

ACT TWO

INT. SUMMER HOUSE, BEDROOM — DAY

Beatrice carries a vase of fresh flowers and bed linens into what will be Oscar's bedroom. She places the flowers on a chest of drawers. Sidney enters.

BEATRICE

I think we shall place Mr. Wilde
in here.

SIDNEY

Miss Potter, I owe you an
apology. For last night.

BEATRICE

(uncomfortable)
Not at all.

SIDNEY

I should not have expressed my
feelings when our proximity
creates such an awkward situation.

BEATRICE

We understand each other, Mr. Webb.
A continued discussion of this can
only be more painful.

SIDNEY

I shall feel the pain whether we
discuss it or not.

(beat)

But I must say your reaction saddens
me deeply. To forsake all love--to
forsake all hope--is to make one's
self into a machine.

BEATRICE

I am a machine. I have given up
all hopes for personal happiness.

SIDNEY

But why?

BEATRICE

I have reasons I do not wish to discuss.

Shaw appears in the doorway.

SHAW

They're here! They're here!

EXT. SUMMER HOUSE, DRIVEWAY — DAY

Charlotte and Oscar descend from their carriage. A DRIVER and Shaw unload trunks and traveling bags from the carriage.

Sidney and Beatrice hurry to help. Oscar supervises but carries only the smallest and lightest bag. Shaw struggles under the weight of a multitude of bags.

SHAW

Charlotte, why so many?

OSCAR

Those are mine.

BEATRICE

(to Oscar)

We're all delighted you could join us. Mr. Shaw has told us so much about you.

OSCAR

Everything good, I hope.

BEATRICE

Oh, of course.

OSCAR

I am relieved. I live in fear of gaining a bad reputation. They are so hard to live up to.

SHAW

The only reputation I've given you is for saying things like that. Let me introduce Miss Beatrice Potter.

OSCAR

I didn't know the Fabian Society
boasted any beautiful women.

BEATRICE

I assure you that I am just as
serious a socialist as your
friend Mr. Shaw.

OSCAR

And I assure you that I can produce
just as much Irish blarney as
your friend Mr. Shaw. I am sorry
if I offended.

BEATRICE

No, I should apologize. I have
never taken compliments gracefully.

SHAW

And this is Mr. Sidney Webb. He is
named for Sidneous, the Etruscan
god of committees.

SIDNEY

Pleased to meet you Mr. Wilde.

OSCAR

Any man who is mocked by Mr.
Shaw and stays in good humor
must be a very intimate friend.
I hope I can become your
friend as well.

Sidney has seized several bags and starts for the house. Shaw
and Oscar follow.

SIDNEY

Let me show you to your room.
It overlooks the garden.

OSCAR

And what wonders does the garden
hold? Will dew-diamonded
daffodils beckon to me in the
morning sun?

(more)

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Do chrysanthemum and delphinium
parade themselves in homage to
the beauty of youth turned to
statues by jealous gods?

SIDNEY

No, but there's a thermometer out-
side your window.

OSCAR

How very useful.

INT. CHARLOTTE'S ROOM--DAY

Charlotte unpacks her trunks. Shaw enters.

SHAW

Alone at last! Now I can say
hello properly.

Shaw hugs her and kisses her. Charlotte LAUGHS.

SHAW

Let me look at those ears of
yours. They don't look any larger
and yet they heard me calling all
the way to Rome.

CHARLOTTE

I confess it: I cut short my trip.
The contessa thought I must be
hurrying back to a rich young
British lord for me to be so
giddy.

SHAW

Are you going to turn my head
with flattery? Fill it with
such starlight and moonshine
that I won't be able to do any
useful work for a week?

CHARLOTTE

I know better than to think that anything I could say would slow the writing machine. In fact, I shall help increase your production.

Charlotte opens a box on her bed revealing a typewriter.

CHARLOTTE

If you will be so good as to put this on the desk.

Shaw puts the typewriter on the desk.

Charlotte gets a sheet of paper, sits at the desk, and feeds the paper into the roller. She types. She is not an expert yet, but it is clear that she has talent and has been practicing. She pulls the paper from the roller and hands it to Shaw.

SHAW

(reads)

"Dear Mr. Shaw, I did not like the thought of spending the whole summer idly watching you and Mr. Webb and Miss Potter scribbling away. So with your permission, I shall assume the position of household typist. As you can see, I have been practicing. Yours sincerely, Charlotte Payne-Townshend." Is Townshend truly spelled with a "Z"?

Charlotte LAUGHS and they look at one another, beaming.

EXT. BACK YARD--DAY

Shaw comes out the back door of the house, pulling Charlotte behind him by the hand. Charlotte LAUGHS. Shaw heads for a large out-building, formerly a stable.

INT. OUTBUILDING--DAY

Shaw leads the way into the building. Along with garden tools, the building holds four bicycles. Shaw grabs one bicycle and displays it for Charlotte.

SHAW

This is yours. I'm afraid it's only a second-hand Osmond.

CHARLOTTE

It's beautiful.

SHAW

I told Sidney that I refuse to perform any more spectacular accidents without a properly sympathetic nurse on hand. Miss Potter merely shakes her head when she sees me lying in a heap and says it is my own fault for standing on my head when I should be looking where I was going.

Charlotte moves to Shaw.

CHARLOTTE

I missed the music of your voice in Rome. When I read your letters, I could hear it, but I wanted it in my ears and not just in my imagination. I had to see you.

Shaw's expression becomes colder.

SHAW

Beware of that word "had."

CHARLOTTE

You needn't worry that I am going to compromise my independence. It is a habit far too ingrained to change.

Shaw's expression softens.

SHAW

Good. Two people can dance only when they stand on their own two feet.

CHARLOTTE

And can you dance?

SHAW

There was never a family as
musically inclined as mine.
The Shaw hasn't been born whose
soul doesn't swim in music.
My mother came to London in
pursuit of her music teacher.
My sister is a professional
singer.

CHARLOTTE

I didn't ask about singing, I
asked about dancing.

SHAW

The dance is the sister of music.
In fact, I can hear it now.

CHARLOTTE

What?

SHAW

A waltz. A bit of foolishness I
composed at the piano one evening.
Someone must be playing it far
away. Can you hear it?

CHARLOTTE

No.

SHAW

It's getting louder. Dum, dum,
dum, Dum, dum, dum...Yes, it's
definitely my tune. The Fabian
Waltz. Dum, dum, dum...

Shaw sweeps Charlotte into his arms and they begin to waltz.
Charlotte LAUGHS and picks up the tune from Shaw.

SHAW AND CHARLOTTE

Dum, dum, dum, Dum, dum...

SHAW

I shall write a new play: The
Waltzing Socialist.

(more)

SHAW (cont'd)

A green-eyed millionairess meets a devilishly dashing Socialist vagabond and is entranced by his hypnotic waltzing.

CHARLOTTE

How will it end?

SHAW

Tragically. He falls in love with Wagner and never waltzes again.

CHARLOTTE

So sad. We'll have to come up with a happier ending than that.

INT. OSCAR'S ROOM--NIGHT

Beatrice sneaks into Oscar's room carrying a book. Beatrice goes to the window.

POV BEATRICE

Oscar sits in a chair in the garden.

Beatrice places a book on the table beside Oscar's bed. The title of the book: FABIAN ESSAYS.

INT. KITCHEN--NIGHT

Shaw chops vegetables and adds them to a soup pot on the stove. Charlotte enters.

CHARLOTTE

And what is for supper?

SHAW

Vegetable soup. Very healthy.

EXT. LAWN--NIGHT

Oscar sits in a chair with a pencil in hand. He works on a manuscript, but he has a book nearby.

CHARLOTTE (O.C.)

Mr. Wilde?

Oscar hastily hides his manuscript and pretends to be reading a book. Charlotte comes out the backdoor.

CHARLOTTE

Mr. Wilde, are you ready for supper?

Oscar gets up with unusual speed.

OSCAR

Supper would be splendid.

INT. DINING ROOM--NIGHT

Oscar, Shaw, Charlotte, Sidney, and Beatrice at supper. Oscar tries to hide his disappointment at the meager fare: soup, bread, and a few vegetables.

SIDNEY

Mr. Wilde, you are Irish, are you not? Forgive me, but how did you remove Ireland from your voice?

OSCAR

I did not remove Ireland; I added Oxford.

BEATRICE

Mr. Webb, would you do me the favor of explaining Marx to me this summer? I am afraid my knowledge of Marx is horribly deficient.

SIDNEY

I'll read him to you and provide commentary. Would you prefer the French translation or the original German?

BEATRICE

French, I think.

SIDNEY

Good. My German is better, but
French lightens economics somehow.
And if Marx becomes too tiresome,
I shall read to you from a volume
by Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

BEATRICE

I'm afraid I do not appreciate
poetry. I always have the urge
to translate it back into prose.

This rebuff causes an awkward silence. Sidney tries not to show
his disappointment and turns to Shaw.

SIDNEY

Bernard, remember when you wanted me
to teach you German by reading Marx?

SHAW

One does not easily forget cockney
German. But Marx is not meant to
be read. Marx is meant to be
dropped on the heads of capitalists
from the roofs of tall buildings.

CHARLOTTE

More soup, Mr. Wilde?

OSCAR

(forced smile)

Thank you very much.

SHAW

Do you like it? It's my own
recipe.

OSCAR

Yes, I believe I can taste the
very spirit of Fabianism.

INT. OSCAR'S ROOM--NIGHT

Oscar hurries into his room, throws open a trunk, pulls out a
box of chocolates. He pops a chocolate in his mouth and his
eyes close in ecstasy.

MONTAGE

SUMMER HOUSE, VARIOUS

An establishing shot of the summer house in the morning light.

Shaw wakes and jumps from bed with ridiculous vigor.

Charlotte wakes and smiles at the light beaming in her window.

Sidney wakes and gropes for his pince-nez.

Beatrice wakes and grabs her diary and a pencil.

Oscar sleeps and shows no sign of waking.

Charlotte and Beatrice set the breakfast table.

Shaw and Sidney prepare porridge in the kitchen.

The four Fabians eat breakfast.

Oscar slumbers on.

DRIVEWAY

Shaw teaches Charlotte to ride her bicycle. Sidney and Beatrice SHOUT encouragements.

COUNTRY LANE

Charlotte ventures for the first time on to the road on her bicycle. She wobbles slightly but is getting the hang of it. She grins as she gains confidence. Shaw, Sidney, and Beatrice follow on their bicycles.

OSCAR'S BEDROOM

Oscar rolls over in bed, clutches his pillow, and snores on.

COUNTRY LANE

Sidney rides alongside Beatrice down an idyllic country road. Sidney points out a herd of cows in a field.

Shaw rides alongside Charlotte and then races a horse that trots on the other side of a fence that borders the road.

Sidney and Beatrice reach the top of a steep hill and begin to coast down the other side.

Shaw shows off to Charlotte by propping his feet on the handlebars just as they reach the crest of the hill. They begin to descend.

As Sidney and Beatrice reach the bottom of the hill, a flock of sheep begins crossing the road. They are forced to stop suddenly. Sidney turns his bike across the road as he prepares to walk it around the sheep.

Shaw gathers speed as he descends the hill with his feet still on the handlebars. He grins at Charlotte.

Charlotte spots the danger and SHOUTS a warning. Too late: CLOSE on Shaw's open-mouthed horror an instant before he collides with Sidney.

INT. OSCAR'S ROOM--DAY

CLOSE on Oscar's open mouth as he gives a tremendous yawn and sits up in bed.

EXT. LAWN--DAY

Charlotte sits at the table TYPING a manuscript of Shaw's. Shaw sits revising his manuscript. One of Shaw's legs is bandaged and he has it propped up on a cushion on a chair.

Oscar comes out of the house. He is brilliantly over-dressed in a summer suit.

OSCAR

Good morning.

SHAW

Good afternoon.

OSCAR

I have always been of the opinion
that morning begins at noon.
Oh, please don't stop typing on my
account, Miss Payne-Townshend.

(more)

OSCAR (cont'd)

Usually the clatter of the typing machine is almost as annoying as the piano when played by a close relation. But your dexterity elevates typing to an art. It is positively Mozartesque.

CHARLOTTE

Thank you. You don't type, Mr. Wilde?

OSCAR

I never exercise. What on earth happened to your leg?

SHAW

A bicycle catastrophe.

CHARLOTTE

He collided with Mr. Webb and a flock of sheep.

SHAW

I flew through the air like a arrow and plummeted to earth like Icarus. Sheep rocketed skyward like ten pins.

OSCAR

And you a vegetarian.

EXT. WILLOW TREE--DAY

An idyllic scene: Beatrice sits beneath a willow tree beside a brook. Sunlight filters golden through the leaves. She reads the French edition of Das Kapital. Sidney comes running up.

SIDNEY

Miss Potter! Miss Potter!

BEATRICE

What is it?

SIDNEY

Inspiration! I know what to do with the ten thousand pounds!

ACT THREE

INT. DINING ROOM--NIGHT

Everyone gathers at the table for supper. Shaw still sits with his leg propped on a chair. Oscar has a decorative fan with which he idly fans himself--and uses to hide the chocolates that he pops into his mouth.

Beatrice, Charlotte and Sidney bring food to the table.

BEATRICE

Did you sleep well last night,
Mr. Wilde?

OSCAR

Very well, Miss Potter. Usually I am troubled by the restlessness one experiences under a strange roof, but a thoughtful soul left a copy of Fabian Essays beside my bed and I was asleep in moments. I dreamed I had found a Socialist paradise in which every man would have equal access to my plays and poems.

Beatrice is annoyed with this wit.

SIDNEY

Bernard, I had an idea this morning on what to do with Hutchinson's bequest. Miss Potter agrees with me completely. We will found a school.

SHAW

A school?

SIDNEY

A college. For teaching economics. Something along the lines of the Ecole Libre des Science Politiques in Paris.

SHAW

You've given up the idea of lectures?

BEATRICE

A school would provide something more lasting than lectures.

SIDNEY

I've wanted to do this for years. We need an institution to preserve and regularize the work that we do.

BEATRICE

A school of economics could do the kind of social investigation on a regular basis that is now done only by eccentric individuals like ourselves.

CHARLOTTE

I think it is an inspired idea.

SIDNEY

Isn't it? Of course, there will be a colossal amount of work putting it together, but I won't mind that. And there will be a frightful amount of important people we will have to recruit.

SHAW

Not to mention the other Hutchinson trustees to convince.

BEATRICE

We shall have them to dinner and then devour them. I have played hostess for my father ever since my mother died, and I dare say I can give as fine a dinner party as anyone in London.

OSCAR

How ruthless you are! Like an attractive spider, you will lure your victims closer and closer until they are entangled in your web.

SIDNEY

Ha! "Her Webb!" Pun! Pun!

Beatrice scowls at Oscar's pun and Sidney's delight at being "her Webb."

INT. HALL, SUMMER HOUSE--NIGHT

Charlotte catches up with Shaw.

CHARLOTTE

I think perhaps we should engage
a cook.

SHAW

Why? Our meals are very healthful.

CHARLOTTE

I think Mr. Wilde may be used to
food that's more sophisticated.

SHAW

There are no vegetarian cooks to
be had in the village. Mrs. Willot
assured me.

CHARLOTTE

Then you won't mind if I ask
around.

SHAW

Tomorrow I must return to London
for a day to fulfill my duties as
a St. Pancras vestryman. Will
you be all right here?

CHARLOTTE

I'm sure Mr. Wilde can amuse me.
Or do you think you're indispens-
able to me already?

SHAW

Not yet. This is only our first
week together. My magic usually
takes at least a fortnight.

Shaw kisses her. Charlotte throws her arms around him.

INT. OSCAR'S ROOM--DAY

Oscar wakes and rubs his eyes. He glances out his window and sees Sidney cutting across the backyard at a brisk pace. At a fence Sidney climbs a stile and cuts across a field. Oscar watches until Sidney disappears down a path between some trees.

INT. TRAIN--DAY

Shaw rides a train back to London.

INT. VESTRY HALL--NIGHT

Shaw attends a vestry committee meeting chaired by the REVEREND ENSOR WALTERS.

WALTERS

The question before the committee tonight is whether or not to construct a women's public lavatory in the Camden High Road. There is a small delegation here representing some of the businessmen who own property on the Camden High Road. But before we see them, does anyone want to say anything?

BILL ALDERS raises his hand.

WALTERS

Mr. Alders.

ALDERS

Mr. Chairman, a public lavatory for women would be a colossal waste of money because no real lady would ever use it. The only ones likely to use it are the flower girls who need water for their violets.

SHAW

That sounds like a good reason to build one to me.

(more)

SHAW (cont'd)

The vestry supports public enterprise, does it not? Every flower girl who supports herself selling flowers is one less girl who ends up in the workhouse.

Alders frowns, but Walters smiles and nods.

SHAW

And I disagree with Mr. Alder's contention that no lady would use a lavatory. If the demands of nature come hard upon a lady when she is in the Camden High Road, does he argue that she would foul the road like a horse rather than use a public lavatory?

ALDERS

Mr. Shaw, you mock the honor of British women with your suppositions!

SHAW

No, Mr. Alders, you deny the intelligence of British women by claiming they will ignore a public lavatory when a pressing need is upon them. The honor of British women is not such a delicate thing that it can be destroyed or even stained by a public lavatory--or even by silly objections made in a British vestry hall.

Walters tries not to laugh.

WALTERS

Gentleman, are there any other comments?

No one has any.

WALTERS

Are there any objections to
receiving the delegation?

Shaw raises his hand.

SHAW

Mr. Chairman, are there any
women in the delegation?

WALTERS

No, I don't believe so.

SHAW

Then I move that the delegation
not be received. The question
before the committee concerns
the health of women. A delegation
with no female members can say
nothing relevant on the subject.

Several VESTRYMEN object at once.

ALDERS

That is ridiculous!

WALTERS

All opposed to receiving the
delegation raise your hands.

Shaw alone raises his hand.

WALTERS

All in favor or receiving the
delegation...

The rest of the Vestrymen raises their hands.

WALTERS

The delegation will be received.

INT. VESTRY HALL--NIGHT

A few minutes later. WALLFORD, a burly cobbler, is seated
before the committee. Walters looks at some notes.

WALTERS

Mr. Wallford, you are a cobbler who owns a shop across the street from the proposed location for the lavatory. Is that right?

WALLFORD

Yes, sir.

WALTERS

And what is your view of the proposed lavatory?

WALLFORD

I'm against it, sir. Build a lavatory there and the value of all our properties will drop. No women would use it so it won't do no good, but the smell would drive away my customers and take away half of the value of my property. Building a lavatory there would be the same as stealing half my money.

WALTERS

Does the committee have questions for Mr. Wallford?

Shaw raises his hand.

SHAW

Mr. Wallford, do you truly believe that no woman would use the proposed lavatory?

WALLFORD

I do. That is, I believe they would not. My missus says she'd not use the lavatory if her life depended on it. I don't believe any woman would.

SHAW

And what is it about the lavatory that would destroy the value of your property?

WALLFORD

It's the smell. No one likes to smell that. It makes a neighborhood unpopular, it does.

SHAW

Why would there be a smell from a lavatory no one uses? The smell you're referring to comes from human waste, does it not? If no one uses the lavatory there won't be any smell, will there?

Wallford says nothing.

SHAW

Mr. Wallford, how often do you clean up the horse dung in the Camden High Road?

WALLFORD

That's not my job. We've got street cleaners for that.

SHAW

But doesn't the smell of horse dung drive away your customers? I've walked on the Camden High Road and the smell of horse dung can be quite strong.

WALLFORD

People are used to horse dung. We smell that every day.

SHAW

So the British nose is used to horse dung, but is still so sensitive to the smell from the wastes of the British female that traffic would cease if a lavatory is constructed? Is the smell of the wastes of the British female more repugnant than mere horse dung? How much more offensive is the smell from the wastes of British women than horse dung to you, sir? Is it twice as offensive? Ten times as offensive?

Walters is desperately trying not to laugh.

SHAW

What do you think makes the wastes of the British female especially offensive to you? Is it their diet? If we made the lavatory accessible to only those women who would swear they have not eaten onions or radishes, would that satisfy you?

Wallford can only stammer.

INT. VESTRY HALL--NIGHT

Wallford and the members of his delegation are gone. Walters takes the vote.

WALTERS

All in favor of construction of the lavatory?

Shaw and Walters raise their hands.

WALTERS

All opposed.

Everyone else raises their hands.

EXT. VESTRY HALL--NIGHT

Walters leaves the hall. Shaw leaves and catches up with him.

SHAW

You voted with me even though
the measure was sure to fail.

WALTERS

You made it so clear that
reasons for opposition were
foolish that I felt I had no
choice.

SHAW

The true reasons for opposition
were never stated.

WALTERS

And what are the true reasons?

SHAW

They don't want to spend money
for the comfort of women.
But they can't admit that so
they talk about "the honor
of British women." Whenever
the word "honor" appears in
public debate, look for a
selfish motive.

INT. DINING ROOM, SUMMER HOUSE--DAY

Oscar, Shaw, Sidney, Beatrice and Charlotte eat supper.

OSCAR

You concern yourself with the
construction of public
lavatories? I would find that
kind of government work low
and sordid.

SHAW

Lavatories must be constructed,
and public lavatories must be
constructed with public money.

(more)

SHAW (cont'd)

There is nothing low or sordid
about meeting public needs.

OSCAR

But instead of attending a vestry
meeting and dealing with these
commonplace matters that any
public-spirited citizen might master,
you could have stayed here and
crafted a play that might
make your name echo down the
ages. Surely, that would be
a better use of your precious
hours.

BEATRICE

What could be of more value than
improving the world for everyone?
The names of most of those who
have built the good things of the
world are forgotten but their work
lives on. The names of most of the
men who fought slavery, who battled
poverty, and who expanded the
franchise are forgotten. Did they
live in vain? I don't think so.
We profit from their work though
we remember not their names.
I hope to live long enough to
do some lasting good in the
world. Whether anyone remembers
me for it is immaterial.

Sidney points a finger at Oscar.

SIDNEY

If mankind ever arrives at Utopia
it will not be through a thunder-
clap of revolution. It will happen
through a slow accumulation of
progressive taxation, improved schools,
free public hospitals, and even
women's public lavatories. Good
government earns its practitioners no
glory, but mankind rises to the
future through their efforts.

SHAW

You have entered a temple of good government, Mr. Wilde. Mock not the goods here or be scorned as a heretic and blasphemer.

OSCAR

I can see that.

BEATRICE

I'm sorry. Mr. Wilde is our guest, and I should not attack him. My apologies, Mr. Wilde.

OSCAR

No apologies are necessary. Passion needs no excuse. Mr. Shaw is right: you are a priestess of political economy and as such you are entitled to scorn followers of other gods.

BEATRICE

Now I feel foolish.

Charlotte gets up and goes into the kitchen.

OSCAR

Passions make us foolish,
and passions make us strong.

Charlotte returns with a chocolate cake on a plate. She places it on the table. Everyone looks at it greedily.

CHARLOTTE

We will have dessert tonight.

SHAW

Charlotte, did you bake that?

CHARLOTTE

No, it was baked by Mrs. Foster. I have found a cook, and I trust our meals will be the better for it.

(more)

CHARLOTTE (cont'd)

Mrs. Foster is the widow of the local butcher. A butcher who suffered from gout the last ten years of his life. She learned to cook without meat.

SIDNEY

And how did you find her?

CHARLOTTE

That will remain my secret. I may not know much about political economy, but I know a little about running a household.

ACT FOUR

INT. OSCAR'S BEDROOM--DAY

Oscar wakes and rubs his eyes. He glances out his window and sees Sidney cutting across the backyard at a brisk pace. Sidney is intercepted by Beatrice. Oscar listens to their conversation through the open window.

BEATRICE

Mr. Webb, aren't you joining us
for breakfast?

SIDNEY

I'm afraid not. I have a headache.
I often get them in the mornings.
I just need a walk in the fresh air.

Sidney climbs the stile as before, and disappears down a path.

Oscar watches this. He rolls over and goes back to sleep.

INT. KITCHEN--DAY

Charlotte checks the cupboards and writes a shopping list.
Oscar enters.

OSCAR

I thank you once again for
finding that gifted cook.
She will be here for tonight's
supper?

CHARLOTTE

Of course.

OSCAR

I am relieved. However did you
find her?

CHARLOTT

I don't mind telling you, but
you mustn't tell Mr. Shaw.

OSCAR

Your secret is safe with me.

CHARLOTTE

I asked myself who would know everyone in the village.

OSCAR

The letter carrier.

CHARLOTTE

That's good. I didn't think of him. I thought of the vicar and the publican. I asked them both about vegetarian cooks and I offered them a small reward if they could produce a name. In a couple of days, the barman produced Mrs. Foster.

OSCAR

Once you explain it, it seems simple. It is obvious that although Mr. Shaw has a theatrical mind, and Mr. Webb and Miss Potter have economic minds, you have a practical mind, and I thank God that you do.

CHARLOTTE

Have those economic minds made any impression on you?

OSCAR

Are you asking if I am becoming a Fabian? Alas, no. Although I sympathize with their aims and dedication, their passions are not mine. And I fear that in the long run, they will be sorely disappointed.

CHARLOTTE

Why?

OSCAR

They believe that they can change the world with their pens.

(more)

OSCAR (cont'd)

They will eventually discover
that the world resists change,
just as human nature resists
reform. The lesson may be bitter.

CHARLOTTE

Should we warn them?

OSCAR

No. Some things people must
discover for themselves. And
we must not discourage them
from doing what good they can.
The world may resist change,
but corners of it may be tidied.

EXT. LAWN--DAY

Shaw sits in a chair and writes furiously in a notebook. He
glances now and again over the shoulder of Charlotte who types
just as furiously at the typewriter on a table.

SHAW

Mind the punctuation.

CHARLOTTE

Don't requires an apostrophe.

SHAW

Dont required an apostrophe when
it was a contraction of "do" and
"not." But it is now in such
common usage that any intelligent
English-speaking being can only
regard it as a proper word in and
of itself. Remove the apostrophe.

CHARLOTTE

Your publishers will think it
unreasonable of you to expect
them to conform to your eccentricities
rather than the public's
expectations.

SHAW

The reasonable man conforms to the world. The unreasonable man expects the world to conform to him. Therefore all progress depends on unreasonable men. Banish the apostrophe!

The apostrophe is banished. Beatrice and Sidney approach with Oscar in tow. Beatrice has a croquet mallet.

BEATRICE

(to Charlotte and Shaw)

Would you care to join us in a game of croquet?

SHAW

(disdainfully)

Croquet?

BEATRICE

We have been very bad hosts and ignoring Mr. Wilde.

OSCAR

Please don't trouble yourselves on my account. Croquet sounds suspiciously like one of those strenuous competitions that are used in public schools to destroy boys' characters.

BEATRICE

I thought it was one activity we could all enjoy.

CHARLOTTE

I think it is a wonderful idea.

SHAW

Are you mad? A game that Exercises neither the body nor the mind? It is an absolute perfection as a waste of time. The only activity I can think of that is more idiotic is smoking.

Oscar pulls out his silver cigarette case.

OSCAR

Really? I had no idea it was as wonderful as that.

Oscar takes the mallet from Beatrice and clucks his tongue like a croquet ball being hit.

OSCAR

Croquet, anyone?

EXT. LAWN--DAY

The lawn is set for a croquet game. Everyone is in a good humor except Shaw who is doing his best to make himself and everyone else miserable. The game is about to begin.

SIDNEY

After you, Miss Potter.

BEATRICE

No, I intend to go last and talk to Mr. Wilde.

Sidney hits his ball and then strides off after it.

Charlotte steps aside and gestures to Shaw.

CHARLOTTE

After you, Mr. Shaw.

Shaw glares at her and GROWLS something under his breath. He takes his shot with angry energy and follows Sidney.

Oscar takes out his cigarette case, opens it, and offers a cigarette to Beatrice.

OSCAR

A cigarette, Miss Potter?

BEATRICE

Thank you.

Beatrice notices a photograph of two boys inside the case.

BEATRICE

Are those your boys?

Oscar takes the photograph from the case with pride and gives it to Beatrice.

OSCAR

My sons. Cyril and Vyvyan.

BEATRICE

How handsome they are. May I ask where they are?

OSCAR

They are with their mother. My only regret is that I don't spend more time with my boys.

Oscar takes his shot.

BEATRICE

May I ask you a personal question?

OSCAR

They are the only kind worth answering.

BEATRICE

Is your wife very beautiful?

OSCAR

Yes, she is.

Beatrice takes her shot and they stroll after the balls.

BEATRICE

And was it her beauty that made you love her?

OSCAR

Why this fascination with beauty, Miss Potter? Has some blind man been hinting that you are plain?

BEATRICE

No.

OSCAR

No, of course not. No, you have found a paramour with the soul of Hamlet and the body of Caliban.

BEATRICE

Something like that.

ON SHAW AND SIDNEY

Sidney stands by his ball and waves to Beatrice. Shaw strides up to him.

SHAW

Why are you smiling?

SIDNEY

Why are you scowling?

SHAW

I was in the middle of a scene of my Julius Caesar play. I was inspired. The words were flowing like water. Cleopatra had just entered and the scene was building to a magnifi--

SIDNEY

Yes, yes, there's nothing as enjoyable as work. But look, Bernard, we've made the women happy.

Sidney gestures to Beatrice who is in conversation with Oscar, and to Charlotte who smiles as she makes a difficult shot.

Shaw sees that Sidney is a hopeless case. He GROWLS to himself again and strides away.

ON BEATRICE AND OSCAR

strolling toward their croquet balls.

BEATRICE

A child will drink poison if the bottle is pretty enough--and a woman will marry for the same reason. If I had listened to my heart I would have married a man who did not respect me. Only my reason saved me and I hated myself for listening to it...And so I prayed that I might meet a man who respected my work, and valued my mind, and could help and be helped by me. Was it Aesop who warned us to be careful of what we wish for because we might get it?

OSCAR

The gods have given him every gift but beauty.

BEATRICE

Every gift but that.

OSCAR

Ah, beauty! It is a mere accident of geometry, a pleasing configuration of planes and curves, and yet we crave it as our soul's delight. Love, friendship, affection are the meat and drink of our souls, but beauty is the soul's champagne. Drink deep and it intoxicates.

BEATRICE

But one can't live only for beauty anymore than one could drink only champagne.

OSCAR

I must disagree. I frequently do both.

BEATRICE

I'm afraid I need something more substantial. The Yorkshire pudding of the soul.

Oscar LAUGHS. He looks and sees Sidney waving at Beatrice.

ON CHARLOTTE AND SHAW

Charlotte approaches Shaw.

CHARLOTTE

You are being very rude.

SHAW

The Almighty finally grants me
a moment of inspiration when
common labor becomes a joy and
you tear me from the workshop
of my mind. And for what? A
Beethoven symphony? A definitive
Lear? Or at least a bicycle ride
in Nature's bosom? No. Croquet.
The past-time of rich and idle fools.

CHARLOTTE

For the sake of our friends, I will
ignore that remark.

SHAW

It was not an insult, it was a
sermon. God's sacred gift of
time is far too precious to be
squandered on the hobbies of
those made stupid by money.

Shaw lines up his shot.

CHARLOTTE

Mr. Shaw, having money is not a sin.

SHAW

No, but leading an idle and useless
life is.

Shaw is about to take his shot when Charlotte furiously WHACKS
his ball with her mallet and sends it flying.

CHARLOTTE

You have no right to talk to me
that way! It was easy for you!
(more)

CHARLOTTE (cont'd)

You had poverty and adversity to give you character; I had only luxury and comfort at every side. How was I to build character from that? I had my father's good example, but that was more than canceled by my mother's bad example. Above all things, that was what my mother wanted me to be-- a useless person! You don't know how long I fought her! How hard I had to work to develop any character at all!

Shaw watches this outburst with fascination. When it is over his tone is much calmer.

SHAW

How did you know I was born poor?

CHARLOTTE

Even your best suits have been worn about a thousand times too much.

ON OSCAR AND BEATRICE

Oscar still watches Sidney who smiles across the lawn at Beatrice. Oscar's face lights up with delight. He LAUGHS.

OSCAR

We are talking about Mr. Webb! Are we not?

BEATRICE

Yes.

OSCAR

And does he love you?

BEATRICE

Passionately.

OSCAR

How fascinating. It must be like watching Karl Marx play Romeo. Once again I am reminded that all the world's a stage--but the play is badly cast.

BEATRICE

You must think I am a foolish idiot.

OSCAR

Love reduces even the most intelligent people to idiocy. That is one reason love is so necessary.

BEATRICE

I have never talked with any man as I have with Mr. Webb. But does one marry for talk?

OSCAR

If Paris had kidnapped the greatest female conversation-alist in Greece, Troy would be standing today, and Paris would be remembered as the wisest and happiest of its kings.

BEATRICE

But he didn't.

OSCAR

No. He valued only beauty and saw only Helen. Like you, he thought love must be tempests and whirlwinds, hurricanes of the heart. He did not realize it could also be the slow bloom of a flower.

BEATRICE

I don't know what terrifies me more: the idea of marrying him or the thought that he might leave me. If you were in my position, Mr. Wilde, what would you do?

OSCAR

Had I been in your shoes, I could not have resisted the beautiful man who did not respect me. I could never deny myself the joy of a glorious sin or the acquired wisdom of a colossal folly.

BEATRICE

You don't think very highly of morality.

OSCAR

On the contrary. I adore morality: it gives my sins their significance.

ON SHAW AND CHARLOTTE

Shaw and Charlotte look for Shaw's lost ball.

SHAW

What did your mother want that was so terrible?

CHARLOTTE

She wanted me to marry. Being the wife of a local Irish nob wasn't good enough for her, and she dragged my family first to Dublin and then London in search of good society. She killed my father's dream of a railroad and the disappointment killed my father. So then the only way my mother could rise in society was by marrying my sister or myself to some great catch. She dragged us all over Europe in search of husbands. And because I hated her, I swore I would never marry. I did everything I could to become the book-reading, opinionated, argumentative spinster my mother abhorred. But perhaps you're right. I may have avoided becoming my mother's kind of useless person by developing a useless type of my own.

SHAW

Nonsense! It's a pilgrim heart
you have, a questing soul seeking
a safe harbor.

He holds his arms wide and she comes to him and kisses him.

SHAW

I've been an ogre.

CHARLOTTE

Yes, you have.

SHAW

I shall apologize to you and Mr.
Wilde and Miss Potter.

CHARLOTTE

Later.

Charlotte kisses him again, passionately.

ON SIDNEY

standing alone with his mallet and ball.

SIDNEY

Why isn't anyone talking to me?