

Audition Pack

Ottershaw Players present Lord Arthur Savile's Crime

By Constance Cox. Story by Oscar Wilde

Directed by Peter Moore. 07930 451317. peter.c.moore@gmail.com

Audition Dates

Read-through for members of Ottershaw Players on **Monday 25th February, 7.30pm**. Public auditions on **Thursday 28th February** and **Sunday 2nd March, also at 7.30pm**. All to be held at Brook Hall, Brox Road, Ottershaw. The format of the auditions is still to be decided. If anyone is interested in auditioning for this production, but is unable to make either of the audition dates, please contact Peter Moore ASAP.

Production Dates / Location

Week commencing 25th May 2008 at the Rhoda McGaw Theatre, Woking

Rehearsals

We will rehearse on Sunday evenings and one other evening (suitable for cast) each week. The last couple of weeks we will probably go to three rehearsals per week. Sunday rehearsals at Brook Hall. Weekday rehearsals at a venue to be decided.

Period

1890s - costume to be in keeping with the period.

Character Notes

Lord Arthur

Age 20s - 40s. Not very bright. Rich. Pleasant. Believes that Sybil loves him "to distraction". Happy. Loves Sybil. Doesn't keep up with gossip. A gambling man, but not to excess. A bit gullible. Believes Podgers implicitly. Grateful to pay him for the information about his "murder".

Baines

Lord Arthur's butler. Old enough to have served Arthur's father. Intelligent. Devoted. Faithful. In love with Arthur? Doesn't approve of Arthur's marriage plans. Admires Podgers (at first). Has a strict moral code. Practical and unflappable. Will do anything to help Arthur, including helping him to murder members of his family.

Sybil Merton

Arthur's fiancée. Beautiful. Gifted. Sweet. Charming. Rich. Loves Arthur. Good taste (decorated A's house). Complicit in his plans to commit murder.

The Dean of Paddington

Old chap. Arthur's uncle. Named "Robert". Clergyman. Poor memory. Collects clocks. Likes his food. Will perform Arthur and Sybil's marriage ceremony.

Lady Margaret Windemere

Arthur's aunt. His mother's younger sister. Young enough to still be vibrant and attractive. Has met Mr Podgers and doesn't like him.

Lady Clementina Beauchamp

Arthur's great-aunt. His father's aunt. Elderly. Rheumatic. Gambling problem. No money, in debt. Supported financially by Arthur. Once a good-time, party girl. Likes the men!

Lady Julia Merton

Sybil's mother. Doesn't trust Arthur. No taste (according to Lady W). Used to being right and not being challenged. Arrogant.

Mr Podgers

A cheiromantist. Has an "expressive face". Motivated by money (obvious at all levels of his character). A fraud. Blackmailer. Outwardly seems bland, inoffensive and comical - but turns steely and strong when blackmailing Arthur.

Nellie

Parlour maid. Young. Newly hired in expectation of A's marriage. "Not uncomely". Flirtatious.

Herr Frederick Winkelkopf

An anarchist. German. About 40 (flexible). Voluble. Excitable. "President of the Royal Society of Anarchists. Humanitarian Branch".

Synopsis

The play is a black comedy, in three acts, requiring 5 male and 5 female actors. Set in 1890, all action takes place in the drawing-room of Lord Arthur Savile's house in Grosvenor Square, London.

Lord Arthur Savile is engaged to be married to Sybil Merton. Her mother, Lady Julia, brings Mr Podgers to a soiree being hosted by Arthur. Podgers is a cheiromantist (not to be confused with a chiropodist!), or a palm-reader. He has become a celebrity in society by exposing scandals which have wrecked several marriages. Lady Julia wants Podgers to read Arthur's hand to ensure that he has never done anything which would disgrace her daughter. Podgers reads Arthur's hand and declares him to be a good suit for marriage. However, in private, he tells Arthur that he is doomed to commit murder at some time in the future.

Arthur decides (with typical Wildean logic) that it would be best to commit the murder before he gets married, to save Sybil the embarrassment. So he plots, with his butler Baines and a German anarchist named Winkelkopf, on the best course of action.

A poisoned sweet, intended for his bankrupt aged great-aunt, Lady Clementia, finds its way into Arthur's drink and he narrowly escapes death.

An exploding clock, intended for his Uncle, the Dean of Paddington (who should be performing the marriage ceremony, eventually) misfires, as does an exploding umbrella, also intended for the Dean.

With each failed attempted murder, Arthur is forced to postpone the wedding, leading Sybil to believe that he does not love her. In order to make her understand he has to explain the real situation, which she accepts coolly and to his delight she assists with the plans to commit a murder.

After an attempt to trip Arthur's aunt, Lady Windermere, on the stairs fails, and Arthur is nearly smothered to death by his butler and the anarchist, Podgers attempts to blackmail Arthur, having learned of his attempts to bring forward the murder.

To kill two birds with one stone, Arthur pushes Podgers into the Thames late one night. Podgers survives, but is then unmasked as a blackmailer AND a fraud. It seems that his psychic predictions are all phony! With that, Podgers commits suicide.

Now free to marry Sybil, knowing that he will not commit murder, Arthur hurries off in his carriage. Finding a stray, smoking bomb (placed there by Winkelkopf in the hope of blowing-up another relative) Arthur throws it out of the window. It explodes and he is taken away by the police for disturbing the peace.

The curtain closes as Baines phones *The Times* to place the now customary notice of postponement of the wedding.

Extract

Attached below is a short extract from the play, to give you an idea of the style. This extract is from near the beginning of Act One. We've been introduced to Arthur, Baines and Sylvia. Arthur's relatives are due to arrive for a dinner party...

ARTHUR. Darling, you must realize I'm nearly thirty. I can't be expected to remember all my past life in a flash. There may be something I've overlooked.

SYBIL. But if you refuse, mother will break off the engagement.

ARTHUR. Oh, no!

SYBIL. She will, Arthur. That's why I came to tell you. She said if you refused she'd know at once you had a guilty conscience.

ARTHUR. But I haven't a guilty conscience. I'm only afraid there may have been something I've forgotten.

SYBIL. Couldn't we make sure?

ARTHUR. How?

SYBIL. Isn't there somebody we could ask about you?

ARTHUR. There's only Baines.

SYBIL. Would he know?

ARTHUR. He might. He's been with me for years and years.

SYBIL. Then do ring for him, Arthur, just to make certain.

(ARTHUR rises, crosses to the fireplace, pulls the bell-rope, then crosses and sits on the sofa)

I hate to seem so suspicious, darling, but I'm so afraid Mr Podgers may see something that would separate us, and I love you so much.

ARTHUR. I love you, too, Sybil, and nothing is going to separate us.

(BAINES enters up c)

BAINES. You rang, my lord?

ARTHUR. Yes, Baines, come in and shut the door.

(BAINES closes the door)

Baines, you know I'm expecting company tonight?

BAINES (moving down c) Your lordship has already informed me. Your lordship's aunts—Lady Windermere and Lady Beauchamp. Your lordship's uncle—the Dean of Paddington, and—(with an inclination towards Sybil) Lady Julia Merton.

ARTHUR. Yes, but now there's going to be somebody else. Have you ever heard of a man named Podgers?

BAINES. The name is not on your visiting list, my lord.

ARTHUR (irritably) No, of course it isn't. He's a palmist.

SYBIL. Cheiromantist.

ARTHUR. Yes, that's it. Cheiromantist.

BAINES (thoughtfully) Cheiromantist. (Suddenly) Not the Podgers, my lord?

SYBIL. There, you see, Arthur.

BAINES. Only the other day he discovered that a certain noble peer had contracted an unfortunate marriage in his extreme youth which he regretted in his maturity.

ARTHUR. Well, what of it? There's nothing wrong in that.

BAINES. Nothing at all, my lord, except that the noble peer in question omitted to discard his former wife before acquiring his present one. I understand the case is to be heard at the next sessions.

ARTHUR. You think he's infallible?

BAINES. Without question, my lord. A wonderful man indeed. A wonderful man.

ARTHUR (rising) Well, you needn't look so pleased about it. He's coming here tonight.

BAINES. Here, my lord?

ARTHUR (moving down L) That's what I said.

BAINES (drawing himself up proudly) I have nothing to fear, my lord.

ARTHUR. I don't care about you. It's not your hand he's going to read. (He moves up L) It's mine.

BAINES (startled) Yours, my lord?

ARTHUR (moving behind the sofa) Lady Julia is bringing him with her. She wants to find out before it's too late if I shall be a suitable husband for Miss Merton.

BAINES. I see, my lord.

SYBIL. I couldn't help it, Arthur. She'd arranged it all before I knew.

ARTHUR. It's not your fault, Sybil, I know.

SYBIL. And if your conscience is clear, we have nothing to worry about.

ARTHUR. Yes, but that's just the point. Is it? (He moves to L of Baines) Baines!

BAINES. My lord?

ARTHUR (leading Baines down c) You may be able to help us, Baines. You've served me a very long time.

BAINES. Man and boy, my lord, for twenty years. Ever since that terrible day in the gun-room, when your lordship's father inadvertently removed himself by cleaning a loaded sixteen-bore sporting gun.

SYBIL. Oh, how dreadful!

BAINES (crossing to Sybil) It was indeed, miss. The gun-room required complete redecoration. The mishap occurred after his lordship had returned home from duck-shooting. His late lordship was excessively fond of the sport, although he could never hit any-

BAINES. I beg your pardon, my lord, I was carried away. (*He moves to L. of Arthur*) You suggested I might be of service, my lord.

ARTHUR. Yes. Now, in order to meet this crisis which may presently be upon us, I'd like to know if you can recall any reprehensible actions I may have committed during the last twenty years, and which might confound me when this redoubtable Mr Podgers arrives.

BAINES. You wish to know now, my lord?

ARTHUR (*annoyed*) Yes, of course I do. (*He moves down R*) I've only got about ten minutes.

BAINES. I will consider, my lord. (*He considers deeply and wavers up C*)

(ARTHUR and SYBIL wait anxiously)

ARTHUR. Come on! I haven't been as dastardly as all that.

BAINES (*with slight reproach*) I confess I cannot recall anything which might be termed a misdeed, my lord. (*He moves C*)

SYBIL (*joyfully*) Nothing at all?

BAINES. No, miss. A few peccadilloes, that is all.

ARTHUR (*moving above the table RC*) Podgers doesn't count peccadilloes?

BAINES. Oh, no, my lord. Forgery, larceny, burglary and bigamy are the things he unhesitatingly exposes.

ARTHUR. Well, I can confidently say I've never committed any of those. (*He moves to R of Baines. Anxiously*) Er—you don't think . . . ? (*To Sybil*) Excuse me, darling. (*He whispers to Baines*) Could he?

BAINES. Oh, no, my lord. There would be insufficient space on the hand for those.

ARTHUR (*looking cheerfully at his hand*) Yes, there isn't much room, is there? (*He crosses to Sybil*) Well, darling, it seems to be all right. My past, Baines can vouch for, my present is an open book, and my future is in your hands.

SYBIL (*rising*) Oh, Arthur, I'm so glad. I felt sure we had nothing to worry about. I always knew you were thoroughly noble.

ARTHUR. Darling!

SYBIL (*to Baines*) When I came in just now, completely unchaperoned, he only kissed me once. Wasn't that honourable?

BAINES (*moving down RC*) It was indeed, miss, though some might say it implied a want of initiative.

(A knock is heard from the front door)

(*They kiss*)

Oh, Arthur, were you as heavenly when you were little as you are now?

ARTHUR. Oh, I was sweet!

SYBIL. I must go. (*She moves to the door up R and turns*) Don't let them frighten you.

(*SYBIL blows Arthur a kiss and exits up R. ARTHUR moves to the fireplace.*)

BAINES enters up C and stands R of the doorway)

BAINES (*announcing*) The Dean of Paddington.

(*The DEAN OF PADDINGTON, Arthur's uncle, enters up C. He is a spry old gentleman, of some absence of mind.*)

BAINES exits up C)

ARTHUR (*moving up C*) Good evening, Uncle. (*He shakes hands with the Dean*) I'm delighted to see you.

DEAN. How are you, Arthur my boy? Upon my word, you're looking well. Did you have a good honeymoon?

(*They move down C together*)

ARTHUR. I'm not married yet, Uncle.

DEAN. You're not? Are you quite sure?

ARTHUR. Quite sure, Uncle.

DEAN. That's an extraordinary thing! I felt sure I married you last month—I mean—I performed the ceremony. (*He moves below the sofa*)

ARTHUR. Perhaps it was Lord Goring, Uncle.

DEAN. Goring? Yes, that's it. Goring, of course. Feller with a blank sort of face and no brains. That's what made me think of you. (*He sits on the sofa*) Well, my boy, and when is the happy day?

ARTHUR. Next Thursday, Uncle, and would you mind seeing if you've made a note of the date? It would be rather awkward if you weren't there. (*He sits in the armchair RC*)

DEAN. Don't you believe it, my boy. There are plenty of husbands who'd be only too grateful if the clergyman hadn't turned up on their wedding day. Still, I don't suppose you feel like that, do you? (*He takes out a diary*)

ARTHUR. Not at the moment.

DEAN. Yes. Old Jedburgh is being sent home pickled from India. It'll cause quite a stir. You ought to feel yourself honoured.

ARTHUR. Well, I hope you won't think me eccentric, Uncle, but I did rather want my marriage to be a cheerful occasion.

DEAN. My dear Arthur, there's nothing cheerful about marriage. The sooner you learn that, the better. As a matter of fact, I always recommend a funeral before a wedding. It puts all the parties in a proper frame of mind. *(He takes out his watch)* Is nobody else coming? *(He rises, crosses to the fireplace and compares his watch with the clock)*

ARTHUR. Auntie Clem and Aunt Margaret. They seem to be a little late. *(He crosses to the window and looks out)*

(A knock is heard from the front door)

DEAN. Thought I'd be the last. Spent half an hour at Frolland's looking at a beautiful little eighteenth-century clock they have there. Perfect period specimen.

ARTHUR *(moving LC)* Still adding to your collection, Uncle?

DEAN. 'Fraid so, my boy. Not likely to stop until I die.

(BAINES enters up C and stands R of the doorway)

BAINES *(announcing)* Lady Windermere, Lady Clementina Beauchamp.

(LADY WINDERMERE and LADY CLEMENTINA BEAUCHAMP enter up C. LADY WINDERMERE is a beautiful woman in the forties. LADY CLEMENTINA is a delightful woman of about sixty. Both are in evening gowns.)

BAINES *exits up C)*

LADY WINDERMERE *(moving to R of Arthur)* Arthur, my dear, you look uncommonly well for a man about to be married.

(ARTHUR kisses Lady Windermere)

ARTHUR. So I've been told, Aunt Margaret.

(LADY WINDERMERE crosses to the Dean. LADY CLEMENTINA moves to Arthur)

Auntie Clem, how good of you to come. *(He kisses her)*

LADY WINDERMERE *(to the Dean)* Ah, Robert! *(She sits on the chair down R)*

LADY CLEMENTINA. Nonsense! I'm a poor rheumatic creature with a false front and a bad temper. If it weren't for dear Margaret who sends me all the worst French novels she can find, I don't think I could get through the day.

ARTHUR. Auntie, you mustn't talk like that just when I'm about to be married.

LADY CLEMENTINA. I shall wait and see you made happy, dear boy, then I shall die in peace. Oh, that reminds me. Before I do that, will you let me have five hundred pounds?

ARTHUR. Oh, Auntie, you haven't been gambling again?

LADY CLEMENTINA. Surely you don't grudge me my poor pleasures? I haven't had a penny from you for six weeks, Arthur. After all, I'm a sick woman, I must have some little amusement.

LADY WINDERMERE. It's too bad of you, Clementina. Arthur will have a great many expenses after he's married.

LADY CLEMENTINA *(with a charming smile)* I know. That's why I'm asking him while he can still afford it. You won't refuse me, will you, Arthur?

ARTHUR *(good-humouredly)* Oh, very well, I'll send you a cheque to-morrow. *(He pats her shoulder, rises and moves up L)*

LADY CLEMENTINA. That's a good boy.

DEAN. And how is Frederick, Clementina? *(He moves to the arm-chair RC and sits)* Is he feeling better?

LADY CLEMENTINA. I hope so, Robert. There's not much point in dying if you still have the gout.

DEAN. 'Pon my soul, is he dead?

LADY CLEMENTINA. I trust so, dear. You buried him.

DEAN. Extraordinary!

LADY WINDERMERE *(looking about her)* Arthur, you've done wonders with this room. It looks perfectly beautiful.

(BAINES enters up C, carrying a tray with glasses of sherry. He serves the company, starting with Lady Windermere)

ARTHUR *(moving C)* I want you to see the rest of the house as well. It's entirely Sybil's doing. She chose every one of the decorations.

LADY WINDERMERE. Did she? Then she must have considerably better taste than her mother. No taste whatever in clothes or people. Have you seen her latest lion?

DEAN. Who's that?

LADY CLEMENTINA. Is that the man who predicted the Belton disaster?

LADY WINDERMERE. The very same. He foretold a marriage and a death both within the same week. And curiously enough, Lady Belton eloped with her daughter's dancing master, and Lord Belton died three days afterwards—of joy or grief, I forget which.

(BAINES exits up c)

ARTHUR (moving above the table rc) Do—you think he's any good, Auntie?

LADY WINDERMERE (rising and placing her glass on the mantelpiece) Oh, as to that, I should hesitate to say. He has made some extraordinarily accurate—guesses, shall we call them. But I have no patience with this rage for digging up what has been nicely buried. Far better to leave things as they are. People find out things quite soon enough for themselves. (She looks in the mirror over the mantelpiece and pats her hair)

DEAN. I quite agree.

LADY WINDERMERE (turning) I was delighted to come here tonight, Arthur, knowing this to be the one place in London where one could be quite certain of not meeting him.

(BAINES enters up c and stands R of the doorway)

BAINES (announcing) Lady Julia Merton. Mr Podgers.

LADY WINDERMERE. Really, Arthur! This is too much! (She moves down R)

(The DEAN rises.)

LADY JULIA MERTON and MR PODGERS enter up c. One feels instinctively that LADY JULIA is closely related to Lady Bracknell. PODGERS is a stout little man, with gold-rimmed spectacles. Both are in evening dress.

BAINES exits up c)

ARTHUR (moving up c; nervously) Good evening, Lady Julia.

LADY JULIA (pausing on the threshold; severely) I was under the impression you would be alone tonight, Arthur. I particularly wanted to talk to you, and now I find you surrounded by half London.

LADY WINDERMERE. I'm sorry if we give you that impression, Lady Julia. You may rest assured that I, for one, will not be staying much longer.

(ARTHUR puts out his hand, then remembers and hurriedly withdraws it)

Permit me to congratulate you. I have heard your happy news.

(LADY JULIA sits L of Lady Clementina on the sofa)

ARTHUR. Thank you. Let me present you to my guests, Mr Podgers—Lady Clementina Beauchamp—

(PODGERS bows)

—Lady Windermere—

LADY WINDERMERE (coldly) We have met. (She sits on the chair down R)

ARTHUR. —and my uncle—the Dean of Paddington.

(PODGERS crosses below Arthur to L of the Dean)

DEAN. So you've taken a night off from your—what-d'you-call-it—fortune-telling, Mr Podgers?

PODGERS. Pardon me, if I correct you, Mr Dean, but I do not tell fortunes. I read the past, the present and the future from the palm of the hand.

(ARTHUR moves to the table up LC and stands listening)

LADY CLEMENTINA. But how exciting that must be.

PODGERS. Not so much for me, perhaps, my lady, as for my—
er . . .

LADY WINDERMERE. Victims?

PODGERS (with a bow) I was about to say "Consulters", Lady Windermere.

LADY CLEMENTINA. Do take a look at my hand, Mr Podgers, I don't know that I have very much future, but I have a great deal of past.

PODGERS (crossing to Lady Clementina) A pleasure, my lady. (He takes her hand and studies the palm)

LADY WINDERMERE. Clem, how can you?

(The DEAN sits in the armchair RC)

LADY CLEMENTINA. Be quiet, Margaret, I'm enjoying myself. (To Podgers) Now don't tell me I'm fond of music, because everybody knows that.

PODGERS. I should never have said you were fond of music. I do . . .

LADY CLEMENTINA. Do go on, Mr Podgers.

PODGERS (*releasing her hand*) Forgive me, my lady, but I have very little time. And tonight I am here on business. (*He looks expressively over his glasses at Arthur, and moves slightly up c*)

LADY WINDERMERE. Business?

LADY JULIA. I have brought Mr Podgers here, Lady Windermere.

LADY WINDERMERE. For what purpose, may I ask?

LADY JULIA. Certainly. To read Lord Arthur's palm.

LADY CLEMENTINA. Arthur's? But why?

LADY JULIA. To ascertain if he is fitted to be a husband for my daughter. He has assured Sybil, at some length, that he has never loved another woman. Though that is unlikely, it *may* be true, and in any event, I am not in a position to contradict it. What I wish to be convinced of, is that he will love no other woman in the future.

ARTHUR (*moving to R of the sofa*) But of course I won't.

LADY JULIA. In that case you need not object to Mr Podgers seeing your palm.

LADY WINDERMERE (*rising*) May I remind you, Lady Julia, that Arthur is *my* nephew.

LADY JULIA. I had not forgotten it, Lady Windermere. That, in itself, seemed more than sufficient reason for having his hand read before marriage.

LADY WINDERMERE (*furiously*) This is insufferable! (*She turns to the fireplace*)

DEAN. I must say, Lady Julia, I think your action a little high-handed. Arthur is also *my* nephew, and I have always endeavoured to inculcate in him the highest principles.

LADY JULIA. From the fact that you object to my little experiment it would appear that you are by no means certain of the success of your teaching.

DEAN (*rising; indignantly*) Upon my soul! Well, really! (*He joins Lady Windermere at the fireplace*)

LADY WINDERMERE (*returning to the attack*) Might I enquire, Lady Julia, whether you would have permitted your husband to have *your* hand read before marriage?

LADY JULIA. Would *you*, Lady Windermere? Might not *your* husband have learned of an unfortunate error about a fan?

LADY WINDERMERE (*crossing to RC; enraged*) Arthur, give this person your hand immediately. We will show Lady Julia that we as a family, have nothing to hide. (*She sits in the armchair RC*)

(PODGERS *moves to R of Arthur. ARTHUR nervously holds out his left hand*)

The right one.

(ARTHUR *holds out his right hand to Podgers*)

Examine it carefully, Mr Podgers. The slightest irregularity and I shall terminate the match.

PODGERS (*leading Arthur down R*) Do not be nervous, Lord Arthur. It is not in any degree painful. Ah, a young hand. The lines are not deeply marked. I shall have to use my other pair of spectacles.

LADY CLEMENTINA. This is wonderfully exciting, is it not?

PODGERS. Now we shall see. (*He peers at Arthur's hand*)

(*The others wait, breathlessly*)

What a fortunate young man you are, Lord Arthur. You have had riches, the best of health, and complete happiness.

ARTHUR. Are you looking at the past?

PODGERS. I am correct, am I not?

ARTHUR. Yes, quite correct.

LADY JULIA. Are there any irregularities?

LADY WINDERMERE (*rising and moving behind the sofa*) Really!

PODGERS. No, my lady, none at all. A singularly upright young man.

(ARTHUR *breathes freely*)

LADY JULIA (*disappointed*) Oh! Then kindly proceed to the future.

PODGERS. I am about to. I shall not be long now, my lord.

ARTHUR. Thank you.

PODGERS. The future—ah, yes . . . (*He suddenly catches his breath, looks aghast at Arthur, then bends to his hand again*)

LADY JULIA. Well? We are waiting, Mr Podgers.

PODGERS (*quickly dropping Arthur's hand*) The hand of a very charming young man, your ladyship. (*He takes out a handkerchief and mops his brow*)

(ARTHUR *stares at Podgers*)

LADY JULIA. But his future? What about his future?

PODGERS (*crossing below Arthur to c*) He—he will be married and have two children—a boy and a girl.

(*He moves to R of Arthur*) I suppose you have something to offer us, Arthur?

ARTHUR (*starting*) Yes, of course, Uncle. I beg your pardon. (*He moves to L of the doors up c*) In the dining-room. (*He opens the doors*)

DEAN (*crossing to the sofa*) Take my arm, Clementina.

LADY CLEMENTINA (*rising*) Thank you, Robert. (*She takes his arm*)

(*The DEAN and LADY CLEMENTINA move up c*)

(*She touches Arthur on the cheek*) I'm glad you're such a good boy, Arthur, but, oh, my dear, what you're missing.

(*The DEAN and LADY CLEMENTINA exit up c*)

LADY JULIA (*rising and moving to L of the sofa*) The decorators have finished upstairs, Arthur?

ARTHUR. All but the Blue Room, Lady Julia.

LADY JULIA (*moving up c*) Then I shall go and see what they've done. (*She turns to Lady Windermere*) Sybil chose the entire colour scheme, you know.

LADY WINDERMERE. Really? (*She crosses to Lady Julia*) And it's so tasteful. It's hard to believe she is your daughter, is it not?

(*LADY JULIA and LADY WINDERMERE exit up c*)

PODGERS (*moving to the doors up c*) If your lordship will excuse me . . .

(*ARTHUR intercepts Podgers and closes the door*)

ARTHUR. Mr Podgers, please wait.

PODGERS. My lord, I have an appointment . . .

ARTHUR (*interrupting*) What was it you saw in my hand? (*He moves down c*)

PODGERS. I've already told you, my lord. A happy marriage . . .

ARTHUR. Not that! There was something else—something you didn't tell me. I must know what it was.

PODGERS (*moving to L of Arthur*) What makes you think I saw more in your hand than I told you?

ARTHUR. You have an expressive face, Mr Podgers. What you saw was catastrophic. I insist upon knowing what it was.

PODGERS (*turning up c*) Lord Arthur, the duchess will be waiting . . .

ARTHUR (*moving up c*) I don't care if a dozen duchesses are wait-

ARTHUR. A hundred pounds.

PODGERS. Guineas? (*He moves down L*)

ARTHUR (*moving below the sofa*) Very well. Guineas. I'll send you a cheque tomorrow. Now tell me.

(*PODGERS glances around then moves to L of Arthur*)

PODGERS. I saw—blood on your hand, Lord Arthur.

ARTHUR. Blood? What do you mean—blood?

PODGERS. Do you still wish me to go on?

ARTHUR. Yes, of course I do. You can't just stop like that. Whose blood?

PODGERS. That I am unable to tell you, my lord. (*He smiles*) Let us hope it will be that of a person of no importance.

ARTHUR. Are you trying to tell me I'm going to—kill somebody?

PODGERS. Precisely, my lord. At some date in the future you will commit murder.

ARTHUR (*sitting on the sofa*) Murder!

PODGERS (*crossing above the sofa to the sideboard*) Would your lordship care for a brandy and soda? I find that generally helps in cases like yours.

ARTHUR (*staring out front*) Do you often tell people this sort of thing?

PODGERS (*pleasantly*) No, not often, but now and again, naturally.

ARTHUR. But I don't believe you. I refuse to believe you. It's utterly fantastic!

PODGERS (*moving down c*) Yes, my lord, that is what they all say, but you will get used to the idea in time.

ARTHUR. But I don't want to kill anybody. I've never dreamt of such a thing. Besides, I wouldn't even know how to go about it.

PODGERS. The ways and means will doubtless present themselves when the moment arrives, my lord. Now, if you will excuse me . . . (*He turns up c*)

ARTHUR (*rising and moving to Podgers*) No, Mr Podgers, please wait. Mr Podgers, are you really serious? Do you give me your word you saw this awful thing in my hand?

PODGERS. I not only give you my word—I am also infallible.

ARTHUR. And—there is no escaping it? (*He moves down L*)

PODGERS. No, my lord.

ARTHUR (*sitting in the armchair down L*) Murder! (*He jumps up*) But I can't possibly do a murder. I'm being married next week.

before next Thursday in which case you may marry Miss Merton with a clear conscience.

ARTHUR. Before—before? Yes, you are right. (*He moves above the table RC*) Since I must do this awful thing, it is my duty to do it before we are married. Then I can devote my life to her, knowing she will never have to blush for me, or hang her head in shame.

PODGERS (*moved*) You are noble, my lord.

ARTHUR (*convinced that he is*) No, no. (*He moves to L of the armchair RC*) It is the simple choice between living for oneself or living for others. I must not allow selfishness to triumph over love. I have no right to marry till the thing is done. By the way, you *did* say only one?

PODGERS (*moving up L*) Oh, yes, my lord. Only one.

ARTHUR. And there's nothing else in my hand?

PODGERS. Nothing, my lord. Just this murder. That is all.

ARTHUR. Thank you, Mr Podgers. I'm most grateful to you. My cheque shall be sent to you first thing tomorrow morning.

(LADY JULIA enters up C)

LADY JULIA. I am going now, Arthur—oh, are you in here, Mr Podgers. (*She looks from one to the other*) I hope you have not been telling Lord Arthur anything you did not tell me.

PODGERS. Certainly not, Lady Julia. I was merely telling Lord Arthur that if at any time he wishes to consult me, my hours are from ten till four, and I make a reduction for families.

LADY JULIA. Indeed? It seems to have taken you a remarkably long time to give him a singularly brief piece of information. I hope, Arthur, your future life will bear out the good character Mr Podgers has given you.

ARTHUR. I hope so, too, Lady Julia.

(LADY JULIA moves to Arthur)

LADY JULIA (*after a long look at him*) You look simple enough. You have never shown signs of genius of any sort, which has such an unfortunate way of cropping up in the English character, and yet I confess myself unsatisfied. I feel I shall have to ask you to read Lord Arthur's hand again at some future date, Mr Podgers.

ARTHUR (*crossing to the doors up C; cheerfully*) Any time after next

(LADY JULIA sweeps out up C.)

PODGERS follows her off. ARTHUR crosses to the fireplace, pulls the bell-rope, turns and paces down L.

BAINES enters up C)

ARTHUR. Oh, Baines, where are the others?

BAINES. The Dean is in the dining-room, my lord. Lady Windermere and Lady Beauchamp are still admiring the rooms upstairs.

ARTHUR. Oh, good. (*He moves to the sofa and sits*) Come in. I want to have a little talk with you.

BAINES (*closing the door and moving C*) I am honoured, my lord.

ARTHUR. It's possible, too, I may need your assistance. The fact is, Baines, Mr Podgers discovered something a little perturbing in my hand, and I have to do something about it rather quickly.

BAINES (*moving above the armchair RC*) Indeed, my lord?

ARTHUR. To put it briefly, I find myself obliged to murder somebody before next Thursday.

BAINES (*smoothing a cushion*) I see, my lord.

ARTHUR. You may wonder why there is such need for haste, but I feel it would be unfair to Miss Merton if I murdered somebody after we were married.

BAINES. Quite so, my lord. Apart from the fact that it is as well to keep such matters extremely private.

ARTHUR. Exactly. Now, being totally unused to this sort of thing, I find myself a little at a loss. If you were proposing to commit a murder, Baines, how would you go about it?

BAINES (*moving to R of the sofa*) Might I first enquire, my lord, whether the victim is to be a member of your lordship's family, or a complete stranger?

ARTHUR. Well, I hadn't actually decided yet. It doesn't really matter.

BAINES. Then, since it appears to be immaterial, my lord, you should, of course, remove some leading politician and, whilst achieving your own object, earn the undying gratitude of the nation.

ARTHUR (*doubtfully*) Y-yes, that's true, Baines, but on the other hand, there would probably be a great deal of vulgar publicity and I might even be given some order or other. I should very much dislike to have my name appearing in the Sunday papers.