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SF PERUSALS

The Judas Kiss

David Hare

A Samuel French Acting Edition



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OPENING NIGHT: APRIL 29, 1998

BROADHURST THEATRE

A Shubert Organization Theatre

Gerald Schoenfeld, *Chairman* **Philip J. Smith,** *President*

Robert E. Wankel, *Executive Vice President*

ROBERT FOX SCOTT RUDIN
ROGER BERLIND JOAN CULLMAN THE SHUBERT ORGANIZATION
PRESENT

THE ALMEIDA THEATRE COMPANY PRODUCTION OF

LIAM NEESON
THE JUDAS KISS

BY
DAVID HARE

WITH
TOM HOLLANDER PETER CAPALDI
STINA NIELSEN DANIEL SERAFINI-SAULI ALEX WALKINSHAW
AND
RICHARD CLARKE

SET AND COSTUME DESIGN BY
BOB CROWLEY

LIGHTING BY
MARK HENDERSON

MUSIC BY
GEORGE FENTON

SOUND BY
JOHN A. LEONARD

CASTING BY
DANIEL SWEE/PATSY POLLACK

PRODUCTION STAGE MANAGER
SUSIE CORDON

GENERAL MANAGEMENT
STUART THOMPSON

TECHNICAL SUPERVISOR
GENE O'DONOVAN

PRESS REPRESENTATIVE
BONEAU/BRYAN-BROWN

DIRECTED BY
RICHARD EYRE

This production would like to express its gratitude to the Theatre Development Fund for its support.

CHARACTERS:

OSCAR WILDE
LORD ALFRED DOUGLAS
ROBERT ROSS
ARTHUR WELLESLEY
PHOEBE CANE
SANDY MOFFATT
GALILEO MASCONI

ACT I: *DECIDING TO STAY*
is set in London in 1895

Scene One: Lunchtime
Scene Two: Teatime

ACT II: *DECIDING TO LEAVE*
is set in Italy in 1897

Scene One: Dusk
Scene Two: Dawn

NOTE: *THE BACKGROUND TO THE PLAY.*

In 1895, the Marquess of Queensberry, enraged by rumors of his son Lord Alfred Douglas's relationship with the Irish playwright Oscar Wilde, entered Wilde's club and left him a note accusing him of 'posing as a sodomite.' When Wilde decided that he could not ignore the challenge, and that he must bring a prosecution against Queensberry for criminal libel, the Marques retaliated by searching London for a list of young men willing to testify against Wilde. Knowing of this list, Wilde nevertheless persisted with his case. After his private suit collapsed in two days, Wilde himself became liable for public prosecution under Section 11 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1886, which had made 'acts of gross indecency' between men a criminal offence.

On May 19th, 1897, Wilde was released after two years in jail. He went abroad at once, and never returned to England before his death in 1900.

Some say a cavalry corps
some infantry, some, again,
will maintain that the swift oars

of our fleet are the finest
sight on dark earth; but I say
that whatever one loves, is.

Sappho

Every man contains his own death
as the fruit contains the stone.

Rilke

ACT I
DECIDING TO STAY

Scene One

(Friday, April 5th, 1895. Romantic orchestral music. A streak of light falls near a bed on which a young couple are making love in a curtained room. The bed is in considerable disorder, a riot of counterpanes, blankets, sheets, and materials in rich brocade. The young woman, PHOEBE, is 17, milk-white and beautiful. The young man, ARTHUR, is only a little older, short, sturdy, blond and handsome. In the shadows, she is seen dimly to climb away from him, his face pressed deep into her as she rises. Standing on the bed, PHOEBE is now spread-eagled, her arms against the wall, in a gesture of crucifixion, as ARTHUR kneels against her. The stage picture is Renaissance: abandoned white flesh against rich patterns, passion expressed as religious torment.)

(The light spreads. The outline of an ornate hotel room becomes clearer. To the left of the bed, a huge window is swagged in rich material. To the right, a door. As their excitement grows, a discreet knocking begins. It goes unremarked. The knocking becomes louder. ARTHUR's name is called urgently. Then louder. Finally PHOEBE hears it. Then ARTHUR hears it too. The music fades.)

PHOEBE. Oh Lord God Almighty.

(Like a frightened animal, she pulls free and runs across to the bathroom. ARTHUR holds a sheet against himself as he goes to unlock the door. He opens it a crack to check, then opens it further. MR. MOFFATT is a refined, feline Scot in his 50s, wearing tails.)

MOFFATT. Ah Arthur, I thought it was you.
ARTHUR. Mr. Moffatt.
MOFFATT. You will forgive me if I let in some light.

(MOFFATT has come into the room and is heading to the window. ARTHUR has closed the door, but seems unperturbed. Like PHOEBE, he is quite strongly cockney.)

ARTHUR. You'll see, sir. I haven't yet started ...

(MOFFATT has drawn the curtain. Light floods from the window onto the floor. The scene is of late-night abandon. Draperies strewn over the room, flowers, bottles, old meals uncleared from table.)

MOFFATT. My goodness. You have had some reckless enjoyment, I see.
ARTHUR. Hardly, Mr. Moffatt. This wasn't our doing. We were just about to start clearing it up.
MOFFATT. I would hope. Who was helping you?
ARTHUR. Oh the new maid.
MOFFATT. Where is she?
ARTHUR. She's in the bathroom.
MOFFATT. I see.
ARTHUR. Her name's Phoebe.
MOFFATT. Thank you. I am apprised of her name.
ARTHUR. She's settling in nicely.
MOFFATT. Yes, Arthur. I think I had worked that out for myself. *(MOFFATT seems untroubled by the scene.)* Does she want to come out of the bathroom?
ARTHUR. I think she may want to, sir.
MOFFATT. *(Raising his voice.)* Phoebe, do you want to come out?
PHOEBE. *(From the bathroom.)* I need my clothes, sir.
MOFFATT. Very well. I shall turn my face to the wall. *(MOFFATT stands facing the wall. PHOEBE comes out of the bathroom, still naked. ARTHUR helps her, as she searches unamused.)* What are you doing?
PHOEBE. I'm looking for my smaller garments, sir.

(ARTHUR holds up a pair of knickers.)

ARTHUR. Here.

PHOEBE. Thank you.

MOFFATT. If you avail yourself of the bathroom, we can make headway in here.

PHOEBE. Thank you, sir.

(She goes out to the bathroom. MOFFATT turns. ARTHUR has had a sheet round him, but now he opens it, showing himself to MOFFATT. Neither man moves.)

ARTHUR. I'd not thought Lord Alfred would need his room quite so quickly.

MOFFATT. That is apparent. You will now get on and continue your work.

(After a moment MOFFATT moves across the room to start work. ARTHUR goes to pull his undergarments on.)

ARTHUR. Lord Alfred doesn't normally get back till the evening.

MOFFATT. That may explain your behavior. It hardly excuses it.

ARTHUR. No, sir.

MOFFATT. Lord Alfred has had to make a sudden change in his plans.

ARTHUR. Oh I see.

MOFFATT. Hence the urgency. *(He lifts various silver lids on a side-table.)* Too much champagne, by the look of it. The remains of a lobster. Plainly he has no respect for crustaceans. This looks like Chef's moules marinieres. *(ARTHUR, naked to the waist, goes to help MOFFATT stripping the bed.)* Did you visit any other rooms this morning?

ARTHUR. Oh yes, sir. I've cleared out the dishes from most of this floor.

MOFFATT. Alone?

ARTHUR. Phoebe was helping me.

MOFFATT. Really? And did you christen each room? *(They work*

on at the bedclothes. PHOEBE comes back, adjusting her maid's uniform.) Get me the baskets.

PHOEBE. I'll get them.

MOFFATT. Ah Phoebe, yes, right. *(She goes intending to open the main door.)* And also ...

PHOEBE. Yes, sir?

MOFFATT. Tell your friend Arthur: the least he can do is put on the rest of his clothes. *(ARTHUR smiles and moves towards his abandoned clothes. PHOEBE goes into the corridor.)* Arthur, I shall need to speak to you later. You have indulged in behavior the hotel cannot possibly condone. I shall need to reprimand you in person.

ARTHUR. Yes, sir.

MOFFATT. That's clear?

(ARTHUR goes on dressing.)

ARTHUR. When do you wish this act of discipline to take place?

MOFFATT. After work. When exactly do you get off?

ARTHUR. Five-thirty.

MOFFATT. Right after.

ARTHUR. Yes, sir.

MOFFATT. I'll wait for you outside the kitchens.

ARTHUR. The kitchens it is, sir.

(PHOEBE comes back with a basket for the dirty laundry.)

MOFFATT. The hotel has standards it must maintain. *(ROBERT ROSS has appeared at the door. He is a short man, not yet 30, with a puck face, Buster Keaton-ish, and beautifully dressed. He is in obvious distress.)* Ah good afternoon, Mr. Ross.

ROSS. Good afternoon.

(ARTHUR is now dressed. He and PHOEBE bow and bob to ROSS.)

ARTHUR & PHOEBE. Afternoon, sir.

MOFFATT. Lord Alfred's room is not quite ready, I fear.

ROSS. There's some luggage.

MOFFATT. Of course, sir. Arthur.

(ARTHUR goes out to get it, leaving the door open.)

ROSS. I am expecting Lord Alfred presently. My fear is our presence is already known.

MOFFATT. Sir?

ROSS. I came through the lobby. Has someone been talking?

MOFFATT. Impossible.

ROSS. I'm grateful.

MOFFATT. It is out of the question. The Cadogan is a steadfastly private hotel.

(PHOEBE goes out again with dirty sheets.)

ROSS. That is its reputation. That was the purpose in choosing it. You know why we came here.

MOFFATT. Indeed, sir.

ROSS. Lord Alfred needed somewhere discreet.

MOFFATT. Discretion is something we pride ourselves on.

(ARTHUR appears smartly with a big bag.)

ARTHUR. The bag, sir.

ROSS. Please, just put it down where you will.

ARTHUR. If it's Lord Alfred's, sir, then I'll unpack it.

ROSS. No. It isn't Lord Alfred's.

(MOFFATT now smoothly intervenes.)

MOFFATT. That's fine, sir. We quite understand.

(PHOEBE reappears urgently at the door.)

PHOEBE. Sir, there are people ...

MOFFATT. What people?

PHOEBE. They do look like reporters.

(ROSS turns away in panic.)

ROSS. It starts! It starts even now!

PHOEBE. Somehow they've got up the stairs.

ROSS. Mr. Moffatt, this is what I most feared.

MOFFATT. I apologize. Have no concern, sir. You will not be inconvenienced, you have my assurance.

ROSS. Well, please.

MOFFATT. Excuse me and let me now go and deal with it.

ROSS. I would be most grateful. Thank you.

MOFFATT. I will do it.

PHOEBE. Back in a tick.

(MOFFATT has gone. PHOEBE follows. ARTHUR opens new sheets for the bed. MOFFATT can be heard admonishing the journalists outside "Gentlemen, this is a private area ..." ROSS looks uncomfortably across to ARTHUR.)

ROSS. I'm sorry. It's our fault. We caused all this upset.

ARTHUR. Sir?

ROSS. Last night a group of us ate in this room.

ARTHUR. It's fine, sir.

ROSS. I'm afraid we only parted at five.

ARTHUR. Did you have an enjoyable evening?

ROSS. No, I could not say enjoyable. Why no, not at all.

(ARTHUR continues his work, the soul of politeness.)

ARTHUR. I've noticed Lord Alfred is addicted to company. He rarely like to be on his own.

ROSS. No. No, he is companionable.

ARTHUR. Yes, sir. That's what I meant. Since he came here, what is it? five weeks ago – I've seen him with a whole range of companions.

ROSS. Yes. Yes, Lord Alfred is always sociable.

ARTHUR. Indeed, sir. It would be a dull world without company. Are you fond of company yourself?

ROSS. I? *(He looks at ARTHUR thoughtfully a moment.)* Oh yes. Within moderation. Sometimes. Occasionally. But always at my own choice.

(At once, LORD ALFRED DOUGLAS ['BOSIE'] arrives, followed by MOFFATT. He is a startlingly handsome young aristocrat, 23, fair-haired and volatile.)

BOSIE. It is simply absurd, it is unendurable ...
MOFFATT. *(Bowing)* Lord Alfred ...
ROSS. Bosie you must calm down.
BOSIE. I cannot believe what has happened.
ROSS. I know.
BOSIE. Even now I cannot believe it.
ROSS. Where is Oscar?
BOSIE. He is on his way here.
ROSS. What are you saying? Do you mean you have left him?
BOSIE. I could not endure that solicitor!
ROSS. Oscar is travelling alone?
BOSIE. I simply got up and walked out. *(He turns, anticipating ROSS.)* It's all right, Oscar and I had already decided. It was better we travelled apart. Somebody spat at him. It is known throughout London that his case has collapsed. The crowds all yell at him. They shout out abuse. The indignity is beyond all description. To have our names in their mouths! *(He turns to MOFFATT.)* I need a glass of cold water. Get it!
MOFFATT. Yes, sir.
BOSIE. From a bottle! A bottle! None of that filthy sewage that flows from your taps.

(MOFFATT turns to ARTHUR who has been working on, quietly ironic.)

MOFFATT. A bottle of water for Lord Alfred.
ARTHUR. At once, sir.
BOSIE. Why is this room in such vile disarray?
(ARTHUR goes out. PHOEBE joins MOFFATT to continue tidying up.)

ROSS. Oscar has finished the letter?
BOSIE. Yes. It is written.
ROSS. Is it dispatched?

BOSIE. To the *Evening News.* Saying the reason he was forced to abandon his case is he could not allow me into the witness box. He had to protect me!

ROSS. He is making that clear?

(BOSIE is shaking his head in anger.)

BOSIE. He would not allow me to dispute with my father in public. It drives me to distraction.

ROSS. I know.

BOSIE. I, who was better placed to denounce my own father than anyone! And yet it is Oscar who forbids me to advance my own cause.

(ROSS is uneasy of this talk in front of the staff.)

ROSS. He has explained to you. It would not be advantageous ...

BOSIE. Not advantageous?

ROSS. He thought it would do you no good.

(BOSIE looks at him wildly, as if he's mad.)

BOSIE. Oh well, how brilliant! What a brilliant decision! And how exactly could things have worked out worse than they have? My father, this disgusting little man, this vandal, who has pretty well ruined my life. And I am not allowed to speak of his appalling behaviour! *(He turns, addressing the whole room.)* And the result? It hardly needs saying: the case is in ruins. The two of us face equal disgrace. He made this fatal mistake. He did not call me!

ROSS. No. *(ROSS looks round, wanting to get rid of the staff.)* Just one minute ...

BOSIE. And now – very well – through his own stubbornness, *now* he is paying the price!

ROSS. Yes. If you could allow us one moment ... is it Phoebe?

(PHOEBE is carrying BOSIE's books across the room.)

BOSIE. Leave those things there! Just leave them! I asked for some water.

PHOEBE. Yes.

(She stands, taken aback by his outburst.)

ROSS. I apologize. Lord Alfred is under great strain.

BOSIE. Robbie, you always speak for me. In everything. Even with the servants, you speak as if I were not in the room. Always I am not allowed to speak! From this habit of silencing, from the way you have all made me silent, from this our present predicament stems. *(ARTHUR comes back with a silver tray.)* Well, I'll be silent no longer!

ARTHUR. Your water, sir.

BOSIE. What?

ARTHUR. The water you asked for. It's here.

(BOSIE frowns as if not understanding.)

BOSIE. So? Set it down. Come on, what are you expecting? Tribute? What are you waiting for? Praise?

ARTHUR. No, sir. Do you want me to pour it?

BOSIE. Pour?

ARTHUR. Do you want me to pour it, sir?

BOSIE. Yes, of course. Do it, Arthur. What is the alternative? It pours itself? Hardly. Mr. Moffatt, this staff you employ! Where do you find them? The music-hall? Robbie, do you have some money? Will you give young Arthur here a penny or two?

ROSS? Yes of course.

BOSIE. I'll repay you. *(BOSIE's mood has changed, so he is almost skittish to MOFFATT.)* What are they, music-hall comics?

MOFFATT. You told me before, sir, you'd been very happy with everything the staff had done for you here.

(BOSIE is already bored and wanders away. ROSS tips ARTHUR and MOFFATT.)

BOSIE. Yes, oh yes. If you say so.

ROSS. Mr. Moffatt, thank you. Here's something for you.

MOFFATT. The room is not yet ready, I fear.

ROSS. As long as you guarantee us security, we shall truly require nothing else. *(MOFFATT has opened WILDE's case on the bed. PHOEBE bobs insolently, and they are all gone. The room is roughly restored to order.)* Bosie, you realize I do have to speak to you.

BOSIE. I know you must speak to me. You have adopted your Headmaster's tone. "Come into my study"!

ROSS. Only because what I must say is important. We have little time. It is vital. *(ROSS pauses.)* You know I have been to his house.

BOSIE. Yes.

ROSS. I have picked up his luggage.

BOSIE. Have you?

ROSS. At his instructions, I have also cashed him a cheque. Protest all you like, you know what is happening. He is set on a path. A path he is now determined to take. *(ROSS is holding up WILDE's pocketbook.)* He will come here only briefly. It is essential. He must not stay long.

BOSIE. No of course not.

ROSS. He needs to keep moving.

(BOSIE looks at ROSS, decisive.)

BOSIE. No, first, I suggest he must stop and take stock.

ROSS. No!

BOSIE. Robbie, Oscar has given me everything. He's a man I love, I admire. There is no-one in the world I admire more than him. But to see him take up the challenge ...

ROSS. Yes.

BOSIE. And then not to give it the care it deserves. *(ROSS stays quiet, patient.)* Yesterday, making that joke in the courtroom – even you must see that did him no good ...

ROSS. Plainly.

BOSIE. That says it all! This need to perform!

ROSS. Yes. But just at this moment, it's scarcely important.

(But BOSIE is ignoring him.)

BOSIE. Finally that instinct is lethal. When asked of an Oxford

college servant if he had kissed him. "Oh no, I did not kiss him. He was far too ugly". In front of the jury!

ROSS. I know ...

BOSIE. It was not a good joke. Not even a good joke! There was no reason except to show off.

ROSS. No.

BOSIE. I had warned him. Yet from the moment he said it ...

ROSS. I know. I know. You have said this.

BOSIE. From the moment he said it, our case was finished. We abandoned all chance of victory.

ROSS. I know. All of us said all this last night.

(But BOSIE takes no notice.)

BOSIE. I had said to him, I had told him one thousand times "Be modest". I said "I am English, you are not." The English people do not like wit. They abhor those who are cleverer than they are. But he did not listen. No. *(He suddenly raises his voice again.)* Robbie, he has not listened throughout!

ROSS. That is as may be.

BOSIE. It's as I tell you.

ROSS. Perhaps. But just at this moment, it is hardly the point. *(ROSS tries to be precise to gain BOSIE's attention.)* Your father's solicitors have passed on the papers. We know this. We've been told this for sure. They were dispatched to the Attorney General over two hours ago.

(ROSS has tried to calm him, but BOSIE seems to miss the point.)

BOSIE. Oh Robbie, come on, why do you think I sent for my cousin? This is exactly what I foresaw!

(ROSS steps towards him, still quiet.)

ROSS. Bosie, in a moment Oscar will come here. We will only have a short time. In conditions of calm and absolute seriousness, he will have to settle his resolve on the path he must take.

BOSIE. Of course.

ROSS. The Attorney General is even now speaking to the Home Secretary. It is assuredly only a matter of time. Asquith will give his consent. Pretty soon the local magistrate will issue his warrant for Oscar's arrest on a charge of gross indecency. *(ROSS puts up a hand.)* Yes. You heard us this morning with Oscar's solicitors. If we stop and examine the evidence, if we look at that list – that disastrous list of young men – well, is it wise ... is it truly courageous to stay here? Fight on when he has no chance to win?

BOSIE. Who says?

ROSS. Listen. Or rather, is it simply foolhardy? In open court, these men will bear witness. They will say the most terrible things. Things no-one will ever forget. Whether he wins or he loses, Oscar's reputation will be destroyed for all time.

BOSIE. You say that.

ROSS. Very well.

BOSIE. I deny it.

ROSS. You may well deny it. That is your right. But your denial is not of the essence. Nothing now matters save Oscar's own view. *(There is a silence. BOSIE looks cannily at ROSS.)* Oscar has looked into the abyss. He has seem all the dangers. He will now leave the country. Yes. That is his decision. To leave it forever. And you must respect this choice he has made. *(They both look, neither man relenting.)* By his nature, we both know Oscar can be excited. How do I say this? He can be swayed. I recognize this truth about Oscar. He is always available to your point of view. I am not seeking to silence you. Be assured. You may say what you like. I ask you, simply take care. There must be no hysteria. You may argue, but you must not dictate. This is the point I am making. On this occasion, because his whole future depends on it, I beg you, let Oscar set his own course. I know I can trust you, Bosie. Behave in a way which gives Oscar a chance.

(The room is silent. But BOSIE seems more amused than sobered.)

BOSIE. Oh Robbie, you always speak prettily.

ROSS. Thank you.

BOSIE. Considerate. Modest, as always. Well-tempered. Does it never occur to you? Life has handed you the easiest role.

ROSS. What role?

BOSIE. Third party. Robbie, anyone can play third party. It requires no real talent. You play it to perfection, but bear this in mind: it is a role of no consequence. That's him! *(He moves across the room because MR. MOFFATT can be heard in the corridor beckoning WILDE to follow him.)* The role can be taken by anyone at all.

(OSCAR WILDE comes through the door. He is just over 40 with long hair, not all the languid pansy of legend. He is a solid, tall and fleshy, 6'3'', a mixture of ungainliness and elegance. MR. MOFFATT is behind him carrying two small bags.)

MOFFATT. In here, sir please, come in, the others are waiting ...
WILDE. What is this?
BOSIE. Oh Oscar.
ROSS. Oscar, you're here.
WILDE. Oh Bosie, dear Bosie ...
BOSIE. Oscar ...

(They fall into each others' arms, hugging.)

WILDE. Bosie ...
BOSIE. Oscar, oh Oscar! Thank goodness, thank goodness you're here.

(ROSS and MOFFATT stand quietly waiting.)

WILDE. Forgive us, Mr. Moffatt, Lord Alfred and I have been parted for almost an hour.
MOFFATT. I quite understand, sir.
WILDE. We have survived the shock of separation. The strain has been awful. On my side at least. And reporters now seem to be holding some sort of professional convention in your lobby. Mr. Moffatt has kindly guided me through.

(ARTHUR has arrived with an ice bucket and bottles on a tray.)

ARTHUR. Wine, sir?
WILDE. Robbie, can you give Mr. Moffatt some money?

ROSS. Why yes, of course. Please put my bags on the bed. Thank you. Oscar, remember, you do not have long.

(ROSS tips MOFFATT, who puts the three bags together on the bed.)

BOSIE. Robbie is desperate that nothing should detain you.

ROSS. Bosie ...

BOSIE. He's given me a lecture on how I am to behave.

WILDE. Oh Robbie, that was superfluous. Bosie at all times behaves impeccably.

ROSS. I have not said otherwise. Oscar, just tell us, what is your news?

WILDE. My news?

ROSS. Yes.

WILDE. My news? I have none. Everyone hourly awaits my arrest. They seem astonished that I am still at liberty. But, my friends, all I can say is: by a miracle, I have achieved the Cadogan.

MOFFATT. Indeed, sir.

WILDE. In spite of everything, I am finally here. And surrounded by friends, I would say, Mr. Moffatt ...

MOFFATT. I would hope, sir ...

WILDE. And Arthur. Good Arthur. The excellent Arthur as well. Oh Lord ...

(He grips ARTHUR's hand tightly.)

MOFFATT. Come, you must sit, sir ...

WILDE. No, no. I am steady. I am here but I cannot yet say for how long. *(He moves to hide his tears, then animates himself to keep cheerful.)* It appears that the whole of London is fleeing. I looked from my coach. Every invert in the metropolitan area is now packing his bags and heading for France. *(ROSS looks nervously to the staff.)* It is a veritable mass migration. I'd never imagined diaspora could be on this scale.

ROSS. Well ...

WILDE. The takings at certain fashionable restaurants will tonight be counted in pennies. Within twenty-four hours opera will be stone dead.

ROSS. *(Nervously)* Yes.

(He turns and sees his bags on the bed.)

WILDE. What remain of my worldly possessions. You had them sent over?

ROSS. Yes. As we agreed, I went to your house.

WILDE. Thank you. Thank you, dear Robbie.

(He moves over and hugs ROSS, then looks into his eyes. ROSS speaks quietly.)

ROSS. Please bear in mind, Oscar, you do not have long.

MOFFATT. Excuse me, do you also want coffee, sir? Have you eaten?

WILDE. Have I eaten? Oh Lord, let me think.

ROSS. Oscar, I'm afraid it's out of the question. You simply do not have time.

WILDE. Do I not?

ROSS. You are here to say your goodbyes to Bosie. Also I needed you to pick up your things.

WILDE. Yes of course. But a small drink, please, Robbie, you must not deny me ...

ROSS. Why, no.

WILDE. And then of course I shall get going. I shall go on the instant.

ARTHUR. Do you want to taste, sir?

WILDE. Pour away. Hock tastes like hock, and seltzer like seltzer. Taste is not in the bottle. It resides in one's mood. So today no doubt hock will taste like burnt ashes. Today I will drink my own death.

(He lights the first of the many cigarettes. ROSS has turned to MOFFATT.)

ROSS. Mr. Moffatt, on my orders a cab is waiting downstairs ...

MOFFATT. Yes, sir. *(PHOEBE has appeared at the door by*

chance, bringing towels.) Ah Phoebe, will you please tell the driver outside that Mr. Wilde ...

ROSS. His passenger, do not call him Mr. Wilde ...

MOFFATT. His passenger is here and will be down very soon.

PHOEBE. Yes, I see, sir.

ROSS. You have that message?

PHOEBE. Yes of course. The passenger who is not Mr. Wilde is coming and the message is he will not be long.

(She glares at him resentfully, then goes. ARTHUR hands WILDE the wine.)

WILDE. Thank you, Arthur.

(BOSIE looks up, quietly confident.)

BOSIE. I would like to talk to you, Oscar.

WILDE. Talk to me? Bosie, truly! You hardly need ask.

BOSIE. No?

WILDE. Of course not. Come talk.

BOSIE. I had an impression from Robbie.

WILDE. What impression?

(WILDE looks between them.)

BOSIE. Robbie implied that your wish was that I should step back.

WILDE. I would never wish that.

BOSIE. Why, thank you.

(ROSS is momentarily discomforted by their contact.)

ROSS. I was saying ... I was saying only that you yourself need to make haste.

BOSIE. Oscar, even now my cousin is having meetings at the Houses of Parliament to make sure this prosecution need never take place.

ROSS. Bosie, it's simply impractical. I have no doubt your cousin is doing his best.

BOSIE. He is.

ROSS. But there is a train.

BOSIE. What do you want? That he wakes up tomorrow in some foreign country? And the real possibility he will never get back?

(Both of them have begun to raise their voices. WILDE smiles, calm.)

WILDE. Please, the two of you, I must impose myself. Robbie, what time is it?

ROSS. It is just past two-thirty.

WILDE. And, tell me, what time is the train? *(ROSS hesitates a second.)* Tell me the time the actual train leaves.

ROSS. The train leaves at four.

WILDE. Ah well then ...

ROSS. It connects with the boat.

WILDE. The Cadogan to Victoria, let us be realistic. In the name of our common humanity, let us get our priorities straight. Let us pause, let us make the seminal decision: it seems that I still have time for my lunch.

(Satisfied, he turns to MOFFATT. ROSS shifts, furious.)

MOFFATT. Sir.

WILDE. Be fair to me, Robbie. I face a long journey. I dread *mal de mer.* I shall need to travel with some ballast inside. *(He turns again to MOFFATT.)* Mr. Moffatt I need something suitable. Perhaps a small lobster. Seafood, certainly. A l'Americaine. With some kind of rice.

MOFFATT. Chef does a rice which is perfumed.

WILDE. Or a timbale. Exquisite. Perfect for crossing the Channel. *(He turns to BOSIE.)* Bosie, be quick now. What would you like?

BOSIE. Nothing. I couldn't. When even now my father is gloating, standing like some mad animal on the steps of the court, screaming that if ever I am seen in your company, then he will have you shot like a dog.

(WILDE smiles absently at him and turns back to MOFFATT.)

WILDE. And langoustines I suppose are quite simply unavailable?

MOFFATT. My regrets. But the season.

WILDE. Don't worry. I quite understand.

(ROSS is still tense.)

ROSS. Very well. It is your decision. I would only remind you the press now know where you are.

WILDE. That is clear.

ROSS. If you stay in this room, I do have to warn you, at any moment the police may appear.

WILDE. That will give my lunch an added spice of excitement. *(He turns back to MOFFATT who is about to leave. PHOEBE has returned with towels.)* Oh Mr. Moffatt, I wonder, with lobster do I really want rice?

ROSS. Oscar ...

MOFFATT. We offer excellent dauphinoise potatoes.

WILDE. Do you recall if I have eaten those before?

MOFFATT. Yes, sir.

WILDE. And were they not heavy? Are they not more suitably a dinner-time dish?

ROSS. All right, eat all you like. Just as long as you are quick. But there are things I must tell you. I have to remind you I have been to your house.

(The atmosphere is changed at once. WILDE looks thoughtfully at ROSS. MOFFATT, alert to the mood, bows tactfully.)

MOFFATT. We shall go, sir. I shall bring you both dishes. The rice and the potatoes. Then you can choose.

WILDE. Excellent, Mr. Moffatt. And thank you, Arthur as well.

ARTHUR. Not at all, sir.

WILDE. Phoebe. Is it Phoebe?

PHOEBE. It is.

(The three find themselves lined up opposite him for an oddly formal moment.)

WILDE. Throughout this time of trial I've had excellent service. Whenever I've visited, I have been made to feel welcome. It's something which means a great deal to me. No, truly. Thank you. I'm moved by it.

MOFFATT. Our pleasure, sir.

(WILDE is once more on the edge of tears.)

WILDE. Robbie, a cue for more money.

ROSS. Oscar that is not what this money is for!

WILDE. You know I can't abide meanness.

ROSS. Very well. I shall give them some of my own.

WILDE. This is in character. Robbie is a true Christian.

ROSS. Here.

(He reaches into his pocket for coins.)

MOFFATT, PHOEBE & ARTHUR. Thank you. Thank you very much sir. Greatly appreciated.

ROSS. Now I'm sorry, but we really do need to be on our own.

(MOFFATT and ARTHUR go out. WILDE has gone across to put a glass in BOSIE's hand.)

WILDE. Will you have some wine with me Bosie? Here. Please. Stay close to me, Bosie. I need you. You and I still have a long way to go.

(WILDE kisses him on the cheek. There is a silence. Then WILDE moves away.)

ROSS. I have to report to you. I have seen Constance.

WILDE. You saw her?

ROSS. Yes.

WILDE. And what did she say? Tell me, how were the children?

ROSS. I did not see them. But she assured me the children were well.

WILDE. Go on.

ROSS. She is in the most terrible turmoil. There is only one way to relieve it. She asked me to beg you: she implores you to flee. *(There is a moment's silence. BOSIE watches from the side.)* Look ...

WILDE. You say you caught no sight of the children?

ROSS. No. My impression was they were playing in the nursery.

WILDE. I see. And do they ... do they yet have any knowledge of what has happened?

ROSS. Constance says they know nothing at all. *(He waits a moment.)* For their sake, she says, you must choose exile. If you stay and battle it out at a trial, the prospect of what will be said, what will be repeated in London ... well, their lives will not be worth living. She is sending them abroad. *(WILDE looks up.)* Tomorrow.

WILDE. She is sending the children? *(There is a silence. For the first time WILDE seems deeply hurt.)* I see.

ROSS. Flight is imperative for the whole family. She was relieved when I gave her your news.

WILDE. My news?

ROSS. Yes.

WILDE. You said I had already decided?

ROSS. I described our meeting last night.

WILDE. Did you say who was there?

ROSS. To be truthful, I mentioned the others. But I did not mention Lord Alfred. Understand, I did not think it was fair. *(He pauses a second, tactful.)* You must realize ...

WILDE. Oh I do ...

ROSS. She has conceived a most passionate resentment. To say at this point that ... that you still meet with Bosie, that you take account of his views ...

(BOSIE interrupts, furious.)

BOSIE. Oh really, I cannot endure this!

ROSS. Why not?

BOSIE. This whole thing makes no sense at all!

ROSS. Why?

BOSIE. Because we did not decide! We have not decided! My recollection is quite firm on this point. Exile was only one choice

among many. *(He looks to WILDE who looks into his glass and takes another draught.)* This is what we must all decide upon now.

ROSS. Oh Bosie now really ...

BOSIE. I mean it. I thought that is what this meeting is for.

ROSS. Whatever we said, whatever we argued, it is no longer relevant. Look at the reality! Outside a cab will be waiting. It's waiting! I ordered it.

BOSIE. So?

ROSS. It will take him to the station. He can do no other. This is the last boat tonight! Oscar?

(WILDE reaches again for the wine.)

WILDE. Do not distress yourself. The hour is fixed in my memory. I know exactly how soon I must go.

(And BOSIE is already continuing.)

BOSIE. Oscar cannot leave until he hears from my cousin.

ROSS. Oh really!

BOSIE. He will come here by three at the latest, he said. He will bring us firm news from Asquith. *(He turns angrily to ROSS.)* Why are you always so scornful?

ROSS. Because we all know it is going to be simply too late!

BOSIE. George Wyndham is a man of considerable influence. He is a member of Parliament. It is madness for Oscar to run headlong from the country until we know beyond any question that a prosecution cannot be stopped.

ROSS. It cannot be stopped!

(BOSIE smiles, confident.)

BOSIE. You know nothing. Robbie, forgive me, but the thinking of better-class people is hardly what one might call a strong point of yours. George is a friend of the Prime Minister.

ROSS. So?

BOSIE. Robbie, please trust me. I understand these things rather better than you. My name is good for something, I hope. There is not

much point in being born with the name of Queensberry unless there are moments when it can be used.

(WILDE is quietly amused.)

WILDE. I wish I shared your faith in the English. Nation to them is just as important as class. They have united at last in hatred of the foreigner. Yes, because I am Irish.

BOSIE. That's absurd.

WILDE. Is it? Yesterday I looked across the courtroom. It shocked me. I tell you their excitement was more than merely professional. Yes? Did you see that? *(ROSS nods.)* This was a court which ached for a kill.

ROSS. Yes.

WILDE. The whole nation is ready. I have been tolerated for too long a time No-one has rights in this country. One is granted only a temporary licence. And here comes the moment when mine is withdrawn. *(But he is already bored with his own theory and has got up to examine the open case on the bed. He takes out some books.)* What is this? Did you pack these for me?

ROSS. Certainly.

WILDE. *The Thoughts of St. Ignatius.* Robbie ... *(He looks at him reproachfully.)* My God. What is this? This only gets worse. Dickens! Robbie, do you not know me?

ROSS. I was rushed.

WILDE. You think I should gorge myself on sentimental morality?

ROSS. Very well then, tell me, what would you prefer?

WILDE. Why, tales of suffering and murder. Injustice. The spilling of blood. Let my reading be only of ravaging, destruction and rape. That is what I want. Nothing else. And for these things the only book worth considering is the Bible. The essential companion to exile. I shall read it continually.

ROSS. I shall get you a Bible.

(But BOSIE is quietly furious.)

BOSIE. Oh Oscar, please, you do not convince.

WILDE. Not convince?

BOSIE. You're affecting indifference ...

WILDE. Affecting it?

BOSIE. You are standing there talking about the books you will take.

WILDE. A critical discussion of literature seems to me at all times worth having.

BOSIE. Oh yes? I am not for one second fooled!

WILDE. No?

BOSIE. Face it: if you flee, it's like admitting you're guilty ...

WILDE. Oh yes ...

BOSIE. It's an open confession of guilt. You hand your enemies their victory. What's worse, my father gets everything he wants.

WILDE. I fear so.

BOSIE. What, and that doesn't not disturb you? The thought of it? The shame? Being taken for a coward?

(WILDE interrupts, smiling.)

WILDE. Bosie, you say I'm acting indifference. I promise you, I have no need to simulate. My indifference is real.

BOSIE. Oscar, please.

WILDE. Why? If I flee, as you say, it's disastrous. But if I stay, my prospects are also not good. So why make a choice? What are you asking exactly? Why at this moment do anything at all? *(He sits back, confident.)* I have always had a low opinion of what is called action. Action is something my mother brought me up to distrust. Why make a decision which does not yet need to be made? What's more, think of this: I am where I wish to be. Consider. I find myself here with you in this room. Yes. With this wine. Where I have been happiest. These past five weeks. The three of us, planning our hopeless campaign. *(He smiles affectionately at BOSIE. Both ROSS and BOSIE are silenced.)* Outside this room, I will find only suffering. The world is charged. It is poised. My destiny will all too quickly unfold. But while we are here – perhaps you think this shortsighted, but you cannot deny it – the fact is that things are not really too bad.

(This is no sooner out than ARTHUR has knocked on the door, wheeling in a trolley.)

ARTHUR. Excuse me ...

WILDE. Ah food, yes, delicious.

BOSIE. I'm sorry ...

WILDE. Ah yes, please enter ...

BOSIE. Oh Oscar, you're not really planning to eat?

WILDE. Yes I am.

BOSIE. You are a goose. I mean, *why*? At this moment?

WILDE. Yes, Arthur, please do set the table down there. *(WILDE has faltered getting up. He has almost finished the bottle.)* Whoops ...

ROSS. Oh God, Oscar, you're stumbling ...

WILDE. No, no. I need a steadying drink. Dear Arthur, some more wine and when you're ready ...

ARTHUR. Yes, sir. *(ARTHUR has pulled out a folding table and is laying it with a white tablecloth.)* I'm afraid to have to tell you, sir, there's now quite a crowd in the street.

WILDE. A crowd?

ARTHUR. Yes. They look like a lynch-mob.

WILDE. Indeed?

ARTHUR. They're baying for blood.

WILDE. That is quite a coincidence. It has also been wildly exciting in here. The temperature's rising. We live in a veritable cauldron of fear. More wine! And shall we nail up the entrance? *(He looks round rather grandly.)* This all confirms me in my decision to stay in this room.

(ROSS shifts, uneasy.)

ROSS. Oscar ...

WILDE. No, Robbie, please, desist for a second. Allow me this gap. This equipoise. Let me have that. I have perhaps half an hour. Allow me this one sweet moment of peace.

(MOFFATT appears now at the door.)

MOFFATT. Excuse me, sir. A Mr. George Wyndham ...

BOSIE. Ah George ...

MOFFATT. He asks if he may be allowed to come in.

BOSIE. Tell him yes.

WILDE. If you don't mind, Bosie, I would prefer it if you saw him outside. No, really ...

BOSIE. Why?

WILDE. I can tell he'll be breathless.

BOSIE. Oh Oscar ...

WILDE. It's the breathless I cannot face.

BOSIE. Are you going to be childish?

WILDE. He'll rush in, wearing those awful striped trousers and bursting with news which he'll want to blurt out. The very name Wyndham! It exudes self-importance. A person called Wyndham indeed! George Wyndham!

(BOSIE is nodding as if this confirms a familiar pattern.)

BOSIE. Oh I see, so you're going to be facetious.

WILDE. Not at all.

BOSIE. He may bring you news of your freedom!

WILDE. Then please by all means you may see him out there in the corridor. I have said. You are welcome to meet him ...

MOFFATT. What shall I say sir?

WILDE. I just don't much fancy the prospect myself.

(WILDE is standing, self-consciously capricious, looking for more wine.)

BOSIE. Oscar, George has been working ...

WILDE. I know this ...

BOSIE. He has been in Parliament all morning on your behalf.

WILDE. Tell him: I appreciate all he has done for me but I do not wish to speak to him now.

BOSIE. Why not?

WILDE. Because it is simple! Open that door and the real world comes into this room.

(WILDE has raised his voice. MOFFATT retires discreetly.)

BOSIE. You know this has been the whole story ...
WILDE. What story?
BOSIE. This has been my problem throughout ...
WILDE. *(To ARTHUR.)* The wine! Can you get me the wine?
ARTHUR. Yes of course sir.

(ARTHUR goes out.)

BOSIE. It is as if you still can't absorb it. George Wyndham is a powerful man!
WILDE. I know that.
BOSIE. He is my cousin, for god's sake! He has far better things to do with his time.
WILDE. I'm sure.

(WILDE smiles surreptitiously at ROSS.)

BOSIE. For him there is also danger.
WILDE. I see that.
BOSIE. A man of his standing. The risk he is taking by speaking on your behalf. Any why do you think he is doing it? My cousin George is actually risking his neck! Because by the purest coincidence he happens to hate my father almost as much as I do myself!

(WILDE looks at him a moment.)

WILDE. Why, yes.
BOSIE. So then why will you not talk to him?
WILDE. Oh Bosie ...
BOSIE. I mean it! Why won't you? He is waiting outside!
WILDE. Oh Bosie, how I envy your spirit! *(He stops, the point reached at last.)* I do not wish to speak to George Wyndham because the point is George Wyndham cannot succeed! *(WILDE seizes on ARTHUR's return.)* Ah and here comes my wine, thank goodness. Arthur your timing is excellent, as always, I see.
ARTHUR. Thank you, sir. Do you want me to open it?
WILDE. I most certainly do. *(WILDE is suddenly fluent, at ease.)* Oh yes, by all means, admit your friend in his pinstripes, let him bring

us news from the oak-panelled corridors of whispered meetings with all his biscuity, high-minded friends. But Bosie ... do you believe such meetings can weigh on our fortunes? Even you must see it, it's simply too late.

BOSIE. Too late?

WILDE. Yes. Of course. Ask Robbie.

BOSIE. Oscar, what makes you so sure that you're not going to win?

(WILDE throws up his hands, near tears.)

WILDE. Oh ...

ROSS. Look, Bosie ...

BOSIE. No, really. We seem to be glibly assuming that there *will* be a criminal trial. And that should it take place, we are destined to lose it.

WILDE. Bosie, do you really imagine I care? Do you think it is the prospect of *losing* which makes me so fearful?

(BOSIE moves towards him with genuine compassion.)

BOSIE. Oh Oscar, I beg you ... I beg you, do not give up.

WILDE. Give up? Give up? Why should it matter? "Shall I give up?" "Shall I carry on?" Either? Neither? Guilty! Not guilty! How can it make a blind bit of difference? The simple fact is: I am cast in a role. My story has already been written. How I choose to play it is a mere matter of taste. The performance of the actor will not determine the action.

BOSIE. And what is this action?

WILDE. The action is: I am being expelled!

(He is suddenly savage. BOSIE turns away.)

BOSIE. Oh really!

WILDE. It's true. I am trapped in the narrative. The narrative now has a life of its own. It travels inexorably towards my disgrace. Towards my final expulsion. And it bears me along on its crest ... *(He*

seems suddenly almost exhilarated.) Yes, in fact, for me, borne along by this story, there is even an odd kind of freedom. I may wear whatever mask I may choose. Tragic? Defiant? Tearful? Resigned? I may try all these attitudes. I may bring what so-called "feelings" I like to the role. But they will not have the slightest effect on the outcome. The story has only one possible end.

(BOSIE is genuinely frightened now.)

BOSIE. Oscar why do you feel that? For god's sake! After all we have been through! Just see him! What may you lose by it? My cousin is serious. My cousin is desperately concerned.

(At this WILDE seems to relax, as if on familiar territory.)

WILDE. Of course. I do not for one second doubt it. I know that look in the English. They affect a particular furrow-browed earnestness, a desperate considerateness. As they settle one's fate, they arrange their features in a way which is always moral and grave. They speak about law and principal and how much it will hurt them to do the thing they must do. And at the end of the seriousness, the weightness, the sorrow, the judicious weighing of things in the scales – have you really not noticed? – the decisions they make lead only one way. This is England. There is always a hanging! And this time it's decided: The noose has been fitted and the neck is my own!

(ARTHUR hovers with the bottle.)

ARTHUR. Do I pour, sir?

WILDE. Pour. *(WILDE is so absorbed he has not even turned to ARTHUR.)* Have you never once stopped ... have you never asked yourself ... never once wondered why your Wyndhams exist? Why they exhibit all that desperate doggy concern? Wyndhams exist only to stand in front of the Asquiths. And the Asquiths are the ones who get their own way. *(A knock, and the door opens again. It is MR. MOFFATT with a second trolley.)* Ask Mr. Moffatt. Mr. Moffatt's not English. The English have been my subject for years. Oh yes, in England the preacher says prayers on the scaffold. Then straight after

he dines with the hangman. *(He turns as PHOEBE joins MOFFATT at the door.)* And how appropriate! It seems that the lobster is here. *(PHOEBE has a large tray with a silver dome. ARTHUR joins MR. MOFFATT who has a trolley with saucepans and a burner.)* And it is the lovely Phoebe who brings it ...

PHOEBE. Thank you sir.

WILDE. Robbie, please shower her with money at once. Alter my mood! Let us do something noble! Let us try and change Phoebe's life for the good.

PHOEBE. Sir.

(PHOEBE is blushing with pleasure. BOSIE moves away in despair.)

WILDE. Since we ourselves cannot be happy ...

ROSS. Oh Oscar ...

WILDE. Let another be happy instead. Yes? You agree with me, Phoebe?

PHOEBE. I'd quite like some money, sir, if that's what you mean.

(MOFFATT, busying for elaborate meal preparation, looks disapproving.)

MOFFATT. Phoebe ...

PHOEBE. I'm sorry sir. I didn't mean to say that. I hope I gave no offence.

WILDE. You did not. You could not.

PHOEBE. Thank you, sir.

(For a second, it seems he might reach out and touch her. They are both moved.)

WILDE. Robbie, open my pocketbook forthwith.

ROSS. No, I refuse to.

WILDE. What, would you defy me?

MOFFATT. Sir, would you like us to serve you the lobster at once?

WILDE. Lay it forth, by all means. Yes, now is the moment.

MOFFATT. I'll do it, sir.

WILDE. Light up your fire and release some warmth in our hearts! *(MOFFATT lights the silver spirit lamp which gives a big pop.)* There we are. The flame of Olympia! A little beacon of hope that flickers and flares ...

MOFFATT. And shall I ready the sauce, sir?

WILDE. Set to, Mr. Moffatt. Abduct me down the path of excess!

MOFFATT. Yes, sir.

(The three staff all laugh, bush round the trolley, as MOFFATT prepares the sauce for the lobster. WILDE moves over to BOSIE and speaks quietly.)

WILDE. Oh Bosie, I beg you, do not look so sulky. I cannot bear to see you cast low.

BOSIE. Well, how do you want me to take this?

WILDE. In the same way I hope I will take it myself. *(An intimacy has returned. WILDE reaches out and touches his hand.)* Bosie ...

BOSIE. I cannot. Oscar, you know what I feel for you. You have been the luck of my life. But now, you are taking up an attitude that makes no sense to me. You have decided you are foredoomed. It is as if you want your own downfall. You welcome it. You imagine this weakness poetic, it is what you have called embracing your fate ...

WILDE. Is that right?

BOSIE. How you love that idea! But to me it has no such attraction. It just means that you lack the will to fight back. *(WILDE is close to BOSIE. ROSS watches. The three staff go on with their work.)* In your writing, you love to say there is always a destiny. Men are always dragged down by the gods. Do not make this mistake. Do not confuse your life with your art. Such ideas belong only in literature. They do not belong in the world. *(He leans further in, assured, not wanting the hotel servants to hear.)* These boys ... these boys who will testify, who will stand up in court and say you took them to bed ... who are they? They are known to be renters. Blackmailers. The scum of society. Why do you think that the court will believe them? Why are you so sure you cannot then win?

WILDE. I have said. I am indifferent to winning. Whatever the verdict, my reputation is gone.

BOSIE. Ah yes, of course, how convenient. It's all a conspiracy!

Everything is out of your hands. Because it's the fault of the English. The English who, as we know, spend the whole day thinking up ways of claiming your scalp ...

WILDE. I didn't say that.

(WILDE moves away in despair at this.)

BOSIE. Didn't you? You said something like it. Yesterday, in court, those answers you gave. I watched you. I know you. You have wanted this thing. In some awful part of your being, you love the idea of surrender. You think there's some hideous glamour in letting Fate propel you down from the heights! But I do well to remind you, it happens I am a poet as well. But with a far different outlook. I don't find destruction romantic.

(WILDE looks up at his accusation.)

WILDE. Bosie, oh please, you must not say that.

BOSIE. Well then sit in this room until you are groggy. By all means. Until you are musky with drink. Sit here and tell yourself that everything is written in advance in the stars. But I am a different character. I shall confer with my cousin. I shall do what you are too lazy to do. I shall fight. I shall fight for your future and for my own.

WILDE. Bosie ...

BOSIE. Because I am not cowed. I will not be cowed by what's happened. Unlike you, Oscar, I refuse to give up.

(BOSIE goes out. WILDE is devastated by his departure.)

MOFFATT. Sir, the meal is now ready.

WILDE. Ah ...

MOFFATT. The dish is prepared.

WILDE. Good.

(The table is set out like a vision, but WILDE does not move towards it.)

MOFFATT. The lobster has been softened in butter. Tomatoes have been added, crushed garlic, shallots, tarragon, orange peel, parsley, white wine ...

WILDE. Yes, thank you.

MOFFATT. We dust with cayenne and then bathe in fresh cream.

WILDE. Please. *(He still does not move.)* In one moment I will be ready to eat it. Robbie, I insist you reward them at once. *(But ROSS is ready to stand firm.)* Now Robbie ... give me that pocketbook. Give me my cash, I insist. Give it here. You must hand it over. I have to remind you the money is mine.

ROSS. No I won't.

WILDE. Robbie ...

ROSS. I cannot do it in honesty. The money is there to fund you in exile. I cannot allow you to give it away.

(The three go very still, sensing the tension as WILDE moves towards ROSS.)

WILDE. Robbie, just pass me the pocketbook. Earlier I asked you to cash me a cheque ...

ROSS. I did it.

WILDE. Well?

ROSS. That cheque was intended for one purpose only.

WILDE. Its purpose is not your concern.

ROSS. Oscar, this is what Bosie is saying. You do not protect your own cause. You need this money. With all respect to these people, why would you waste it?

WILDE. Give me my money! How dare you? The money is mine!

(WILDE has shouted this, and is now swaying slightly. MOFFATT is uncomfortable.)

MOFFATT. Excuse me, sir ...

WILDE. No, Mr. Moffatt this does not concern you. Robbie, give me my money.

ROSS. No, I refuse.

(WILDE moves closer. ROSS is transfixed.)

WILDE. Robbie, come close to me. Robbie. Would you wish to upset me? Now, Robbie. Robbie. Look me in the eye. It is my will. Give me the pocketbook. *(There is a silence. ROSS reaches into his breast pocket and hands the wallet over.)* Thank you. Please allow us all to live our own lives. *(He moves a little unsteadily towards the group who are standing together.)* Mr. Moffatt, I have had magnificent service. I have remarked on this already, I know. But the vision of this meal reminds me ... the standard of service is the highest I've known. For that reason, I would be grateful ... it would do me honour if I could bestow some reward ... *(Fumblingly, he takes out notes.)* For the three of you, say, five pounds for your trouble? Ten, even? Five each?

(WILDE has misread MOFFATT's reluctance and clumsily taken out more.)

MOFFATT. I'm sorry, Mr. Wilde, but we cannot accept.

(The group stirs. WILDE is shocked.)

WILDE. What?

MOFFATT. No, sir we cannot. We cannot take this money of yours. If we accepted it would weigh on our conscience. No really. I promise, I speak for us all. Arthur?

ARTHUR. Indeed, sir.

MOFFATT. Phoebe?

PHOEBE. Yes, I feel the same way.

(It is not true for PHOEBE, and they all know it.)

MOFFATT. These last few weeks, Mr. Wilde, we have come to know you. No visitor to this hotel has ever been kinder or better regarded than you. And not for what you have given us. Not money, anyway. You have given us kindness. And at this moment your need is greater than ours. Here in this hotel, we see all sorts of people. People of every background and type. But we see very few gentlemen.

(He bows very slightly. WILDE, near to tears again, is barely able to speak.)

WILDE. Thank you. I am very moved.
MOFFATT. And now we would ask you just one single favour ...
WILDE. Of course. What's that Mr. Moffatt?
MOFFATT. That you sit down and eat your lunch.
WILDE. Yes, of course, Mr. Moffatt.

(He sits down obediently. They hand him his napkin. They pour wine into his glass. A small ritual. Then:)

MOFFATT. We'll leave you. Goodbye, sir. Call if there's anything you feel you might need.
ALL THREE: Goodbye, sir.
MOFFATT. We will be close, sir.
WILDE. Thank you. Thank you indeed. *(They go out. WILDE has lifted his fork but then he breaks down, overcome.)* I cannot. I cannot eat it. *(He drops the fork and gets up, moving blindly towards ROSS.)* Oh Robbie, Robbie ...
ROSS. Oscar ...
WILDE. Robbie, come here please, come here and hold me ...
ROSS. Oh Oscar ...
WILDE. Hold me, my dear, my precious, my own ...

(The two men stand in each others' arms.)

ROSS. Oh Oscar ...
WILDE. You think ... you think I have upset Bosie? What is Bosie thinking, do you know?
ROSS. I do not.

(WILDE had buried his head in ROSS's shoulder, but now ROSS tenses, and WILDE moves away, the moment past.)

WILDE. Good God, what's happening? I am awash. I have lost my handkerchief. Oh Lord, are there handkerchiefs here?

(He has blundered over to the suitcase, and is now pulling at its contents, clothes going everywhere in his untidy search.)

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