mine. I am...untroubled. I cannot even remember the troubles I had. How do you do that?

SYBIL

It's inexplicable. Though I'm not one to comment on the subject as with my afflictions my sense of memory is as reliable as snow on the sun.

ARTHUR

*Inexplicable.* Yes. Yes...

*A beat. A nice one.*

SYBIL

I've missed you. Deeply. At night. Under the stars. (*slight beat*) Would you...care to sit with me a moment? Discuss Italian architecture?

ARTHUR

No...

SYBIL

French, then?

ARTHUR

Neither of us shall sit. Come close to me.

*SHE does. HE embraces HER. So tightly.*

SYBIL

Artie! Pr--propriety!

ARTHUR

It's been of little use to me. All of it. All plans. All possessions. Everything I see has misled me and all I hear makes misery. I am so lost. I didn't know one could get so lost. And, yet, here you are. Another mad and magical moment. It's most mysterious that all I need is to be in two such delicate, right-slightly-shorter-than-the-left if I remember correctly, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful arms. I hardly understand it. (*beat*) I do hope you're awake.

SYBIL

I am.

ARTHUR

Good. So good. (*SYBIL's eyes close. A beat*) Lovely?

SYBIL

Hm?

*HE lets go. SHE shakes fully awake. THEY stand a proper distance. Small smiles.*

ARTHUR

Enough of Arthur and his ailments. What on Earth are you doing back?

SYBIL

*(worried, remembers)* Oh. Time?

ARTHUR

You came back for seasoning?

SYBIL

What time is it, Artie?

ARTHUR

Oh.

*ARTHUR pats at HIS pockets, finally finds and procures HIS pocketwatch.*

ARTHUR

2:37 in the PM.

SYBIL

Oh, dear, well, come along or we'll be late.

ARTHUR

But to what?

SYBIL

Artie, have you forgotten the news as well as soap?

ARTHUR

I've been...preoccupied.

SYBIL

The funeral.

ARTHUR

*(struck, excited)* A funeral? Someone died?

SYBIL

Typically the case in such matters, yes.

ARTHUR

Whom?

SYBIL

A relative of your mother. Aunt? Second aunt? Perhaps third? Maybe a cousin? The Lady Clementia.



(joyous) SHE DIED?!

ARTHUR

Sadly, yes.

SYBIL

*ARTHUR rushes to SYBIL, takes HER in HIS arms, and dances with HER.*

Ha! Artie!

SYBIL

After the funeral let's ask the priest to marry us immediately.

ARTHUR

What?

SYBIL

You're awake. You heard that.

ARTHUR

But, Artie, isn't it our duty to respect our families' wishes for a proper wedding ceremony?

SYBIL

Isn't it our duty as humans to love as much as we can as soon as possible? We can have a ceremony later. We'll do it for ourselves. Like Romeo and Juliet did. (*mostly to HIMSELF*) Ha, though I certainly shan't be buying any more poisons...

ARTHUR

*SYBIL might have heard this remark. SHE'S confused. ARTHUR notices.*

Er--wouldn't want to disrespect the...good Lady Clem.

ARTHUR

What's that mean?

SYBIL

Well the woman was accidentally poisoned, yes? Yes?

ARTHUR

No.

SYBIL

No?

ARTHUR

(*stops dancing*) No. No, terrible accident all the same, though. Ruddy cane of hers gave out. Apparently it had been recently damaged. Just so happens it was beside the Thames and the old girl fell and drowned.

SYBIL

ARTHUR

She...drowned? In water?

SYBIL

For what passes for it in that septic nightmare. How grisly an end...

ARTHUR

*(growing desperate)* And nothing else?

SYBIL

Well the fall may have dislocated her shoulder but she'dve healed. I can't believe you hadn't heard correctly. Did you not receive the telegram?

ARTHUR

I...I've had other concerns on my mind.

SYBIL

Such as?

ARTHUR

Oh...(HE turns away. Struggles. Decides. Is unable to meet HER eyes.) You remember. Our wedding postponement. I...I just told you of it when you entered. Of my worry of it being too soon? Too...unprepared? With you having been away for so long I must...reevaluate my feelings. Especially...in light of the lack of progress in solving your sleeping spells. It would be improper otherwise. The stress of it all leading to my somewhat appalling appearance. You said you understood. You agreed it was for the best.

SYBIL

I...I did?

ARTHUR

Twice, I believe.

SYBIL

I can't remember...

ARTHUR

Oh, no, another spell. You see?

SYBIL

I...suppose. Though I normally don't speak during them. But they do...they do afflict my memory.

ARTHUR

Well, it's done.

SYBIL

*(disappointed)* Oh. *(beat)* But didn't you just ask me to marry you today?

ARTHUR

*(feigning shock)* Today? Absolutely not. When would we? After the funeral? How shockingly uncouth.

SYBIL

It seems my time in Venice has not been as helpful as I thought. What a rotten shock...

ARTHUR

Everything will come right. But patience is necessary.

*SHE stares at HIM. A beat.*

SYBIL

Artie?

ARTHUR

...yes?

SYBIL

If we're to be man and wife there can be no secrets.

ARTHUR

I'm fully aware.

SYBIL

None.

ARTHUR

I have nothing I *want* to hide from you, Sybil.

*Beat. Not the nicest one.*

SYBIL

Well, I *do* remember the time of the funeral. Which is soon. I'll fetch our mothers. I think you should not attend, Artie. You seem...not yourself. Perhaps seek some proper help.

ARTHUR

*(beat)* Yes. Yes. A wise choice. *(slight beat, finally able to meet HER eyes)* Do send in Winky. I must remind him to burn the recently-made inaccurate invitations. He loves fire so.

SYBIL

Yes, Artie, lovely.

ARTHUR

Lovely.

*SHE exits. ARTHUR pulls out the photograph of SYBIL. Absolutely cannot bear to look at it. Sets it on a surface. Covers it with an item. WINCKELKOPF enters. ARTHUR immediately snaps into action. Goes to WINCKELKOPF.*

ARTHUR

*(desperately)* Winky, when a man meets a mountain how does he conquer it?

WINCKELKOPF

Climb?

ARTHUR

And if it is simply too high?

WINCKELKOPF

Dynamite.

ARTHUR

Dynamite.

*ARTHUR calculates. Formulates. Turns to WINKY...darkly.*

ARTHUR

Winky...you carry a dagger with you at all times, yes?

WINCKELKOPF

*(laughs heartily)* Of course, mein Lord!

ARTHUR

*(deadly serious)* Give it to me. Now.

*WINCKELKOPF stops laughing. Somewhat nervously, HE withdraws a dagger from within HIS clothes and gives it to ARTHUR. It weighs on ARTHUR heavily. The burden of it, that is. HE grips it firmly, turns suddenly. Worried, WINCKELKOPF withdraws several daggers and perhaps a small hatchet from within HIS clothes. Holds them defensively.*

ARTHUR

*(disturbed)* Winky, my fine bearded fellow...no. Is this rocky chasm I've plunged into so dreadfully deep? Am I so obscured? I'd never hurt one I...I care for. German or otherwise.

WINCKELKOPF

Then why the dagger?

*ARTHUR walks to the piano. Sets the dagger down. Plays a somber song.*

ARTHUR

There is one thing worse than an absolutely loveless marriage: a marriage in which there is love, but on one side only. I've lost sight of how to properly love, Winky.

Remarkable considering it is totally invisible. How is it the most wonderful and terrible things are usually so?

WINCKELKOPF

A woeful, stupefying mystery, *mein* Lord.

ARTHUR

One of fate's deeper, darker notes. (*beat*) By the end of the night, Winky, I shall end the life of another.

*HE stops playing. Picks up the dagger.*

ARTHUR

Or, rightly, take my own. Suicide is as much a form of murder as any other, though certainly a much less preferable one. (*Duty finally clear*) Accompany the women to the funeral. I know you like those events. I will take to the streets. If questioned concerning my whereabouts...make up a story. Seems to be a recurring occurrence within these walls. Let us hope we both return breathing.

*ARTHUR admires the dagger. Holds it to HIS left hand and presses lightly. Pulls it away and into HIS pocket. THEY exit. ARTHUR to outside. WINCKELKOPF to within. A beat.*

*PODGERS passes by the window outside, another wine bottle in hand. Enters.*

PODGERS

(*calling*) Dear, lovely Duchess! I sensed your return! I've come for your training session! I know it's a surprise, but don't we all like those from time to time? Reminds us there's more to come than we ever expected. A jolly mystery. But hopefully with right timing. However with fate that's all there is. For the time it happens is the only time it can, and, thus, can only be right. And--

*PODGERS is struck by a sudden sensation. Worried, HE goes to the window. Touches it lightly. Looks away suddenly. Nearly drops the bottle. Must set it down.*

PODGERS

Tonight? Oh, dear. (*beat*) Oh, yes, of course. Tonight...

**END ACT ONE SCENE FOUR**

**END ACT ONE**

**INTERMISSION**

ACT TWO SCENE ONE

AT RISE: The drawing room. Darker than ever, as nighttime has a tendency to be. Still. Silent. Shrouded. PODGERS wine bottle remains. WINCKELKOPF's coat and shirt lie scattered on the floor.

ARTHUR goes suddenly running past the window, overwhelmed. Trips. Picks HIMSELF up, using the window for support, leaving a bloody handprint on the glass.

HE enters, breathing heavily. HE is only in HIS white undershirt and trousers. The undershirt is deeply stained red. Blood red.

HE withdraws something wrapped in a kerchief from HIS trouser pocket. HE opens it. A dagger. Bloody. Wipes it on HIS already bloody undershirt. Breathes. Breathes. Breathes.

WINCKELKOPF enters. HE is also down to HIS undershirt and trousers. HIS undershirt is also stained, though purple. HE is also breathing heavily.

Alarmed by HIS sudden appearance, ARTHUR throws the dagger at HIM. WINCKELKOPF dodges it (or catches it and sets it down if you're a brave, brave company).

ARTHUR What happened? I almost died. How?

WINCKELKOPF What happened? I almost died. How?

A beat.

THEY both start to talk again at the same time but catch THEMSELVES. THEY stop. WINCKELKOPF points at ARTHUR to go.

ARTHUR  
A dagger. You?

WINCKELKOPF  
Worse. A woman. Is it done, mein Lord?

ARTHUR

Oh, how it is. It is all done.

WINCKELKOPF

You were successful?

ARTHUR

In that I have reached a conclusion.

WINCKELKOPF

And so has someone else? (*noticing*) Wait, what is on your undershirting?

ARTHUR

Life. But not near as much as needed. And you?

WINCKELKOPF

Wine. But not near as much as needed as well, apparently. (*goes and picks up the bottle PODGERS brought*) English women need much coaxing to share affections. The accent just doesn't do it. Actually, it seems more to scare them away. But, anyway, what happened?

*ARTHUR goes and picks up the dagger.*

ARTHUR

It cuts true, but aim it does not improve. Must've stabbed the man's left arm a half dozen times. We wrestled. Ripped my coat and my literally bloody shirt right off my back. Then the damned dagger fell out of my hands and he picked it up to turn on me! The blade was blissfully slippery. He dropped it and I recovered. Certainly didn't end his life, but most definitely crippled his future in row boating.

*ARTHUR's actions are nearly too much to bear. Fights tears. HE cannot look at WINCKELKOPF. Struggles with the world in general.*

WINCKELKOPF

Who was it?

ARTHUR

A man in a corner. The irony is not lost. I lost my coat. My shirt. Nearly...my life. But that did not matter. The fight, Winky!

WINCKELKOPF

Sounds like a stupendous scuffle.

ARTHUR

Not our altercation. The fight in the man's eyes! My will to kill could not overcome his to live. As one hopes it should always be.

WINCKELKOPF

If you say so.

ARTHUR

Though, hope, I've found, can be the most scant, scarce substance. I failed and ran. And ran. And ran.

*ARTHUR holds the knife to HIS hand. Then, HIS, wrist. Holds it there.*

ARTHUR

I have done my best to commit this murder, but on both occasions I have failed. It seems as if Destiny herself has turned traitor. Perhaps this is best. Perhaps *this* is my duty. Sybil will suffer, but suffering could not really mar a nature so noble as hers. As for myself, what does it matter? As life has no pleasure for me, so death has no terror. (*Presses lightly. Holds it.*) I'm almost tempted to ask you to do it for me, Winky. End my life. But that would be...improper.

*Presses. Harder. Almost entirely...*

WINCKELKOPF

I would get rid of you. If you asked.

*ARTHUR holds the blade back, morbidly intrigued.*

WINCKELKOPF

I serve you. Whatever you wish I will do. It is *mein* duty.

*A beat.*

ARTHUR

For Sybil. Do it.

*WINCKELKOPF nods. ARTHUR gives HIM the blade.*

WINCKELKOPF

Take off your undershirting.

*ARTHUR is puzzled.*

WINCKELKOPF

Please.

*ARTHUR does. WINCKELKOPF gestures for it. ARTHUR gives it to HIM. ARTHUR starts to remove HIS own trousers.*

WINCKELKOPF

What are you doing?



ARTHUR

I assumed this was the logical progression? Somehow?

WINCKELKOPF

*Nein. Nein, nein, nein, why would you--nein. Nein. (slight beat) Nein.*

*ARTHUR is thoroughly clueless. WINCKELKOPF scoffs at ARTHUR's ignorance. WINCKELKOPF then wildly, vigorously, and with an ever-stretching smile stabs the shirt multiple times.*

ARTHUR

Winky?

WINCKELKOPF

SILENCE!

*HE ceases stabbing. HIS bloodlust lingers, but is subsiding.*

WINCKELKOPF

Now, you go.

ARTHUR

Well I'd rather not go like that if it's all right. A single swift heart puncture will suffice.

WINCKELKOPF

No.

ARTHUR

Please?

WINCKELKOPF

No. You will go...away. Away from England. Now. Live another life. I will tell them you were attacked. Killed. Your body taken. All I was able to recover was your undershirting. You are dead. And it won't be a lie. Because when you leave, Lord Arthur Savile stays. I recommend Munich, it's *wunderbar* this time of year. I will telegraph *mein* step-brother: *Herr* Alois Schicklgruber. Take the next boat to the mainland, then the train to Munich. He will be waiting. (*realizing*) You still have your wallet, *ja?* (*ARTHUR nods*) *Gut*. Oh, and for the seasonal, freezing winds.

*PICKS up HIS coat, gives it to ARTHUR. HE gives it back.*

WINCKELKOPF

It should fit...mostly.

ARTHUR

No, Winky, you're doing more than more than enough. It wouldn't be proper of me.

WINCKELKOPF

It would be ever less proper for me not to. (*gives the coat back*) I feel supremely sorry for the whole Turkish Delight slip-up. What was I thinking, *ja*?

*ARTHUR accepts the circumstances. Puts the coat on.*

ARTHUR

You are a clever and compassionate man, Winky. For a German.

WINCKELKOPF

And you are a *gut* man with nice teeth. For a Brit.

*A rustle of sound from off.*

WINCKELKOPF

Go! *Schnell!*

*ARTHUR starts to go. Stops.*

ARTHUR

Tell Sybil my last words were of love to her. I know they would have been, as I'm sure someday they will be.

WINCKELKOPF

Will do, *mein* Lord.

ARTHUR

And do well, *mein* friend.

*ARTHUR goes. Exits. Is gone.*

*A moment.*

*Sadly, WINCKELKOPF looks at the shirt. Stabs it feebly a few more times.*

*LADY WINDERMERE enters, carrying and swigging heavily a bottle of mostly empty wine (from A1S1). WINCKELKOPF quickly tosses the dagger away so SHE doesn't see it. Not like SHE probably would, or could, anyway...*

LADY WINDERMERE

Winky-Tinky take a drinky...

*SHE offers the bottle. HE shakes HIS head.*

LADY WINDERMERE

I'm feeling much more in tune with my inner German bar wench. Come to bed, my Kaiser of Canoodling. You can even bring your bloody undershirt. (*laughing*) A bloody undershirt! You Germans should add comedy alongside chocolate and clockwork to your list of accomplishments. Honestly, a bloody undershirt! (*slight beat. Realizing*) A bloody undershirt? Bloody hell! A bloody undershirt!

*SHE takes a deep swig and backs away.*

WINCKELKOPF

Mein Lady Windermere.

*HE draws near to HER. SHE slaps at HIS arm.*

LADY WINDERMERE

That's a very, *VERY* bad Winky!

*DUCHESS and PODGERS enter. Then, SYBIL.*

DUCHESS

What's the matter, Gladys?

SYBIL

(*noticing ARTHUR's shirt*) Artie!

*THEY rush over.*

LADY WINDERMERE

No, it's his manservant! German vermin!

*SYBIL grabs the undershirt from WINCKELKOPF who withdraws from LADY WINDERMERE.*

SYBIL

(*to WINCKELKOPF*) What is the meaning of this?

LADY WINDERMERE

I was just walking and got...thirsty. Alone!

SYBIL

(*to WINCKELKOPF*) Why do you have Artie's shirt? (*growing increasingly worried*) What...what is this substance on it? Answer me. Now.

*All eyes on WINCKELKOPF.*

WINCKELKOPF

I was watching outside and saw *mein* Lord returning from the stomach specialist steadily walking by the steps of the stained-glass window vendors when a wandering gang of weapon-wielding wrongdoers attacked.

I went to waive them away but was withheld. I was stopped by them, and made to watch. I was able to get unstuck and wanted to stymie the warriors but slipped on the stairs. When I stood, they were the winners. The only thing I was able to wrestle away was *mein* Lord's undershirting. They stole his body. Not a whisper of to where. Wistfully I wish I wasn't the one weighted with this work. Still, I understand if you need a while to weep. This story is so...wild. All wild.

*A moment. SYBIL fingers the undershirt while staring intently at WINCKELKOPF. Turns suddenly, desperately, to LADY WINDERMERE.*

SYBIL

Mother.

LADY WINDERMERE

Dear?

*SYBIL looks to LADY WINDERMERE, needing. LADY WINDERMERE holds HER. SYBIL moves HER head to be out-of-the-way of LADY WINDERMERE's breath. LADY WINDERMERE sips while holding SYBIL.*

DUCHESS

No. *(beat)* Not again...

*DUCHESS is dizzy with despair. LADY WINDERMERE and SYBIL continue holding.*

*PODGERS glares at WINCKELKOPF. PODGERS wants to say something very, very badly but is struggling internally with its ramifications. Seeing the terribly drab scene, though, HE cannot withhold.*

PODGERS

*(to ALL)* No is right. *(to WINCKELKOPF)* And wild is even better. *(to ALL)* I believe we're all suffering from a...mistake in translation. Our German friend here might be blaming someone inaccurately for a problematic situation. A future trend for his people, I assure you.

DUCHESS

What?

SYBIL

What?

WINCKELKOPF

What?

PODGERS

The good Lord Arthur is not dead.

*Gasps.*

WINCKELKOPF

Yes, he is.

PODGERS

*(sternly to WINCKELKOPF)* I know he is not. *(softer, to ALL)* A simple matter of mistranslation I hypothesize. A moment.

*PODGERS pulls WINCKELKOPF aside.*

PODGERS

*(loudly, for ALL to hear)* Guten tag! Weinerschnitzel!  
*(hushed, stern, to WINCKELKOPF)* Follow along with me or I'll tell them the real, complete truth about you and you'll be back to Berlin to that prison you escaped from faster than you can say *Schnitzel* with yellow mustard.

WINCKELKOPF

*(hushed)* I was wrongly imprisoned. It was only six who died, not eight. Okay, maybe seven. But, fine, whatever.

PODGERS

*(hushed)* Very proper choice. *(Loudly, for ALL)* Willkommen! Ha ha. There, you see? Herr Winckelkopf confused the word "weapon" with "tomato". Seems Arthur was a victim of that dreadful Vegetable Vagrant gang they wrote of in the London Times. Tomato and weapon, German homonyms.

WINCKELKOPF

...Ja. Did I say weapon? Whoops.

SYBIL

So Artie *is* alive?

PODGERS

...yes.

*Relief washes over. LADY WINDERMERE joyfully drinks.*

DUCHESS

What a terrible fright.

PODGERS

Yes...I'm certain he'll return shortly. *(slight beat, quietly)* Quite certain. *(beat)* Lady Windermere?

LADY WINDERMERE

Who--er, what?

PODGERS  
(*indicating bottle*) If you wouldn't mind?

*Surprised, LADY WINDERMERE hands the bottle to PODGERS who sips, savoring the liquid. Finishes the bottle.*

PODGERS  
Exquisite. A perfect end.

*HE returns it to HER.*

*A shivering ARTHUR appears at the window, coat pulled tightly. HE is alarmed at the presence of ALL, though no one sees HIM at the window but PODGERS. HE enters. SYBIL sees HIM.*

SYBIL  
Artie!

DUCHESS  
Darling!

*SYBIL runs and embraces HIM.*

ARTHUR  
Oh, Sybil, Lovely, no, I'm covered in--

SYBIL  
Tomato. I'm aware and don't care.

ARTHUR  
Tomato?

PODGERS  
Yes, Arthur, we all heard.

ARTHUR  
(*quite confused*) Did...you?

WINCKELKOPF  
*Mein* Lord, we were worried for your well-being.

ARTHUR  
Have you talked to them, Winky?

PODGERS  
He told them everything he should as is the charge of any proper manservant. It has been a pulse-quickenning evening and if we allow it to continue the lot of us might expire. And we don't all deserve such a fate tonight. Duchess, you show great aptitude in the Cheiromantic field. If you require further information you may consult my book.

DUCHESS

I wasn't aware there was one published.

PODGERS

There shall be. Soon. (*beat*) To bed now. All of you.

ARTHUR

Oh, but do wait, Sybil. We must talk.

SYBIL

I wouldn't dare leave you. Never again. As I hope you wouldn't leave me.

*ARTHUR looks to SYBIL sweetly.  
Gratefully.*

DUCHESS

And to think I might have lost you while lost myself in puerile palmistry practice. Never again. No more of this terrible tomfoolery.

ARTHUR

No, mother. Joy, nor anything else, will be sacrificed because of me. Not any more.

DUCHESS

But, Arthur, darling, you were a victim.

ARTHUR

Of my own egotistical endeavoring. It nearly did cost you me, as similar ambivalence towards what really mattered cost us father. Sins repeated on a selfish son.

DUCHESS

Whatever are you trying to say? I'm completely confounded.

PODGERS

A typical symptom of such a traumatic transgression. Now, unless Lord Arthur has a wish for more darker divination, I urge no more words. Simply steps. To your rooms. All of you.

DUCHESS

Do be wary when you walk, Arthur. These sidewalks seem to attract all sorts of ill fortunes. First the Lady Clem and now you. I can only imagine what's next.

PODGERS

More days, more destinations. I assure you.

DUCHESS

Good night, Arthur. I do love you.

*SHE embraces HIM. And HE, HER.*

DUCHESS

*(quietly)* Thank you.

*SHE exits to within.*

LADY WINDERMERE

Uh...well, I am terribly...terrified...of the reappearance of these Fruit-Flinging Fiends and will need to be accompanied to my quarters. *Herr* Winckel-Toes?

ARTHUR

*Winckel*-what?

LADY WINDERMERE

Uh--*Kopf*. Do you have tomato in your ears, as well? Come along, *Winckel*...you.

*SHE grabs WINCKELKOPF, quite forcefully, and THEY go to exit to within. Before THEY'RE completely off...*

PODGERS

Lady Windermere, my former dearest lady, I do wish the both of you all the best in the future.

LADY WINDERMERE

*(lightly stepping away from WINCKELKOPF)* Both of er--whom?

PODGERS

*Heh*. Yes, of course. *(mystical hand gesture)* Whomever it is that fate decrees you be with.

LADY WINDERMERE

Oh. Well...perhaps that proper person will present themselves promptly. *(staring at WINCKELKOPF)* Quite promptly...

*Quite promptly, THEY exit.*

ARTHUR

If you would allow us a spot of privacy, doctor?

PODGERS

I must have words with you, Arthur. Concerning your reading? A check-up if you would.

ARTHUR

Will you be outside?

PODGERS

No. Not yet. I'll go to the kitchen. I spied an unopened *Riesling*. I'd love to admire the bottle. *(carefully)* You don't always have to drink to appreciate the wine, Arthur. Remember it.



*PODGERS exits to within. SYBIL looks to ARTHUR, smiling. Almost devilishly.*

ARTHUR

Oh, and what could you possibly be smiling for?

SYBIL

I've just never seen you without a shirt on.

ARTHUR

*Oh...(embarrassed, grabs a pillow off the couch to cover HIMSELF) Oh.*

SYBIL

Now don't get any redder than you have already been tonight. I love your ability to surprise me. It's one of your most endearing qualities. That and now apparently your chest.

ARTHUR

Sybil, I--I must come clean.

SYBIL

I'd hope so after the evening's tomatoing.

ARTHUR

No, I...I need to tell you something.

SYBIL

Me first. Please. I can't bear to hear much more tragedy from you or in regards to you so...please. Allow me first?

*ARTHUR nods. SYBIL's eyes close. A beat. ARTHUR lightly pokes HER.*

ARTHUR

Sybil?

SYBIL

*(HER eyes open.) Hm? Oh, dear. Not again. You didn't tell me you're moving to the States or some other bestial far away country, right?*

ARTHUR

No, Lovely.

SYBIL

Oh, thank heavens. Ever since our...our discussion this afternoon I've been ever so afraid to fall asleep again and not hear what your heart needs. But I think I've found a trick: think of Artie, feel my heart take flight, and I stay conscious. It is not easy. But whatever it takes to make you mine, I'll do. No matter how enduring or undesirable it may be. You opened my eyes to love and, in doing so, woke my heart.

Whatever it is that must be done, whatever, I'll understand. And, if I must, I'll wait. Always. Even though that is the hardest of all. But that is the duty of one in love. *(beat)* There. I've said all I need and quite succinctly. That wasn't so bad, eh? Now what did you have to say?

*ARTHUR looks at SYBIL, then, HIS hand.*

SYBIL (cont'd)

Tomato stain?

*HE looks up.*

ARTHUR

Plan the wedding, Sybil. As soon as you want.

SYBIL

*(beat)* Really, Artie?

ARTHUR

Yes.

SYBIL

You're sure?

ARTHUR

Yes.

SYBIL

I'm...not asleep, right?

*HE grabs HER. Kisses HER quite well.*

ARTHUR

Well you're definitely awake now. Plan the wedding. Everything else be damned, plan it.

SYBIL

Oh, Artie! Your new, surprising self is so endearing...surprisingly! *(Embraces HIM)* Ooooo, and your back skin is so nicely smooth and hairless.

*Takes HER by the hands. Puts HERS over HIS.*

SYBIL (cont'd)

Who's coat is this?

ARTHUR

A very generous man. I must thank him.

SYBIL

Oh, Artie, what about my spells?

ARTHUR

The only spell I am concerned with is the one you cast on me. And I am a most...fortunate victim of it.

SYBIL

The surprises don't stop.

ARTHUR

You're telling me. Now, to bed, Lovely. You have a busy day ahead of planning and cake selection and if it is lemon I'll never be able to forgive you.

*ARTHUR guides HER to the exit to within. THEY look into each OTHER's eyes.*

SYBIL

A most interesting thing. Though this evening proved full of fears, one thought could not stop echoing in my ears. And that is how much I love you. Curious isn't it?

ARTHUR

It is a powerful thought. Able to overcome the most stressed situations. And I hope you know I love you. Why, I dare say it was...written in the stars.

*HE kisses HER hand. Looks at it. Then HER. Smiles. SHE exits to within. ARTHUR sighs. Takes in the space. Notices the dagger. Picks it up. PODGERS enters, sees HIM, is alarmed, then remembers.*

PODGERS

(to HIMSELF) No. Not like that.

ARTHUR

(sets it down) Don't worry. I'm quite ill-suited with it.

PODGERS

Certainly couldn't fend off the Garden Gang.

ARTHUR

What was that? That story? What were you doing?

PODGERS

I would ask you the same. Committing to your marriage in spite of your mental malady? And after having run away so recently.

ARTHUR

When one loses his bearings, a loss of way is all that can follow. Fear propelled me to my would-have-been-cowardly escape, as it has so thoroughly since our...your reading.

PODGERS

The rush of it from your attempted murder, yes? The brutal, bloody bluntness of it?

ARTHUR

How are you aware of all of this?

PODGERS

I would say your second greatest flaw is memory. My skills extend far beyond mere sooth-saying, my boy. Fat lot of good they've done me...

ARTHUR

What do you have to say to me?

PODGERS

Oh, very little. "Actions speak louder..." being the axiom.

ARTHUR

Doctor, like many in your profession you have the remarkable ability to never say exactly what it is we wish to hear. Some similarities aside I must say you're a very poor proper doctor. You have caused me nothing but extreme discomfort and continuous loss of wardrobe.

PODGERS

There is something I prescribed...

ARTHUR

And I shan't be following doctor's orders. Not presently at least. If someone's life is to be ended at my hands then so be it. I will not give power to the worries of anticipation. I cannot run away simply out of uncertainty. No one would get anywhere were that acceptable. It would be undutiful. The questions I have may not be answered for some time, but love will see that I am at least adequately satisfied with existence until they are.

PODGERS

*Adequately satisfied?* A poor way to live with love.

ARTHUR

It will have to do. I'll make it a new duty to see it work.

PODGERS

*(almost more to HIMSELF)* A most terribly unfair task.

ARTHUR

I've had to learn to understand that which seems not understandable.

PODGERS

The duty of life perhaps?

ARTHUR

(*defeated*) Seems as if it is an endless, unanswerable mystery.

*Finds the photograph of SYBIL HE set down earlier. Looks at it. Emotionally crushed. Looks away from it. PODGERS notices. Struggles. Decides.*

PODGERS

Give me your hand.

ARTHUR

This is a very improper time for parlor tricks, Dr. Podgers.

PODGERS

Propriety can take on many forms. Your hand.

*Nothing to lose, ARTHUR complies  
PODGERS withdraws HIS magnifying glass.  
Gives ARTHUR's hand a light read.*

PODGERS (cont'd)

*Hm. Yes. I see...happy days. All your problems soon solved.*

*HE pockets the magnifying glass.*

ARTHUR

You do? Whether due to lack of sleep or shirt, I don't possibly see how. Perhaps it's your hat. Either way, I assume all responsibility for my ignorance. It is only right. And, sadly, increasingly constant.

PODGERS

And *that* is your greatest *strength*: your adherence to duty. As uncomfortable as it may be.

ARTHUR

You once believed that to be my greatest flaw.

PODGERS

As would anyone who had not yet developed a sense of it themselves. Perhaps you should give lessons in the skill. I dare say it's rarer an ability than mine in this world. (*Sighs. Steps away. Takes off HIS turban. Stares at it.*) There is much temptation to walk the primrose path of dalliance, Lord Arthur. The *easy way*. This is something you, a true gentleman, would never understand, but many, many do. Just look around. Myself most ashamedly included. I thought cultivating Cheiromancy ability might aid me in my quest for...eased fulfillment. And for a time it did. But having knowledge of the future doesn't make it any better. Or any less avoidable. Otherwise...how could it be what it is? The future happens to us all, for better or worse. Much like...

ARTHUR

Death?

PODGERS

I was going to say love.

ARTHUR

You seem to have all the answers.

PODGERS

One who reads the future very well should, yes?

ARTHUR

I envy you. Your course must always be clear.

PODGERS

*Hmm...*that it is.

ARTHUR

*(sadly staring at the photograph)* You have no idea how fortunate you are...

*A beat. PODGERS observes ARTHUR observing the photograph.*

PODGERS

You have no idea how fortunate you are, Lord Arthur. There is one thing that is impossible to know, even with the knowledge of what is to come. Because of it, actually. And that is love. One can never hope to find it with the...*gift* I have. It should not be planned. Never. Rather, it should always be ...a mystery. A chance encounter. The unseen push. Unexplainable. Otherwise, it is nothing. Certainly not love. Not true, proper love. It would simply be...*(looking at HIS turban)* an act. Love can never happen. And that is no way to live. *(beat)* However that is the price I must pay for my life: the *undutiful* life. Just as your current crisis, your need to commit murder, is the price you pay for yours: the life of duty. *(a beat. Tosses the magnifying glass on the floor)* But there is a way yet to settle both our debts.

ARTHUR

How?

PODGERS

I'll be on the roof.

ARTHUR

What? Whatever for? It's scathingly cold outside. I'm riddled to the bone with goose pimples.

PODGERS

*(Beat)* Do you not see it, Arthur? What I'm saying you should...what you *must* do?

ARTHUR

No.

PODGERS

*(Small, sad smile. Puts turban back on.)* It is true. The simplest solutions can be the hardest to see. Sometimes...*heh*...right above our heads. Come along, my boy. I'd say we've all had our fill of uncertainty for the evening. To the roof. With me. We'll speak more on the way up. That will be the...*easiest* way. Not your usual style, I know, but those who so rarely take it are often the ones most deserving of it. And the opposite, I suppose, is true, too. As well as...proper.

*PODGERS offers HIS hand and helps ARTHUR stand up. ARTHUR gives PODGERS the dropped magnifying glass.*

PODGERS

Ever the gentleman. Upstairs then.

*ARTHUR exits to within. PODGERS looks at the magnifying glass. Reads HIS own hand with it. Looks out the window. Nods. Acceptance. Places it next to the dagger. Exits to within.*

*A very extended beat, during which WINCKELKOPF reenters. Searching madly. Finds HIS dagger. Holds it lovingly. Turns to where HE entered from.*

*PODGERS' body quickly drops in front of the window, landing on the sidewalk.*

*And, then, HIS turban.*

*Shocked at the sight, WINCKELKOPF then looks at the dagger in HIS hand. A sudden, mad, unreasonable panic. Fearing possible accusations of complicity hides it under one of the sofa cushions, then exits to within.*

*The body does not rise.*

**END ACT TWO SCENE ONE**

ACT TWO SCENE TWO

*Daytime. Lovely, vibrant, and, above all, lively piano music. ARTHUR is playing, of course. HE is smiling broadly and wearing a tuxedo. There is a large curtain in downstage of the window.*

*SYBIL quickly enters from within dressed in a wedding gown. SHE sees ARTHUR playing and shakes HER head.*

SYBIL  
*(calling)* He's in here! Again! *(to ARTHUR)* Your hands are going to fall off.

ARTHUR  
These fortunate fingers? They'd be fools!

SYBIL  
*Artie, we must depart immediately! We still haven't put all our wedding gifts in the carriage and the boat is off in less than thirty minutes for our Venetian voyage!*

ARTHUR  
Ask Winky. Germans have the strength of ten men. They're like gorillas.

SYBIL  
I don't have the heart to ask our new father-in-law to work on his wedding day.

ARTHUR  
Well, thankfully, I have heart enough for both of us. *(With a flourish, stops playing. Jubilantly hops up. Sing-song)* Winky!...

*WINCKELKOPF enters, as well as LADY WINDERMERE. THEY are hand-in-hand and wearing a tuxedo and wedding gown respectfully. LADY WINDERMERE carries a small, giftwrapped package.*

WINCKELKOPF  
*Mein son-in-law? We must welcome our wagon or the train will be wheeling without the recently wed!*

ARTHUR  
Oh, do us one tiny favor on our mutual wedding day, you Kooky Kraut.

WINCKELKOPF  
What?



ARTHUR

Grab the last of the gifts. I know Sybil won't sleep if there's the potential to unwrap something. And the newly-made Mrs. Winckelkopf would appreciate it, too, I can only, with the utmost assurance, speculate.

LADY WINDERMERE

This is the last one, Arthur. (*SHE holds up the package*) And for some, I'm almost certain conspiratorial reason, it's for Sybil.

ARTHUR

(to *SYBIL*) Now I see why you're so insistent, Lovely.

SYBIL

But we really must go or I predict we'll be late.

LADY WINDERMERE

*Uch*, don't even say that word. Delivers me right back weeks ago to that terrible business with Dr. Podgers. Me *and* my digestive system. And with the hillock of cake I've consumed today...

ARTHUR

We have the new curtain up, ma'am. And the sidewalk shall be cleaned again before our return.

LADY WINDERMERE

Terrible travesty. Will the Horticultural Hooligans ever be stopped? Chucking pineapples was it, Arthur, at the Doctor when he went to the roof to inspect your newly reinstalled lightning rod?

ARTHUR

Oh, yes. Such a crime.

WINCKELKOPF

We are better off. He was...wicked.

SYBIL

No more piano, Artie. I know you've been so immersed of late.

ARTHUR

I only play when emotion overwhelms me and how could it not with you? (*HE kisses HER hand*) Your hand. What a wonderful future it shall be with it in mine. Let's be off. Only where's mother?

*DUCHESS enters, nose buried in a book. SHE nows wears HER own turban with a feather.*

ARTHUR

Speak of the preoccupied devil. Still with that book.

DUCHESS

I can't stop. Dr. Podgers--

LADY WINDERMERE

*Boughff.*

DUCHESS

Oh, please. I've seen your stomach handle buckets worse. He recommended it for my continued Cheiromancy training.

ARTHUR

But you've been at it non-stop. You nearly missed the vows.

DUCHESS

But I enjoy it so.

ARTHUR

*(smiling, playfully imitating PODGERS' mystical hand gesture)*  
Well, if that is what fate decrees, so be it.

LADY WINDERMERE

Sordid business.

DUCHESS

You disapprove of Cheiromancy?

LADY WINDERMERE

I disapprove of its *practitioner*. He was a dreadful imposter. Of course, I didn't mind that at all, and even when he wanted to borrow money I forgave him, but I could not stand his making love to me. And that hat. He has really made me hate Cheiromancy.

*WINCKELKOPF is a bit put-off by these comments.*

SYBIL

You mustn't say anything against cheiromancy here, mother. Artie is quite serious over it.

LADY WINDERMERE

You don't mean to say that he believes in it?

ARTHUR

I am right here. And of course I do.

LADY WINDERMERE

But why?

ARTHUR

Because I owe to it all the happiness of my life.

LADY WINDERMERE

My dear Lord Arthur, what do you owe to it?

ARTHUR

Sybil.

*HE looks into SYBIL's open eyes.*

LADY WINDERMERE

What nonsense! I never heard such nonsense in all my life.

DUCHESS

You really should listen to yourself more at cocktail parties then.

WINCKELKOPF

*(to ARTHUR) Mein son-in-law, we should work with the wagoner for our wedding voyage.*

ARTHUR

*Jawvohl, Winky. You lovely ladies and my Lovely stay inside where it's warm. We'll knock when ready.*

SYBIL

All right, Artie. Lovely.

ARTHUR

Lovely. Lovely, lovely, lovely.

*Seems as if HE's going to walk past SYBIL, but, suddenly, turns, grabs HER, and dips HER for a tender, wonderful kiss.*

ARTHUR

*(smiling) Surprise...*

*THEY stand.*

*ARTHUR and WINCKELKOPF go to exit to outside. ARTHUR holds the door for WINCKELKOPF.*

WINCKELKOPF

*Danke.*

ARTHUR

*You're welcome.*

*THEY exit to outside.*

SYBIL

A honeymoon in Venice. Artie's newly adopted adventurous attitude leaves me constantly contemplating what happy happenings are to come. I haven't had a spell since!

LADY WINDERMERE

Lucky you. I nearly drooled on my veil I was so close to sleep at the ceremony.

DUCHESS

I'm sure interest is hard to keep for one who has experienced the procedure as many times as you.

LADY WINDERMERE

You're just funnier than your feather, aren't you? And twice as fluffy.

DUCHESS

It is a happy day, Gladys. Let's retract the claws a bit?

LADY WINDERMERE

*(disappointed)* Bugger. Very well.

DUCHESS

Don't frown. You'll give yourself more wrinkles. Sybil? Let me see your hand.

LADY WINDERMERE

*Oh, Lord.*

DUCHESS

Oh, it fascinated you plenty weeks ago.

LADY WINDERMERE

My interest in subjects certainly can't be expected to last that long.

DUCHESS

Or husbands, Fivey? Okay, that was the last of it. I promise.

LADY WINDERMERE

Go on and get it over and done with, I'm too tired to say no anymore. *(off-hand)* *Hmph...* seems I say that phrase on all of my wedding days...

DUCHESS

*(to SYBIL)* Now, I'm no expert but I do have the basics. Let's see.

*SHE takes SYBIL's hand. Inspects it. Then the book. Then the hand. Then the book. Then the hand. Confusion. Then SHE remembers and withdraws PODGERS' magnifying glass from HER handbag. SHE inspects SYBIL's hand thoroughly.*

DUCHESS (cont'd)

Line of beauty...extensive. Of course. Line of intellect...eh, s--solid. Wealth, oh, recently raised.

Growing girl. And let's see....line of life...line of life.  
Hmm. Turn the hand around? (*SHE does. DUCHESS inspects*)  
Peculiar. The other? (*SHE does again. DUCHESS inspects just  
as thoroughly*) Huh...odd.

SYBIL

What's that?

DUCHESS

I...can't seem to find it.

SYBIL

My line of life?

DUCHESS

I'm...sorry, love. I'll need to read more carefully. I did  
only skim that third chapter. There were muffins cooking.

LADY WINDERMERE

(*off-hand*) There's a surprise...

*DUCHESS puts away the magnifying glass.  
SYBIL rubs HER hand slightly perturbed.*

DUCHESS

Well, while my cheiromancy skills might be dull, my womanly  
instincts are razor-sharp. We'll make it all up by opening  
presents.

SYBIL

Oh, but wouldn't Artie want to be here?

LADY WINDERMERE

It'll be our small secret. No good marriage should be without  
one. Or thirty. Open it or I will and I'll keep it. And if  
it's ill-fitting clothing I will burn it.

*SYBIL unwraps the gift. It's a small,  
elegant, silver case. What kind  
exactly?*

SYBIL

Ooo, a *bonbonniere*! I've been wanting one.

DUCHESS

You see? Fate works in your favor.

LADY WINDERMERE

See who it's from. That way we know who to secretly spite if  
it's imitation silver.

*SYBIL inspects the card inside it.*

SYBIL

It's from Artie's uncle. Oh, Lady Clementia's brother. It's from Lady Clem's estate. The only item they were able to recover from her handbag following the accident.

LADY WINDERMERE

A bit unsettling.

SYBIL

Perhaps. Ooo, but look. They included a Turkish Delight with it! How considerate. I'm sure the family is still reeling with grief.

LADY WINDERMERE

If they gave you that I'm sure their wealth of misery is nothing compared to their deficit of taste.

*SYBIL takes out the Turkish Delight. It seems as if something has been shoved in the middle of it?*

SYBIL

A bit oddly shaped. Homemade, perhaps? No matter, it'll make for a fitting train ride snack. I'm sure it will be to die for. A sweet secret for Artie.

*SHE puts the Turkish Delight back in the case. A knock at the window.*

SYBIL

Suppose it's time.

DUCHESS

*(holding HER book up)* With fate it always is. Or something. That's what the doctor always says. *Said*, I suppose...

LADY WINDERMERE

Shame about the gift. Disappointing if you ask me and you should. Hopefully the honeymoon will be more in your favor. And mine.

*ARTHUR enters.*

ARTHUR

*Italia awaits!*

DUCHESS

We're just now leaving. Come along, Gladys.

LADY WINDERMERE

Oh, but we weren't even allowed a moment of snark together. And unlike women, men are too lunk-headed to appreciate the finer points of true insult. It's like wine.

DUCHESS

And if it gets better with age, you are unparalleled in skill.

*Smiling at each other, LADY WINDERMERE and DUCHESS exit to outside. NEITHER try to hold the door for the OTHER. ARTHUR points at the bonbonniere.*

ARTHUR

What's that?

SYBIL

*(smiling sneakily, hiding it)* Nothing. A quick question: are you hungry?

ARTHUR

An even quicker answer: yes.

SYBIL

Then do I have a treat for us both.

ARTHUR

A surprise then?

SYBIL

You're not the only one, you know.

ARTHUR

You are all the treat I need now, Sybil.

SYBIL

Well, who knows what the future holds?

ARTHUR

Most thankfully, not I.

*Smiling, lovingly, arm-in-arm, love-with-love, THEY exit to outside.*

**END ACT TWO SCENE TWO**

**END ACT TWO**

**END**

APPENDIX C.

Twelfth draft of the play following the summer production.



**Murder and the English Gentleman**

by Adam Esquenazi Douglas

Adapted from the short story  
"Lord Arthur Savile's Crime"  
by Oscar Wilde.

Draft Twelve  
09/14/11

## CHARACTERS

**LORD ARTHUR SAVILE** (*rhymes with 'GRAVEL'*) **II** - Young, handsome, noble, professional. Like most men of inherited wealth of the time. And a bit helplessly hapless. Like most men of inherited wealth of the time.

**THE DUCHESS OF PAISLEY**- Arthur's mother. Serene, though stunning. A sweet woman with a very strong heart, and an even stronger bank account. Though, normally, you'd never guess it. Propriety, after all. However, since the recent death of Arthur's father, has decided to try living a little, much to Lady Windermere's approval.

**LADY GLADYS WINDERMERE**- Sibyl's mother. A curious psychological study. Early in life she had discovered the important truth that nothing looks so like innocence as an indiscretion and by a series of reckless escapades, half of them quite harmless, she had acquired all the privileges of a personality. She is also wealthy, and you can tell.

**DR. SEPTIMUS PODGERS**- Cheiromantist to the affluent ennui-encapsulated English. A man of fine tastes and deep debts. Should have learned better by now, but shouldn't all of us? (*to possibly be played by the actor playing LADY CLEMENTIA*)

**LADY CLEMENTIA**- Distant relative of Arthur and Duchess in both relation and age. No one visits her much, and there is a reason why. You'll understand, I promise. (*to possibly be played by the actor playing DR. SEPTIMUS PODGERS*)

**SYBIL WINDERMERE**- Lady Windermere's daughter. Love of Arthur's life. A ceaseless ray of light in dreary, foggy London town. Sadly afflicted with random sleeping spells. Poor girl.

**WINCKELKOPF**- Arthur's manservant. Curt. Bearded. German.

## SETTING

**LOCATION**- A posh London flat drawing room in a building owned by Arthur.

**TIME**- 1890. A proper year. Beginning of autumn. An equally proper season.

## PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES

As you'll have noticed, PODGERS and CLEMENTIA could be played by the same actor. This is entirely gender-neutral and it is left at your discretion. It's fun, I promise. And don't worry, there's plenty of time for costume changes.

A strong suggestion: The actor playing Winckelkopf needs to make use of the traditional Vaudevillian pronunciation style of native

Germans speaking English. That is with "W" words being pronounced with a "V". Ex: "We" would be pronounced "Ve", "Wait" would be "Vait" and so on. Also, "S" words should be like "Z" words. "See" would be "Zee", etc. though this is less strict than the "W" words. "That"s might be "Zat"s, "still" would be "shtill", and others throughout, similar and otherwise. Please find them. And, please, even more so, have a good time.

A final note: please consider timing. While the page number of this play is relatively short for a full-length, its words can add unexpected time, turning what should be a ninety-minute play to over two hours. To avoid this, I urge you to make transitions as swift as possible, make picking up of lines razor sharp, and trim any bit of fat you come across in rehearsal. Timing really is everything in comedy, and this play will either live or be murdered by it. Thanks again.

**Murder and the English Gentleman**

adapted by Adam Esquenazi Douglas from the short story "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime" by Oscar Wilde.

**ACT ONE SCENE ONE**

*AT RISE: A posh, late 19th century English apartment building drawing room. There is a very large, upstage window looking out into the London street. Perhaps shoppes dot the other side of the street. Perhaps the Thames.*

*The sun is setting, ending the day outside, but the night inside has just begun. A piano rests serenely on stage. As does an elegant sofa with a high back. The piano is polished and prim.*

*The room is dark. Too dark. Someone has turned off the light. Or rather, someones...*

*LADY GLADYS WINDERMERE and the DUCHESS OF PAISLEY enter, giggling like girls much younger than THEY. THEY are dressed elegantly, though extravagantly. THEY sit on the floor in front of the sofa.*

*DR. SEPTIMUS PODGERS enters shortly after. Funny little outfit. Cloak. Turban with a large, unearthly colored feather sticking out the top. HE makes HIS way across strangely and mystically. The WOMEN are completely entertained and entranced. With a flourish, PODGERS sits between THEM.*

*HE withdraws a pack of tarot cards, shuffles them, then lays a few out. HE then withdraws three candles and a matchbook. HE lights THEIR candles and has THEM hold them. Covers HIS candle with HIS hands. When he removes HIS hands, the candle is lit. The WOMEN clap at the trick. HE shushes THEM, then puts HIS hands on THEIR shoulders. Closes HIS eyes, sways, and hums. THEY join in.*

*PODGERS*

*(ethereal) Candles lit and evening comes. Here we sit, floor beneath our bums. (WOMEN laugh. PODGERS winks, then gets immediately back in character).*

Though two bright beauties within arms reach, darkness slithers, a hungry leech. (As if HE is seeing great danger approaching) Trials and troubles, approaching swift. A poison, a dagger, a forgotten gift...

HE frowns. Sways harder. Hums Harder. The WOMEN completely buy it and are totally enthralled.

WINCKELKOPF, a gruff, quick, and (oh, so preferably if possible) outrageously bearded manservant passes by the window. HE's dressed as well as a foreign, (also, if possible) helplessly short, German manservant can be. That is to say mildly uncomfortable, and majorly emasculating. HE enters the building and then the drawing room. The TRIO does not take notice of HIM. HE stands in the doorway.

PODGERS (cont'd)

A figure nears to hear fate's gavel. The figure's name--

WINCKELKOPF

(very quickly) LORD ARTHUR SAVILE!

The WOMEN and PODGERS jump.

LADY WINDERMERE

My Lord!

WINCKELKOPF

(indicating the window) Mein Lord.

LORD ARTHUR SAVILE passes by the window. HE is a handsome, tall (or, at least, preferably, taller than WINCKELKOPF), young man, and dressed appropriately. Fine clothes. Not a wrinkle. HE does seem a bit on edge. As if HE's dying to say something but lacks the courage. HE tries to overcompensate throughout.

HE is followed by LADY SYBIL WINDERMERE, LADY WINDERMERE'S daughter and ARTHUR'S fiance. Lovely dress, lovely disposition, lovely girl.

ARTHUR enters. Notices the darkness but not the TRIO.

ARTHUR

Lights, Winckelkopf. You know I dislike mysteries so. Far too mysterious usually.

*WINCKELKOPF turns on the lights. THEY come on much to ARTHUR's approval.*

ARTHUR (cont'd)

Ah, sweet, bright certainty.

*HE sees the TRIO on the carpet. SYBIL does as well and becomes excited.*

SYBIL

Ooo, Arthur, parlor games!

ARTHUR

Honestly, Sybil?

SYBIL

Yes, they're right there.

*SHE sits with the group.*

SYBIL (cont'd)

What's the game, mother?

ARTHUR

*(rolling eyes)* Oh, but Sybil--

LADY WINDERMERE

Oh, but Schmybil. Join us, dear. The game is just beginning.

PODGERS

The future is no game, dear Lady Windermere. Save for its few winners, and many, many losers.

ARTHUR

What madness have I walked into?

DUCHESS

*Cheiromancy*, Arthur darling.

ARTHUR

Oh, Lord, now they're speaking gibberish.

LADY WINDERMERE

Fortune-telling, Arthur. By use of hands.

ARTHUR

I restate my question once again and with far more gusto. What madness have I walked into?

DUCHESS

Arthur, darling, remember your duty as new owner of the building. Think of what your father would have said: hello.

ARTHUR

(to LADY WINDERMERE and PODGERS quickly) Hello. (to DUCHESS) Who is he?

DUCHESS

You could ask.

ARTHUR

He speaks English?

PODGERS

And understands it as well.

*PODGERS stands steps forward. Bows grandly, arms opened wide. HIS turban falls off. Scrambles to put it back on.*

PODGERS (cont'd)

Septimus Podgers.

*LADY WINDERMERE quickly steps up next to HIM. DUCHESS and SYBIL play with the tarot cards.*

LADY WINDERMERE

(proud) Doctor Septimus Podgers.

PODGERS

(to LADY WINDERMERE) Oh, you.

LADY WINDERMERE

Oh, me. (to ARTHUR) Hello, Arthur.

ARTHUR

Lady Windermere. And Dr. Podgers...greetings. Do forgive my initial rash behavior. Unsureness is ever so uncomfortable, don't you find?

PODGERS

Oh, it's been some time since I was afforded *that* little luxury.

ARTHUR

What's that?

PODGERS

That is *everything*.

LADY WINDERMERE

Dr. Podgers tells the future, dear. By studying auras and, much more specifically, hands, he is able to divine the future from them. I wouldn't have the first wink of a dream of giving a party without hiring him to stop by. But I don't even need to invite the man at all! Always sensing our celebrations beforehand. Dr. Podgers is so fantastically, magically mystical at appearing at the most unexpected moments. Always showing such excellent timing.

PODGERS

*(smiling, with a mystical hand gesture to LADY WINDERMERE)*  
With fate, there always is.

LADY WINDERMERE

A teller of fortunes and *misfortunes* both. Next year, for instance, I am in great danger, both by land and sea, so I am going to live in a balloon, and draw up my dinner in a basket every evening. It is all written down on my little finger, or on the palm of my hand, I forget which. I think everyone should have their hands told once a month, so as to know what not to do. Of course, one does it all the same, but it is so pleasant to be warned. That was what we were doing on the floor, you see. Dr. Podgers was showing us how to divine. After a few more lessons, I am going to positively dominate at the dog races. *Oh, yes...*

ARTHUR

Incredible.

LADY WINDERMERE

Isn't it?

ARTHUR

That you would ever give credence to lunacy such as the power of the whims of chance? *Oh, yes.* Truly the excellent foppery of the world. *Work. That* is what pushes us into the future. What we do. Or don't. It is against our task as members of humanity to put responsibility on any things we cannot see. *(notices DUCHESS with the tarot)* Or things we can. *(taking the cards from HER)* Mother, it is less than hardly a surprise Lady Windermere is so easily enchanted by such elaborate eccentricities, but you? Think of what my father would have said. *(flipping some cards over)* Be flipping in his grave...

*DUCHESS stands and takes ARTHUR aside.  
An old argument is resurfacing.*

DUCHESS

I've found my reservations on more superfluous subjects have passed along with him. Perhaps if Arthur the first had been willing to do the same he'd be here still. Rules, rightness, rigidity: those were his undoing, Arthur, darling.



ARTHUR

*(indicating the apartment building)* But look at his doing, mother! It's the finest flat building in London. How high he reached.

DUCHESS

And how far he fell. Two meters below the ground to be exact. These walls may as well have been a coffin the stress they caused him, enhanced by his dense decision of flawless correctness. I'd hate to see that happen again to anyone. Certainly you, and most definitely me. And that is the last time we shall revisit this discussion. *(beat)* Now, as I have no desire to join my departed darling Arthur any time soon-- and I hope Dr. Podgers can positively predict such--I'm going to have fun.

ARTHUR

Sybil, come along before we both start believing in fairies or dragons or the competency of the crown or other fantasies. Sybil?

*SYBIL, to the notice of no one, has fallen asleep. LADY WINDERMERE nudges HER.*

SYBIL

*(waking suddenly, disoriented)* I agree. What?

ARTHUR

Come along, lovely.

LADY WINDERMERE

Why the rush, Arthur? You've just arrived. Let us enjoy our time with Sybil before she's off to Venice to be cured of her narcoleptic affliction.

ARTHUR

Yes, of course we'll join you but I must...chat with Sybil. About...tea. Yes...delicious tea.

*PODGERS senses something.*

PODGERS

Lord Arthur. Timing, I've found, is everything and a bit more. And I believe this is a most opportune moment for me to move my lips.

ARTHUR

Why is that, sir?

PODGERS

You doubt my abilities, yes?

ARTHUR  
Yes, I doubt your abilities.

PODGERS  
Well, then...

ARTHUR  
Then, well?...

PODGERS  
Why don't you ask her?

*ARTHUR is taken aback. Clearly PODGERS is aware. ARTHUR is flummoxed, but tries to find resolve.*

PODGERS (cont'd)  
I want all of you to take a very good, long, luxurious look at Lord Arthur. This is the face of disbelief. True, pure disbelief. For, you see, to have beliefs, one must sacrifice that scant, sacred sense: logic. Harmful as it may seem, such an act is necessary for us to experience hope or faith. Or love.

ARTHUR  
I have no lack of that, sir.

PODGERS  
The ignorance of youth. Were you to continue on your present path you'd cling ever tighter to this ocean of austerity. Always appropriate. And your love will trickle, like so many grains of sand, into the wind. If you do not take the step, you cannot move forward. *(beat)* So loosen up, my boy, and come join us.

*PODGERS sits again, as does WINDERMERE. ARTHUR stay standing, a bit unnerved by PODGERS' accurate assessment. But more so out of some other hesitation.*

PODGERS (cont'd)  
Unless there's other business you must tend to?

SYBIL  
Oh, Arthur, I depart tomorrow morning. Don't break my heart, join us.

ARTHUR  
I...can not.

LADY WINDERMERE  
I see no reason why you shouldn't and if I don't see it, it most certainly couldn't exist.

ARTHUR  
It's...well...it's...--

LADY WINDERMERE  
Out with it!

ARTHUR  
I wish to propose marriage is all.

*A beat.*

LADY WINDERMERE  
To me?

ARTHUR  
Sybil. To Sybil.

SYBIL  
Arthur, are you?

ARTHUR  
Sybil, will you?

SYBIL  
Yes.

ARTHUR  
Yes?

SYBIL  
Yes!

ARTHUR  
Yes!

*Hugs, joy, clapping. Happiness. SYBIL goes for a kiss. ARTHUR stops HER and politely kisses HER hand instead.*

LADY WINDERMERE  
Well it's about bloody well time. We were due for a new wedding celebration.

DUCHESS  
At least one that wasn't yours, right, Gladys?

LADY WINDERMERE  
I really did think eighth time was the charm. *C'est la vie.* Dr. Podgers, your gift to me you can give to the soon-to-be-betrothed instead.

PODGERS  
Are you certain, Madam?

LADY WINDERMERE

*Absolument.* You can just buy me two later.

PODGERS

Very well.

*PODGERS fetches a bottle of wine.  
Brings it over, but on the way nearly  
collides with WINCKELKOPF.*

PODGERS (cont'd)

*Mein Gott, man!* You nearly crushed the *LaFite*. Not to mention *my* feet. Prepare us some wine glasses in the dining room, you brute.

WINCKELKOPF

*Mein* apologies. I'll watch *mein* step more steadfastly. Sir...  
(Noticing LADY WINDERMERE in a particular way) Madam.

*Bows to EACH. LADY WINDERMERE is  
suddenly quite intrigued by the MAN.  
Watches HIM exit. PODGERS notices all  
of this. Isn't too happy.*

ARTHUR

Oh, do forgive the man, doctor. He's German. Constantly stepping into other people's personal space unasked.

PODGERS

Why not sack him? I sense...a problematic past from the man.

ARTHUR

After I found Winky stranded outside that prison in Berlin where he had lost all of his possessions and clothing and was wearing a prison uniform he blessedly found on a nearby shrubbery after he survived a very, very, very tragic donkey accident--Winky tells me--I've yet to find better help. Winky costs very little and asks even less. Why, if he had slightly longer hair and a much shorter beard I'd marry *him* instead of Sybil.

*PODGERS withdraws from giving  
WINCKELKOPF the evil eye. Turns to the  
group, holding the wine bottle up.*

PODGERS

My tea leaves told of good tidings today for a handsome, young gentleman, and my mirror hasn't reflected that since the last monarch. Sensing these future high spirits I figured what better way to meet them than with another. 1837 *LaFite*. From my own personal, ever-growing, arguably spiraling-dangerously-out-of-control collection.

Lady Windermere, seeing as how payment from our sessions--and please don't forget it is double for engagement parties--afforded it, it's only proper to share. Any *connoisseur* knows the only thing more desirable than a fine bottle is showing others that you have it. And, might I add, it will crisply compliment the roast goose. The best wines make for the best endings.

LADY WINDERMERE

Oh, Dr. Podgers, you are always dropping such smashing surprises on us all!

*SHE embraces HIM lightly. WINCKELKOPF sees this and is...sad.*

PODGERS

It is...a gift. As is this. Congratulations, Lord Arthur.

LADY WINDERMERE

And the fun doesn't stop there.

PODGERS

Oh?

LADY WINDERMERE

We have not had enough until I say so and I haven't and shan't. I want to make sure my daughter...er, Sybil.

*Again, SHE has fallen asleep. LADY WINDERMERE wiggles HER nose. SHE awakens.*

LADY WINDERMERE (cont'd)

There you are. I must ensure she is in proper hands with Arthur. My history with husbands is one of grave manhandling, most of which I did not enjoy, and I want a more firm future for our darling girl. Arthur, come let Dr. Podgers read your hand.

ARTHUR

Absolutely not. You know I refuse to consent to such abhorrent foolishness.

LADY WINDERMERE

You act as if that was a question. How endearing.

ARTHUR

You don't mind, Doctor?

LADY WINDERMERE

Of course, he won't mind, that is what he is here for. But I must warn you beforehand that I shall tell everyone everything. If Dr. Podgers finds out that you have a bad temper, or a tendency to scurvy, or a wife living in Bayswater, I shall certainly let her know all about it.

ARTHUR

I am not afraid. Sybil knows me as well as I her. I keep nothing hidden.

LADY WINDERMERE

Ah! I am a little sorry to hear you say that. The proper basis for marriage is a mutual misunderstanding. No, I am not at all cynical, I merely have experience, which, however, is very much the same thing. Dr. Podgers, Arthur is dying to have his hand read. Don't tell him that he is engaged to one of the most beautiful girls in Europe, because we all just found that little bit of news out. But do be sure to tell us *some* thing nice. Arthur is one of my special favorites.

*ARTHUR goes to PODGERS and offers HIS hand. PODGERS takes it, and makes grand, sweeping gestures with it in HIS hands. Leading ARTHUR around, swooping, pulling turning. Completely ludicrous activity. The WOMEN are, of course, again, positively thrilled.*

*However, halfway through PODGERS freezes and holds ARTHUR's hand delicately. PODGERS grows curiously pale. A shudder passes through HIM, and HIS eyebrows twitch convulsively, in an odd, irritating way as if HE's darkly puzzled. HE holds ARTHUR's hand close to HIS eyes and reads it. HE wipes HIS brow and reads deeper, saying nothing.*

*ARTHUR notices these strange signs of agitation and feels the impulse to run from the room, but restrains HIMSELF.*

ARTHUR

I am--*heh*--waiting, Dr. Podgers.

LADY WINDERMERE

*(quickly, impatiently)* We are all waiting.

*Suddenly, PODGERS drops ARTHUR's right hand and seizes HIS left, bending extremely low to examine. For a moment, PODGERS's face becomes a white mask of horror, but he soon recovers. HE adopts a forced smile.*

PODGERS

It is the hand of a charming young man.

DUCHESS

Of course it is! But will he be a charming husband? That is what I want to know.

PODGERS

All charming young men are.

LADY WINDERMERE

How wretchedly dull.

DUCHESS

I don't think a husband should be too fascinating. It is so dangerous.

LADY WINDERMERE

My dear, they are *never* too fascinating. But what I want are details. Details are the only things that interest. What is going to happen to Lord Arthur?

*ARTHUR is cautiously curious HIMSELF.  
PODGERS is obviously trying to cover.*

PODGERS

W--within the next few months, er--Lord Arthur will go on a *voyage--*

LADY WINDERMERE

On his honeymoon, of course!

PODGERS

But, before that, he will...uh--lose a relative.

DUCHESS

Not his mother I hope!

PODGERS

No, certainly not his mother. A distant relative, merely. I see Arthur beset with grief over it.

*DUCHESS sighs deeply with relief. LADY WINDERMERE sighs with equally deep disappointment.*

LADY WINDERMERE

I am dreadfully disappointed I haven't a pittance of gossip. No one cares about distant relatives nowadays. They went out of fashion years ago. What a bust.

DUCHESS

I have enjoyed myself immensely. I found it most interesting. Ooooo, perhaps future Cheiromancy training sessions could be scheduled. Yes, that'd be a capital good time. Doctor?

*PODGERS, still wrapped in concern, does not acknowledge.*

DUCHESS (cont'd)  
Doctor? Podgers? Funny-Hat-Wearing Man?

PODGERS  
(*snapping back to reality*) Er--yes? Yes, ma'am?

DUCHESS  
A lesson?

PODGERS  
A lesson?

DUCHESS  
Could we schedule one? Gladys and I will be visiting Sybil in Venice soon, so perhaps after our return?

PODGERS  
Uh--certainly. (*suddenly remembering*) Though my fee is not cheap.

DUCHESS  
And neither am I. Very good, then. Everyone gets a special surprise today. Hooray.

PODGERS  
(*offhand, quiet, quick glances to ARTHUR*) Indeed...

DUCHESS  
Come along now, everyone, wine before dinner in the dining room?

LADY WINDERMERE  
No need to ask me...well...once, even.

*LADY WINDERMERE and DUCHESS exit to the kitchen.*

SYBIL  
Arthur, you too?

ARTHUR  
Soon enough, lovely. (*intently staring at PODGERS*) Gentleman's discussion, first.

SYBIL  
Perhaps make it a brief chat? I depart tomorrow, don't forget. Early.

ARTHUR  
I have arranged for a carriage to take you to the train.

SYBIL  
And will you accompany as well?



ARTHUR

Sybil, that would hardly be suitable. To allow so many strangers to see you so overcome with grief of having to say goodbye to me in person.

SYBIL

Oh...yes, of course...

*Gloomily, SHE is about to exit. PODGERS quickly pipes up.*

PODGERS

His heart will be beside you in Venice even if his body is in London. His aura says so.

SYBIL

*(surprisingly charmed)* You're full of surprises today, Arthur.

ARTHUR

Apparently.

SYBIL

It's so unlike you. I--

*Suddenly, SHE falls asleep. An entering WINCKELKOPF catches HER just in time before SHE hits the floor.*

ARTHUR

To the kitchen, Winky.

*WINCKELKOPF lifts SYBIL and carries HER off. ARTHUR eyes the obviously nerve-stricken PODGERS.*

PODGERS

S-sir, it--it was a pleasure. Congratulations again on your forthcoming nuptials. I remember my first marriage. Very brief. She criticized my glasses frequently. And then died. Seeing as you're spectacle-free you're well better off. Good evening, sir.

*PODGERS quickly goes to exit to outside, but ARTHUR swiftly approaches HIM, blocking HIS path.*

ARTHUR

Dr. Podgers, I must insist on your giving me a straightforward answer to a question I am going to put to you.

PODGERS

*(uneasy, not meeting HIS eyes)* Another time, Lord Arthur...

ARTHUR

Tell me what you saw there. I must know it. I am not a child. Tell me the truth. As a doctor it is your duty.

PODGERS

*(fumbling with a pocketwatch)* What makes you think that I saw anything in your hand more than I told you?

ARTHUR

I know you did, and I insist on your telling me what it was. I'm not fond of secrets being kept from me.

PODGERS

Though you have the capacity?

ARTHUR

Why would you say that?

PODGERS

My skills extend far beyond mere sooth-saying.

ARTHUR

What did you see?

PODGERS

Lord Arthur...I--I cannot...

*PODGERS puts HIS watch away. Finally is able to make eye contact.*

PODGERS (cont'd)

You are a good man of noble standing. Affluent, able. You can even play the piano, yes?

ARTHUR

Is that what you read? I'm not *that* bad.

PODGERS

Savor your good fortune is what I am saying. Marry your Sybil and worry never again of these past few moments. Believe me it is a far better course of action.

*PODGERS heads steadfastly for the door.*

ARTHUR

I will pay you. I will give you a cheque for a hundred pounds.

*PODGERS freezes.*

PODGERS

A hundred?

ARTHUR

A hundred and fifty. Your wealth cannot be much if your evenings are spent sniffing the skin of wealthy widows. (*pointing to the turban*) And if you are forced to wear that...that...well, would you even call it a hat?

*ARTHUR has struck a nerve. Calmly, PODGERS turns. Sighs. Takes the turban off. Holds it, ashamed. HIS vocal quality becomes much less showman, and much more somber.*

PODGERS

(*ashamed*) Call it what it is...a daft embarrassment. A cheap, colorful tool in cultivating cheaper, colorful tales.

ARTHUR

Whatever do you mean?

PODGERS

Funny. You yourself questioned the validity of my ability. And here you are, right and not able to see it. I suppose certainty *is* intangible. And yet how strongly you grasp for it. Ever proper.

ARTHUR

So you admit your falsity? I shall inform mother posthaste.

PODGERS

I do no such thing, Lord Arthur, nor could I. It's only...propriety...*duty* if you will...can take on many forms. Some more clandestine than others. (*twirling the turban*) Some more shameful.

ARTHUR

Your hat-twirling, hibbity jibbity, mumbo jumbo neither impresses nor convinces me, doctor.

PODGERS

I am aware. And that is why I am putting my theatrics aside. You are far too straight-minded for such distractions. Far too...dutiful. (*sets the turban down*) It will take a little time. You had better sit down.

*ARTHUR does. PODGERS withdraws a large magnifying glass from HIS trousers and polishes it vigorously.*

PODGERS (cont'd)

Lord Arthur, what would you say is your greatest flaw?

ARTHUR

Flaw? Hmmm. (*beat*) Bugger, now there's a question. Ah...poor penmanship?

PODGERS

*Hmph.* Undoubtedly, you believe, I'm sure.

ARTHUR

My patience grows thinner than your feather, doctor.

PODGERS

A precautionary measure. I have found those more willing to see bad qualities in themselves are even more willing to accept bad tidings ahead.

ARTHUR

Would you begin this poppycock?

PODGERS

Poppycock, *hm?* You're willing to shed a quid or two.

ARTHUR

A *grotesque* curiosity fuels me, nothing further. Now do go on. My dear future-mother-in-law might be swiftly swayed by men who wiggle their fingers particularly...just ask her past four husbands...but I myself am not. Quit hiding and come out with it.

*PODGERS who has indeed been withholding suddenly rushes into action. HE quickly goes to ARTHUR and grabs both HIS hands and holds them out.*

*PODGERS inspects them, swiftly and expertly with HIS magnifying glass. Then, travels across ARTHUR's body: ARTHUR's heart, mind, eyes, perhaps lower, but always seemingly tethered to the hands. PODGERS recites as HE inspects:*

PODGERS

You were offered the delicate and luxurious life of a young man of birth and fortune, a life exquisite in its freedom from sordid care, its beautiful boyish insouciance. But remarkably and inexplicably, you declined. Preferring the steep heights of duty as a means of seeing things through and avoiding unwanted surprises. But now for the first time you are conscious of the terrible mystery of Destiny, of the awful meaning of Doom.

*PODGERS quickly breathes twice on the glass, polishes it and sets it on the sofa, all done exquisitely swift.*

*ARTHUR is perturbed and on HIS feet.*

ARTHUR

How mad and monstrous a dissection.

PODGERS

Inaccurate?

ARTHUR

Unrelated. I pay for my future.

PODGERS

Don't we all?

*An ominous beat.*

*PODGERS is apprehensive of ARTHUR. With an appropriate, worried distance and a deep breath...*

PODGERS (cont'd)

I would say your greatest flaw is your infallible commitment to duty. Propriety. To what is right. Such a flaw, I know. But when one observes your circumstances, how could they think otherwise? Why would a man so steeped in fortunes not dive into them? Why not enjoy an easier life when one is right in front of you?

ARTHUR

I'm withdrawing my cheque...

PODGERS

No. I know that you are not. I inspect hands only because I cannot hearts. But, could I, I would. *That* is where the future truly lies. What we love, what we desire. *That* leads us. It is the only thing that can.

ARTHUR

My heart. Sybil?

PODGERS

The present is not my particular speciality. *(beat)* You will...someday...commit murder. *(beat)* That is the fate I read.

*It festers.*

ARTHUR

*(worried confusion)* But...why?

PODGERS

The reason was not written. The fact is all that is there. And I sense you, a man of flawless duty, now tasked with this shall not shirk your responsibility, as terrible as it is. Your flaw will be someone's...fall.

ARTHUR

And...and who is it I am meant to murder?

PODGERS

You pay for your own future, Arthur. I can only read what is to come for the hand's owner. Yours says nothing of anyone else's.

ARTHUR

*(troubled)* You spoke of the passing of my distant relative. Perhaps...that is the one?

PODGERS

Perhaps. But I will not offer unfounded speculation. That could be...even deadlier.

*A most awful beat.*

*ARTHUR's victimized nature melts. The Englishman in HIM stands, defiantly.*

ARTHUR

You have no evidence.

PODGERS

I never claimed to.

ARTHUR

This is a fabrication. You'd as well say I have seven arms.

PODGERS

Well, were that the case, I *would* have evidence.

ARTHUR

I will not pay. This is heresay and chicanery. I demand results for my money. I never tossed a shekel in a wishing well and I shan't start such nonsense now. My cheque is invalidated.

PODGERS

Quite improper. Going against your word.

ARTHUR

And what of it?

PODGERS

It is against your nature, and you know it. Even such a tiny trifle would drive you mad. *(slight beat)* I'll make one final prediction. An immediate one, not my usual style. The near future being the most unavoidable. Regardless, write me the cheque for two days from now and if my prediction does not occur before then, you'll have ample time to have it cancelled. *(slight beat)* Be the gentleman of his word that we both know you are.

*PODGERS extends HIS hand. ARTHUR looks at HIS own for a moment, then takes PODGERS' and shakes.*

ARTHUR  
(*accepting*) You're an enterprising fellow.

PODGERS  
The best doctors are excellent businessmen. (*slight beat*)  
Tomorrow you will lose something extremely dear to you.  
*Something*. Not someone, no need to be alarmed there. It is an  
item many of us take for granted but our day would most  
certainly be adversely affected by its absence.

ARTHUR  
I cannot wait to see.

PODGERS  
I thought you didn't believe.

ARTHUR  
Exactly. Who doesn't love being proven right?

PODGERS  
You would be surprised...

*LADY WINDERMERE pokes HER head in.*

LADY WINDERMERE  
Arthur, we've begun pre-celebrations already and are waiting  
for you for celebration celebrations! You wouldn't believe  
what's happening in here!

ARTHUR  
(*eyeing PODGERS*) I'm sure I wouldn't.

LADY WINDERMERE  
(*to the room SHE entered from*) Ja, darling, ja...(to ARTHUR)  
er--come along, it would be a most fabulous idea for you to  
join.

ARTHUR  
I was going to accompany Dr. Podgers to his flat and pay for  
my...er, that is to say, our session today, future mother.

LADY WINDERMERE  
An even fabulouser idea.

*WINCKELKOPF's arms pull HER back inside. PODGERS notices this and sighs, disappointed.*

*A most uncomfortable beat.*

ARTHUR

I...I need to not be here. I disturbingly tingle. I'll accompany you home and write the cheque at your flat

PODGERS

But your dinner.

ARTHUR

With Lady Windermere's appetite, I'd be surprised if any wine or food remains. And then she goes for your clothing. Best to keep my trousers attached.

PODGERS

*A-heh-heh.* Certainly.

ARTHUR

I'll call for my carriage.

PODGERS

Ever the gentleman aren't you?

ARTHUR

Even with such dizzying words, my foundations shall remain. There is nothing I can see that would change that.

*ARTHUR exits out the door to the outside, perhaps more brisk than usual. Passes by the window, hailing a carriage as HE does.*

*PODGERS follows, uneasy. Right before HE's outside, HE reenters. HE forgot HIS magnifying glass and turban. HE picks up the magnifying glass and holds it. Considers reading HIS own hand. Shakes HIS head. Decides against it.*

*HE takes the two items and goes to exit again, but stops, suddenly, by the window. It is as if a sudden, bone-chilling gust of wind passed. PODGERS doesn't allow it another moment and races out the door.*

*As HE passes in the street, HE keeps a considerable distance away from the window.*

**END ACT ONE SCENE ONE**



ACT ONE SCENE TWO

*The next day. Bright, sobering morning sunlight drowns the room.*

*The aftermath. Scattered sundries are about the building. LADY WINDERMERE and THE DUCHESS are beached on the sofa sort of on top of each other. Dresses are ruffled. Perhaps a glove on a foot.*

*A beat.*

*ARTHUR staggers from off the street behind the window. HE peers in, eyes wild from grief. HE knocks lightly on the window.*

*Also, HE is pantsless.*

*WINCKELKOPF appears from behind the sofa. HE considers returning to sleep.*

*HE is also pantsless.*

*ARTHUR gestures wildly to the door, which WINCKELKOPF opens. ARTHUR enters.*

ARTHUR

*(hushed)* Five thousand thank yous, Winky. Now there isn't a need...

WINCKELKOPF

*(very quickly)* LORD ARTHUR SAVILE!

*LADY WINDERMERE and DUCHESS are violently thrust awake and fall off the sofa. ARTHUR runs to get out of THEIR view.*

ARTHUR

...to announce me.

*ARTHUR tries, continuously, to hide HIS state. Running behind and between items when eyes aren't upon HIM.*

DUCHESS

Good morning, Arthur, darling. *(noticing)* Oh, my. Your manservant is trouserless.

ARTHUR

*Afternoon,* mother. And, believe me, it happens. Shall I send him away?

DUCHESS

Oh, I wasn't complaining.

*LADY WINDERMERE sits up.*

LADY WINDERMERE

...where are we? (*sees WINCKELKOPF*) Ahh! A bear!

DUCHESS

Gladys, you need a large cup of coffee. And perhaps a long trip to the confessional. Arthur, be a dear?

*SHE holds HER hand out. Still trying to hide, ARTHUR awkwardly helps HER up. LADY WINDERMERE grabs ARTHUR and claws HER way to HER feet. SHE is shoeless. WINCKELKOPF stands guard near the door, ever the man-servant, though with longing stares towards LADY WINDERMERE.*

LADY WINDERMERE

(*to ARTHUR*) You look ghastly.

ARTHUR

Well, I've never been one to break from the group.

LADY WINDERMERE

Hm?

ARTHUR

Nothing. I shall say nothing more than an apology for my absence last night. I had accompanied the...*fascinating*...Dr. Podgers to his flat and...was unable to find my way home. I've never been the sort to navigate by the stars. It wasn't until I was nearly squashed to death by an early morning taxi carriage that I was able to return. A second apology if I stink of horse. I think it had influenza. I still need to pay the man. I used my final cheque last night.

DUCHESS

He's out there? Now?

ARTHUR

(*looking out the window*) Wiping the horse's nose as we speak.

DUCHESS

We'll take it and pay. I've yet to see the viral strain that can affect our dear Gladys. Come on then, dearie. Let's away to breakfast.

ARTHUR

*Lunch.*

LADY WINDERMERE

My shoes have vanished.

*Indeed they have.*

DUCHESS

What better reason to buy a new pair, then? Arthur, do come with.

ARTHUR

Oh, I'm miserable shoe-shopping company, mother. Right, Winky?

WINCKELKOPF

*Nein.*

*ARTHUR gives HIM a meaningful look.*

WINCKELKOPF (cont'd)

*Nein is Deutsch for...yes?*

LADY WINDERMERE

All the better. The only thing more useless than a man's opinion is a man's opinion on footwear.

DUCHESS

I need eggs.

LADY WINDERMERE

A common, hopeless desire for most women our age. Ta.

*THEY leave. WINCKELKOPF staring wistfully as THEY do. As THEY pass by the window, LADY WINDERMERE falls down. DUCHESS helps HER up. THEY exit. ARTHUR exhales deeply, as if HE has been unable to breathe since HE entered.*

ARTHUR

Winky?

WINCKELKOPF

*Mein Lord?*

*A beat.*

ARTHUR

AAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!

WINCKELKOPF

*(joining) AAHHHHHHHHHHH!*

ARTHUR

What are you doing?

WINCKELKOPF

Helping you?

ARTHUR

*(grief ridden)* Oh, no. No, no, no.

*ARTHUR flings HIMSELF on the sofa.*

ARTHUR *(cont'd)*

Are we no better than chessmen, Winky? Moved by an unseen power, vessels the potter fashions at his fancy, for honour or for shame?

WINCKELKOPF

I prefer checkers.

ARTHUR

Winky, you are my most faithful and trusted manservant since I had to let Jimmy go. I know anything I say is kept in strictest confidence. Yes?

WINCKELKOPF

Yes.

ARTHUR

And that is not German for anything else?

WINCKELKOPF

*Ja.*

ARTHUR

Well then, would you pace with me? I must return circulation to my near-frostbitten thighs. And pace briskly, otherwise I am liable to explode and your afternoon would be ruined. *(THEY pace)* Actors, Winky, are so fortunate. They can choose whether they will appear in tragedy or in comedy, whether they will suffer or make merry, laugh or shed tears. But in real life it is different. Most men and women are forced to perform parts for which they have no qualifications. Our Guildensterns play Hamlet for us, and our Hamlets have to jest like Mercutio. The world is a stage, but the play is badly cast. *(Stops pacing. Slight beat.)* I'm not making a millimeter of sense am I?

WINCKELKOPF

Englishmen rarely do.

*ARTHUR grabs HIM by HIS shoulders.*

ARTHUR

Murder!

WINCKELKOPF

Now we are talking.

ARTHUR

Murder, murder, murder...

*ARTHUR lets go, is carried away by HIS fear. It grows in scale of ghaſtlineſſ until HE falls to the ground. WINCKELKOPF shrugs.*

ARTHUR (cont'd)

That is what the Cheiromantist had ſeen in me. Murder! The very night ſeemed to know it! The dark corners of the ſtreets were full of it! It grinned at me from the roofs of the houſes! I've not ſlept ſince I heard! Perhaps I ſhould! *(Closes eyes. A ſhort beat. Opens them)* I cannot!

*ARTHUR ſits up. Looks worried at WINCKELKOPF.*

ARTHUR (cont'd)

You are unperturbed. *(noticing)* And trouserleſſ.

WINCKELKOPF

The Lady Windermere er...is waſhing them? They got a...ſtain on them during the dinner. Lady Windermere inſiſted on removing them.

ARTHUR

You have no idea of your fortune.

WINCKELKOPF

*(nodding)* Pfft, ja...Er--why?

ARTHUR

I've no idea where mine have gone! When I left they were on me, and ſomehow, ſomewhere, ſomething muſt have taken them. I hope! I have no recollection beyond my horror. Oh, my ſorts are ſorted acroſſ London. I took a fetid taxi carriage, Winky! Where did my carriage driver even go? Did I ſend him away...or...or could I have murdered him in my queſt for fulfillment? No...no, ſurely not. Hopefully not. *(beat)* *This (indicating HIS pantsleſſneſſ)* is what that daſtardly doctor divined for the near future! My trouſers. Diſappeared like a dream and I'm left in a nightmare. It has given birth to a nagging ſenſe of doubt. Like a hair caught on the back of your throat. It never comes looſe. It diſrupts my equilibrium. I couldn't find my way back, Winky. Dr. Podgers lives leſſ than ſeven blockſ away.

WINCKELKOPF

I will buy for you mapſ.

ARTHUR

No. No, no...

*ARTHUR looks to the window. Sadly, HE goes to it. Hopeless.*

WINCKELKOPF

You can fix this.

ARTHUR

How?

WINCKELKOPF

He said to murder. That is not impossible.

ARTHUR

You think so?

WINCKELKOPF

I *know* so.

ARTHUR

The thought had crossed my mind...

WINCKELKOPF

As all actions must at first.

*ARTHUR considers. Debates it. Steps away.*

ARTHUR

Winky, it's...no. One good guess is hardly reason enough. (*beat*) Though if someone were to...how should they?

WINCKELKOPF

Depends. How much I like them. If they are male or female. Age. What I had for breakfast that day...

*ARTHUR draws in.*

ARTHUR

What if it were, say, an elderly person well past their prime and having forgotten how to even *spell* "happy". Perhaps a woman.

WINCKELKOPF

Hands. Or stairs. Or dogs.

ARTHUR

Something more subtle.

WINCKELKOPF

Dogs can be subtle. They leave no evidence. Well, not any you would want to investigate.

ARTHUR

You know I'm allergic.

WINCKELKOPF

This is not for you though, yes?

ARTHUR

Of course not. Purely making conversation.

WINCKELKOPF

A poison is good for a woman. Easy to hide. Tea, perfume, eye drops.

ARTHUR

Poison. Where would one find some?

WINCKELKOPF

Private poison collections?

ARTHUR

*(horrified)* And where, by God, would one find such a horrid thing?!

WINCKELKOPF

Come upstairs, I will show you.

*WINCKELKOPF goes, ARTHUR follows. Then stops.*

ARTHUR

No. No! NO! *(Walks briskly away)* There is no reason to this. To any of this! I cannot see one. If I cannot see it, I will not will it. It would be improper and that is no way to achieve certainty.

*HE goes to exit to within, but freezes when HIS eyes catch a framed photograph. HE picks it up.*

ARTHUR *(cont'd)*

Sybil...Oh, Sybil...sweet, simple Sybil. To take in a man with no faith in those things which required it, and prove to him the existence of that inexplicable pixie: love.

*HE holds the photograph close. But is unable to keep it there.*

ARTHUR *(cont'd)*

Winky, do you know what this means?

WINCKELKOPF

*(hurt)* You do not want to see *mein* collection?...

*ARTHUR walks, darkly, to the piano. HE plays, the music fitting the mood. HE sets the photo of SYBIL in the holder usually reserved for sheet music.*

ARTHUR

I cannot marry Sybil. Not yet. With the doom of murder hanging over my head, it would be a betrayal like that of Judas. What happiness could there be for us, when at any moment I might be called upon to carry out the awful prophecy written in my hand? What manner of life would be ours while Fate still held this fearful fortune in the scales? Were circumstances to remain hanging by the wicked, black widow's web of uncertainty and anticipation, I would deny her the love needed. The love deserved. The love I have. And such action would damn me deeper than a thousand murders a day for a thousand years. The marriage must be postponed, at all costs. I recognize where my duty lies, and am fully conscious of the fact that I have no right to marry until I have committed the crime. This done, I could stand before the altar with Sybil and give my life into her hands without terror of wrongdoing. This done, I could take her to my arms, knowing that she would never have to blush for me, never have to hang her head in shame. But done it must be first; and the sooner the better for both.

WINCKELKOPF

So...no collection?

ARTHUR

Soon...

*HE ceases playing. Pockets the photograph. Regains composure, finally.*

ARTHUR (cont'd)

Winky, as soon as you find and change into your own trousers, I need you to decide my most distant and oldest relative within same-day carriage travel and send for them for tea this evening. You have an hour. Until then I must run very cold water over my face. And then I must vomit.

*Quite resolved, ARTHUR briskly exits to within the apartment. WINCKELKOPF is alone. HE looks around. Remembers. From under a sofa cushion, HE withdraws HIS trousers. HE then withdraws LADY WINDERMERE'S shoes from them. And, HER stockings. HE exits to within.*

**END ACT ONE SCENE TWO**



**ACT ONE SCENE THREE**

*Same day. Later. Tea time.*

*ARTHUR, now properly pantsed stands staring straight out.*

*WINCKELKOPF's foot appears onstage from within. ARTHUR sees it.*

ARTHUR

*(tersely)* Not yet!

*WINCKELKOPF's foot exits. ARTHUR looks out again. Then, HE sits. A beat.*

ARTHUR *(cont'd)*

*Now.*

*WINCKELKOPF enters carrying a covered silver tray.*

ARTHUR *(cont'd)*

Yes. That's a good Winky.

*WINCKELKOPF stops beside the sofa.*

ARTHUR *(cont'd)*

And what shall you say? *(silence)* *Precisely.* Lady Clementia's distaste for any other Europeans is well known from here to several Italian housekeeper's early-death-due-to-work-related-stress gravestones. So long as you keep quiet she won't suspect and thus shan't run out prematurely. Now, after I deftly maneuver Lady Clem to the sofa, step two.

*WINCKELKOPF lifts the tray lid. It's empty.*

ARTHUR *(cont'd)*

It's empty. Where are the Turkish Delights? *(beat)* Open your mouth.

*WINCKELKOPF does. Nothing.*

ARTHUR *(cont'd)*

Nothing. Is my eyesight deteriorating along with my mind? Did I even request Turkish Delights?

*WINCKELKOPF nods.*

ARTHUR *(cont'd)*

Well, where are they?

WINCKELKOPF

I'm not supposed to speak *mein* Lord. (*realizes*) Oh, no.

ARTHUR

Oh, bugger, you *Germans*. You'd follow any orders explicitly no matter how moronic, ridiculous, uncouth, nonsensical, or purely, truly idiotic they are. We're simply rehearsing. You may talk. The first thing you may tell me is the location of the Turkish Delights.

WINCKELKOPF

They cool from cooking as you--we speak.

ARTHUR

And the poison capsule?

WINCKELKOPF

It will be in the *lemon* Turkish Delight.

ARTHUR

And that one shall be?

WINCKELKOPF

Delicious. But deadly.

ARTHUR

The *color*. Yellow, I can assume?

WINCKELKOPF

Absolutely. Definitely yellow.

ARTHUR

Splendid. Step three?

*WINCKELKOPF covers the tray again.*

ARTHUR

Excellent. I think we have figured it all out, Winky. Poison is a good route. Safe, sure, quiet, and does away with any necessity for painful scenes, to which, like most English gentlemen, I have a rooted objection. And it is slow acting you say?

WINCKELKOPF

Like a sloth in syrup.

*ARTHUR is assured in HIS conviction and stands accordingly. However, sadness lingers. WINCKELKOPF takes notice, sets down the tray, and takes one of ARTHUR's hands.*

WINCKELKOPF (cont'd)

(*genuinely concerned*) You do not have second thinkings do you, *mein* Lord?

ARTHUR looks to HIM, worried. ARTHUR is about to speak...

WINCKELKOPF (cont'd)  
(looking out the window) She comes!

The MEN scramble. WINCKELKOPF grabs the tray and cover and rushes to the kitchen. ARTHUR, panicked, tumbles across the apartment. HE stands and opens the door, sticking HIS head out.

ARTHUR  
(sing-song) Lady Clementia! (calling) Do come in my dear, sweet, lovely, beauty's beauty!

HE opens the door fully, smiling broadly. LADY CLEMENTIA passes by the window. SHE has a cane in HER hand and looks as if HER heart is in a wheelchair. HER demeanor is best compared to spoiled milk: pungent and biting. And perhaps a bit chunky.

SHE hobbles across scowling and enters the apartment building. SHE is carrying an unnecessarily large handbag which SHE thrusts into ARTHUR's hand. HE sets it beside the sofa. SHE sniffs the air in short, sharp inhales.

LADY CLEMENTIA  
I can finally breathe in here. I take it you fired that Spaniard?

ARTHUR  
Yes, ma'am.

LADY CLEMENTIA  
It's by God's lily-white beard that your chandelier didn't go missing. Give us a kiss.

ARTHUR kisses HER on the cheek, beaming. SHE curtly inspects the space, poking and prodding at various things with HER cane, including ARTHUR.

LADY CLEMENTIA  
Why haven't you been to see me all this time? No one in the family does and I haven't the slightest inclination as to why. The buggerers...

ARTHUR  
My dear Lady Clem, I never have a moment to myself.

LADY CLEMENTIA

I suppose you mean that you go about all day long with Miss Sybil, buying *chiffons* and talking nonsense? I cannot understand why people make such a fuss about being married. In my day we never dreamed of billing and cooing in public. Or in private for that matter...

ARTHUR

I assure you I have not seen Sybil in weeks, Lady Clem. As far as I can make out, she belongs entirely to her doctors and her hatmakers.

LADY CLEMENTIA

*Hats.* Ruddy sordid business that is. You know who wears hats? Jews.

ARTHUR

So I've heard. Now, I'm sure you've been told of my recent engagement.

LADY CLEMENTIA

*Oh, God, yes. Ucch.* I cannot understand why people make such a fuss about being married. In my day we never dreamed of billing and cooing in public. Or in private for that matter...

ARTHUR

You and my father both. As such, I have decided against a traditional, frightfully garish multi-leveled wedding cake.

LADY CLEMENTIA

Cannot blame you. I insisted upon a strict reception menu of tripe and onions for my second wedding. No, third. No, no, fourth. (*beat*) *Seventh.* That was the tripe.

ARTHUR

It was my memory of that...distinctive delicacy that prompted my calling on you. I'd like to have your opinion on my possible choice of cuisine, as with your very...*impressive* marriage experience you'd have the perfect palette. Now, you must be absolutely tuckered, ma'am. Please, sit.

*HE gestures gracefully to the sofa.*

*LADY CLEMENTIA pokes at it, as one might to discern a dead skunk's gender.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

Where is this sofa from?

ARTHUR

Persia, I believe. Or Greece. Perhaps, actually, China.

*LADY CLEMENTIA spits on the sofa.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

For decades I have refused to sit on anything constructed by non-english speakers for fear of tainting and I stand by it. Figuratively and literally.

ARTHUR

*(cleaning the spit)* Well--erm, if we cannot rest our rumps let us settle our stomachs, eh? *(calling)* Winckelk*(catching himself)*...jones...ington...smith?!

LADY CLEMENTIA

Winckelkjonesingtonsmith?

ARTHUR

Er--yes, my...northern English manservant.

LADY CLEMENTIA

A most queer name. *(suddenly)* Oh, no, you don't reckon he's a Catholic do you? I refuse to be in their heretical presence.

ARTHUR

I assure you not, ma'am. The man's deadly allergic to Holy Water. *Ha ha.* He should be coming. *(whispered)* Please, God of Germany...

*WINCKELKOPF enters with the covered tray. HE expected them sitting. The plan being slightly thrown off balance affects HIM. HE approaches tentatively.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

What's this then? Not Goose, I pray. Hate Goosemeat.

ARTHUR

Turkish Delights, ma'am. My dessert decision for the reception. These are homemade, though, I assure you. Turkish in name only. And perhaps in decadence as well. I expected us to sit and take these at the table but if we are to stand, Winckelk...Winck can hold them for us.

*WINCKELKOPF strongly shakes HIS head.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

No? What kind of help have you hired? *(to WINCKELKOPF, suspecting)* You're Lithuanian aren't you?

ARTHUR

Simply a nervous tick, dear Lady Clem. Winck only gets this way near powerful women. Poor glandular faculties the man has.

LADY CLEMENTIA

*Hmph.* Most men *do* find themselves with a weak gland around me.

ARTHUR

Well I assure you my mandibles are as strong as ever. Now I must insist you start with the *lemon* Turkish Delight. It's simply...delightful. Or, better yet, heavenly. Winck?

*WINCKELKOPF lifts the cover off the tray. All the Turkish Delights (or just their frostings) are varying shades of yellow. ARTHUR's eyes go wide.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

Lemon, you say? And which one is it?

ARTHUR

*(to the tray, panic)* Which one is it? *(to WINCKELKOPF, asking, panic escalating)* Which one is it? *(to LADY CLEMENTIA, plan rapidly formulated. Playfully)* Which one is it? Why, ma'am, that's the fun of the dish! Sample 'til you find it! Go ahead. As many as you'd like. All if you wish.

LADY CLEMENTIA

Ucch, certainly not. Do you see me draped in an Irish flag? I'm not that crude and needy. And certainly not as befreckled. Have one with me. Go on. I demand it.

*LADY CLEMENTIA picks one out. ARTHUR hesitates.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

I highly doubt this is the first decision you've ever made in your life and, most likely, it shan't be your last. Pick.

*ARTHUR looks to WINCKELKOPF. No help there. Hopeless, HE picks one up.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

There you are. *(beat)* Now it goes in your mouth.

*ARTHUR is frozen. LADY CLEMENTIA takes the hand with the Turkish Delight and puts it to ARTHUR's mouth. HE slowly opens it, and SHE pushes it in. SHE pops HER's into HER mouth and munches.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

Mmm. Custard. What's yours?

*ARTHUR sweats. HE has nowhere to run. Resigned, HE takes the teensiest of bites. The flavor comes to him, then a jubilated relief.*

ARTHUR

*(almost crying with joy, mouthful)* BANANA! Oh, what a long, glorious fruit...*(HE swallows)*

LADY CLEMENTIA

Never cared for it. Far too mushy. *(SHE picks another)* And you.

ARTHUR

*(patting HIS stomach)* Oh, no. I'm...deadly full.

LADY CLEMENTIA

Here. One more won't kill you.

*ARTHUR opens HIS mouth to protest as SHE picks one up, and quickly puts it into HIS open, now surprised mouth. SHE puts one hand on the top of HIS head and the other below HIS chin and forces HIM to chew. SHE casually grabs another for HERSELF.*

*ARTHUR gloomily chews. Oh, no...*

LADY CLEMENTIA

What? Not butterscotch I hope for the Lord's sake. No more foul a flavor.

*ARTHUR continues to chew, resigned to Doom. But then...*

ARTHUR

*(mouthful)* No, it's maybe...*(gasps)* poppy! Is it poppy?! *(looks to WINCKELKOPF)* Was there poppy? *(WINCKELKOPF nods)* IT'S POPPY!

LADY CLEMENTIA

Well don't *pop* because of it.

*LADY CLEMENTIA cackles at HER own joke. ARTHUR swallows, relieved. SHE eats HERS. HER face becomes mortified. ARTHUR and WINCKELKOPF get excited. SHE swallows, grimacing sharply.*

ARTHUR

Is it lemon?

LADY CLEMENTIA

UFF! BUTTERSCOTCH! IT'S LIKE THE DEVIL'S URINE! I must wash this flavor out immediately! Do you have any extremely hard liquor?!

ARTHUR  
Uh, in the kitchen, ma'am.

*LADY CLEMENTIA swiftly exits to the kitchen, scraping HER tongue with HER fingers to rid HERSELF of the taste.*

*ARTHUR hotly turns to WINCKELKOPF. BOTH speak hushed throughout.*

ARTHUR  
Yellow?!

WINCKELKOPF  
*Ja*, I know.

ARTHUR  
How could you make such a grievous error?! *Et tu, Wincke?! Are you trying to kill me as well?!*

WINCKELKOPF  
Not today.

ARTHUR  
Explain yourself promptly or I'll make you eat two!

WINCKELKOPF  
It was the yellow, *Mein Lord!*

ARTHUR  
They're all as bloody, bright yellow as the sun's smelly, linty navel!

WINCKELKOPF  
No. The *lemon* was yellow. The custard was canary. The banana was gold. The poppy was wheat. And the butterscotch was rotten *sauerkraut*.

ARTHUR  
Well, I obviously can't tell the difference, can you?!

WINCKELKOPF  
I could.

ARTHUR  
Then do!

WINCKELKOPF  
No, I *could*. I cannot anymore.

ARTHUR  
What?!



WINCKELKOPF

You are standing! When we rehearsed you sat! I was going to point to it but my fingers are enslaved if I stand! I'm improvising! I forgot which is which! This acting business is very, very hard!

ARTHUR

*(sighs)* It is no matter. We shall send the rest home with her and then I shall punch you in the bracket until you *bleed* yellow...somehow.

WINCKELKOPF

You might have known. The capsule very well may still be intact inside. You could feel it.

ARTHUR

Well couldn't she then?

WINCKELKOPF

She is old. With age the senses become less...refined.

*LADY CLEMENTIA reenters, long, heavy liquor bottle in hand. SHE's chugging. SHE leaves about half a teaspoon.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

If there were two things I could permanently remove in this world it would be butterscotch and Italians. And Scots. And the Welsh. And Swiss. And the Germans, ooooo I'd save them for last.

*ARTHUR excessively yawns and stretches HIS arms.*

ARTHUR

Well, dear, darling Lady Clem, I'm afraid I must retire to bed.

LADY CLEMENTIA

I just arrived.

ARTHUR

And as soon as I wake I will promptly begin work on enhancing my meeting scheduling skills. By all means feel free to take the remainder of the Turkish Delights. After all, I am trying to be slim for my upcoming tuxedo. *A-ha-ha.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

Well I'd like another before I leave to erase that positively torturous gustatory experience.

ARTHUR

Pick away. Lemon remains...

LADY CLEMENTIA

No, no.

ARTHUR

Yes, yes. Please, please.

LADY CLEMENTIA

*(aghast)* Not alone.

ARTHUR

Truly, I cannot eat another. Just take them with you. Please.

LADY CLEMENTIA

Compounding gluttony? I'll have nothing of it. Either you have one with me now or I'll leave them here when I exit.

*A weighty beat.*

ARTHUR

*(resigned)* You are a very difficult woman. Perhaps I chose more correctly than I thought.

LADY CLEMENTIA

What?

ARTHUR

Nothing. Nothing at all. *(quietly)* Let's get this sodding business finalized.

*Not caring anymore, HE just picks one up. SHE does as well.*

ARTHUR

To long life. Cheers.

*HE "toasts" HIS Turkish Delight with HER's and tosses it in HIS mouth, lightly grimacing, chewing slowly. A beat.*

*Oh, no. Most certainly this time...*

ARTHUR

*(whispered, mouthful)* Lemon.

LADY CLEMENTIA

Oh, lucky you.

ARTHUR

*(mouthful)* Lemon. Definitely lemon.

*ARTHUR chews, slowly, terrified. WINCKELKOPF is trying to say something, but cannot audibly communicate due to the circumstances.*

ARTHUR  
(to WINCKELKOPF, mouthful) Oh, just say it.

WINCKELKOPF  
(a very poor attempt of a German imitation of an English accent) The...lemon...might still be intact *mein...*mind you.

LADY CLEMENTIA  
(to WINCKELKOPF) Which part of England were you from again?

ARTHUR chews. *HE's right!*

ARTHUR  
(to WINCKELKOPF, mouthful, relieved) You're right! You're right!

LADY CLEMENTIA  
Well, go on and swallow now.

ARTHUR  
(chewing exquisitely slowly, mouthful, fear) Oh, but I just love the...lemon...y goodness. I have to keep chewing. Mmmmm.

*Abject panic. WINCKELKOPF, behind LADY CLEMENTIA has nothing.*

ARTHUR (cont'd)  
(chewing still, desperately slowly, mouthful) Just simply adore the...tanginess. Mmmmmmm-mmmmmmm...

*Horror. Then! An idea!*

MMMM!

ARTHUR (cont'd)

*Flinging out HIS arms as if propelled by the joy of taste, ARTHUR knocks LADY CLEMENTIA's cane out from under HER, causing HER to fall, hard.*

Ahhh!

LADY CLEMENTIA

*ARTHUR looks furtively to WINCKELKOPF, violently beckoning HIM with a head gesture. WINCKELKOPF rushes over. With one hand, ARTHUR helps LADY CLEMENTIA to HER feet. In the other, HE spits the remains of the Turkish Delight and hands them to WINCKELKOPF. WINCKELKOPF withdraws the still-intact poison capsule from the mess.*

*LADY CLEMENTIA is standing, balancing on ARTHUR. HE grabs HER cane for HER.*

ARTHUR

So sorry, Lady Clem! Suddenly overcome with such a radiant taste explosion!

LADY CLEMENTIA

I haven't been struck by a man like that since before my first husband passed.

*As SHE says this, WINCKELKOPF is gesturing to ARTHUR that THEY still need to place the pill in another Turkish Delight so that LADY CLEMENTIA can eat it and later die. ARTHUR nods HIS head in worried agreement. HE is unsure what to do, as LADY CLEMENTIA would surely see them place the pill.*

ARTHUR

*(snapping back to attention to LADY CLEMENTIA)* Er--what's that?

*LADY CLEMENTIA has finally regained total balance with HER cane.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

I said...

*Ah-HA! Another idea!*

ARTHUR

MMMM!

*Once again, ARTHUR's arms go flying, knocking LADY CLEMENTIA's cane out from under HER. SHE falls, again. Even harder. While SHE's down, WINCKELKOPF tosses ARTHUR the capsule, who catches it and swiftly places it in another Turkish Delight.*

ARTHUR (cont'd)

After-taste! Just as thrilling as the previous! Oh, Lady Clem, do forgive me. If my mother were to see my behavior she'd kill me where I stood.

*SHE struggles to get up. There is little help.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

Seems you're the only one standing around here.

ARTHUR

Here, please.

*LADY CLEMENTIA extends HER hand for HELP, but ARTHUR completely ignores it and grabs HER handbag and the tray of Turkish Delights, right before WINCKELKOPF was going to take one for HIMSELF. ARTHUR pours all the Turkish Delights into LADY CLEMENTIA's handbag.*

ARTHUR

Please, take them all, I insist. For my bitter actions you deserve sweet compensation.

*LADY CLEMENTIA returns to HER feet and assumes a safe distance from ARTHUR.*

LADY CLEMENTIA

If you're really apologetic, get me the bloody hell out and call me a coachmen. Many of them are Dutch and I refuse to make eye contact.

*THEY start to exit.*

LADY CLEMENTIA (cont'd)

No, no, no! Maintain your distance! Flinging your arms like some Portuguese drunkard. Find my wedding invitation and drown it!

ARTHUR

Oh, Lady Clementia, why would I ever want to be without your charming company? I'm sure I'll see you again very, very, very soon in the coming days.

*THEY leave out the door, ARTHUR calling to a coachmen as THEY pass the window and exit.*

*Alone and with the Turkish Delights gone, WINCKELKOPF rubs HIS stomach. HE's hungry. HE shrugs.*

*HE eats the remains of ARTHUR's lemon Turkish Delight.*

**END ACT ONE SCENE THREE**

ACT ONE SCENE FOUR

*A foggy, gray afternoon. The drafty, lonely drawing room. Seemingly empty. As if its heart has been dashed out and tossed on the street.*

WINCKELKOPF enters from within. Stands.

WINCKELKOPF

Mein Lord?

ARTHUR

Mein man?

*ARTHUR is lying behind the sofa. And is miserable.*

WINCKELKOPF

*(trying to boost spirits)* I have a surprise for you.

ARTHUR

You should start a club...

WINCKELKOPF

Your mother is here.

ARTHUR

That is as much a surprise as saying my nose is on my face.

WINCKELKOPF

And the...*(wistfully)* Lady Windermere.

ARTHUR

And my nostrils below it.

WINCKELKOPF

And...er--well, *ja*. They are here. Now. Would you like to stand up?

ARTHUR

The day's date?

WINCKELKOPF

Fourteenth, September.

ARTHUR

That makes it a fortnight to the day since we set Lady Clem with those treacherous treats and nothing. Nothing.

WINCKELKOPF

Perhaps you would like to consider changing clothes, *mein* Lord? You have had on the same set.

ARTHUR

For one fortnight...

WINCKELKOPF

You smell vaguely of old turnips.

ARTHUR

My heart, Winky, is an old turnip. Purple and rotting. Dreadfully rotting. My trousers can manage.

WINCKELKOPF

Shall I send madams in?

ARTHUR

Has there ever been a woman alive you could stop doing exactly what she wants without extensive use of elbows?

WINCKELKOPF

Alive? (*light chuckle*) No.

ARTHUR

Seems to be the only sort I know. Let them in. Do alert them to my odor.

*WINCKELKOPF exits to within.*

*ARTHUR rises, finally, revealing HIS pitiful self. Carries over to the other side of the sofa. Sits. Slumps. Lies down. Falls to the floor. Stays.*

*A beat.*

*HE sniffs HIMSELF. Closes HIS eyes.*

ARTHUR

I'd say cabbage.

*LADY WINDERMERE and DUCHESS enter. BOTH are dressed in black. THEY both see ARTHUR on the ground.*

DUCHESS

Is he asleep?

ARTHUR

No.

LADY WINDERMERE

Arthur, you're on the floor.

ARTHUR

Observant as ever, Lady Windermere.

*DUCHESS is concerned. LADY WINDERMERE is preoccupied with looking into other rooms containing certain Germanic servants. DUCHESS approaches, worried.*

WINCKELKOPF reenters. HE and LADY WINDERMERE briefly stare at each other longingly, then, quickly, ruefully, look away. Then, THEY move slightly closer to EACH OTHER. Such a dance continues throughout.

DUCHESS  
We've returned from Venice.

ARTHUR  
Italy?

LADY WINDERMERE  
Erm, uh...is there another?

DUCHESS  
Did you fall?

ARTHUR  
From the pure, pink, puffy clouds of heaven.

DUCHESS  
I suppose you knocked your head as well.

*SHE bends over HIM to investigate.*

ARTHUR  
Mother, while I am happy to see you again if at a distinctly different angle than usual I...I think it best you leave for now. (*HE sits up*) I am obviously odorously not fit for company.

DUCHESS  
I did detect a whiff of spoiled rutabaga. What's the matter, darling? I'd heard you were out of sorts.

ARTHUR  
Loose lips sink German U-boats...

DUCHESS  
I'm positively flummoxed. Unless...(SHE approaches HIM slyly)  
It's Sybil.

ARTHUR  
(*looking around*) Where?

DUCHESS  
On your mind. My word, vegetables aren't the only thing of which you reek. And they say there's only one way to tell when a man's thinking of a woman. It is *she*, yes?



ARTHUR

Yes. (*realizing*) It *is* she. If she were only here it wouldn't matter would it? My joy would just be a huge, massive...eraser to this bleak scribbling.

DUCHESS

Well, then, I think I found you the perfect *souvenir* from Venice. Gladys?

*LADY WINDERMERE and WINCKELKOPF have now drawn so close THEY'RE sniffing each other excitedly. DUCHESS sees.*

DUCHESS (cont'd)

What on Earth is going on?

LADY WINDERMERE

I'm (*panicked, looks to WINCKELKOPF*)...denying his advances!

*SHE slaps WINCKELKOPF.*

LADY WINDERMERE (cont'd)

Dreadful Deutschlander. (*to DUCHESS*) Yes, dearie?

DUCHESS

Would you fetch Arthur's...present?

LADY WINDERMERE

Now? I thought we were waiting until dinner.

*DUCHESS gives a concerned look to ARTHUR, then a smiling one to LADY WINDERMERE.*

DUCHESS

Now, I believe, is perfect timing. As always with fate. A sublime surprise. I'm growing to enjoy those.

*LADY WINDERMERE exits. WINCKELKOPF is sad. DUCHESS sniffs ARTHUR.*

DUCHESS (cont'd)

Just say you were making stew and failed.

ARTHUR

Hm?

*LADY WINDERMERE reenters. Beckons to WINCKELKOPF. Whispers in HIS ear. Lingers, then stands away.*

WINCKELKOPF

LADY SYBIL WINDERMERE!

*SYBIL enters. Tender. Pure. Beaming. SYBIL rushes to ARTHUR. THEY hold hands. THEN relinquish.*

Artie...  
SYBIL

Sybil...  
ARTHUR

*SHE sniffs.*

SYBIL  
Has someone left a squash out in the sun?

ARTHUR  
Uh...

DUCHESS  
Well, I am quite famished! Gladys, you?

LADY WINDERMERE  
*(looking intensely at WINCKELKOPF)* Starved.

DUCHESS  
To the kitchen then. I've found it to be the most suitable place for such impulses. *(Smiling)* Excuse us.

*DUCHESS exits to within. LADY WINDERMERE and WINCKELKOPF follow for a bit then pause, frozen in each other's views. DUCHESS' arms pull THEM within. ARTHUR and SYBIL gaze at EACH OTHER.*

ARTHUR  
I don't believe I'm seeing you. Even with all the madness that's followed me home of late, I still cannot.

SYBIL  
You always were dismissive of the unbelievable. How you ever enjoyed Christmas as a lad I'll never know. *(beat)* Arthur, you're staring.

*Indeed, HE is.*

ARTHUR  
I'm...sorry. So rude.

SYBIL  
I don't mind a bit. It's just so unlike you.

ARTHUR  
It has been a most backwards past two weeks. Though some things remain unchanged. You look wonderful.

SYBIL

You do not. What's happened?

*ARTHUR smiles. HE stands a bit away, almost unable to face such joy. SYBIL's eyes close. A beat.*

ARTHUR

May I hold you? For a moment? Trade you an answer for it? (A beat. Silence.) Alright then.

SYBIL

*(as if suddenly coming to)* Hm?

ARTHUR

Did you not hear me, Lovely?

SYBIL

Was I not the last to speak?

ARTHUR

No, Lovely.

SYBIL

*(deeply disappointed)* Oh, fiddlee-dee. And I'd been doing so well...

ARTHUR

Your sleeping spells, of course.

SYBIL

Really, I've been better. Really. The doctors were so impressed they let me ride the bicycle for nearly twelve minutes! I've been working ever so diligently. Dutifully, like you asked. I do wish so to make you happy. I hoped I could prove it in person. It must be seeing you. I'm all a-twitter.

ARTHUR

It's no matter.

SYBIL

*(surprised)* Really? You were so overly concerned with its continuance.

*(realizing)* Nothing is.

SYBIL (cont'd)

What's that?

ARTHUR

Nothing is the matter. All is irrelevant with you in this room and your eyes in mine. I am...untroubled. I cannot even remember the troubles I had. How do you do that?

SYBIL

It's inexplicable. Though I'm not one to comment on the subject as with my afflictions my sense of memory is as reliable as snow on the sun.

ARTHUR

*Inexplicable.* Yes. Yes...

*A beat. A nice one.*

SYBIL

I've missed you. Deeply. At night. Under the stars. (*slight beat*) Would you...care to sit with me a moment? Discuss Italian architecture?

ARTHUR

No...

SYBIL

French, then?

ARTHUR

Neither of us shall sit. Come close to me.

*SHE does. HE embraces HER. So tightly.*

SYBIL

Artie! Pr--propriety!

ARTHUR

It's been of little use to me. All of it. All plans. All possessions. Everything I see has misled me and all I hear makes misery. I am so lost. I didn't know one could get so lost. And, yet, here you are. Another mad and magical moment. It's most mysterious that all I need is to be in two such delicate, right-slightly-shorter-than-the-left if I remember correctly, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful arms. I hardly understand it. (*beat*) I do hope you're awake.

SYBIL

I am.

ARTHUR

Good. So good. (*SYBIL's eyes close. A beat*) Lovely?

SYBIL

Hm?

*HE lets go. SHE shakes fully awake. THEY stand a proper distance. Small smiles.*

ARTHUR  
Enough of Arthur and his ailments. What on Earth are you doing back?

SYBIL  
*(worried, remembers)* Oh. Time?

ARTHUR  
You came back for seasoning?

SYBIL  
What time is it, Artie?

ARTHUR  
Oh.

*ARTHUR pats at HIS pockets, finally finds and procures HIS pocketwatch.*

ARTHUR *(cont'd)*  
2:37 in the PM.

SYBIL  
Oh, dear, well, come along or we'll be late.

ARTHUR  
But to what?

SYBIL  
Artie, have you forgotten the news as well as soap?

ARTHUR  
I've been...preoccupied.

SYBIL  
The funeral.

ARTHUR  
*(struck, excited)* A funeral? Someone died?

SYBIL  
Typically the case in such matters, yes.

ARTHUR  
Whom?

SYBIL  
A relative of your mother. Aunt? Second aunt? Perhaps third? Maybe a cousin? The Lady Clementia.

(joyous) SHE DIED?!

ARTHUR

Sadly, yes.

SYBIL

*ARTHUR rushes to SYBIL, takes HER in HIS arms, and dances with HER.*

Ha! Artie!

SYBIL (cont'd)

After the funeral let's ask the priest to marry us immediately.

ARTHUR

What?

SYBIL

You're awake. You heard that.

ARTHUR

But, Artie, isn't it our duty to respect our families' wishes for a proper wedding ceremony?

SYBIL

Isn't it our duty as humans to love as much as we can as soon as possible? We can have a ceremony later. We'll do it for ourselves. Like Romeo and Juliet did. (*mostly to HIMSELF*) Ha, though I certainly shan't be buying any more poisons...

ARTHUR

*SYBIL might have heard this remark. SHE'S confused. ARTHUR notices.*

Er--wouldn't want to disrespect the...good Lady Clem.

ARTHUR

What's that mean?

SYBIL

Well the woman was accidentally poisoned, yes? Yes?

ARTHUR

No.

SYBIL

No?

ARTHUR

(*stops dancing*) No. No, terrible accident all the same, though. Ruddy cane of hers gave out. Apparently it had been recently damaged. Just so happens it was beside the Thames and the old girl fell and drowned.

SYBIL

ARTHUR

She...drowned? In water?

SYBIL

For what passes for it in that septic nightmare. How grisly an end...

ARTHUR

*(growing desperate)* And nothing else?

SYBIL

Well the fall may have dislocated her shoulder but she'dve healed. I can't believe you hadn't heard correctly. Did you not receive the telegram?

ARTHUR

I...I've had other concerns on my mind.

SYBIL

Such as?

ARTHUR

Oh...(HE turns away. Struggles. Decides. Is unable to meet HER eyes.) You remember. Our wedding postponement. I...I just told you of it when you entered. Of my worry of it being too soon? Too...unprepared? With you having been away for so long I must...reevaluate my feelings. Especially...in light of the lack of progress in solving your sleeping spells. It would be improper otherwise. The stress of it all leading to my somewhat appalling appearance. You said you understood. You agreed it was for the best.

SYBIL

I...I did?

ARTHUR

Twice, I believe.

SYBIL

I can't remember...

ARTHUR

Oh, no, another spell. You see?

SYBIL

I...suppose. Though I normally don't speak during them. But they do...they do afflict my memory.

ARTHUR

Well, it's done.

SYBIL

*(disappointed)* Oh. *(beat)* But didn't you just ask me to marry you today?

ARTHUR

*(feigning shock)* Today? Absolutely not. When would we? After the funeral? How shockingly uncouth.

SYBIL

It seems my time in Venice has not been as helpful as I thought. What a rotten shock...

ARTHUR

Everything will come right. But patience is necessary.

*SHE stares at HIM. A beat.*

SYBIL

Artie?

ARTHUR

...yes?

SYBIL

If we're to be man and wife there can be no secrets.

ARTHUR

I'm fully aware.

SYBIL

None.

ARTHUR

I have nothing I *want* to hide from you, Sybil.

*Beat. Not the nicest one.*

SYBIL

Well, I *do* remember the time of the funeral. Which is soon. I'll fetch our mothers. I think you should not attend, Artie. You seem...not yourself. Perhaps seek some proper help.

ARTHUR

*(beat)* Yes. Yes. A wise choice. *(slight beat, finally able to meet HER eyes)* Do send in Winky. I must remind him to burn the recently-made inaccurate invitations. He loves fire so.

SYBIL

Yes, Artie, lovely.

ARTHUR

Lovely.

*SHE exits. ARTHUR pulls out the photograph of SYBIL. Absolutely cannot bear to look at it. Sets it on a surface. Covers it with an item. WINCKELKOPF enters. ARTHUR immediately snaps into action. Goes to WINCKELKOPF.*



ARTHUR

*(desperately)* Winky, when a man meets a mountain how does he conquer it?

WINCKELKOPF

Climb?

ARTHUR

And if it is simply too high?

WINCKELKOPF

Dynamite.

ARTHUR

Dynamite.

*ARTHUR calculates. Formulates. Turns to WINKY...darkly.*

ARTHUR

Winky...you carry a dagger with you at all times, yes?

WINCKELKOPF

*(laughs heartily)* Of course, mein Lord!

ARTHUR

*(deadly serious)* Give it to me. Now.

*WINCKELKOPF stops laughing. Somewhat nervously, HE withdraws a dagger from within HIS clothes and gives it to ARTHUR. It weighs on ARTHUR heavily. The burden of it, that is. HE grips it firmly, turns suddenly. Worried, WINCKELKOPF withdraws several daggers and perhaps a small hatchet from within HIS clothes. Holds them defensively.*

ARTHUR

*(disturbed)* Winky, my fine bearded fellow...no. Is this rocky chasm I've plunged into so dreadfully deep? Am I so obscured? I'd never hurt one I...I care for. German or otherwise.

WINCKELKOPF

Then why the dagger?

*ARTHUR walks to the piano. Sets the dagger down. Plays a somber song.*

ARTHUR

There is one thing worse than an absolutely loveless marriage: a marriage in which there is love, but on one side only. I've lost sight of how to properly love, Winky.

Remarkable considering it is totally invisible. How is it the most wonderful and terrible things are usually so?

WINCKELKOPF

A woeful, stupefying mystery, *mein* Lord.

ARTHUR

One of fate's deeper, darker notes. (*beat*) By the end of the night, Winky, I shall end the life of another.

*HE stops playing. Picks up the dagger.*

ARTHUR (cont'd)

Or, rightly, take my own. Suicide is as much a form of murder as any other, though certainly a much less preferable one. (*Duty finally clear*) Accompany the women to the funeral. I know you like those events. I will take to the streets. If questioned concerning my whereabouts...make up a story. Seems to be a recurring occurrence within these walls. Let us hope we both return breathing.

*ARTHUR admires the dagger. Holds it to HIS left hand and presses lightly. Pulls it away and into HIS pocket. THEY exit. ARTHUR to outside. WINCKELKOPF to within. A beat.*

*PODGERS passes by the window outside, another wine bottle in hand. Enters.*

PODGERS

(*calling*) Dear, lovely Duchess! I sensed your return! I've come for your training session! I know it's a surprise, but don't we all like those from time to time? Reminds us there's more to come than we ever expected. A jolly mystery. But hopefully with right timing. However with fate that's all there is. For the time it happens is the only time it can, and, thus, can only be right. And--

*PODGERS is struck by a sudden sensation. Worried, HE goes to the window. Touches it lightly. Looks away suddenly. Nearly drops the bottle. Must set it down.*

PODGERS (cont'd)

Tonight? Oh, dear. (*beat*) Oh, yes, of course. Tonight...

**END ACT ONE SCENE FOUR**

**END ACT ONE**

**INTERMISSION**

ACT TWO SCENE ONE

AT RISE: The drawing room. Darker than ever, as nighttime has a tendency to be. Still. Silent. Shrouded. PODGERS wine bottle remains. WINCKELKOPF's coat and shirt lie scattered on the floor.

ARTHUR goes suddenly running past the window, overwhelmed. Trips. Picks HIMSELF up, using the window for support, leaving a bloody handprint on the glass.

HE enters, breathing heavily. HE is only in HIS white undershirt and trousers. The undershirt is deeply stained red. Blood red.

HE withdraws something wrapped in a kerchief from HIS trouser pocket. HE opens it. A dagger. Bloody. Wipes it on HIS already bloody undershirt. Breathes. Breathes. Breathes.

WINCKELKOPF enters. HE is also down to HIS undershirt and trousers. HIS undershirt is also stained, though purple. HE is also breathing heavily.

Alarmed by HIS sudden appearance, ARTHUR throws the dagger at HIM. WINCKELKOPF dodges it (or catches it and sets it down if you're a brave, brave company).

ARTHUR What happened? I almost died. How?

WINCKELKOPF What happened? I almost died. How?

A beat.

THEY both start to talk again at the same time but catch THEMSELVES. THEY stop. WINCKELKOPF points at ARTHUR to go.

ARTHUR  
A dagger. You?

WINCKELKOPF  
Worse. A woman. Is it done, mein Lord?

ARTHUR

Oh, how it is. It is all done.

WINCKELKOPF

You were successful?

ARTHUR

In that I have reached a conclusion.

WINCKELKOPF

And so has someone else? (*noticing*) Wait, what is on your undershirting?

ARTHUR

Life. But not near as much as needed. And you?

WINCKELKOPF

Wine. But not near as much as needed as well, apparently. (*goes and picks up the bottle PODGERS brought*) English women need much coaxing to share affections. The accent just doesn't do it. Actually, it seems more to scare them away. But, anyway, what happened?

*ARTHUR goes and picks up the dagger.*

ARTHUR

It cuts true, but aim it does not improve. Must've stabbed the man's left arm a half dozen times. We wrestled. Ripped my coat and my literally bloody shirt right off my back. Then the damned dagger fell out of my hands and he picked it up to turn on me! The blade was blissfully slippery. He dropped it and I recovered. Certainly didn't end his life, but most definitely crippled his future in row boating.

*ARTHUR's actions are nearly too much to bear. Fights tears. HE cannot look at WINCKELKOPF. Struggles with the world in general.*

WINCKELKOPF

Who was it?

ARTHUR

A man in a corner. The irony is not lost. I lost my coat. My shirt. Nearly...my life. But that did not matter. The fight, Winky!

WINCKELKOPF

Sounds like a stupendous scuffle.

ARTHUR

Not our altercation. The fight in the man's eyes! My will to kill could not overcome his to live. As one hopes it should always be.

WINCKELKOPF

If you say so.

ARTHUR

Though, hope, I've found, can be the most scant, scarce substance. I failed and ran. And ran. And ran.

*ARTHUR holds the knife to HIS hand. Then, HIS, wrist. Holds it there.*

ARTHUR

I have done my best to commit this murder, but on both occasions I have failed. It seems as if Destiny herself has turned traitor. Perhaps this is best. Perhaps *this* is my duty. Sybil will suffer, but suffering could not really mar a nature so noble as hers. As for myself, what does it matter? As life has no pleasure for me, so death has no terror. (*Presses lightly. Holds it.*) I'm almost tempted to ask you to do it for me, Winky. End my life. But that would be...improper.

*Presses. Harder. Almost entirely...*

WINCKELKOPF

I would get rid of you. If you asked.

*ARTHUR holds the blade back, morbidly intrigued.*

WINCKELKOPF

I serve you. Whatever you wish I will do. It is *mein* duty.

*A beat.*

ARTHUR

For Sybil. Do it.

*WINCKELKOPF nods. ARTHUR gives HIM the blade.*

WINCKELKOPF

Take off your undershirting.

*ARTHUR is puzzled.*

WINCKELKOPF

Please.

*ARTHUR does. WINCKELKOPF gestures for it. ARTHUR gives it to HIM. ARTHUR starts to remove HIS own trousers.*

WINCKELKOPF

What are you doing?

ARTHUR

I assumed this was the logical progression? Somehow?

WINCKELKOPF

*Nein. Nein, nein, nein, why would you--nein. Nein. (slight beat) Nein.*

*ARTHUR is thoroughly clueless. WINCKELKOPF scoffs at ARTHUR's ignorance. WINCKELKOPF then wildly, vigorously, and with an ever-stretching smile stabs the shirt multiple times.*

ARTHUR

Winky?

WINCKELKOPF

SILENCE!

*HE ceases stabbing. HIS bloodlust lingers, but is subsiding.*

WINCKELKOPF

Now, you go.

ARTHUR

Well I'd rather not go like that if it's all right. A single swift heart puncture will suffice.

WINCKELKOPF

No.

ARTHUR

Please?

WINCKELKOPF

No. You will go...away. Away from England. Now. Live another life. I will tell them you were attacked. Killed. Your body taken. All I was able to recover was your undershirting. You are dead. And it won't be a lie. Because when you leave, Lord Arthur Savile stays. I recommend Munich, it's *wunderbar* this time of year. I will telegraph *mein* step-brother: *Herr* Alois Schicklgruber. Take the next boat to the mainland, then the train to Munich. He will be waiting. (*realizing*) You still have your wallet, *ja?* (*ARTHUR nods*) *Gut*. Oh, and for the seasonal, freezing winds.

*PICKS up HIS coat, gives it to ARTHUR. HE gives it back.*

WINCKELKOPF

It should fit...mostly.

ARTHUR

No, Winky, you're doing more than more than enough. It wouldn't be proper of me.

WINCKELKOPF

It would be ever less proper for me not to. (*gives the coat back*) I feel supremely sorry for the whole Turkish Delight slip-up. What was I thinking, *ja*?

*ARTHUR accepts the circumstances. Puts the coat on.*

ARTHUR

You are a clever and compassionate man, Winky. For a German.

WINCKELKOPF

And you are a *gut* man with nice teeth. For a Brit.

*A rustle of sound from off.*

WINCKELKOPF

Go! *Schnell!*

*ARTHUR starts to go. Stops.*

ARTHUR

Tell Sybil my last words were of love to her. I know they would have been, as I'm sure someday they will be.

WINCKELKOPF

Will do, *mein* Lord.

ARTHUR

And do well, *mein* friend.

*ARTHUR goes. Exits. Is gone.*

*A moment.*

*Sadly, WINCKELKOPF looks at the shirt. Stabs it feebly a few more times.*

*LADY WINDERMERE enters, carrying and swigging heavily a bottle of mostly empty wine (from A1S1). WINCKELKOPF quickly tosses the dagger away so SHE doesn't see it. Not like SHE probably would, or could, anyway...*

LADY WINDERMERE

Winky-Tinky take a drinky...

*SHE offers the bottle. HE shakes HIS head.*

LADY WINDERMERE

I'm feeling much more in tune with my inner German bar wench. Come to bed, my Kaiser of Canoodling. You can even bring your bloody undershirt. (*laughing*) A bloody undershirt! You Germans should add comedy alongside chocolate and clockwork to your list of accomplishments. Honestly, a bloody undershirt! (*slight beat. Realizing*) A bloody undershirt? Bloody hell! A bloody undershirt!

*SHE takes a deep swig and backs away.*

WINCKELKOPF

Mein Lady Windermere.

*HE draws near to HER. SHE slaps at HIS arm.*

LADY WINDERMERE

That's a very, *VERY* bad Winky!

*DUCHESS and PODGERS enter. Then, SYBIL.*

DUCHESS

What's the matter, Gladys?

SYBIL

(*noticing ARTHUR's shirt*) Artie!

*THEY rush over.*

LADY WINDERMERE

No, it's his manservant! German vermin!

*SYBIL grabs the undershirt from WINCKELKOPF who withdraws from LADY WINDERMERE.*

SYBIL

(*to WINCKELKOPF*) What is the meaning of this?

LADY WINDERMERE

I was just walking and got...thirsty. Alone!

SYBIL

(*to WINCKELKOPF*) Why do you have Artie's shirt? (*growing increasingly worried*) What...what is this substance on it? Answer me. Now.

*All eyes on WINCKELKOPF.*

WINCKELKOPF

I was watching outside and saw *mein* Lord returning from the stomach specialist steadily walking by the steps of the stained-glass window vendors when a wandering gang of weapon-wielding wrongdoers attacked.



I went to waive them away but was withheld. I was stopped by them, and made to watch. I was able to get unstuck and wanted to stymie the warriors but slipped on the stairs. When I stood, they were the winners. The only thing I was able to wrestle away was *mein* Lord's undershirting. They stole his body. Not a whisper of to where. Wistfully I wish I wasn't the one weighted with this work. Still, I understand if you need a while to weep. This story is so...wild. All wild.

*A moment. SYBIL fingers the undershirt while staring intently at WINCKELKOPF. Turns suddenly, desperately, to LADY WINDERMERE.*

SYBIL

Mother.

LADY WINDERMERE

Dear?

*SYBIL looks to LADY WINDERMERE, needing. LADY WINDERMERE holds HER. SYBIL moves HER head to be out-of-the-way of LADY WINDERMERE's breath. LADY WINDERMERE sips while holding SYBIL.*

DUCHESS

No. *(beat)* Not again...

*DUCHESS is dizzy with despair. LADY WINDERMERE and SYBIL continue holding.*

*PODGERS glares at WINCKELKOPF. PODGERS wants to say something very, very badly but is struggling internally with its ramifications. Seeing the terribly drab scene, though, HE cannot withhold.*

PODGERS

*(to ALL)* No is right. *(to WINCKELKOPF)* And wild is even better. *(to ALL)* I believe we're all suffering from a...mistake in translation. Our German friend here might be blaming someone inaccurately for a problematic situation. A future trend for his people, I assure you.

DUCHESS

What?

SYBIL

What?

WINCKELKOPF

What?

PODGERS

The good Lord Arthur is not dead.

*Gasps.*

WINCKELKOPF

Yes, he is.

PODGERS

*(sternly to WINCKELKOPF)* I know he is not. *(softer, to ALL)* A simple matter of mistranslation I hypothesize. A moment.

*PODGERS pulls WINCKELKOPF aside.*

PODGERS

*(loudly, for ALL to hear)* Guten tag! Weinerschnitzel!  
*(hushed, stern, to WINCKELKOPF)* Follow along with me or I'll tell them the real, complete truth about you and you'll be back to Berlin to that prison you escaped from faster than you can say *Schnitzel* with yellow mustard.

WINCKELKOPF

*(hushed)* I was wrongly imprisoned. It was only six who died, not eight. Okay, maybe seven. But, fine, whatever.

PODGERS

*(hushed)* Very proper choice. *(Loudly, for ALL)* Willkommen! Ha ha. There, you see? Herr Winckelkopf confused the word "weapon" with "tomato". Seems Arthur was a victim of that dreadful Vegetable Vagrant gang they wrote of in the London Times. Tomato and weapon, German homonyms.

WINCKELKOPF

...Ja. Did I say weapon? Whoops.

SYBIL

So Artie *is* alive?

PODGERS

...yes.

*Relief washes over. LADY WINDERMERE joyfully drinks.*

DUCHESS

What a terrible fright.

PODGERS

Yes...I'm certain he'll return shortly. *(slight beat, quietly)* Quite certain. *(beat)* Lady Windermere?

LADY WINDERMERE

Who--er, what?

PODGERS  
(*indicating bottle*) If you wouldn't mind?

*Surprised, LADY WINDERMERE hands the bottle to PODGERS who sips, savoring the liquid. Finishes the bottle.*

PODGERS  
Exquisite. A perfect end.

*HE returns it to HER.*

*A shivering ARTHUR appears at the window, coat pulled tightly. HE is alarmed at the presence of ALL, though no one sees HIM at the window but PODGERS. HE enters. SYBIL sees HIM.*

SYBIL  
Artie!

DUCHESS  
Darling!

*SYBIL runs and embraces HIM.*

ARTHUR  
Oh, Sybil, Lovely, no, I'm covered in--

SYBIL  
Tomato. I'm aware and don't care.

ARTHUR  
Tomato?

PODGERS  
Yes, Arthur, we all heard.

ARTHUR  
(*quite confused*) Did...you?

WINCKELKOPF  
*Mein* Lord, we were worried for your well-being.

ARTHUR  
Have you talked to them, Winky?

PODGERS  
He told them everything he should as is the charge of any proper manservant. It has been a pulse-quickenning evening and if we allow it to continue the lot of us might expire. And we don't all deserve such a fate tonight. Duchess, you show great aptitude in the Cheiromantic field. If you require further information you may consult my book.

DUCHESS

I wasn't aware there was one published.

PODGERS

There shall be. Soon. (*beat*) To bed now. All of you.

ARTHUR

Oh, but do wait, Sybil. We must talk.

SYBIL

I wouldn't dare leave you. Never again. As I hope you wouldn't leave me.

*ARTHUR looks to SYBIL sweetly.  
Gratefully.*

DUCHESS

And to think I might have lost you while lost myself in puerile palmistry practice. Never again. No more of this terrible tomfoolery.

ARTHUR

No, mother. Joy, nor anything else, will be sacrificed because of me. Not any more.

DUCHESS

But, Arthur, darling, you were a victim.

ARTHUR

Of my own egotistical endeavoring. It nearly did cost you me, as similar ambivalence towards what really mattered cost us father. Sins repeated on a selfish son.

DUCHESS

Whatever are you trying to say? I'm completely confounded.

PODGERS

A typical symptom of such a traumatic transgression. Now, unless Lord Arthur has a wish for more darker divination, I urge no more words. Simply steps. To your rooms. All of you.

DUCHESS

Do be wary when you walk, Arthur. These sidewalks seem to attract all sorts of ill fortunes. First the Lady Clem and now you. I can only imagine what's next.

PODGERS

More days, more destinations. I assure you.

DUCHESS

Good night, Arthur. I do love you.

*SHE embraces HIM. And HE, HER.*

DUCHESS

*(quietly)* Thank you.

*SHE exits to within.*

LADY WINDERMERE

Uh...well, I am terribly...terrified...of the reappearance of these Fruit-Flinging Fiends and will need to be accompanied to my quarters. *Herr* Winckel-Toes?

ARTHUR

*Winckel*-what?

LADY WINDERMERE

Uh--*Kopf*. Do you have tomato in your ears, as well? Come along, *Winckel*...you.

*SHE grabs WINCKELKOPF, quite forcefully, and THEY go to exit to within. Before THEY'RE completely off...*

PODGERS

Lady Windermere, my former dearest lady, I do wish the both of you all the best in the future.

LADY WINDERMERE

*(lightly stepping away from WINCKELKOPF)* Both of er--whom?

PODGERS

*Heh*. Yes, of course. *(mystical hand gesture)* Whomever it is that fate decrees you be with.

LADY WINDERMERE

Oh. Well...perhaps that proper person will present themselves promptly. *(staring at WINCKELKOPF)* Quite promptly...

*Quite promptly, THEY exit.*

ARTHUR

If you would allow us a spot of privacy, doctor?

PODGERS

I must have words with you, Arthur. Concerning your reading? A check-up if you would.

ARTHUR

Will you be outside?

PODGERS

No. Not yet. I'll go to the kitchen. I spied an unopened *Riesling*. I'd love to admire the bottle. *(carefully)* You don't always have to drink to appreciate the wine, Arthur. Remember it.

*PODGERS exits to within. SYBIL looks to ARTHUR, smiling. Almost devilishly.*

ARTHUR

Oh, and what could you possibly be smiling for?

SYBIL

I've just never seen you without a shirt on.

ARTHUR

*Oh...(embarrassed, grabs a pillow off the couch to cover HIMSELF) Oh.*

SYBIL

Now don't get any redder than you have already been tonight. I love your ability to surprise me. It's one of your most endearing qualities. That and now apparently your chest.

ARTHUR

Sybil, I--I must come clean.

SYBIL

I'd hope so after the evening's tomatoing.

ARTHUR

No, I...I need to tell you something.

SYBIL

Me first. Please. I can't bear to hear much more tragedy from you or in regards to you so...please. Allow me first?

*ARTHUR nods. SYBIL's eyes close. A beat. ARTHUR lightly pokes HER.*

ARTHUR

Sybil?

SYBIL

*(HER eyes open.) Hm? Oh, dear. Not again. You didn't tell me you're moving to the States or some other bestial far away country, right?*

ARTHUR

No, Lovely.

SYBIL

Oh, thank heavens. Ever since our...our discussion this afternoon I've been ever so afraid to fall asleep again and not hear what your heart needs. But I think I've found a trick: think of Artie, feel my heart take flight, and I stay conscious. It is not easy. But whatever it takes to make you mine, I'll do. No matter how enduring or undesirable it may be. You opened my eyes to love and, in doing so, woke my heart.

Whatever it is that must be done, whatever, I'll understand. And, if I must, I'll wait. Always. Even though that is the hardest of all. But that is the duty of one in love. *(beat)* There. I've said all I need and quite succinctly. That wasn't so bad, eh? Now what did you have to say?

*ARTHUR looks at SYBIL, then, HIS hand.*

SYBIL (cont'd)

Tomato stain?

*HE looks up.*

ARTHUR

Plan the wedding, Sybil. As soon as you want.

SYBIL

*(beat)* Really, Artie?

ARTHUR

Yes.

SYBIL

You're sure?

ARTHUR

Yes.

SYBIL

I'm...not asleep, right?

*HE grabs HER. Kisses HER quite well.*

ARTHUR

Well you're definitely awake now. Plan the wedding. Everything else be damned, plan it.

SYBIL

Oh, Artie! Your new, surprising self is so endearing...surprisingly! *(Embraces HIM)* Ooooo, and your back skin is so nicely smooth and hairless.

*Takes HER by the hands. Puts HERS over HIS.*

SYBIL (cont'd)

Who's coat is this?

ARTHUR

A very generous man. I must thank him.

SYBIL

Oh, Artie, what about my spells?

ARTHUR

The only spell I am concerned with is the one you cast on me. And I am a most...fortunate victim of it.

SYBIL

The surprises don't stop.

ARTHUR

You're telling me. Now, to bed, Lovely. You have a busy day ahead of planning and cake selection and if it is lemon I'll never be able to forgive you.

*ARTHUR guides HER to the exit to within. THEY look into each OTHER's eyes.*

SYBIL

A most interesting thing. Though this evening proved full of fears, one thought could not stop echoing in my ears. And that is how much I love you. Curious isn't it?

ARTHUR

It is a powerful thought. Able to overcome the most stressed situations. And I hope you know I love you. Why, I dare say it was...written in the stars.

*HE kisses HER hand. Looks at it. Then HER. Smiles. SHE exits to within. ARTHUR sighs. Takes in the space. Notices the dagger. Picks it up. PODGERS enters, sees HIM, is alarmed, then remembers.*

PODGERS

(to HIMSELF) No. Not like that.

ARTHUR

(sets it down) Don't worry. I'm quite ill-suited with it.

PODGERS

Certainly couldn't fend off the Garden Gang.

ARTHUR

What was that? That story? What were you doing?

PODGERS

I would ask you the same. Committing to your marriage in spite of your mental malady? And after having run away so recently.

ARTHUR

When one loses his bearings, a loss of way is all that can follow. Fear propelled me to my would-have-been-cowardly escape, as it has so thoroughly since our...your reading.



PODGERS

The rush of it from your attempted murder, yes? The brutal, bloody bluntness of it?

ARTHUR

How are you aware of all of this?

PODGERS

I would say your second greatest flaw is memory. My skills extend far beyond mere sooth-saying, my boy. Fat lot of good they've done me...

ARTHUR

What do you have to say to me?

PODGERS

Oh, very little. "Actions speak louder..." being the axiom.

ARTHUR

Doctor, like many in your profession you have the remarkable ability to never say exactly what it is we wish to hear. Some similarities aside I must say you're a very poor proper doctor. You have caused me nothing but extreme discomfort and continuous loss of wardrobe.

PODGERS

There is something I prescribed...

ARTHUR

And I shan't be following doctor's orders. Not presently at least. If someone's life is to be ended at my hands then so be it. I will not give power to the worries of anticipation. I cannot run away simply out of uncertainty. No one would get anywhere were that acceptable. It would be undutiful. The questions I have may not be answered for some time, but love will see that I am at least adequately satisfied with existence until they are.

PODGERS

*Adequately satisfied?* A poor way to live with love.

ARTHUR

It will have to do. I'll make it a new duty to see it work.

PODGERS

*(almost more to HIMSELF)* A most terribly unfair task.

ARTHUR

I've had to learn to understand that which seems not understandable.

PODGERS

The duty of life perhaps?

ARTHUR

(*defeated*) Seems as if it is an endless, unanswerable mystery.

*Finds the photograph of SYBIL HE set down earlier. Looks at it. Emotionally crushed. Looks away from it. PODGERS notices. Struggles. Decides.*

PODGERS

Give me your hand.

ARTHUR

This is a very improper time for parlor tricks, Dr. Podgers.

PODGERS

Propriety can take on many forms. Your hand.

*Nothing to lose, ARTHUR complies  
PODGERS withdraws HIS magnifying glass.  
Gives ARTHUR's hand a light read.*

PODGERS (cont'd)

*Hm. Yes. I see...happy days. All your problems soon solved.*

*HE pockets the magnifying glass.*

ARTHUR

You do? Whether due to lack of sleep or shirt, I don't possibly see how. Perhaps it's your hat. Either way, I assume all responsibility for my ignorance. It is only right. And, sadly, increasingly constant.

PODGERS

And *that* is your greatest *strength*: your adherence to duty. As uncomfortable as it may be.

ARTHUR

You once believed that to be my greatest flaw.

PODGERS

As would anyone who had not yet developed a sense of it themselves. Perhaps you should give lessons in the skill. I dare say it's rarer an ability than mine in this world. (*Sighs. Steps away. Takes off HIS turban. Stares at it.*) There is much temptation to walk the primrose path of dalliance, Lord Arthur. The *easy way*. This is something you, a true gentleman, would never understand, but many, many do. Just look around. Myself most ashamedly included. I thought cultivating Cheiromancy ability might aid me in my quest for...eased fulfillment. And for a time it did. But having knowledge of the future doesn't make it any better. Or any less avoidable. Otherwise...how could it be what it is? The future happens to us all, for better or worse. Much like...

ARTHUR

Death?

PODGERS

I was going to say love.

ARTHUR

You seem to have all the answers.

PODGERS

One who reads the future very well should, yes?

ARTHUR

I envy you. Your course must always be clear.

PODGERS

*Hmm...*that it is.

ARTHUR

*(sadly staring at the photograph)* You have no idea how fortunate you are...

*A beat. PODGERS observes ARTHUR observing the photograph.*

PODGERS

You have no idea how fortunate you are, Lord Arthur. There is one thing that is impossible to know, even with the knowledge of what is to come. Because of it, actually. And that is love. One can never hope to find it with the...*gift* I have. It should not be planned. Never. Rather, it should always be ...a mystery. A chance encounter. The unseen push. Unexplainable. Otherwise, it is nothing. Certainly not love. Not true, proper love. It would simply be...*(looking at HIS turban)* an act. Love can never happen. And that is no way to live. *(beat)* However that is the price I must pay for my life: the *undutiful* life. Just as your current crisis, your need to commit murder, is the price you pay for yours: the life of duty. *(a beat. Tosses the magnifying glass on the floor)* But there is a way yet to settle both our debts.

ARTHUR

How?

PODGERS

I'll be on the roof.

ARTHUR

What? Whatever for? It's scathingly cold outside. I'm riddled to the bone with goose pimples.

PODGERS

*(Beat)* Do you not see it, Arthur? What I'm saying you should...what you *must* do?

ARTHUR

No.

PODGERS

*(Small, sad smile. Puts turban back on.)* It is true. The simplest solutions can be the hardest to see. Sometimes...*heh*...right above our heads. Come along, my boy. I'd say we've all had our fill of uncertainty for the evening. To the roof. With me. We'll speak more on the way up. That will be the...*easiest* way. Not your usual style, I know, but those who so rarely take it are often the ones most deserving of it. And the opposite, I suppose, is true, too. As well as...proper.

*PODGERS offers HIS hand and helps ARTHUR stand up. ARTHUR gives PODGERS the dropped magnifying glass.*

PODGERS (cont'd)

Ever the gentleman. Upstairs then.

*ARTHUR exits to within. PODGERS looks at the magnifying glass. Reads HIS own hand with it. Looks out the window. Nods. Acceptance. Places it next to the dagger. Exits to within.*

*A very extended beat, during which WINCKELKOPF reenters. Searching madly. Finds HIS dagger. Holds it lovingly. Turns to where HE entered from.*

*PODGERS' body quickly drops in front of the window, landing on the sidewalk.*

*And, then, HIS turban.*

*Shocked at the sight, WINCKELKOPF then looks at the dagger in HIS hand. A sudden, mad, unreasonable panic. Fearing possible accusations of complicity hides it under one of the sofa cushions, then exits to within.*

*The body does not rise.*

**END ACT TWO SCENE ONE**

ACT TWO SCENE TWO

*Daytime. Lovely, vibrant, and, above all, lively piano music. ARTHUR is playing, of course. HE is smiling broadly and wearing a tuxedo. There is a large curtain in downstage of the window.*

*SYBIL quickly enters from within dressed in a wedding gown. SHE sees ARTHUR playing and shakes HER head.*

SYBIL

*(calling)* He's in here! Again! *(to ARTHUR)* Your hands are going to fall off.

ARTHUR

These fortunate fingers? They'd be fools!

SYBIL

*Artie, we must depart immediately! We still haven't put all our wedding gifts in the carriage and the boat is off in less than thirty minutes for our Venetian voyage!*

ARTHUR

Ask Winky. Germans have the strength of ten men. They're like gorillas.

SYBIL

I don't have the heart to ask our new father-in-law to work on his wedding day.

ARTHUR

Well, thankfully, I have heart enough for both of us. *(With a flourish, stops playing. Jubilantly hops up. Sing-song)* Winky!...

*WINCKELKOPF enters, as well as LADY WINDERMERE. THEY are hand-in-hand and wearing a tuxedo and wedding gown respectfully. LADY WINDERMERE carries a small, giftwrapped package.*

WINCKELKOPF

*Mein* son-in-law? We must welcome our wagon or the train will be wheeling without the recently wed!

ARTHUR

Oh, do us one tiny favor on our mutual wedding day, you Kooky Kraut.

WINCKELKOPF

What?

ARTHUR

Grab the last of the gifts. I know Sybil won't sleep if there's the potential to unwrap something. And the newly-made Mrs. Winckelkopf would appreciate it, too, I can only, with the utmost assurance, speculate.

LADY WINDERMERE

This is the last one, Arthur. (*SHE holds up the package*) And for some, I'm almost certain conspiratorial reason, it's for Sybil.

ARTHUR

(to SYBIL) Now I see why you're so insistent, Lovely.

SYBIL

But we really must go or I predict we'll be late.

LADY WINDERMERE

*Uch*, don't even say that word. Delivers me right back weeks ago to that terrible business with Dr. Podgers. Me *and* my digestive system. And with the hillock of cake I've consumed today...

ARTHUR

We have the new curtain up, ma'am. And the sidewalk shall be cleaned again before our return.

LADY WINDERMERE

Terrible travesty. Will the Horticultural Hooligans ever be stopped? Chucking pineapples was it, Arthur, at the Doctor when he went to the roof to inspect your newly reinstalled lightning rod?

ARTHUR

Oh, yes. Such a crime.

WINCKELKOPF

We are better off. He was...wicked.

SYBIL

No more piano, Artie. I know you've been so immersed of late.

ARTHUR

I only play when emotion overwhelms me and how could it not with you? (*HE kisses HER hand*) Your hand. What a wonderful future it shall be with it in mine. Let's be off. Only where's mother?

*DUCHESS enters, nose buried in a book.  
SHE nows wears HER own turban with a feather.*

ARTHUR

Speak of the preoccupied devil. Still with that book.

DUCHESS

I can't stop. Dr. Podgers--

LADY WINDERMERE

*Boughff.*

DUCHESS

Oh, please. I've seen your stomach handle buckets worse. He recommended it for my continued Cheiromancy training.

ARTHUR

But you've been at it non-stop. You nearly missed the vows.

DUCHESS

But I enjoy it so.

ARTHUR

*(smiling, playfully imitating PODGERS' mystical hand gesture)*  
Well, if that is what fate decrees, so be it.

LADY WINDERMERE

Sordid business.

DUCHESS

You disapprove of Cheiromancy?

LADY WINDERMERE

I disapprove of its *practitioner*. He was a dreadful imposter. Of course, I didn't mind that at all, and even when he wanted to borrow money I forgave him, but I could not stand his making love to me. And that hat. He has really made me hate Cheiromancy.

*WINCKELKOPF is a bit put-off by these comments.*

SYBIL

You mustn't say anything against cheiromancy here, mother. Artie is quite serious over it.

LADY WINDERMERE

You don't mean to say that he believes in it?

ARTHUR

I am right here. And of course I do.

LADY WINDERMERE

But why?

ARTHUR

Because I owe to it all the happiness of my life.

LADY WINDERMERE

My dear Lord Arthur, what do you owe to it?

ARTHUR

Sybil.

*HE looks into SYBIL's open eyes.*

LADY WINDERMERE

What nonsense! I never heard such nonsense in all my life.

DUCHESS

You really should listen to yourself more at cocktail parties then.

WINCKELKOPF

*(to ARTHUR) Mein son-in-law, we should work with the wagoner for our wedding voyage.*

ARTHUR

*Jawvohl, Winky. You lovely ladies and my Lovely stay inside where it's warm. We'll knock when ready.*

SYBIL

All right, Artie. Lovely.

ARTHUR

Lovely. Lovely, lovely, lovely.

*Seems as if HE's going to walk past SYBIL, but, suddenly, turns, grabs HER, and dips HER for a tender, wonderful kiss.*

ARTHUR

*(smiling) Surprise...*

*THEY stand.*

*ARTHUR and WINCKELKOPF go to exit to outside. ARTHUR holds the door for WINCKELKOPF.*

WINCKELKOPF

*Danke.*

ARTHUR

*You're welcome.*

*THEY exit to outside.*

SYBIL

A honeymoon in Venice. Artie's newly adopted adventurous attitude leaves me constantly contemplating what happy happenings are to come. I haven't had a spell since!



LADY WINDERMERE

Lucky you. I nearly drooled on my veil I was so close to sleep at the ceremony.

DUCHESS

I'm sure interest is hard to keep for one who has experienced the procedure as many times as you.

LADY WINDERMERE

You're just funnier than your feather, aren't you? And twice as fluffy.

DUCHESS

It is a happy day, Gladys. Let's retract the claws a bit?

LADY WINDERMERE

*(disappointed)* Bugger. Very well.

DUCHESS

Don't frown. You'll give yourself more wrinkles. Sybil? Let me see your hand.

LADY WINDERMERE

*Oh, Lord.*

DUCHESS

Oh, it fascinated you plenty weeks ago.

LADY WINDERMERE

My interest in subjects certainly can't be expected to last that long.

DUCHESS

Or husbands, Fivey? Okay, that was the last of it. I promise.

LADY WINDERMERE

Go on and get it over and done with, I'm too tired to say no anymore. *(off-hand)* *Hmph...* seems I say that phrase on all of my wedding days...

DUCHESS

*(to SYBIL)* Now, I'm no expert but I do have the basics. Let's see.

*SHE takes SYBIL's hand. Inspects it. Then the book. Then the hand. Then the book. Then the hand. Confusion. Then SHE remembers and withdraws PODGERS' magnifying glass from HER handbag. SHE inspects SYBIL's hand thoroughly.*

DUCHESS (cont'd)

Line of beauty...extensive. Of course. Line of intellect...eh, s--solid. Wealth, oh, recently raised.

Growing girl. And let's see....line of life...line of life.  
Hmm. Turn the hand around? (*SHE does. DUCHESS inspects*)  
Peculiar. The other? (*SHE does again. DUCHESS inspects just  
as thoroughly*) Huh...odd.

SYBIL

What's that?

DUCHESS

I...can't seem to find it.

SYBIL

My line of life?

DUCHESS

I'm...sorry, love. I'll need to read more carefully. I did  
only skim that third chapter. There were muffins cooking.

LADY WINDERMERE

(*off-hand*) There's a surprise...

*DUCHESS puts away the magnifying glass.  
SYBIL rubs HER hand slightly perturbed.*

DUCHESS

Well, while my cheiromancy skills might be dull, my womanly  
instincts are razor-sharp. We'll make it all up by opening  
presents.

SYBIL

Oh, but wouldn't Artie want to be here?

LADY WINDERMERE

It'll be our small secret. No good marriage should be without  
one. Or thirty. Open it or I will and I'll keep it. And if  
it's ill-fitting clothing I will burn it.

*SYBIL unwraps the gift. It's a small,  
elegant, silver case. What kind  
exactly?*

SYBIL

Ooo, a *bonbonniere*! I've been wanting one.

DUCHESS

You see? Fate works in your favor.

LADY WINDERMERE

See who it's from. That way we know who to secretly spite if  
it's imitation silver.

*SYBIL inspects the card inside it.*

SYBIL

It's from Artie's uncle. Oh, Lady Clementia's brother. It's from Lady Clem's estate. The only item they were able to recover from her handbag following the accident.

LADY WINDERMERE

A bit unsettling.

SYBIL

Perhaps. Ooo, but look. They included a Turkish Delight with it! How considerate. I'm sure the family is still reeling with grief.

LADY WINDERMERE

If they gave you that I'm sure their wealth of misery is nothing compared to their deficit of taste.

*SYBIL takes out the Turkish Delight. It seems as if something has been shoved in the middle of it?*

SYBIL

A bit oddly shaped. Homemade, perhaps? No matter, it'll make for a fitting train ride snack. I'm sure it will be to die for. A sweet secret for Artie.

*SHE puts the Turkish Delight back in the case. A knock at the window.*

SYBIL (cont'd)

Suppose it's time.

DUCHESS

*(holding HER book up)* With fate it always is. Or something. That's what the doctor always says. *Said*, I suppose...

LADY WINDERMERE

Shame about the gift. Disappointing if you ask me and you should. Hopefully the honeymoon will be more in your favor. And mine.

*ARTHUR enters.*

ARTHUR

*Italia awaits!*

DUCHESS

We're just now leaving. Come along, Gladys.

LADY WINDERMERE

Oh, but we weren't even allowed a moment of snark together. And unlike women, men are too lunk-headed to appreciate the finer points of true insult. It's like wine.

DUCHESS

And if it gets better with age, you are unparalleled in skill.

*Smiling at each other, LADY WINDERMERE and DUCHESS exit to outside. NEITHER try to hold the door for the OTHER. ARTHUR points at the bonbonniere.*

ARTHUR

What's that?

SYBIL

*(smiling sneakily, hiding it)* Nothing. A quick question: are you hungry?

ARTHUR

An even quicker answer: yes.

SYBIL

Then do I have a treat for us both.

ARTHUR

A surprise then?

SYBIL

You're not the only one, you know.

ARTHUR

You are all the treat I need now, Sybil.

SYBIL

Well, who knows what the future holds?

ARTHUR

Most thankfully, not I.

*Smiling, lovingly, arm-in-arm, love-with-love, THEY exit to outside.*

**END ACT TWO SCENE TWO**

**END ACT TWO**

**END**

## APPENDIX D.

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## Lord Arthur Savile's Crime

### A Study of Duty

By  
Oscar Wilde

#### I

It was Lady Windermere's last reception before Easter, and Bentinck House was even more crowded than usual. Six Cabinet Ministers had come on from the Speaker's Levée in their stars and ribands, all the pretty women wore their smartest dresses, and at the end of the picture-gallery stood the Princess Sophia of Carlsruhe, a heavy Tartar-looking lady, with tiny black eyes and wonderful emeralds, talking bad French at the top of her voice, and laughing immoderately at everything that was said to her. It was certainly a wonderful medley of people. Gorgeous peeresses chatted affably to violent Radicals, popular preachers brushed coat-tails with eminent sceptics, a perfect bevy of bishops kept following a stout prima-donna from room to room, on the staircase stood several Royal Academicians, disguised as artists, and it was said that at one time the supper-room was absolutely crammed with geniuses. In fact, it was one of Lady Windermere's best nights, and the Princess stayed till nearly half-past eleven.

As soon as she had gone, Lady Windermere returned to the picture-gallery, where a celebrated political economist was solemnly explaining the scientific theory of music to an indignant virtuoso from Hungary, and began to talk to the Duchess of Paisley. She looked wonderfully beautiful with her grand ivory throat, her large blue forget-me-not eyes, and her heavy coils of golden hair. *Or pur* they were – not that pale straw colour that nowadays usurps the gracious name of gold, but such gold as is woven into sunbeams or hidden in strange amber; and gave to her face something of the frame of a saint, with not a little of the fascination of a sinner. She was a curious psychological study. Early in life she had discovered the important truth that nothing looks so like innocence as an indiscretion; and by a series of reckless escapades, half of them quite harmless, she had acquired all the privileges of a personality. She had more than once changed her husband; indeed, Debrett credits her with three marriages; but as she had never changed her lover, the world had long ago ceased to talk scandal about her. She was now forty years of age, childless, and with that inordinate passion for pleasure which is the secret of remaining young.

Suddenly she looked eagerly round the room, and said, in her clear contralto voice, “Where is my cheiromantist?”

“Your what, Gladys?” exclaimed the Duchess, giving an involuntary start.

“My cheiromantist, Duchess; I can't live without him at present.

“Dear Gladys! you are always so original,” murmured the Duchess, trying to remember what a cheiromantist really was, and hoping it was not the same as a cheiropodist.

“He comes to see my hand twice a week regularly,” continued Lady Windermere, “and is most interesting about it.”

“Good heavens!” said the Duchess to herself “he is a sort of cheiropodist after all. How very dreadful. I hope he is a foreigner at any rate. It wouldn't be quite so bad then.”

“I must certainly introduce him to you.”

“Introduce him!” cried the Duchess; “you don't mean to say he is here?” and she began looking about for a small tortoise-shell fan and a very tattered lace shawl, so as to be ready to go at a moment's notice.

“Of course he is here, I would not dream of giving a party without him. He tells me I have a pure psychic hand, and that if my thumb had been the least little bit shorter, I should have been a confirmed pessimist, and gone into a convent.”

“Oh, I see! said the Duchess, feeling very much relieved; “he tells fortunes, I suppose?”

“And misfortunes, too,” answered Lady Windermere, “any amount of them. Next year, for instance, I am in great danger, both by land and sea, so I am going to live in a balloon, and draw up my dinner in a basket every evening. It is all written down on my little finger, or on the palm of my hand, I forget which.”

“But surely that is tempting Providence, Gladys.”

“My dear Duchess, surely Providence can resist temptation by this time. I think every one should have their hands told once a month, so as to know what not to do. Of course, one does it all the same, but it is so pleasant to be warned. Now, if some one doesn't go and fetch Mr Podgers at once, I shall have to go myself.”

“Let me go, Lady Windermere,” said a tall handsome young man, who was standing by, listening to the conversation with an amused smile.

“Thanks so much, Lord Arthur; but I am afraid you wouldn't recognise him.”

“If he is as wonderful as you say, Lady Windermere, I couldn't well miss him. Tell me what he is like, and I'll bring him to you at once.”

“Well, he is not a bit like a cheiromantist. I mean he is not mysterious, or esoteric, or romantic-looking. He is a little, stout man, with a funny, bald head, and great gold-rimmed spectacles; something between a family doctor and a country attorney. I'm really very sorry, but it is not my fault. People are so annoying. All my pianists look exactly like poets, and all my poets look exactly like pianists; and I remember last season asking a most dreadful conspirator to dinner, a

man who had blown up ever so many people, and always wore a coat of mail, and carried a dagger up his shirt-sleeve; and do you know that when he came he looked just like a nice old clergyman, and cracked jokes all the evening? Of course, he was very amusing, and all that, but I was awfully disappointed; and when I asked him about the coat of mail, he only laughed, and said it was far too cold to wear in England. Ah, here is Mr Podgers! Now, Mr Podgers, I want you to tell the Duchess of Paisley's hand. Duchess, you must take your glove off. No, not the left hand, the other."

"Dear Gladys, I really don't think it is quite right," said the Duchess, feebly unbuttoning a rather soiled kid glove.

"Nothing interesting ever is," said Lady Windermere: "*on a fait le monde ainsi*. But I must introduce you. Duchess, this is Mr Podgers, my pet cheiromantist. Mr Podgers, this is the Duchess of Paisley, and if you say that she has a larger mountain of the moon than I have, I will never believe in you again."

"I am sure, Gladys, there is nothing of the kind in my hand," said the Duchess gravely.

"Your Grace is quite right," said Mr Podgers, glancing at the little fat hand with its short square fingers, "the mountain of the moon is not developed. The line of life, however, is excellent. Kindly bend the wrist. Thank you. Three distinct lines on the *rascette*! You will live to a great age, Duchess, and be extremely happy. Ambition - very moderate, line of intellect not exaggerated, line of heart —"

"Now, do be indiscreet, Mr Podgers," cried Lady Windermere.

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure," said Mr Podgers, bowing, "if the Duchess ever had been, but I am sorry to say that I see great permanence of affection, combined with a strong sense of duty."

"Pray go on, Mr Podgers," said the Duchess, looking quite pleased.

"Economy is not the least of your Grace's virtues," continued Mr Podgers, and Lady Windermere went off into fits of laughter.

"Economy is a very good thing," remarked the Duchess complacently; "when I married Paisley he had eleven castles, and not a single house fit to live in."

"And now he has twelve houses, and not a single castle," cried Lady Windermere.

"Well, my dear," said the Duchess, "I like —"

"Comfort," said Mr Podgers, "and modern improvements, and hot water laid on in every bedroom. Your Grace is quite right. Comfort is the only thing our civilisation can give us."



“You have told the Duchess's character admirably, Mr Podgers, and now you must tell Lady Flora's;” and in answer to a nod from the smiling hostess, a tall girl, with sandy Scotch hair, and high shoulder-blades, stepped awkwardly from behind the sofa, and held out a long, bony hand with spatulate fingers.

“Ah, a pianist! I see,” said Mr Podgers, “an excellent pianist, but perhaps hardly a musician. Very reserved, very honest, and with a great love of animals.”

“Quite true!” exclaimed the Duchess, turning to Lady Windermere, “absolutely true! Flora keeps two dozen collie dogs at Macloskie, and would turn our town house into a menagerie if her father would let her.”

“Well, that is just what I do with my house every Thursday evening,” cried Lady Windermere, laughing, “only I like lions better than collie dogs.”

“Your one mistake, Lady Windermere,” said Mr Podgers, with a pompous bow.

“If a woman can't make her mistakes charming, she is only a female,” was the answer. “But you must read some more hands for us. Come, Sir Thomas, show Mr Podgers yours;” and a genial-looking old gentleman, in a white waistcoat, came forward, and held out a thick rugged hand, with a very long third finger.

“An adventurous nature; four long voyages in the past, and one to come. Been shipwrecked three times. No, only twice, but in danger of a shipwreck your next journey. A strong Conservative, very punctual, and with a passion for collecting curiosities. Had a severe illness between the ages of sixteen and eighteen. Was left a fortune when about thirty. Great aversion to cats and Radicals.”

“Extraordinary!” exclaimed Sir Thomas; “you must really tell my wife's hand, too.”

“Your second wife's,” said Mr Podgers quietly, still keeping Sir Thomas's hand in his. “Your second wife's. I shall be charmed;” but Lady Marvel, a melancholy-looking woman, with brown hair and sentimental eyelashes, entirely declined to have her past or her future exposed; and nothing that Lady Windermere could do would induce Monsieur de Koloff the Russian Ambassador, even to take his gloves off. In fact, many people seemed afraid to face the odd little man with his stereotyped smile, his gold spectacles, and his bright, beady eyes; and when he told poor Lady Fermor, right out before every one, that she did not care a bit for music, but was extremely fond of musicians, it was generally felt that cheiromancy was a most dangerous science, and one that ought not to be encouraged, except in a *tête-a-tête*.

Lord Arthur Savile, however, who did not know anything about Lady Fermor's unfortunate story, and who had been watching Mr Podgers with a great deal of interest, was filled with an immense curiosity to have his own hand read, and feeling somewhat shy about putting himself forward, crossed over the room to where Lady Windermere was sitting, and, with a charming blush, asked her if she thought Mr Podgers would mind.

“Of course, he won't mind,” said Lady Windermere “that is what he is here for. All my lions, Lord Arthur, are performing lions, and jump through hoops whenever I ask them. But I must warn you beforehand that I shall tell Sybil everything. She is coming to lunch with me tomorrow, to talk about bonnets, and if Mr Podgers finds out that you have a bad temper, or a tendency to gout, or a wife living in Bayswater, I shall certainly let her know all about it.”

Lord Arthur smiled, and shook his head. “I am not afraid,” he answered. “Sybil knows me as well as I know her.”

“Ah! I am a little sorry to hear you say that. The proper basis for marriage is a mutual misunderstanding. No, I am not at all cynical, I have merely got experience, which, however, is very much the same thing. Mr Podgers, Lord Arthur Savile is dying to have his hand read. Don't tell him that he is engaged to one of the most beautiful girls in London, because that appeared in the *Morning Post* a month ago.”

“Dear Lady Windermere,” cried the Marchioness of Jedburgh, “do let Mr Podgers stay here a little longer. He has just told me I should go on the stage, and I am so interested.”

“If he has told you that, Lady Jedburgh, I shall certainly take him away. Come over at once, Mr Podgers, and read Lord Arthur's hand.”

“Well,” said Lady Jedburgh, making a little *moue* as she rose from the sofa, “if I am not to be allowed to go on the stage, I must be allowed to be part of the audience at any rate.”

“Of course; we are all going to be part of the audience,” said Lady Windermere; “and now, Mr Podgers, be sure and tell us something nice. Lord Arthur is one of my special favourites.”

But when Mr Podgers saw Lord Arthur's hand he grew curiously pale, and said nothing. A shudder seemed to pass through him, and his great bushy eyebrows twitched convulsively, in an odd, irritating way they had when he was puzzled. Then some huge beads of perspiration broke out on his yellow forehead, like a poisonous dew, and his fat fingers grew cold and clammy.

Lord Arthur did not fail to notice these strange signs of agitation, and, for the first time in his life, he himself felt fear. His impulse was to rush from the room, but he restrained himself. It was better to know the worst, whatever it was, than to be left in this hideous uncertainty.

“I am waiting, Mr Podgers,” he said.

“We are all waiting,” cried Lady Windermere, in her quick, impatient manner, but the cheiromantist made no reply.

“I believe Arthur is going on the stage,” said Lady Jedburgh, “and that, after your scolding, Mr Podgers is afraid to tell him so.”

Suddenly Mr Podgers dropped Lord Arthur's right hand, and seized hold of his left, bending down so low to examine it that the gold rims of his spectacles seemed almost to touch the

palm. For a moment his face became a white mask of horror, but he soon recovered his *sang-froid*, and looking up at Lady Windermere, said with a forced smile, "It is the hand of a charming young man."

"Of course it is!" answered Lady Windermere, "but will he be a charming husband? That is what I want to know."

"All charming young men are," said Mr Podgers.

"I don't think a husband should be too fascinating, murmured Lady Jedburgh pensively, "it is so dangerous."

"My dear child, they never are too fascinating," cried Lady Windermere. "But what I want are details. Details are the only things that interest. What is going to happen to Lord Arthur?"

"Well, within the next few months Lord Arthur will go a voyage —"

"Oh yes, his honeymoon, of course!"

"And lose a relative."

"Not his sister, I hope?" said Lady Jedburgh, in a piteous tone of voice.

"Certainly not his sister," answered Mr Podgers, with a deprecating wave of the hand, "a distant relative merely."

"Well, I am dreadfully disappointed," said Lady Windermere. "I have absolutely nothing to tell Sybil to-morrow. No one cares about distant relatives nowadays. They went out of fashion years ago. However, I suppose she had better have a black silk by her; it always does for church, you know. And now let us go to supper. They are sure to have eaten everything up, but we may find some hot soup. Francois used to make excellent soup once, but he is so agitated about politics at present, that I never feel quite certain about him. I do wish General Boulanger would keep quiet. Duchess, I am sure you are tired?"

"Not at all, dear Gladys," answered the Duchess, waddling towards the door. "I have enjoyed myself immensely, and the cheiropodist, I mean the cheiromantist, is most interesting. Flora, where can my tortoise-shell fan be? Oh, thank you, Sir Thomas, so much. And my lace shawl, Flora? Oh, thank you, Sir Thomas, very kind, I'm sure;" and the worthy creature finally managed to get downstairs without dropping her scent-bottle more than twice.

All this time Lord Arthur Savile had remained standing by the fireplace, with the same feeling of dread over him, the same sickening sense of coming evil. He smiled sadly at his sister, as she swept past him on Lord Plymdale's arm, looking lovely in her pink brocade and pearls, and he hardly heard Lady Windermere when she called to him to follow her. He thought of Sybil Merton, and the idea that anything could come between them made his eyes dim with tears.

Looking at him, one would have said that Nemesis had stolen the shield of Pallas, and shown him the Gorgon's head. He seemed turned to stone, and his face was like marble in its melancholy. He had lived the delicate and luxurious life of a young man of birth and fortune, a life exquisite in its freedom from sordid care, its beautiful boyish insouciance; and now for the first time he became conscious of the terrible mystery of Destiny, of the awful meaning of Doom.

How mad and monstrous it all seemed! Could it be that written on his hand, in characters that he could not read himself, but that another could decipher, was some fearful secret of sin, some blood-red sign of crime? Was there no escape possible? Were we no better than chessmen, moved by an unseen power, vessels the potter fashions at his fancy, for honour or for shame? His reason revolted against it, and yet he felt that some tragedy was hanging over him, and that he had been suddenly called upon to bear an intolerable burden. Actors are so fortunate. They can choose whether they will appear in tragedy or in comedy, whether they will suffer or make merry, laugh or shed tears. But in real life it is different. Most men and women are forced to perform parts for which they have no qualifications. Our Guildensterns play Hamlet for us, and our Hamlets have to jest like Prince Hal. The world is a stage, but the play is badly cast.

Suddenly Mr Podgers entered the room. When he saw Lord Arthur he started, and his coarse, fat face became a sort of greenish-yellow colour. The two men's eyes met, and for a moment there was silence.

“The Duchess has left one of her gloves here, Lord Arthur, and has asked me to bring it to her,” said Mr Podgers finally. “Ah, I see it on the sofa! Good evening.”

“Mr Podgers, I must insist on your giving me a straightforward answer to a question I am going to put to you.”

“Another time, Lord Arthur, but the Duchess is anxious. I am afraid I must go.”

“You shall not go. The Duchess is in no hurry.”

“Ladies should not be kept waiting, Lord Arthur,” said Mr Podgers, with his sickly smile. “The fair sex is apt to be impatient.”

Lord Arthur's finely-chiselled lips curled in petulant disdain. The poor Duchess seemed to him of very little importance at that moment. He walked across the room to where Mr Podgers was standing, and held his hand out.

“Tell me what you saw there,” he said. “Tell me the truth. I must know it. I am not a child.”

Mr Podgers's eyes blinked behind his gold-rimmed spectacles, and he moved uneasily from one foot to the other, while his fingers played nervously with a flash watch-chain.

“What makes you think that I saw anything in your hand, Lord Arthur, more than I told you?”

“I know you did, and I insist on your telling me what it was. I will pay you. I will give you a cheque for a hundred pounds.”

The green eyes flashed for a moment, and then became dull again.

“Guineas?” said Mr Podgers at last, in a low voice.

“Certainly. I will send you a cheque to-morrow. What is your club?”

“I have no club. That is to say, not just at present. My address is — but allow me to give you my card;” and producing a bit of gilt-edged pasteboard from his waistcoat pocket, Mr Podgers handed it, with a low bow, to Lord Arthur, who read on it,

MR. SEPTIMUS R. PODGERS Professional Cheiromantist 103a West Moon Street
--

“My hours are from ten to four,” murmured Mr Podgers mechanically, “and I make a reduction for families.”

“Be quick,” cried Lord Arthur, looking very pale, and holding his hand out.

Mr Podgers glanced nervously round, and drew the heavy *portière* across the door.

“It will take a little time, Lord Arthur, you had better sit down.”

“Be quick, sir,” cried Lord Arthur again, stamping his foot angrily on the polished floor.

Mr Podgers smiled, drew from his breast-pocket a small magnifying ‘glass, and wiped it carefully with his handkerchief.

“I am quite ready,” he said.

## II

Ten minutes later, with face blanched by terror, and eyes wild with grief Lord Arthur Savile rushed from Bentinck House, crushing his way through the crowd of fur-coated footmen that stood round the large striped awning, and seeming not to see or hear anything. The night was bitter cold, and the gas-lamps round the square flared and flickered in the keen wind; but his hands were hot with fever, and his forehead burned like lire. On and on he went, almost with the gait of a drunken man. A policeman looked curiously at him as he passed, and a beggar, who

slouched from an archway to ask for alms, grew frightened, seeing misery greater than his own. Once he stopped under a lamp, and looked at his hands. He thought he could detect the stain of blood already upon them, and a faint cry broke from his trembling lips.

Murder! that is what the cheiromantist had seen there. Murder! The very night seemed to know it, and the desolate wind to howl it in his ear. The dark corners of the streets were full of it. It grinned at him from the roofs of the houses.

First he came to the Park, whose sombre woodland seemed to fascinate him. He leaned wearily up against the railings, cooling his brow against the wet metal, and listening to the tremulous silence of the trees. "Murder! murder!" he kept repeating, as though iteration could dim the horror of the word. The sound of his own voice made him shudder, yet he almost hoped that Echo might hear him, and wake the slumbering city from its dreams. He felt a mad desire to stop the casual passer-by, and tell him everything.

Then he wandered across Oxford Street into narrow, shameful alleys. Two women with painted faces mocked at him as he went by. From a dark courtyard came a sound of oaths and blows, followed by shrill screams, and, huddled upon a damp doorstep, he saw the crook-backed forms of poverty and eld. A strange pity came over him. Were these children of sin and misery predestined to their end, as he to his? Were they, like him, merely the puppets of a monstrous show?

And yet it was not the mystery, but the comedy of suffering that struck him; its absolute uselessness, its grotesque want of meaning. How incoherent everything seemed! How lacking in all harmony! He was amazed at the discord between the shallow optimism of the day, and the real facts of existence. He was still very young.

After a time he found himself in front of Marylebone Church. The silent roadway looked like a long riband of polished silver, flecked here and there by the dark arabesques of waving shadows. Far into the distance curved the line of flickering gas-lamps, and outside a little walled-in house stood a solitary hansom, the driver asleep inside. He walked hastily in the direction of Portland Place, now and then looking round, as though he feared that he was being followed. At the corner of Rich Street stood two men, reading a small bill upon a hoarding. An odd feeling of curiosity stirred him, and he crossed over. As he came near, the word 'Murder', printed in black letters, met his eye. He started, and a deep flush came into his cheek. It was an advertisement offering a reward for any information leading to the arrest of a man of medium height, between thirty and forty years of age, wearing a billy-cock hat, a black coat, and check trousers, and with a scar upon his right cheek. He read it over and over again, and wondered if the wretched man would be caught, and how he had been scarred. Perhaps, some day, his own name might be placarded on the walls of London. Some day, perhaps, a price would be set on his head also.

The thought made him sick with horror. He turned on his heel, and hurried on into the night.

Where he went he hardly knew. He had a dim memory of wandering through a labyrinth of sordid houses, of being lost in a giant web of sombre streets, and it was bright dawn when he

found himself at last in Piccadilly Circus. As he strolled home towards Belgrave Square, he met the great waggons on their way to Covent Garden. The white-smocked carters, with their pleasant sunburnt faces and coarse curly hair, strode sturdily on, cracking their whips, and calling out now and then to each other; on the back of a huge grey horse, the leader of a jangling team, sat a chubby boy, with a bunch of primroses in his battered hat, keeping tight hold of the mane with his little hands, and laughing; and the great piles of vegetables looked like masses of jade against the morning sky, like masses of green jade against the pink petals of some marvellous rose. Lord Arthur felt curiously affected, he could not tell why. There was something in the dawn's delicate loveliness that seemed to him inexpressibly pathetic, and he thought of all the days that break in beauty, and that set in storm. These rustics, too, with their rough, good-humoured voices, and their nonchalant ways, what a strange London they saw! A London free from the sin of night and the smoke of day, a pallid, ghost-like city, a desolate town of tombs! He wondered what they thought of it, and whether they knew anything of its splendour and its shame, of its fierce, fiery-coloured joys, and its horrible hunger, of all it makes and mars from morn to eve. Probably it was to them merely a mart where they brought their fruits to sell, and where they tarried for a few hours at most, leaving the streets still silent, the houses still asleep. It gave him pleasure to watch them as they went by. Rude as they were, with their heavy, hobnailed shoes, and their awkward gait, they brought a little of Arcady with them. He felt that they had lived with Nature, and that she had taught them peace. He envied them all that they did not know.

By the time he had reached Belgrave Square the sky was a faint blue, and the birds were beginning to twitter in the gardens.

### III

When Lord Arthur woke it was twelve o'clock, and the mid-day sun was streaming through the ivory-silk curtains of his room. He got up and looked out of the window. A dim haze of heat was hanging over the great city, and the roofs of the houses were like dull silver. In the flickering green of the square below some children were flitting about like white butterflies, and the pavement was crowded with people on their way to the Park. Never had life seemed lovelier to him, never had the things of evil seemed more remote.

Then his valet brought him a cup of chocolate on a tray. After he had drunk it, he drew aside a heavy *portière* of peach coloured plush, and passed into the bathroom. The light stole softly from above, through thin slabs of transparent onyx, and the water in the marble tank glimmered like a moonstone. He plunged hastily in, till the cool ripples touched throat and hair, and then dipped his head right under, as though he would have wiped away the stain of some shameful memory. When he stepped out he felt almost at peace. The exquisite physical conditions of the moment had dominated him, as indeed often happens in the case of very finely-wrought natures, for the senses, like lire, can purify as well as destroy.

After breakfast, he flung himself down on a divan, and lit a cigarette. On the mantel-shelf, framed in dainty old brocade, stood a large photograph of Sybil Merton, as he had seen her first at Lady Noel's ball. The small, exquisitely-shaped head drooped slightly to one side, as though the thin, reed-like throat could hardly bear the burden of so much beauty; the lips were slightly parted, and seemed made for sweet music; and all the tender purity of girlhood looked out in wonder from the dreaming eyes. With her soft, clinging dress of *crêpe-de-chine*, and her large leaf-shaped fan, she looked like one of those delicate little figures men find in the olive-woods near Tanagra; and there was a touch of Greek grace in her pose and attitude. Yet she was not *petite*. She was simply perfectly proportioned – a rare thing in an age when so many women are either over life-size or insignificant.

Now as Lord Arthur looked at her, he was filled with the terrible pity that is born of love. He felt that to marry her, with the doom of murder hanging over his head, would be a betrayal like that of Judas, a sin worse than any the Borgia had ever dreamed of. What happiness could there be for them, when at any moment he might be called upon to carry out the awful prophecy written in his hand? What manner of life would be theirs while Fate still held this fearful fortune in the scales? The marriage must be postponed, at all costs. Of this he was quite resolved. Ardently though he loved the girl, and the mere touch of her fingers, when they sat together, made each nerve of his body thrill with exquisite joy, he recognised none the less clearly where his duty lay, and was fully conscious of the fact that he had no right to marry until he had committed the murder. This done, he could stand before the altar with Sybil Merton, and give his life into her hands without terror of wrongdoing. This done, he could take her to his arms, knowing that she would never have to blush for him, never have to hang her head in shame. But done it must be first; and the sooner the better for both.

Many men in his position would have preferred the primrose path of dalliance to the steep heights of duty; but Lord Arthur was too conscientious to set pleasure above principle. There was more than mere passion in his love; and Sybil was to him a symbol of all that is good and noble. For a moment he had a natural repugnance against what he was asked to do, but it soon passed away. His heart told him that it was not a sin, but a sacrifice; his reason reminded him that there was no other course open. He had to choose between living for himself and living for others, and terrible though the task laid upon him undoubtedly was, yet he knew that he must not suffer selfishness to triumph over love. Sooner or later we are all called upon to decide on the same issue – of us all, the same question is asked. To Lord Arthur it came early in life – before his nature had been spoiled by the calculating cynicism of middle-age, or his heart corroded by the shallow, fashionable egotism of our day, and he felt no hesitation about doing his duty. Fortunately also, for him, he was no mere dreamer, or idle dilettante. Had he been so, he would have hesitated, like Hamlet, and let irresolution mar his purpose. But he was essentially practical. Life to him meant action, rather than thought. He had that rarest of all things, common sense.

The wild, turbid feelings of the previous night had by this time completely passed away, and it was almost with a sense of shame that he looked back upon his mad wanderings from street to street, his fierce emotional agony. The very sincerity of his sufferings made them seem unreal to him now. He wondered how he could have been so foolish as to rant and rave about the inevitable. The only question that seemed to trouble him was, whom to make away with; for he



was not blind to the fact that murder, like the religions of the Pagan world, requires a victim as well as a priest. Not being a genius, he had no enemies, and indeed he felt that this was not the time for the gratification of any personal pique or dislike, the mission in which he was engaged being one of great and grave solemnity. He accordingly made out a list of his friends and relatives on a sheet of notepaper, and after careful consideration, decided in favour of Lady Clementina Beauchamp, a dear old lady who lived in Curzon Street, and was his own second cousin by his mother's side. He had always been very fond of Lady Clem, as every one called her, and as he was very wealthy himself, having come into all Lord Rugby's property when he came of age, there was no possibility of his deriving any vulgar monetary advantage by her death. In fact, the more he thought over the matter, the more she seemed to him to be just the right person, and, feeling that any delay would be unfair to Sybil, he determined to make his arrangements at once.

The first thing to be done was, of course, to settle with the cheiromantist; so he sat down at a small Sheraton writing-table that stood near the window, drew a cheque for £105, payable to the order of Mr Septimus Podgers, and, enclosing it in an envelope, told his valet to take it to West Moon Street. He then telephoned to the stables for his hansom, and dressed to go out. As he was leaving the room, he looked back at Sybil Merton's photograph, and swore that, come what may, he would never let her know what he was doing for her sake, but would keep the secret of his self-sacrifice hidden always in his heart.

On his way to the Buckingham, he stopped at a florist's, and sent Sybil a beautiful basket of narcissi, with lovely white petals and staring pheasants' eyes, and on arriving at the club, went straight to the library, rang the bell, and ordered the waiter to bring him a lemon-and-soda, and a book on Toxicology. He had fully decided that poison was the best means to adopt in this troublesome business. Anything like personal violence was extremely distasteful to him, and besides, he was very anxious not to murder Lady Clementina in any way that might attract public attention, as he hated the idea of being lionised at Lady Windermere's, or seeing his name figuring in the paragraphs of vulgar society-newspapers. He had also to think of Sybil's father and mother, who were rather old-fashioned people, and might possibly object to the marriage if there was anything like a scandal, though he felt certain that if he told them the whole facts of the case they would be the very first to appreciate the motives that had actuated him. He had every reason, then, to decide in favour of poison. It was safe, sure, and quiet, and did away with any necessity for painful scenes, to which, like most Englishmen, he had a rooted objection.

Of the science of poisons, however, he knew absolutely nothing, and as the waiter seemed quite unable to find anything in the library but Ruff's *Guide* and Bailey's *Magazine*, he examined the bookshelves himself, and finally came across a handsomely-bound edition of the *Pharmacopeia*, and a copy of Erskine's *Toxicology*, edited by Sir Mathew Reid, the President of the Royal College of Physicians, and one of the oldest members of the Buckingham, having been elected in mistake for somebody else; a *contretemps* that so enraged the Committee, that when the real man came up they black-balled him unanimously. Lord Arthur was a good deal puzzled at the technical terms used in both books, and had begun to regret that he had not paid more attention to his classics at Oxford, when in the second volume of Erskine, he found a very complete account of the properties of aconitine, written in fairly clear English. It seemed to him to be exactly the poison he wanted. It was swift – indeed, almost immediate, in its effect – perfectly

painless, and when taken in the form of a gelatine capsule, the mode recommended by Sir Mathew, not by any means unpalatable. He accordingly made a note, upon his shirt-cuff of the amount necessary for a fatal dose, put the books back in their places, and strolled up St James's Street, to Pestle and Humbey's, the great chemists. Mr Pestle, who always attended personally on the aristocracy, was a good deal surprised at the order, and in a very deferential manner murmured something about a medical certificate being necessary. However, as soon as Lord Arthur explained to him that it was for a large Norwegian mastiff that he was obliged to get rid of, as it showed signs of incipient rabies, and had already bitten the coachman twice in the calf of the leg, he expressed himself as being perfectly satisfied, complimented Lord Arthur on his wonderful knowledge of Toxicology, and had the prescription made up immediately.

Lord Arthur put the capsule into a pretty little silver *bonbonnière* that he saw in a shop-window in Bond Street, threw away Pestle and Humbey's ugly pill-box, and drove off at once to Lady Clementina's.

“Well, *monsieur le mauvais sujet*,” cried the old lady, as he entered the room, “why haven't you been to see me all this time?”

“My dear Lady Clem, I never have a moment to myself,” said Lord Arthur, smiling.

“I suppose you mean that you go about all day long with Miss Sybil Merton, buying *chiffons* and talking nonsense? I cannot understand why people make such a fuss about being married. In my day we never dreamed of billing and cooing in public, or in private for that matter.

“I assure you I have not seen Sybil for twenty-four hours, Lady Clem. As far as I can make out, she belongs entirely to her milliners.”

“Of course; that is the only reason you come to see an ugly old woman like myself. I wonder you men don't take warning. *On a fait des folies pour moi*, and here I am, a poor, rheumatic creature, with a false front and a bad temper. Why, if it were not for dear Lady Jansen, who sends me all the worst French novels she can find, I don't think I could get through the day. Doctors are no use at all, except to get fees out of one. They can't even cure my heartburn.”

“I have brought you a cure for that, Lady Clem,” said Lord Arthur gravely. “It is a wonderful thing, invented by an American.”

“I don't think I like American inventions, Arthur. I am quite sure I don't. I read some American novels lately, and they were quite nonsensical.”

“Oh, but there is no nonsense at all about this, Lady Clem! I assure you it is a perfect cure. You must promise to try it;” and Lord Arthur brought the little box out of his pocket, and handed it to her.

“Well, the box is charming, Arthur. Is it really a present? That is very sweet of you. And is this the wonderful medicine? It looks like a *bonbon*. I'll take it at once.”

“Good heavens! Lady Clem,” cried Lord Arthur, catching hold of her hand, “you mustn't do anything of the kind. It is a homœopathic medicine, and if you take it without having heartburn, it might do you no end of harm. Wait till you have an attack, and take it then. You will be astonished at the result.”

“I should like to take it now,” said Lady Clementina, holding up to the light the little transparent capsule, with its floating bubble of liquid aconitine. “I am sure it is delicious. The fact is that, though I hate doctors, I love medicines. However, I'll keep it till my next attack.”

“And when will that be?” asked Lord Arthur eagerly. “Will it be soon?”

“I hope not for a week. I had a very bad time yesterday morning with it. But one never knows.”

“You are sure to have one before the end of the month then, Lady Clem?”

“I am afraid so. But how sympathetic you are to-day, Arthur! Really, Sybil has done you a great deal of good. And now you must run away, for I am dining with some very dull people, who won't talk scandal, and I know that if I don't get my sleep now I shall never be able to keep awake during dinner. Good-bye, Arthur, give my love to Sybil, and thank you so much for the American medicine.”

“You won't forget to take it, Lady Clem, will you?” said Lord Arthur, rising from his seat.

“Of course I won't, you silly boy. I think it is most kind of you to think of me, and I shall write and tell you if I want any more.”

Lord Arthur left the house in high spirits, and with a feeling of immense relief.

That night he had an interview with Sybil Merton. He told her how he had been suddenly placed in a position of terrible difficulty, from which neither honour nor duty would allow him to recede. He told her that the marriage must be put off for the present, as until he had got rid of his fearful entanglements, he was not a free man. He implored her to trust him, and not to have any doubts about the future. Everything would come right, but patience was necessary.

The scene took place in the conservatory of Mr Merton's house, in Park Lane, where Lord Arthur had dined as usual. Sybil had never seemed more happy, and for a moment Lord Arthur had been tempted to play the coward's part, to write to Lady Clementina for the pill, and to let the marriage go on as if there was no such person as Mr Podgers in the world. His better nature, however, soon asserted itself, and even when Sybil flung herself weeping into his arms, he did not falter. The beauty that stirred his senses had touched his conscience also. He felt that to wreck so fair a life for the sake of a few months' pleasure would be a wrong thing to do.

He stayed with Sybil till nearly midnight, comforting her and being comforted in turn, and early the next morning he left for Venice, after writing a manly, firm letter to Mr Merton about the necessary postponement of the marriage.

#### IV

In Venice he met his brother, Lord Surbiton, who happened to have come over from Corfu in his yacht. The two young men spent a delightful fortnight together. In the morning they rode on the Lido, or glided up and down the green canals in their long black gondola; in the afternoon they usually entertained visitors on the yacht; and in the evening they dined at Florian's, and smoked innumerable cigarettes on the Piazza. Yet somehow Lord Arthur was not happy. Every day he studied the obituary column in the *Times*, expecting to see a notice of Lady Clementina's death, but every day he was disappointed. He began to be afraid that some accident had happened to her, and often regretted that he had prevented her taking the aconitine when she had been so anxious to try its effect. Sybil's letters, too, though full of love, and trust, and tenderness, were often very sad in their tone, and sometimes he used to think that he was parted from her for ever.

After a fortnight Lord Surbiton got bored with Venice, and determined to run down the coast to Ravenna, as he heard that there was some capital cock-shooting in the Pinetum. Lord Arthur, at first, refused absolutely to come, but Surbiton, of whom he was extremely fond, finally persuaded him that if he stayed at Danielli's by himself he would be moped to death, and on the morning of the 15th they started, with a strong nor'-east wind blowing, and a rather sloppy sea. The sport was excellent, and the free, open-air life brought the colour back to Lord Arthur's cheeks, but about the 22nd he became anxious about Lady Clementina, and, in spite of Surbiton's remonstrances, came back to Venice by train.

As he stepped out of his gondola on to the hotel steps, the proprietor came forward to meet him with a sheaf of telegrams. Lord Arthur snatched them out of his hand, and tore them open. Everything had been successful. Lady Clementina had died quite suddenly on the night of the 17th!

His first thought was for Sybil, and he sent her off a telegram announcing his immediate return to London. He then ordered his valet to pack his things for the night mail, sent his gondoliers about five times their proper fare, and ran up to his sitting-room with a light step and a buoyant heart. There he found three letters waiting for him. One was from Sybil herself, full of sympathy and condolence. The others were from his mother, and from Lady Clementina's solicitor. It seemed that the old lady had dined with the Duchess that very night, had delighted every one by her wit and *esprit*, but had gone home somewhat early, complaining of heartburn. In the morning she was found dead in her bed, having apparently suffered no pain. Sir Mathew Reid had been sent for at once, but, of course, there was nothing to be done, and she was to be buried on the 22nd at Beauchamp Chalcote. A few days before she died she had made her will, and left Lord Arthur her little house in Curzon Street, and all her furniture, personal effects, and pictures, with the exception of her collection of miniatures, which was to go to her sister, Lady Margaret Rufford and her amethyst necklace, which Sybil Merton was to have. The property was not of much value; but Mr Mansfield the solicitor was extremely anxious for Lord Arthur to return at once, if possible, as there were a great many bills to be paid, and Lady Clementina had never kept any regular accounts.

Lord Arthur was very much touched by Lady Clementina's kind remembrance of him, and felt that Mr Podgers had a great deal to answer for. His love of Sybil, however, dominated every other emotion, and the consciousness that he had done his duty gave him peace and comfort. When he arrived at Charing Cross, he felt perfectly happy.

The Mertons received him very kindly, Sybil made him promise that he would never again allow anything to come between them, and the marriage was fixed for the 7th June. Life seemed to him once more bright and beautiful, and all his old gladness came back to him again.

One day, however, as he was going over the house in Curzon Street, in company with Lady Clementina's solicitor and Sybil herself, burning packages of faded letters, and turning out drawers of odd rubbish, the young girl suddenly gave a little cry of delight.

“What have you found, Sybil?” said Lord Arthur, looking up from his work, and smiling.

“This lovely little silver *bonbonnière*, Arthur. Isn't it quaint and Dutch? Do give it to me! I know amethysts won't become me till I am over eighty.”

It was the box that had held the aconitine.

Lord Arthur started, and a faint blush came into his cheek. He had almost entirely forgotten what he had done, and it seemed to him a curious coincidence that Sybil, for whose sake he had gone through all that terrible anxiety, should have been the first to remind him of it.

“Of course you can have it, Sybil. I gave it to poor Lady Clem myself.”

“Oh! thank you, Arthur; and may I have the *bonbon* too? I had no notion that Lady Clementina liked sweets. I thought she was far too intellectual.”

Lord Arthur grew deadly pale, and a horrible idea crossed his mind.

“*Bonbon*, Sybil? What do you mean?” he said in a slow, hoarse voice.

“There is one in it, that is all. It looks quite old and dusty, and I have not the slightest intention of eating it. What is the matter, Arthur? How white you look!”

Lord Arthur rushed across the room, and seized the box. Inside it was the amber-coloured capsule, with its poison-bubble. Lady Clementina had died a natural death after all!

The shock of the discovery was almost too much for him. He flung the capsule into the fire, and sank on the sofa with a cry of despair.

## V

Mr Merton was a good deal distressed at the second postponement of the marriage, and Lady Julia, who had already ordered her dress for the wedding, did all in her power to make Sybil break off the match. Dearly, however, as Sybil loved her mother, she had given her whole life into Lord Arthur's hands, and nothing that Lady Julia could say could make her waver in her faith. As for Lord Arthur himself, it took him days to get over his terrible disappointment, and for a time his nerves were completely unstrung. His excellent common sense, however, soon asserted itself and his sound, practical mind did not leave him long in doubt about what to do. Poison having proved a complete failure, dynamite, or some other form of explosive, was obviously the proper thing to try.

He accordingly looked again over the list of his friends and relatives, and, after careful consideration, determined to blow up his uncle, the Dean of Chichester. The Dean, who was a man of great culture and learning, was extremely fond of clocks, and had a wonderful collection of timepieces, ranging from the fifteenth century to the present day, and it seemed to Lord Arthur that this hobby of the good Dean's offered him an excellent opportunity for carrying out his scheme. Where to procure an explosive machine was, of course, quite another matter. The London Directory gave him no information on the point, and he felt that there was very little use in going to Scotland Yard about it, as they never seemed to know anything about the movements of the dynamite faction till after an explosion had taken place, and not much even then.

Suddenly he thought of his friend Rouvaloff, a young Russian of very revolutionary tendencies, whom he had met at Lady Windermere's in the winter. Count Rouvaloff was supposed to be writing a life of Peter the Great, and to have come over to England for the purpose of studying the documents relating to that Tsar's residence in this country as a ship carpenter; but it was generally suspected that he was a Nihilist agent, and there was no doubt that the Russian Embassy did not look with any favour upon his presence in London. Lord Arthur felt that he was just the man for his purpose, and drove down one morning to his lodgings in Bloomsbury, to ask his advice and assistance.

“So you are taking up politics seriously?” said Count Rouvaloff, when Lord Arthur had told him the object of his mission; but Lord Arthur, who hated swagger of any kind, felt bound to admit to him that he had not the slightest interest in social questions, and simply wanted the explosive machine for a purely family matter, in which no one was concerned but himself.

Count Rouvaloff looked at him for some moments in amazement, and then seeing that he was quite serious, wrote an address on a piece of paper, initialled it, and handed it to him across the table.

“Scotland Yard would give a good deal to know this address, my dear fellow.”

“They shan't have it,” cried Lord Arthur, laughing; and after shaking the young Russian warmly by the hand he ran downstairs, examined the paper, and told the coachman to drive to Soho Square.

There he dismissed him, and strolled down Greek Street, till he came to a place called Bayle's Court. He passed under the archway, and found himself in a curious *cul-de-sac*, that was apparently occupied by a French Laundry, as a perfect network of clothes-lines was stretched across from house to house, and there was a flutter of white linen in the morning air. He walked to the end, and knocked at a little green house. After some delay, during which every window in the court became a blurred mass of peering faces, the door was opened by a rather rough-looking foreigner, who asked him in very bad English what his business was. Lord Arthur handed him the paper Count Rouvaloff had given him. When the man saw it he bowed, and invited Lord Arthur into a very shabby front parlour on the ground-floor, and in a few moments Herr Winckelkopf, as he was called in England, bustled into the room, with a very wine-stained napkin round his neck, and a fork in his left hand.

“Count Rouvaloff has given me an introduction to you, said Lord Arthur, bowing, “and I am anxious to have a short interview with you on a matter of business. My name is Smith, Mr Robert Smith, and I want you to supply me with an explosive clock.”

“Charmed to meet you, Lord Arthur,” said the genial little German laughing. “Don't look so alarmed, it is my duty to know everybody, and I remember seeing you one evening at Lady Windermere's. I hope her ladyship is quite well. Do you mind sitting with me while I finish my breakfast? There is an excellent *pâté*, and my friends are kind enough to say that my Rhine wine is better than any they get at the German Embassy,” and before Lord Arthur had got over his surprise at being recognised, he found himself seated in the back-room, sipping the most delicious Marcobrunner out of a pale yellow hock-glass marked with the Imperial monogram, and chatting in the friendliest manner possible to the famous conspirator.

“Explosive clocks,” said Herr Winckelkopf, “are not very good things for foreign exportation, as, even if they succeed in passing the Custom House, the train service is so irregular, that they usually go off before they have reached their proper destination. If, however, you want one for home use, I can supply you with an excellent article, and guarantee that you will be satisfied with the result. May I ask for whom it is intended? If it is for the police, or for any one connected with Scotland Yard, I am afraid I cannot do anything for you. The English detectives are really our best friends, and I have always found that by relying on their stupidity, we can do exactly what we like. I could not spare one of them.”

“I assure you,” said Lord Arthur, “that it has nothing to do with the police at all. In fact, the clock is intended for the Dean of Chichester.”

“Dear me! I had no idea that you felt so strongly about religion, Lord Arthur. Few young men do nowadays.”

“I am afraid you overrate me, Herr Winckelkopf,” said Lord Arthur, blushing. “The fact is, I really know nothing about theology.”

“It is a purely private matter then?”

“Purely private.”

Herr Winckelkopf shrugged his shoulders, and left the room, returning in a few minutes with a round cake of dynamite about the size of a penny, and a pretty little French clock, surmounted by an ormolu figure of Liberty trampling on the hydra of Despotism.

Lord Arthur's face brightened up when he saw it. "That is just what I want," he cried, "and now tell me how it goes off."

"Ah! there is my secret," answered Herr Winckelkopf, contemplating his invention with a justifiable look of pride; "let me know when you wish it to explode, and I will set the machine to the moment."

"Well, to-day is Tuesday, and if you could send it off at once —"

"That is impossible; I have a great deal of important work on hand for some friends of mine in Moscow. Still, I might send it off to-morrow."

"Oh, it will be quite time enough!" said Lord Arthur politely, "if it is delivered to-morrow night or Thursday morning. For the moment of the explosion, say Friday at noon exactly. The Dean is always at home at that hour."

"Friday, at noon," repeated Herr Winckelkopf, and he made a note to that effect in a large ledger that was lying on a bureau near the fireplace.

"And now," said Lord Arthur, rising from his seat, "pray let me know how much I am in your debt."

"It is such a small matter, Lord Arthur, that I do not care to make any charge. The dynamite comes to seven and sixpence, the clock will be three pounds ten, and the carriage about five shillings. I am only too pleased to oblige any friend of Count Rouvaloff's."

"But your trouble, Herr Winckelkopf?"

"Oh, that is nothing! It is a pleasure to me. I do not work for money; I live entirely for my art."

Lord Arthur laid down £4:2:6 on the table, thanked the little German for his kindness, and, having succeeded in declining an invitation to meet some Anarchists at a meat-tea on the following Saturday, left the house and went off to the Park.

For the next two days he was in a state of the greatest excitement, and on Friday at twelve o'clock he drove down to the Buckingham to wait for news. All the afternoon the stolid hall-porter kept posting up telegrams from various parts of the country giving the results of horse-races, the verdicts in divorce suits, the state of the weather, and the like, while the tape ticked out wearisome details about an all-night sitting in the House of Commons, and a small panic on the Stock Exchange. At four o'clock the evening papers came in, and Lord Arthur disappeared into the library with the *Pall Mall*, the *St James's*, the *Globe*, and the *Echo*, to the immense indignation of Colonel Goodchild, who wanted to read the reports of a speech he had delivered



that morning at the Mansion House, on the subject of South African Missions, and the advisability of having black Bishops in every province, and for some reason or other had a strong prejudice against the *Evening News*. None of the papers, however, contained even the slightest allusion to Chichester, and Lord Arthur felt that the attempt must have failed. It was a terrible blow to him, and for a time he was quite unnerved. Herr Winckelkopf, whom he went to see the next day, was full of elaborate apologies, and offered to supply him with another clock free of charge, or with a case of nitro-glycerine bombs at cost price. But he had lost all faith in explosives, and Herr Winckelkopf himself acknowledged that everything is so adulterated nowadays, that even dynamite can hardly be got in a pure condition. The little German, however, while admitting that something must have gone wrong with the machinery, was not without hope that the clock might still go off and instanced the case of a barometer that he had once sent to the military Governor at Odessa, which, though timed to explode in ten days, had not done so for something like three months. It was quite true that when it did go off, it merely succeeded in blowing a housemaid to atoms, the Governor having gone out of town six weeks before, but at least it showed that dynamite, as a destructive force, was, when under the control of machinery, a powerful, though a somewhat unpunctual agent. Lord Arthur was a little consoled by this reflection, but even here he was destined to disappointment, for two days afterwards, as he was going upstairs, the Duchess called him into her boudoir, and showed him a letter she had just received from the Deanery.

“Jane writes charming letters,” said the Duchess; “you must really read her last. It is quite as good as the novels Mudie sends us.”

Lord Arthur seized the letter from her hand. It ran as follows: -

THE DEANERY, CHICHESTER

27th May.

My Dearest Aunt,

Thank you so much for the flannel for the Dorcas Society and also for the gingham. I quite agree with you that it is nonsense their wanting to wear pretty things, but everybody is so Radical and irreligious nowadays, that it is difficult to make them see that they should not try and dress like the upper classes. I am sure I don't know what we are coming to. As papa has often said in his sermons, we live in an age of unbelief.

We have had great fun over a clock that an unknown admirer sent papa last Thursday. It arrived in a wooden box from London, carriage paid; and papa feels it must have been sent by some one who had read his remarkable sermon, ‘Is License Liberty?’ for on the top of the clock was a figure of a woman, with what papa said was the cap of Liberty on her head. I didn't think it very becoming myself, but papa said it was historical, so I suppose it is all right. Parker unpacked it, and papa put it on the mantelpiece in the library, and we were all sitting there on Friday morning, when just as the clock struck twelve, we heard a whirring noise, a little puff of smoke came from the pedestal of the figure, and the goddess of Liberty fell off and broke her nose on the fender! Maria was quite alarmed, but it looked so ridiculous, that James and I went off into fits

of laughter, and even papa was amused. When we examined it, we found it was a sort of alarm clock, and that, if you set it to a particular hour, and put some gunpowder and a cap under a little hammer, it went off whenever you wanted. Papa said it must not remain in the library, as it made a noise, so Reggie carried it away to the schoolroom, and does nothing but have small explosions all day long. Do you think Arthur would like one for a wedding present? I suppose they are quite fashionable in London. Papa says they should do a great deal of good, as they show that Liberty can't last, but must fall down. Papa says Liberty was invented at the time of the French Revolution. How awful it seems!

I have now to go to the Dorcas, where I will read them your most instructive letter. How true, dear aunt, your idea is, that in their rank of life they should wear what is unbecoming. I must say it is absurd, their anxiety about dress, when there are so many more important things in this world, and in the next. I am so glad your flowered poplin turned out so well, and that your lace was not torn. I am wearing my yellow satin, that you so kindly gave me, at the Bishop's on Wednesday, and think it will look all right. Would you have bows or not? Jennings says that every one wears bows now, and that the underskirt should be frilled. Reggie has just had another explosion, and papa has ordered the clock to be sent to the stables. I don't think papa likes it so much as he did at first, though he is very flattered at being sent such a pretty and ingenious toy. It shows that people read his sermons, and profit by them.

Papa sends his love, in which James, and Reggie, and Maria all unite, and, hoping that Uncle Cecil's gout is better, believe me, dear aunt, ever your affectionate niece,

JANE PERCY

PS – Do tell me about the bows. Jennings insists they are the fashion.

Lord Arthur looked so serious and unhappy over the letter, that the Duchess went into fits of laughter.

“My dear Arthur,” she cried, “I shall never show you a young lady's letter again! But what shall I say about the clock? I think it is a capital invention, and I should like to have one myself.”

“I don't think much of them,” said Lord Arthur, with a sad smile, and, after kissing his mother, he left the room.

When he got upstairs, he flung himself on a sofa, and his eyes filled with tears. He had done his best to commit this murder, but on both occasions he had failed, and through no fault of his own. He had tried to do his duty, but it seemed as if Destiny herself had turned traitor. He was oppressed with the sense of the barrenness of good intentions, of the futility of trying to be line. Perhaps, it would be better to break off the marriage altogether. Sybil would suffer, it is true, but suffering could not really mar a nature so noble as hers. As for himself, what did it matter? There is always some war in which a man can die, some cause to which a man can give his life, and as life had no pleasure for him, so death had no terror. Let Destiny work out his doom. He would not stir to help her.

At half-past seven he dressed, and went down to the club. Surbiton was there with a party of young men, and he was obliged to dine with them. Their trivial conversation and idle jests did not interest him, and as soon as coffee was brought he left them, inventing some engagement in order to get away. As he was going out of the club, the hall-porter handed him a letter. It was from Herr Winckelkopf, asking him to call down the next evening, and look at an explosive umbrella, that went off as soon as it was opened. It was the very latest invention, and had just arrived from Geneva. He tore the letter up into fragments. He had made up his mind not to try any more experiments. Then he wandered down to the Thames Embankment, and sat for hours by the river. The moon peered through a mane of tawny clouds, as if it were a lion's eye, and innumerable stars spangled the hollow vault, like gold dust powdered on a purple dome. Now and then a barge swung out into the turbid stream, and floated away with the tide, and the railway signals changed from green to scarlet as the trains ran shrieking across the bridge. After some time, twelve o'clock boomed from the tall tower at Westminster and at each stroke of the sonorous bell the night seemed to tremble. Then the railway lights went out, one solitary lamp left gleaming like a large ruby on a giant mast, and the roar of the city became fainter.

At two o'clock he got up, and strolled towards Blackfriars. How unreal everything looked! How like a strange dream! The houses on the other side of the river seemed built out of darkness. One would have said that silver and shadow had fashioned the world anew. The huge dome of St Paul's loomed like a bubble through the dusky air.

As he approached Cleopatra's Needle he saw a man leaning over the parapet, and as he came nearer the man looked up, the gas-light falling full upon his face.

It was Mr Podgers, the cheiromantist! No one could mistake the fat, flabby face, the gold-rimmed spectacles, the sickly feeble smile, the sensual mouth.

Lord Arthur stopped. A brilliant idea flashed across him, and he stole softly up behind. In a moment he had seized Mr Podgers by the legs, and flung him into the Thames. There was a coarse oath, a heavy splash, and all was still. Lord Arthur looked anxiously over, but could see nothing of the cheiromantist but a tall hat, pirouetting in an eddy of moonlit water. After a time it also sank, and no trace of Mr Podgers was visible. Once he thought that he caught sight of the bulky misshapen figure striking out for the staircase by the bridge, and a horrible feeling of failure came over him, but it turned out to be merely a reflection, and when the moon shone out from behind a cloud it passed away. At last he seemed to have realised the decree of destiny. He heaved a deep sigh of relief, and Sybil's name came to his lips.

"Have you dropped anything, sir?" said a voice behind him suddenly.

he turned round, and saw a policeman with a bulls-eye lantern.

"Nothing of importance, sergeant, he answered, smiling, and hailing a passing hansom, he jumped in, and told the man to drive to Belgrave Square.

For the next few days he alternated between hope and fear. There were moments when he almost expected Mr Podgers to walk into the room, and yet at other times he felt that Fate could

not be so unjust to him. Twice he went to the cheiromantist's address in West Moon Street, but he could not bring himself to ring the bell. He longed for certainty, and was afraid of it.

Finally it came. He was sitting in the smoking-room of the club having tea, and listening rather wearily to Surbiton's account of the last comic song at the Gaiety, when the waiter came in with the evening papers. He took up the *St James's*, and was listlessly turning over its pages, when this strange heading caught his eye:

### SUICIDE OF A CHEIROMANTIST

He turned pale with excitement, and began to read. The paragraph ran as follows: –

Yesterday morning, at seven o'clock, the body of Mr Septimus R Podgers, the eminent cheiromantist, was washed on shore at Greenwich, just in front of the Ship Hotel. The unfortunate gentleman had been missing for some days, and considerable anxiety for his safety had been felt in cheiromantic circles. It is supposed that he committed suicide under the influence of a temporary mental derangement, caused by overwork, and a verdict to that effect was returned this afternoon by the coroner's jury. Mr Podgers had just completed an elaborate treatise on the subject of the Human Hand, that will shortly be published when it will no doubt attract much attention. The deceased was sixty-five years of age, and does not seem to have left any relations.

Lord Arthur rushed out of the club with the paper still in his hand, to the immense amazement of the hall-porter, who tried in vain to stop him, and drove at once to Park Lane. Sybil saw him from the window, and something told her that he was the bearer of good news. She ran down to meet him, and, when she saw his face, she knew that all was well.

“My dear Sybil,” cried Lord Arthur, “let us be married to-morrow!”

“You foolish boy! Why the cake is not even ordered!” said Sybil, laughing through her tears.

## VI

When the wedding took place, some three weeks later, St Peter's was crowded with a perfect mob of smart people. The service was read in a most impressive manner by the Dean of Chichester, and everybody agreed that they had never seen a handsomer couple than the bride and bridegroom. They were more than handsome, however – they were happy. Never for a single moment did Lord Arthur regret all that he had suffered for Sybil's sake, while she, on her side, gave him the best things a woman can give to any man – worship, tenderness, and love. For them romance was not killed by reality. They always felt young.

Some years afterwards, when two beautiful children had been born to them, Lady Windermere came down on a visit to Alton Priory, a lovely old place, that had been the Duke's wedding

present to his son; and one afternoon as she was sitting with Lady Arthur under a lime-tree in the garden, watching the little boy and girl as they played up and down the rose-walk, like fitful sunbeams, she suddenly took her hostess's hand in hers, and said, "Are you happy, Sybil?"

"Dear Lady Windermere, of course I am happy. Aren't you?"

"I have no time to be happy, Sybil. I always like the last person who is introduced to me; but, as a rule, as soon as I know people I get tired of them."

"Don't your lions satisfy you, Lady Windermere?"

"Oh dear, no! lions are only good for one season. As soon as their manes are cut, they are the dullest creatures going. Besides, they behave very badly, if you are really nice to them. Do you remember that horrid Mr Podgers? He was a dreadful impostor. Of course, I didn't mind that at all, and even when he wanted to borrow money I forgave him, but I could not stand his making love to me. He has really made me hate cheiromancy. I go in for telepathy now. It is much more amusing."

"You mustn't say anything against cheiromancy here, Lady Windermere; it is the only subject that Arthur does not like people to chaff about. I assure you he is quite serious over it."

"You don't mean to say that he believes in it, Sybil?"

"Ask him, Lady Windermere, here he is;" and Lord Arthur came up the garden with a large bunch of yellow roses in his hand, and his two children dancing round him.

"Lord Arthur?"

"Yes, Lady Windermere."

"You don't mean to say that you believe in cheiromancy?"

"Of course I do," said the young man, smiling.

"But why?"

"Because I owe to it all the happiness of my life," he murmured, throwing himself into a wicker chair.

"My dear Lord Arthur, what do you owe to it?"

"Sybil," he answered, handing his wife the roses, and looking into her violet eyes.

"What nonsense!" cried Lady Windermere. "I never heard such nonsense in all my life."

APPENDIX E.

Production photographs taken by director Esteban Arévalo Ibáñez.

PICTURE ONE

Promo image used for media outlets. Sets and costumes had not been constructed yet. From left to right: Emily Tomlinson, Caden Worley, Brandi Hoofnagle.



## PICTURE TWO

Act One, Scene One. The same scene from picture one, only with costumes on set. In this opening scene, Dr. Podgers practices a bit of Tarot card reading for the fascinated Duchess and Lady Windemere. From left to right: Emily Tomlinson as the Duchess, Caden Worley as Dr. Podgers, and Brandi Hoofnagle as Lady Windemere.





PICTURE THREE

Act One, Scene One. Later in the scene. Lord Arthur Savile has his hand read by Dr. Podgers, and is then told of his future, bloody endeavor. From left to right: David Michael Seals as Lord Arthur Savile, Caden Worley as Dr. Podgers.



## PICTURE FOUR

Act One, Scene Two. Having been lost on the streets all night, Arthur returns unfortunately pantsless, and tries to hide his state from the two aristocratic women. Arthur's manservant, Winckelkopf, knows the truth, but isn't quite sure what to do with it. From left to right: Emily Tomlinson as the Duchess, Brandi Hoofnagle as Lady Windermere, Forrest Jessing as Winckelkopf, and David Michael Seals as Arthur.



PICTURE FIVE

Act One, Scene Three. Arthur and Winky attempt to trick Lady Clementia into eating a poisoned Turkish Delight. The plan goes awry, however, and Arthur now risks eating the deadly dessert himself. From left to right: David Michael Seals as Arthur, Forrest Jessing as Winky, and Caden Worley as Lady Clementia.



## PICTURE SIX

Act One, Scene Four. Sybil returns and informs Arthur that Lady Clementia has died. Thinking it is because of the efforts made in the last scene, thus freeing Arthur of his murderous duty, he dances with her. Sybil is shocked but elated by Arthur's sudden joy. From left to right: Frances Wilson as Sybil Windermere, David Michael Seals as Arthur.





PICTURE SEVEN

Act One, Scene Four. Later in the scene. Arthur contemplates outright assault to complete his task. Winky misinterprets Arthur's words and assumes Arthur wants him to kill him himself.

From left to right: David Michael Seals as Arthur, Forrest Jessing as Winky.



PICTURE EIGHT

Act Two, Scene One. Arthur returns after unsuccessfully attempting to murder a vagrant. He leaves a bloody handprint on the window. David Michael Seals as Arthur.



PICTURE NINE

Act Two, Scene One. Later in the scene. Lady Windermere attempts to seduce Winky, who is busy trying to hide evidence of Arthur's almost crime. From left to right: Brandi Hoofnagle as Lady Windermere. Forrest Jessing as Winky.



PICTURE TEN

Act Two, Scene Two. Duchess, Sybil, and Lady Windermere inspect a peculiar wedding gift: a Turkish Delight from Lady Clementia's estate. From left to right: Emily Tomlinson as the Duchess, Frances Wilson as Sybil, and Brandi Hoofnagle as Lady Windermere.





PICTURE ELEVEN

The cast. Clockwise from bottom left: Emily Tomlinson as the Duchess, David Michael Seals as Lord Arthur Savile, Caden Worley as Dr. Podgers, Forrest Jessing as Winckelkopf, Brandi Hoofnagle as Lady Windermere, Frances Wilson as Sybil Windermere.

