

Wallace's Will

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Excerpt

SCENE 2

FELTON. Have you given any thought to what you might do as you own person, sir, while you are abroad?

TERENCE. As a matter of fact, Felton, I have. That's why we're waiting here until she arrives. I expect her to come any moment now.

(Silence. FELTON and DOWDLE exchange a glance.)

FELTON. "Her," sir?

TERENCE. Of course. It would be rude to invite her and then flee to France before she got here. Here, d'you suppose I should grow a moustache? I haven't had one since I was Prince Ivan the Tolerable.

DOWDLE. Well, sir, that is—

FELTON. That is, sir, Mrs. Dowdle and myself were under the impression that—

DOWDLE. You had given up wooing young ladies—

FELTON. For the present.

DOWDLE. Not that we have any objection to young ladies *in general*, mind you, but—

FELTON. You *have* wooed all the eligible—

DOWDLE. And ineligible—

FELTON. Young ladies in London—

DOWDLE. England—

FELTON. And nearly all of Europe—

DOWDLE. Except for Belgium—

FELTON. For which we commend you. But, sir—

DOWDLE. Wouldn't you rather be yourself for a little *without*—

FELTON. *Without* a lady friend?

TERENCE. My dearest Mrs. Dowdle, my very dear Felton, you may breathe easy. The woman I expect is no debutante come to steal my heart away. She is my secretary.

DOWDLE & FELTON. Ah!

TERENCE. Yes, I am going to write my memoirs.

DOWDLE & FELTON. *Ah?*

TERENCE. Yes! When I told you I had been seized with a spate of honesty, I meant just what I said. I am done forever with schemes and lies. I may not know who *I* am, having pretended so long to be other men, but I do *hope* to be honest. And not at all wicked like Jasper Lovelace, Mrs. Dowdle.

DOWDLE. (*Sniffing.*) I did so like Lovelace!

FELTON. So you mean to have this...woman...write down *everything*, sir?

TERENCE. Yes. Consider it my confession.

FELTON. With descriptions of everything? Of every *one*?

TERENCE. Naturally!

DOWDLE. Mercy! (*She falls back on the couch.*)

TERENCE. But you needn't fear, my dear Mrs. Dowdle. Rest assured, I shall describe you best of all!

DOWDLE. Oh...mercy!

(*The doorbell rings.*)

TERENCE. That must be her now! Felton, the door! Or, no, I am not prepared! I have no idea who I am! What do I wear? Do I have an accent? Who are my parents? What is my favourite colour?

(*FELTON leaves to answer the door, as MRS. DOWDLE grasps for TERENCE'S sleeve.*)

DOWDLE. Oh, Terence! *Master* Terence! This is a terrible idea! Don't you realize what might happen to you—to all of us—if you told the truth?

TERENCE. Oh, I suppose there might be some repercussion. Some women angry with my deceptions. But nothing to concern you. Besides which, I'll be overseas, looking for my parents.

DOWDLE. Mercy!

FELTON. (*Off-stage.*) This way.

TERENCE. Here she comes! Do get up, Mrs. Dowdle. Aid me! I have no practice being myself. Do I stand or do I slouch?

COLONEL. (*Off-stage.*) *MARMALADE!*

DOWDLE. *There is no more marmalade!*

TERENCE. Mrs. Dowdle, some advice!

DOWDLE. Heavens, Master Terence! If you cannot be yourself, who can you be?

COLONEL. (*Off-stage, singing to 'Hail Britannia.'*) Marmalade! I demand marmalade! Marmle-*maaaaar*-mle! Marmalade!

DOWDLE. Kate! Julia!

KATE & JULIA. (*Appearing.*) Yes, Mrs. Dowdle!

DOWDLE. To the kitchens. If it's marmalade he wants, it's marmalade he'll get! Even if I have to squash it out of strychnine!

SCENCE 3

(*They exit, leaving TERENCE to practice being himself. FELTON re-enters.*)

TERENCE. Hello, so meet to nice you. I am Jasper Lovelace, lover extraordinaire...no, I mean I am Terence Wallace Wally Wally Washington, mate. No, I mean I am.... Hello, so mice to neat you. My Wimbledon is....

FELTON. (*Coughing.*) Sir—

TERENCE. Hello, so moose to niece you... No....

FELTON. (*Coughing louder.*) Sir—

TERENCE. Just a minute, Felton. Hello, my name is Inigo Montoya, you killed my father, prepare to die. No....

FELTON. *(Even louder.) Master Terence—*

TERENCE. What? What is it? Send her in! No, I've forgotten my name! Call me Ishmael, no....

FELTON. *(To the visitor.)* This way, if you please.

TERENCE. *(Turning, all charm.)* Hello, so nice to meet you, my dear miss—who are you?

FELTON. Mr. Byron Grimsel, Esquire, sir. Your...solicitor.

(BYRON GRIMSEL, one of those fellows burdened with a name larger than himself, is also burdened with a propensity to cough politely and pointedly. He is small and neat in all particulars and very dull at dinner parties.)

TERENCE. My solicitor? Absurd, I don't have a solicitor—except for myself, and I had myself disbarred five years ago. You have a card, sir?

GRIMSEL. Here, sir.

TERENCE. Astonishing, sir! It appears you *do* exist after all.

GRIMSEL. Mr. Wimbledon-Greene was in doubt?

TERENCE. Existence is a fluid thing, Grimsel old boy. Alright, I am prepared to accept that you may in fact be my solicitor, but I have an appointment with a young lady, a date in the south of France, parents to be found and a pressing quest for marmalade. Be brief.

GRIMSEL. Very well. *(He opens his briefcase.)* You are Mister *(slight cough)* Evelyn T. Wimbledon-Greene? *(Pronounced Eh-velyn for a girl.)*

TERENCE. *Evelyn* Terence Wimbledon-Greene. *(Pronounced EE-velyn for a boy.)*

GRIMSEL. I beg pardon. *Evelyn.*

TERENCE. I prefer Terence.

GRIMSEL. Understandable. And your uncle's the renowned author and explorer, Sir Colonel Wallace Wimbledon-Greene?

TERENCE. He is.

GRIMSEL. I regret to say, he *was*.

TERENCE. I beg your pardon?

GRIMSEL. I shall repeat: your uncle *was* Sir Colonel Wallace Wimbledon....

TERENCE. Now see here! That's a rather serious declension!

GRIMSEL. But accurate nonetheless.

TERENCE. Do you mean to tell me that my uncle, *who but lately* bellowed for marmalade was, in fact, desiring such delicacy from beyond the grave?

GRIMSEL. You said so yourself, sir.

TERENCE. I did not!

GRIMSEL. You will pardon me—you did. “Who but *lately* bellowed for marmalade?”

TERENCE. Is this your idea of a joke?

GRIMSEL. (*Deathly serious and more than a little creepy.*) I pride myself on having *no* humour—*whatsoever*.

TERENCE. Well...bully for you.

GRIMSEL. Would you care to see the conditions of the will?

TERENCE. (*Taking the will.*) Conditions?

GRIMSEL. Fourth paragraph, sir. Just to the left. “Whereby I, Sir Colonel Wallace...”

TERENCE. “...Wimbledon-Greene, do bequeath all my earthly belongings to my beloved Evelyn upon the celebration of a marriage...twenty-four hours after my death?!” What does this mean?

GRIMSEL. I had thought the document clearly written, sir. You have twenty-four hours from the time of your uncle's death in which to marry and become a very rich man indeed. Or, you may remain a bachelor and lose everything.

TERENCE. Marry someone...by tomorrow?

GRIMSEL. I regret to say, sir, that by the terms of your uncle's will, you must marry someone within the hour.

TERENCE. Within the hour? What happened to the other twenty-three?

GRIMSEL. I regret to say, sir, that the other twenty-three hours were spent attempting to find you.

TERENCE. To find me? I've been here this entire time!

GRIMSEL. Have you? This address has been listed, variously, as belonging to (*Consulting a list.*) a Mr. Dudley Dudley, a Mr. Easter Rabbit and a Rear Admiral Floppsybottom, but *not* to an *Evelyn* much less a Terence. Indeed, sir, I regret to say—

TERENCE. Oh, you don't regret anything! But look here, old bean, you haven't proved to me that my uncle is dead. I refer you to the spectral marmalade. Do you mean to imply that there is no marmalade up there in Heav.... Oh! Do you mean that *down there*, there is no mar.... Oh, dear.

GRIMSEL. Just so. Have you, in fact, *seen* your uncle this morning?

TERENCE. No....

GRIMSEL. Yesterday then. At dinner?

TERENCE. Well....

GRIMSEL. I see. Mr. Wimbledon-Greene, have you in fact seen your uncle this week?

(Silence.)

GRIMSEL. Month?

(Silence.)

GRIMSEL. Year?

(Silence.)

GRIMSEL. Oh, excellent.

(There's a double meaning in that!)

GRIMSEL. Do you mean to tell me that you have *never* seen your uncle?

TERENCE. Weeell, no. Uncle Wallace is a very private man, you know. Comes of being a bachelor. And a celebrity. Why—he might have died years ago, for all I....

(TERENCE *trails off, suddenly realizing the consequences of his words.*)

GRIMSEL. Ah?

TERENCE. Well, that is to say.... Felton!

FELTON. (*Appearing.*) You bellowed sir?

TERENCE. Felton, old boy, do tell this good gentleman here the last time you saw Uncle Wallace.

FELTON. The *last* time, sir?

TERENCE. Right-ho, old boy.

(*Silence.*)

TERENCE. Felton?

FELTON. Allow me to endeavour to understand you, sir. You wish to know when one last *saw* Sir Colonel Wallace Wimbledon-Greene?

TERENCE. Yes.

FELTON. With one's own *eyes*, sir?

TERENCE. Those are the usual organs, I believe.

FELTON. Then I regret to say: never.

GRIMSEL. Never!

TERENCE. Never?

FELTON. Never.

GRIMSEL. Well, Mr. Wimbledon-Greene...!

TERENCE. No, wait. Mrs. Dowdle! Kate! Julia! Just one moment, Mr. Grimsel. Please, make yourself comfortable. Mrs. Dowdle, I say!

(MRS. DOWDLE *enters with a mixing bowl, the servants, and a ferocious grimace.*)

DOWDLE. (*Muttering.*) He wants marmalade, he says. Can't have strawberry jam, oh no! Not him! The cyanide, Kate. Not too much, that's the way. Yes, Master Terence? How do you do, sir? Julia, the arsenic, if you please.

TERENCE. (*Hysterically.*) Ah ha ha ha ha ha! Isn't that just her way? Mrs. Dowdle is such a joker, Mr. Grimsel. Cyanide, arsenic! That's just her way of saying apples and oranges, isn't it Mrs. Dowdle? Just making some jam, Mr. Grimsel, here I'll try some—

KATE & JULIA. No sir!

TERENCE. —Later! Later I'll try this jam. Mrs. Dowdle, Mrs. Dowdle, step away from the bowl, Mrs. Dowdle. She's a feeling a little under the weather, Mr. Grimsel. Mrs. Dowdle, how would you like to come with us to the south of France? Won't that be nice? Now tell the nice Mr. Grimsel, please Mrs. Dowdle—take the spoon from her Kate—tell the nice Mr. Grimsel when you last saw my uncle, if you please.

DOWDLE. The ungrateful wretch? Saw him not ten minutes ago, didn't I? Add the hemlock, Kate.

GRIMSEL. Mr. Wimbledon-Greene, while this is all very interesting, I can assure you the following things: your uncle is dead, you have one hour to marry, and the name *Evelyn* for a man is simply disgraceful. I shall see you in (*He glances at his watch.*) twenty-five minutes—

TERENCE. Twenty-five minutes? But you said I had an—

GRIMSEL. Twenty-five minutes, *Evelyn*, at which time I expect you to be married or to be...marmaladed. Good day!

(GRIMSEL leaves. Silence, broken by:)

SCENE 4

COLONEL. (*Off-stage.*) Marmalade! I demand marmalade here! And I demand it now!

TERENCE. Couldn't have demanded it earlier, could you? Oh, it's no good poisoning the old fool, Mrs. Dowdle. He's already dead.

(*Play continues.*)