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CECILY. A Maréchal Niel? [*Picks up scissors from table R C and starts U R C.*]

ALGY [*following her*]. No, I'd sooner have a pink rose.

CECILY. Why? [*Cuts flower from one of potted plants.*]

ALGY. Because you are like a pink rose, Cousin Cecily.

CECILY. I don't think it can be right for you to talk to me like that. Miss Prism never says such things to me.

ALGY. Then Miss Prism is a very short-sighted old lady.

[*CECILY offers him rose and puts it in his buttonhole.*] You are the prettiest girl I ever saw.

CECILY. Miss Prism says that all good looks are a snare.

[*Crosses R. ALGY follows.*]

ALGY. They are a snare that every sensible man would like to be caught in.

CECILY. Oh, I don't think I would care to catch a sensible man. I wouldn't know what to talk to him about. [*Goes quickly out R with ALGY.*]

[*MISS PRISM comes in L with CHASUBLE.*]

MISS PRISM [*coming C, as CHASUBLE follows*]. Where is Cecily? You are too much alone, dear Dr. Chasuble. You should get married. A misanthrope I can understand—a womanthrope, never! [*Crosses R C and neatly arranges books CECILY has thrown on table.*]

CHASUBLE. The precept, as well as the practice, of the Primitive Church was distinctly against matrimony.

MISS PRISM. That is obviously the reason why the Primitive Church has not lasted up to the present day. And you do not seem to realize, dear Doctor, that by persistently remaining single, a man converts himself into a permanent public temptation. Men should be more careful; this very celibacy leads weaker vessels astray. [*Moves back of table R C and sits right of it, her hands on table.*]

CHASUBLE [*crossing, sitting upstage of table R C*]. But is a man not equally attractive when married?

MISS PRISM. No married man is ever attractive except to his wife.

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CHASUBLE. And often, I've been told, not even to her. [*Puts his hand over hers on table.*]

MISS PRISM. But where is Cecily? [*Rises agitatedly and moves R, looking off.*]

CHASUBLE [*rising, moving L C*]. Perhaps she followed us to the schools.

[*As MISS PRISM moves R C again, JACK enters R. He is dressed entirely in black and walks with mock solemnity. As he comes R C, he takes out a long white handkerchief and dabs at his eyes.*]

MISS PRISM [*concerned*]. Mr. Worthing!

CHASUBLE. Mr. Worthing.

MISS PRISM [*shaking his hand, which goes limp when she drops it*]. This is indeed a surprise. We did not look for you till Monday afternoon.

JACK [*mock tragedy in his voice*]. I have returned sooner than I expected. [*Moves C, speaking to CHASUBLE.*] Dr. Chasuble, I hope you are well.

CHASUBLE. Dear Mr. Worthing, I trust this garb of woe does not betoken some terrible calamity.

JACK. My brother! [*Dabs at eyes.*]

MISS PRISM. More shameful debts and extravagancies?

CHASUBLE. Still leading his life of pleasure?

JACK [*shaking his head*]. Dead! [*Puts handkerchief to his eyes again.*]

CHASUBLE. Your brother Ernest, dead?

JACK. Quite dead.

MISS PRISM. What a lesson for him. [*Sits left of table R C.*] I trust he will profit by it.

CHASUBLE [*crossing, patting JACK's shoulder*]. Mr. Worthing, I offer you my sincere condolences. You have at least the consolation of knowing that you were always the most generous and forgiving of brothers.

JACK [*dabbing at eyes*]. Poor Ernest. He had many faults, but it is a sad blow. [*Blows nose loudly in handkerchief.*]

CHASUBLE. Very sad, indeed. Were you with him at the end?

JACK. No, he died abroad in Paris. [*Crosses L C and sits.*] I had a telegram last night from the manager of the Grand Hotel.

CHASUBLE. Was the cause of his death mentioned?

JACK. A severe chill, it seems.

CHASUBLE [*raising his hand*]. None of us are perfect. I myself am particularly susceptible to draughts. Will the—interment take place here?

JACK. No. He seems to have expressed the desire to be buried in Paris.

CHASUBLE. In Paris. [*Shakes his head.*] I fear that hardly points to any very serious state of mind at the last. [*Crosses to right of JACK.*] You would no doubt wish me to make some slight allusion to this tragic domestic affliction next Sunday. [*JACK reaches out and grasps CHASUBLE's arm convulsively.*] My sermon on the meaning of the manna in the wilderness can be adapted to almost any occasion, joyful or, as in the present case, distressing. [*Moves C.*] I have preached it at harvest celebrations, christenings, confirmations, on days of humiliation and festal days. The last time I delivered it was in the Cathedral, as a charity sermon on behalf of the Society for the Prevention of Discontent among the Upper Classes. The Bishop, who was present, was much struck by some of the analogies I drew.

JACK [*rising, dropping his mournful pose*]. Ah, that reminds me, you mentioned christenings, I think, Dr. Chasuble. I suppose you know how to christen, all right? [*CHASUBLE looks astounded. JACK moves toward him.*] I mean, of course, you are continually christening, aren't you?

MISS PRISM. It is, I regret to say, one of the rector's most constant duties in his parish. I have often spoken to the poorer classes on the subject. But they don't seem to know what thrift is. [*Takes some embroidery work from her bag on table and works at it as scene continues.*]

CHASUBLE. But is there any particular infant in whom you are interested, Mr. Worthing? Your brother was, I believe, unmarried, was he not?

JACK [*mournfully again*]. Oh, yes. Quite unmarried.

MISS PRISM [*bitterly*]. People who live entirely for pleasure usually are.

JACK. Oh, it is not for any child, dear Doctor. I am very fond of children. No, the fact is, I would like to be christened myself, this afternoon, if you have nothing better to do.

CHASUBLE. But surely, Mr. Worthing, you have been christened already.

JACK. I don't remember anything about it. [*Paces D L, as CHASUBLE sits on settee.*] Of course, I don't know if the thing would bother you in any way, or if you think I am a little too old now.

CHASUBLE. Not at all. The sprinkling and indeed immersion of adults is a perfectly canonical practice.

JACK [*shuddering*]. Immersion?

CHASUBLE. Oh, no! You need have no apprehensions. Sprinkling is all that is necessary, or indeed, I think, advisable. Our weather is so changeable. What hour would you wish the ceremony to be performed?

JACK [*coming to left of settee*]. Oh, I might trot 'round about five, if that would suit you.

CHASUBLE. Oh, perfectly! In fact I have two similar ceremonies to perform at that time. A case of twins that occurred recently in one of the outlying cottages on your own estate. Poor Jenkins, the carter, a most hard-working man. [*Shakes his head.*]

JACK. Oh! I don't see much fun in being christened along with other babies. It would be childish. Would half-past five do?

CHASUBLE. Admirably, admirably! [*Takes out watch.*] And now, dear Mr. Worthing, I will not intrude any longer into a house of sorrow. [*Rises.*] I would merely beg you not to be too much bowed down by grief. [*JACK remembers his pose and assumes a tragic attitude again.*] What seem to us bitter trials are often blessings in disguise. [*Starts L.*]

MISS PRISM. This seems to me a blessing of an extremely obvious kind.

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