Studying Oscar Wilde

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Appendix:
Wilde’s Unfinished Plays and Scenarios

The Cardinal of Avignon

The text is taken from the appendix to Stuart Mason, Bibliography of Oscar Wilde (London: T. Werner Laurie Ltd., 1914), 583–85. The Clark Library has a manuscript copy of the same scenario in the hand of Wilde’s friend, More Adey; it is reprinted in Small, Oscar Wilde Revalued (Greensboro: ELT Press, 1993), 120–23.

Sketch of the Scenario of an unpublished play by Oscar Wilde, written in April 1894:—

The play opens in the palace of the Cardinal at Avignon. The Cardinal is alone and somewhat excited for he has received news that the Pope is sick and about to die. “What if they were to elect me Pope?” he says, thus giving the keynote of his inordinate ambition. Nobles and Princes enter; and the Cardinal, who knows the vices and pleasures of each one, solicits and obtains promises of their votes by promising each of them the fulfilment of their personal aims and desires. Exeunt, and the Cardinal says: “Will God place me on such a pinnacle?” and he has a fine speech with regard to the Papacy. A servant enters and says that a lady wishes to see the Cardinal. He refuses; but the lady, a beautiful young girl, a ward of the Cardinal, enters. She upbraids him for refusing to see her, and a very pretty and affectionate scene occurs between them. In the course of the conversation the girl says: “You have spoken to me of many things, but there is one thing you never told me about, and that is Love.” “And do you know what Love is?” “Yes, for I love.” Then she explains to the Cardinal that she has plighted her troth to a handsome young man who some time since came to the Cardinal’s Court and has been much of late at the Prelate’s Court and has been made much of by the Prelate. The Prelate is much upset and makes her promise not to mention this conversation to her lover. When his ward has left him, the Cardinal is filled with rage and sorrow. “And so my sin of twenty years ago has risen up against me and come to rob me of the only thing I love!” The young man is his son.

The scene now changes to some gardens at the rear of the Palace. The Cardinal’s ward and her betrothed are together. They have a passionate love scene. The young man, mindful of what they both owe to the Cardinal, asks his betrothed whether she has told the Cardinal of their betrothal. She, also mindful of her promise, says “No.” He urges her to do so as soon as possible.

At this point there enters a pageant, and suddenly a Masque of Death appears. This alarms the girl who sees in it a presage of some coming woe. Her lover scours the idea, saying: “What have you and I, with our new-born love, to do with Death? Death is not for such as you and me.” The pageant comes to an end, and the lovers part. The girl, in leaving, drops her glove.
The Cardinal comes out of the Palace, picks up the glove, and at the same time sees the young man. He is furious. “So they have met!” He is determined that he will not lose the only thing he loves, and so in the course of conversation he tells the young man, who desires to be told about his father, that, years ago, a mighty prince, on his death-bed, entrusted his two children to the Cardinal’s care. “Am I one of those children?” “You are.” “Then I have a brother?” “No; but a sister.” “A sister! Where is she? Why do I not know her?” “You do know her. She is the girl to whom you have betrothed yourself.” The young man is horror- and grief-stricken. The Cardinal, without, however, betraying his own relationship, urges him to pluck this impossible love from his heart and also to kill it in the heart of the girl. The girl now re-enters, and the Cardinal explains that her lover finds that he has made a serious mistake and does not love her sufficiently to wed her. This portion of the play winds up with a powerful scene between the two lovers, the young man rigidly carrying out the promise exacted from him by the Cardinal.

The scene now changes back to the interior of the Palace, as in the opening of the play. The Cardinal is alone and already repenting of the deed of yesterday. He is miserable. A struggle is going on within him between his ambition and his love. He is desperately in love with his ward; and at the same time he doubts whether, with such a sin on his soul, God will raise him to the Papacy. Trumpets are heard. Nobles and Princes enter. The Pope is dead, and the Cardinal has been elected Pope in his place. He is now the Pope. The Nobles and others, after making obeisance, exeunt. The Cardinal is radiant. “I who was but now in the mire am now placed so high, Christ’s Vicar on earth!” and so on. A fine speech. Now his ambition conquers. He sends for the young man. “What I told you yesterday was done simply to test you. You and your betrothed are no relations. Go, find her, and I will marry you to her tonight before I ride away to Rome.” At this moment the huge doors at the end of the hall are thrown open and there enter friars bearing a bier covered with a pall which they proceed to set down in the centre of the hall, and then exeunt without speaking a word. Both men intuitively feel who is the occupant of the bier. The young girl has killed herself in despair at the loss of her lover. The Cardinal opens the doors and says to the soldiers outside: “Do not enter here, whatever you may hear, until I walk forth again.” He then re-enters the room and draws a heavy bolt across the doors. The young man then says: “Now I am going to kill you.” The Pope answers: “I shall not defend myself, but I will plead with you.” He then urges upon the young man the sanctity of the papal office etc., etc. and represents the horrible sacrilege of such a murder. “No, you cannot kill the Pope.” “Such a crime has no horror for me: I shall kill you.” The Pope then reveals to him that he is the young man’s father, and places before him the hideousness of the crime of patricide. “You cannot kill your father!” “Nothing in me responds to your appeal. I have no filial feelings: I shall kill you.” The Pope now goes to the bier and, drawing back the pall, says: “I too loved her.” At this the young man runs and flings open the doors and says to the soldiers: “His Holiness will ride hence to-night on his way to Rome.” The Pope is standing, blessing the corpse, and as he does so, the young man throws himself on the bier between the Pope and stabs himself. The soldiers, Nobles, etc. enter. The Pope still stands blessing.

[Curtain.]
A Florentine Tragedy

There is no proper edition of *A Florentine Tragedy*. The text which Ross published in his 1908 *Collected Edition* is usually taken as copy-text. Ross’s 1909 *Second Collected Edition*, and his 1910 *Collected Edition*, issued for America, also prints Thomas Sturge Moore’s additional opening scene. We do not reproduce that scene; rather we print the additional manuscript material given by Stuart Mason in his *A Bibliography of Oscar Wilde* (1914), supplemented by that printed by Ian Small in *Oscar Wilde Revalued*. Mason reprints a “reduced facsimile” of the “original manuscript” of the piece’s “Scene” and “Characters” (463), which is given below as Fragment A. He also prints a transcription of “a manuscript of *A Florentine Tragedy*” which “contains the following unpublished fragments” (464–65). This is given below as Fragment B. In addition Mason prints the first part of yet another fragment of an alternative opening for the play (465); the whole of this fragment (the manuscript of which is in the Clark Library) is also reprinted by Small (132–33). The only difference between the readings of the part of the text printed by Mason and by Small is as follows. In the third line of Guido’s first speech, Mason prints “visit” as a variant of “follow,” rather than part of the line. This is given below as Fragment C.

**Fragment A**

**Scene**

The scene represents a room in a burgher’s house at Florence. A large window at the back opens on a moonlit sky. The city towers are faintly seen. There is a door L.C. A large tape-tried bed with close drawn curtains L.U. The time is XVIth century. There is a table set with supper for one. A lamp. Stools. A chest, etc.

**Characters**

Simone Dario (a merchant)  
Bianca (his wife)  
Guido Bardi (a young Florentine of high birth)

**Time. XVI. century.**

**Place**

Florence

**Fragment B**

*The scene represents a room in the house of a Florentine Burgher. The time is night, and through the open window at the back of the stage one can see the moon and the tall towers of the … and the roofs of many houses and many bright stars.*

**Bianca:**  
Oh! I had thought Love came with winged feet
And not with feet of lead! ['Tis past the hour.]

Why does he tarry?

These foolish lights were better quenched.

'Tis past the hour, and the [dull] slow-ticking clock
Like an unskilful player on the lute,
Makes harsh divisions of each point of Time
And sickens expectation. Mary Mother!
Thou knowest all my love and loveless days
Wearily passed and patiently endured,
Days without light or laughter, or such joys
As are [a] the common heritage of those
Who lack both food and raiment.

Holy Mother,

Thou knowest them all? And if it be thy will,

Oh! he has come! He has come

Guido's voice outside

... ...

Bianca:

Sing! Sing again! The thorn-pierced nightingale
[That all night long makes music for the moon]
[Is not so sweet. She does but sing of pain]

That every eve calls to the listening moon
Is not so sweet, for all her ecstasies,
She does but sing of pain, and bleeding loves,
[Of bleeding loves and pain she does but sing]
[And] fierce misery her melody.
Therefore she hides herself in forest leaves
And to the deepest darkness makes her moan,
And with false echoes fills that hollow shell,

Guido's voice

Bianca

Simone Dario:

My good wife you come slowly. Were it not seemlier

[better]
To run to meet your lord? Here take my cloak.
[And] First store this pack. 'Tis heavy. I have sold nothing

Fragment C

Bianca, a beautiful woman, is kneeling before an image of the Madonna. She is simply but beautifully dressed.

Enter by Window, GUIDO

GUIDO:
Last night it snowed in Florence, but tonight
It rained red roses. Nay, my gentle dove,
Why do you lure the hawk to follow you, visit
And then grow timorous? Do you know my name?

BIANCA:
Too well. Too well.
You are that terrible Lord, who men call love,
    homely

And I a common burgher’s unloved wife.
It is enough that I have looked on you.

GUIDO:
No, by St James, but it is not enough.

BIANCA:
Tell me your name. Nay do not tell me your name.
Love having many names has yet but one.
I am content, so I may touch your cheek,
Or smooth these tangled blossoms.
    How fair you are!
Fair as that young St. Michael on the wall
Of Santa Croce where we go and pray.
Your throat like milk, your mouth a scarlet flower
Whose petals prison music, and your eyes
Wild woodland wells in which dark violets see
Their purple shadows drown.
Our Florence lilies
Are white and red, but you have lily and rose
Yet in one garden.

[The text of Ross’s 1908 edition begins here]

[Enter THE HUSBAND]

SIMONE.
My good wife, you come slowly, were it not better
To run to meet your lord? Here, take my cloak.
Take this pack first. ’Tis heavy. I have sold nothing:
Save a furred robe unto the Cardinal’s son,
Who hopes to wear it when his father dies,
And hopes that will be soon.

But who is this?
Why you have here some friend. Some kinsman doubtless,
Newly returned from foreign lands and fallen
Upon a house without a host to greet him?
I crave your pardon, kinsman. For a house
Lacking a host is but an empty thing
And void of honour; a cup without its wine,
A scabbard without steel to keep it straight,
A flowerless garden widowed of the sun.
Again I crave your pardon, my sweet cousin.

BIANCA.
This is no kinsman and no cousin neither.

SIMONE.
No kinsman, and no cousin! You amaze me.
Who is it then who with such courtly grace
Deigns to accept our hospitalities?

GUIDO.
My name is Guido Bardi.

SIMONE.

What! The son
Of that great Lord of Florence whose dim towers
Like shadows silvered by the wandering moon
I see from out my casement every night!
Sir Guido Bardi, you are welcome here,
Twice welcome. For I trust my honest wife,
Most honest if uncomely to the eye,
Hath not with foolish chatterings wearied you,
As is the wont of women.

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

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

It is such things as these
That knit a state together, when a Prince
So nobly born and of such fair address,
Forgetting unjust Fortune's differences,
Comes to an honest burgher's honest home
As a most honest friend.

And yet, my Lord,
I fear I am too bold. Some other night
We trust that you will come here as a friend,
To-night you come to buy my merchandise.
Is it not so? Silks, velvets, what you will,
I doubt not but I have some dainty wares
Will woo your fancy. True, the hour is late,
But we poor merchants toil both night and day
To make our scanty gains. The tolls are high,
And every city levies its own toll,
And prentices are unskilful, and wives even
Lack sense and cunning, though Bianca here
Has brought me a rich customer to-night.
Is it not so, Bianca? But I waste time.
Where is my pack? Where is my pack, I say?
Open it, my good wife. Unloose the cords.
Kneel down upon the floor. You are better so.
Nay not that one, the other. Despatch, despatch!
Buyers will grow impatient oftentimes.
We dare not keep them waiting. Ay! 'tis that,
Give it to me; with care. It is most costly.
Touch it with care. And now, my noble Lord—
Nay, pardon, I have here a Lucca damask,
The very web of silver and the roses
So cunningly wrought that they lack perfume merely
To cheat the wanton sense. Touch it, my Lord.
Is it not soft as water, strong as steel?
And then the roses! Are they not finely woven?
I think the hillsides that best love the rose,
As Bellosguardo or at Fiesole,
Throw no such blossoms on the lap of spring,
Or if they do their blossoms droop and die.
Such is the fate of all the dainty things
That dance in wind and water. Nature herself
Makes war on her own loveliness and slays
Her children like Medea. Nay but, my Lord,
Look closer still. Why in this damask here
It is summer always, and no winter’s tooth
Will ever blight these blossoms. For every ell
I paid a piece of gold. Red gold, and good,
The fruit of careful thrift.

GUIDO.

Honest Simone,

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

My generous Prince!

I kiss your hands. And now I do remember
Another treasure hidden in my house
Which you must see. It is a robe of state:
Woven by a Venetian: the stuff, cut-velvet:
The pattern, pomegranates: each separate seed
Wrought of a pearl: the collar all of pearls,
As thick as moths in summer streets at night,
And whiter than the moons that madmen see
Through prison bars at morning. A male ruby
Burns like a lighted coal within the clasp.
The Holy Father has not such a stone,
Nor could the Indies show a brother to it.
The brooch itself is of most curious art,
Cellini never made a fairer thing
To please the great Lorenzo. You must wear it.
There is none worthier in our city here,
And it will suit you well. Upon one side
A slim and horned satyr leaps in gold
To catch some nymph of silver. Upon the other
Stands Silence with a crystal in her hand,
No bigger than the smallest ear of corn,
That wavers at the passing of a bird,
Yet so cunningly wrought that one would say
It breathed, or held its breath.

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

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

BIANCA.

Am I your prentice?

Why should I chaffer for your velvet robe?

GUIDO.

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

SIMONE.
I stand rebuked. But you will buy my wares?
Will you not buy them? Fifty thousand crowns
Would scarce repay me. But you, my Lord, shall have them
For forty thousand. Is that price too high?
Name your own price. I have a curious fancy
To see you in this wonder of the loom
Amidst the noble ladies of the court,
A flower among the flowers.

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

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

GUIDO.

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

SIMONE.

True: I had forgotten,
Nor will offend again. Yet, my sweet Lord,
You’ll buy the robe of state. Will you not buy it?
But forty thousand crowns. ’Tis but a trifle,
To one who is Giovanni Bardi’s heir.

GUIDO.

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

SIMONE.

A hundred thousand!
Said you a hundred thousand? Oh! be sure
That will for all time, and in everything
Make me your debtor. Ay! from this time forth
My house, with everything my house contains,
Is yours, and only yours.

A hundred thousand!
My brain is dazed. I will be richer far
Than all the other merchants. I will buy
Vineyards, and lands, and gardens. Every loom
From Milan down to Sicily shall be mine,
And mine the pearls that the Arabian seas
Store in their silent caverns.

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

GUIDO.

What if I asked
For white Bianca here?

SIMONE.

You jest, my Lord,
She is not worthy of so great a Prince.
She is but made to keep the house and spin.
Is it not so, good wife? It is so. Look!
Your distaff waits for you. Sit down and spin.
Women should not be idle in their homes.
For idle fingers make a thoughtless heart.
Sit down, I say.

BIANCA.

What shall I spin?

SIMONE.

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

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

Simone.
   It matters not.
Tomorrow you shall spin, and every day
Shall find you at your distaff. So, Lucretia
Was found by Tarquin. So, perchance, Lucretia
Waited for Tarquin. Who knows? I have heard
Strange things about men's wives. And now, my lord,
What news abroad? I heard today at Pisa
That certain of the English merchants there
Would sell their woollens at a lower rate
Than the just laws allow, and have entreated
The Signory to hear them.

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

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

Noble Lord,
I pray you pardon my good husband here,
His soul stands ever in the market-place,
And his heart beats but at the price of wool.
Yet he is honest in his common way.

[To Simone]
And you, have you no shame? A gracious Prince
Comes to our house, and you must weary him
With most misplaced assurance. Ask his pardon.

Simone.
I ask it humbly. We will talk to-night
Of other things. I hear the Holy Father
Has sent a letter to the King of France
Bidding him cross that shield of snow, the Alps,
And make a peace in Italy, which will be
Worse than war of brothers, and more bloody
Than civil rapine or intestine feuds.

Guido.
Oh! we are weary of that King of France,
Who never comes, but ever talks of coming.
What are these things to me? There are other things
Closer, and of more import, good Simone.

Bianca. [To Simone]
I think you tire our most gracious guest.
What is the King of France to us? As much
As are your English merchants with their wool.

Simone.
Is it so then? Is all this mighty world
Narrowed into the confines of this room
With but three souls for poor inhabitants?
Ay! there are times when the great universe,
Like cloth in some unskilful dyer’s vat,
Shrivels into a handsbreadth, and perchance
That time is now! Well! let that time be now.
Let this mean room be as that mighty stage
Whereon kings die, and our ignoble lives
Become the stakes God plays for.

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

    Alas! my lord,
How poor a bargain is this life of man,
And in how mean are market are we sold!
When we are born our mothers weep, but when
We die there is none weep for us. No, not one.

    [Passes to back of stage.]

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

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

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

SIMONE. [Turning round]
Who spake of Death? Let no one speak of Death.
What should Death do in such a merry house,
With but a wife, a husband, and a friend
To give it greeting? Let Death go to houses
Where there are vile, adulterous things, chaste wives
Who grow weary of their noble lords
Draw back the curtains of their marriage beds,
And in polluted and dishonoured sheets
Feed some unlawful lust. Ay! 'tis so
Strange, and yet so. You do not know the world.
You are too single and too honourable.
I know it well. And would it were not so,
But wisdom comes with winters. My hair grows grey,
And youth has left my body. Enough of that.
Tonight is ripe for pleasure, and indeed,
I would be merry, as beseems a host
Who finds a gracious and unlooked-for guest
Waiting to greet him. [Takes up a lute.]
But what is this, my lord?
Why, you have brought a lute to play to us.
Oh! play, sweet Prince. And, if I am bold,
Pardon, but play.

GUIDO.
I will not play tonight.
Some other night, Simone.
[To bianca] You and I
Together, with no listeners but the stars,
Or the more jealous moon.

SIMONE.
Nay, but my lord!
Nay, but I do beseech you. For I have heard
That by the simple fingering of a string,
Or delicate breath breathed along hollowed reeds,
Or blown into cold mouths of cunning bronze,
Those who are curious in this art can draw
Poor souls from prison-houses. I have heard also
How such strange magic lurks within these shells
And innocence puts vine-leaves in her hair,
And wantons like a maenad. Let that pass.
Your lute I know is chaste. And therefore play:
Ravish my ears with some sweet melody;
My soul is in a prison-house, and needs
Music to cure its madness. Good Bianca,
Entreat our guest to play.

BIANCA.

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

GUIDO.

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

SIMONE.

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

Well, my dear lord,
If you will not draw melodies from your lute
To charm my moody and o'er-troubled soul
You'll drink with me at least? [Sees table.]

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

Now, my lord,
Give us a toast from a full brimming cup. [Starts back.]
What is this stain upon the cloth? It looks
As purple as a wound upon Christ's side.
Wine merely is it? I have heard it said
When wine is spilt blood is spilt also,
But that's a foolish tale.

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

GUIDO.

I like it well,
Honest Simone; and, with your good leave,
Will toast the fair Bianca when her lips
Have like red rose-leaves floated on this cup
And left its vintage sweeter. Taste, Bianca. [Bianca drinks.]
Oh, all the honey of Hyblean bees,
Matched with this draught were bitter!

Good Simone,
You do not share the feast.

SIMONE.

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

GUIDO.

Sweet Bianca,
This common chapman wearies me with words.
I must go hence. To-morrow I will come.
Tell me the hour.

BIANCA.

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

GUIDO.

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

Bianca.

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

Guido.

And by a ladder
Wrought out of scarlet silk and sewn with pearls
Will come to meet me. White foot after foot,
Like snow upon a rose-tree.

Bianca.

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

Guido.
Simone, I must go to mine house.

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

Guido.
Be not afraid, Simone. I will stand
Most constant in my friendship. But to-night
I go to mine own home, and that at once.
To-morrow, sweet Bianca.
Well, well, so be it.
I would have wished for fuller converse with you,
My new friend, my honourable guest,
But that it seems may not be.

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

Good night, my lord.
Fetch a pine torch, Bianca. The old staircase
Is full of pitfalls, and the churlish moon
Grows, like a miser, niggard of her beams,
And hides her face behind a muslin mask
As harlots do when they go forth to snare
Some wretched soul in sin. Now, I will get
Your cloak and sword. Nay, pardon, my good Lord,
It is but meet that I should wait on you
Who have so honoured my poor burgher's house,
Drunk of my wine, and broken bread, and made
Yourself a sweet familiar. Oftentimes
My wife and I will talk of this fair night
And its great issues.

Why, what a sword is this!
Ferrara's temper, pliant as a snake,
And deadlier, I doubt not. With such steel
One need fear nothing in the toil of life.
I never touched so delicate a blade,
I have a sword too, somewhat rusted now.
We men of peace are taught humility,
And to bear many burdens on our backs,
And not to murmur at an unjust world,
And to endure unjust indignities.
We are taught that, and like the patient Jew
Find profit in our pain.

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

GUIDO.

Why do you speak like this?

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

GUIDO.

Naught would please me better
Than to stand fronting you with naked blade
In jest, or earnest. Give me mine own sword.
Fetch yours. To-night will settle the great issue
Whether the Prince's or the merchant's steel
Is better tempered. Was not that your word?
Fetch your own sword. Why do you tarry, sir?

SIMONE.
My lord, of all the gracious courtesies
That you have showered upon my barren house
This is the highest.
Bianca, fetch my sword.

Thrust back that stool and table. We must have
An open circle for our match at arms,
And good Bianca here shall hold the torch
Lest what is but a jest grow serious.

BIANCA. [To Guido]

Oh! kill him, kill him!

SIMONE.

Hold the torch, Bianca.

[They begin to fight.]

Have at you! Ah! Ha! would you?

[He is wounded by Guido.]

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

Do not look sad, Bianca. It is nothing.

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

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

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

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

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

Again! again!

[SIMONE disarms Guido.]

My gentle Lord, you see that I was right.

My sword is better tempered, finer steel,

But let us match our daggers.

BIANCA. [To Guido]

Kill him! kill him!

SIMONE.

Put out the torch, Bianca.

[BIANCA puts out the torch.]

Now, my good Lord,

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

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

There and there.

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

[SIMONE overpowers Guido and throws him down over table.]
GUIDO.  Fool! Take your strangling fingers from my throat.  
I am my father's only son; the State  
Has but one heir, and that false enemy France  
Waits for the ending of my father's line  
To fall upon our city.

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

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

SIMONE.  Nay, you are caught in such a cunning vice  
That nothing will avail you, and your life  
Narrowed into a single point of shame  
Ends with that shame and ends most shamefully.

GUIDO.  Oh! let me have a priest before I die!

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

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

SIMONE.  What, is there life yet in those lying lips?
Die like a dog with lolling tongue! Die! Die!
And the dumb river shall receive your corse
And wash it all unheeded to the sea.

GUIDO.
Lord Christ receive my wretched soul tonight!

SIMONE.
Amen to that. Now for the other.
[He dies. SIMONE rises and looks at BIANCA. She comes towards him as one dazed with wonder and with outstretched arms.]
BIANCA.
Why
Did you not tell me you were so strong?

SIMONE.
Why
Did you not tell me you were beautiful?
[He kisses her on the mouth.]
CURTAIN

La Sainte Courtisane;
Or, The Woman Covered With Jewels

The text is taken from Ross, ed., Miscellanies (London: Methuen, 1908), 231–39. The manuscript which Ross almost certainly worked from is in the Clark Library; a transcript of parts of it, indicating the ways in which Ross reordered the material, can be found in Small, Oscar Wilde Revalued, 146–48.

The scene represents the corner of a valley in the Thebaid. On the right hand of the stage is a cavern. In front of the cavern stands a great crucifix. On the left [sand dunes].
The sky is blue like the inside of a cup of lapis lazuli. The hills are of red sand. Here and there on the hills there are clumps of thorns.

FIRST MAN.
Who is she? She makes me afraid. She has a purple cloak and her hair is like threads of gold. I think she must be the daughter of the Emperor. I have heard the boatmen say that the Emperor has a daughter who wears a cloak of purple.
SECOND MAN.
She has birds’ wings upon her sandals, and her tunic is of the colour of green corn. It is like corn in spring when she stands still. It is like young corn troubled by the shadows of hawks when she moves. The pearls on her tunic are like many moons.

FIRST MAN.
They are like the moons one sees in the water when the wind blows from the hills.

SECOND MAN.
I think she is one of the gods. I think she comes from Nubia.

FIRST MAN.
I am sure she is the daughter of the Emperor. Her nails are stained with henna. They are like the petals of a rose. She has come here to weep for Adonis.

SECOND MAN.
She is one of the gods. I do not know why she has left her temple. The gods should not leave their temples. If she speaks to us let us not answer and she will pass by.

FIRST MAN.
She will not speak to us. She is the daughter of the Emperor.

MYRRHINA.
Dwells he not here, the beautiful young hermit, he who will not look on the face of woman?

FIRST MAN.
Of a truth it is here the hermit dwells.

MYRRHINA.
Why will he not look on the face of woman?

SECOND MAN.
We do not know.

MYRRHINA.
Why do ye yourselves not look at me?

FIRST MAN.
You are covered with bright stones, and you dazzle our eyes.
SECOND MAN.
He who looks at the sun becomes blind. You are too bright to look at. It is not wise to look at things that are very bright. Many of the priests in the temples are blind, and have slaves to lead them.

MYRRHINA.
Where does he dwell, the beautiful young hermit who will not look on the face of woman? Has he a house of reeds or a house of burnt clay or does he lie on the hillside? Or does he make his bed in the rushes?

FIRST MAN.
He dwells in that cavern yonder.

MYRRHINA.
What a curious place to dwell in.

FIRST MAN.
Of old a centaur lived there. When the hermit came the centaur gave a shrill cry, wept and lamented, and galloped away.

SECOND MAN.
No. It was a white unicorn who lived in the cave. When it saw the hermit coming the unicorn knelt down and worshipped him. Many people saw it worshipping him.

FIRST MAN.
I have talked with people who saw it.

SECOND MAN.
Some say he was a hewer of wood and worked for hire. But that may not be true.

MYRRHINA.
What gods then do ye worship? Or do ye worship any gods? There are those who have no gods to worship. The philosophers who wear long beards and brown cloaks have no gods to worship. They wrangle with each other in the porticoes. The [_____] laugh at them.

FIRST MAN.
We worship seven gods. We may not tell their names. It is a very dangerous thing to tell the names of the gods. No one should ever tell the name of his god. Even the priests who praise the gods all day long, and eat of their food with them, do not call them by their right names.
**Myrrhina.**
Where are these gods ye worship?

**First Man.**
We hide them in the folds of our tunics. We do not show them to any one. If we showed them to any one they might leave us.

**Myrrhina.**
Where did ye meet with them?

**First Man.**
They were given to us by an embalmer of the dead who had found them in a tomb. We served him for seven years.

**Myrrhina.**
The dead are terrible. I am afraid of Death.

**First Man.**
Death is not a god. He is only the servant of the gods.

**Myrrhina.**
He is the only god I am afraid of. Ye have seen many of the gods?

**First Man.**
We have seen many of them. One sees them chiefly at night time. They pass one by very swiftly. Once we saw some of the gods at daybreak. They were walking across a plain.

**Myrrhina.**
Once as I was passing through the market place I heard a sophist from Cilicia say that there is only one God. He said it before many people.

**First Man.**
That cannot be true. We have ourselves seen many, though we are but common men and of no account. When I saw them I hid myself in a bush. They did me no harm.

**Myrrhina.**
Tell me more about the beautiful young hermit. Talk to me about the beautiful young hermit who will not look on the face of woman. What is the story of his days? What mode of life has he?
First Man.
We do not understand you.

Myrrhina.
What does he do, the beautiful young hermit? Does he sow or reap? Does he plant a garden or catch fish in a net? Does he weave linen on a loom? Does he set his hand to the wooden plough and walk behind the oxen?

Second Man.
He being a very holy man does nothing. We are common men and of no account. We toil all day long in the sun. Sometimes the ground is very hard.

Myrrhina.
Do the birds of the air feed him? Do the jackals share their booty with him?

First Man.
Every evening we bring him food. We do not think that the birds of the air feed him.

Myrrhina.
Why do ye feed him? What profit have ye in so doing?

Second Man.
He is a very holy man. One of the gods whom he has offended has made him mad. We think he has offended the moon.

Myrrhina.
Go and tell him that one who has come from Alexandria desires to speak with him.

First Man.
We dare not tell him. This hour he is praying to his God. We pray thee to pardon us for not doing thy bidding.

Myrrhina.
Are ye afraid of him?

First Man.
We are afraid of him.

Myrrhina.
Why are ye afraid of him?
First Man.
We do not know.

Myrrhina.
What is his name?

First Man.
The voice that speaks to him at night time in the cavern calls to him by the name of Honorius. It was also by the name of Honorius that the three lepers who passed by once called to him. We think that his name is Honorius.

Myrrhina.
Why did the three lepers call to him?

First Man.
That he might heal them.

Myrrhina.
Did he heal them?

Second Man.
No. They had committed some sin: it was for that reason they were lepers. Their hands and faces were like salt. One of them wore a mask of linen. He was a king’s son.

Myrrhina.
What is the voice that speaks to him at night time in his cave?

First Man.
We do not know whose voice it is. We think it is the voice of his God. For we have seen no man enter his cavern nor any come forth from it.

Myrrhina.
Honorius.

Honorius (from within).
Who calls Honorius?

Myrrhina.
Come forth, Honorius.
My chamber is ceiled with cedar and odorous with myrrh. The pillars of my bed are of cedar and the hangings are of purple. My bed is strewn with purple and the steps are of silver. The hangings are sewn with silver pomegranates and the steps that are of silver are strewn with saffron and with myrrh. My lovers hang garlands round the pillars of my house. At night time they come with the flute players and the players of the harp. They woo me with apples and on the pavement of my courtyard they write my name with wine.

From the uttermost parts of the world my lovers come to me. The kings of the earth come to me and bring me presents.

When the Emperor of Byzantium heard of me he left his porphyry chamber and set sail in his galleys. His slaves bare no torches that none might know of his coming. When the King of Cyprus heard of me he sent me ambassadors. The two Kings of Libya who are brothers brought me gifts of amber.

I took the minion of Cæsar from Cæsar and made him my playfellow. He came to me at night in a litter. He was pale as a narcissus, and his body was like honey.

The son of the Prefect slew himself in my honour, and the Tetrarch of Cilicia scourged himself for my pleasure before my slaves.

The King of Hierapolis who is a priest and a robber set carpets for me to walk on. Sometimes I sit in the circus and the gladiators fight beneath me. Once a Thracian who was my lover was caught in the net. I gave the signal for him to die and the whole theatre applauded. Sometimes I pass through the gymnasium and watch the young men wrestling or in the race. Their bodies are bright with oil and their brows are wreathed with willow sprays and with myrtle. They stamp their feet on the sand when they wrestle and when they run the sand follows them like a little cloud. He at whom I smile leaves his companions and follows me to my home. At other times I go down to the harbour and watch the merchants unloading their vessels. Those that come from Tyre have cloaks of silk and earrings of emerald. Those that come from Massilia have cloaks of fine wool and earrings of brass. When they see me coming they stand on the prows of their ships and call to me, but I do not answer them. I go to the little taverns where the sailors lie all day long drinking black wine and playing with dice and I sit down with them.

I made the Prince my slave, and his slave who was a Tyrian I made my Lord for the space of a moon.

I put a figured ring on his finger and brought him to my house. I have wonderful things in my house.

The dust of the desert lies on your hair and your feet are scratched with thorns and your body is scorched by the sun. Come with me, Honorius, and I will clothe you in a tunic of silk. I will smear your body with myrrh and pour spikenard on your hair. I will clothe you in hyacinth and put honey in your mouth. Love—
HONORIUS.
There is no love but the love of God.

MYRRHINA.
Who is He whose love is greater than that of mortal men?

HONORIUS.
It is He whom thou seest on the cross, Myrrhina. He is the Son of God and was born of a virgin. Three wise men who were kings brought Him offerings, and the shepherds who were lying on the hills were wakened by a great light.

The Sibyls knew of His coming. The groves and the oracles spake of Him. David and the prophets announced Him. There is no love like the love of God nor any love that can be compared to it.

The body is vile, Myrrhina. God will raise thee up with a new body which will not know corruption, and thou wilt dwell in the Courts of the Lord and see Him whose hair is like fine wool and whose feet are of brass.

MYRRHINA.
The beauty …

HONORIUS.
The beauty of the soul increases till it can see God. Therefore, Myrrhina, repent of thy sins. The robber who was crucified beside Him He brought into Paradise. [Exit.]

MYRRHINA.
How strangely he spake to me. And with what scorn did he regard me. I wonder why he spake to me so strangely.

HONORIUS.
Myrrhina, the scales have fallen from my eyes and I see now clearly what I did not see before. Take me to Alexandria and let me taste of the seven sins.

MYRRHINA.
Do not mock me, Honorius, nor speak to me with such bitter words. For I have repented of my sins and I am seeking a cavern in this desert where I too may dwell so that my soul may become worthy to see God.

HONORIUS.
The sun is setting, Myrrhina. Come with me to Alexandria.
Myrrhina.
I will not go to Alexandria.

Honorius.
Farewell, Myrrhina.

Myrrhina.
Honorius, farewell. No, no, do not go.

I have cursed my beauty for what it has done, and cursed the wonder of my body for the evil that it has brought upon you.

Lord, this man brought me to Thy feet. He told me of Thy coming upon earth, and of the wonder of Thy birth, and the great wonder of Thy death also. By him, O Lord, Thou was revealed to me.

Honorius.
You talk as a child, Myrrhina, and without knowledge. Loosen your hands. Why didst thou come to this valley in thy beauty?

Myrrhina.
The God whom thou worshippest led me here that I might repent of my iniquities and know Him as the Lord.

Honorius.
Why didst thou tempt me with words?

Myrrhina.
That thou shouldst see Sin in its painted mask and look on Death in its robe of Shame.