

LORD ARTHUR SAVILE'S CRIME - ARTHUR'S AUDITION PIECE

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. Come in. I want to have a little talk with you.

BAINES: 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: Indeed, my lord?

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

BAINES: 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: 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 could, of course, remove some leading politician and, whilst achieving your own object, earn the undying gratitude of the nation.

ARTHUR: 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.

BAINES: In that case, my lord, I suggest we turn to the other sphere. There must be a large number of insignificant persons about, who could easily be spared by their relations. Would your lordship care for me to make a few discreet enquiries among the staff ?

ARTHUR: No, I think not, Baines. On second thoughts, I feel I ought to keep this a purely personal matter. After all, I am extremely well-endowed with relatives myself.

BAINES: One might almost say to the point of saturation, my lord.

ARTHUR: Yes. (They look at each other) Which would you choose, Baines?

BAINES: Since your lordship naturally wishes to avoid publicity I feel it would be as well to select one of your relatives who does not, so to speak, figure in the public eye.

ARTHUR: But all my relatives are public figures except . . . (He breaks off)

BAINES: Exactly, my lord.

ARTHUR: Oh, but dash it all, I'm fond of Lady Clem.

BAINES: I think, my lord, that this is not a matter where you should allow your finer feelings to enter in.

ARTHUR: No, that's true.

BAINES: And the Lady Clemeritina, if I may make so bold, has cost your lordship considerable sums of money since your majority.

ARTHUR: Yes, I know, but I'm not doing this for reasons of economy.

BAINES: Nevertheless, my lord, there can be no harm in killing two birds with one stone.

My remark was not intended as a pun, my lord.

ARTHUR: Of course, she has often remarked to me that she wished she was dead. But I don't know that she really meant it.

BAINES: Have we any right to question the veracity of the lady, my lord ? Who can tell but - if she could read your lordship's thoughts - she would not be more than grateful for your lordship's timely assistance.

ARTHUR: You really think it would be a good thing for her?

BAINES: Unquestionably, my lord.

ARTHUR: Then I'll do it. Poor Lady Clem! You know, Baines, somebody ought to have been humane enough to do this for her before.

BAINES: No doubt her physicians have done their best, my lord, but they have certain inhibitions.

ARTHUR: Now, how do we do it? That's the next thing. It's got to be something completely painless, Baines. I couldn't bear to hurt her.

BAINES: With regard to method, my lord, I feel we might do worse than take a leaf from the book of the Borgias.

ARTHUR: The who?

BAINES: The Borgias, my lord. An Italian family with whom it was considered highly inadvisable to dine.

ARTHUR: Bad cooking, I suppose?

BAINES: (pained) No, my lord.

ARTHUR: I'm sorry if I appear ill-informed Baines, but you must remember I haven't had your advantages. I only went to Eton and Oxford.

BAINES: I understand, my lord. We cannot all be so fortunate as to have been educated at elementary schools.

ARTHUR: These Borgias - they put something in the food - was that it?

BAINES: Precisely, my lord. A subtle poison. It was indeed an occasion when anybody but the Borgias rose from the table.

ARTHUR: Oh. You don't happen to know any subtle poisons, do you, Baines?

BAINES: By a curious coincidence, my lord, I was reading a murder case recently, in which a family of ten was wiped out at one sitting by a preparation known as Wolf's Bane.