

THE RARE FLOWERS

by

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PEOPLE IN THE PLAY:

Pontius Pilate governor of Judea

Procula his wife

Herod Antipas Tetrarch of Galilee

Two girls servants to Procula

SETTING

The action of the play takes place towards the end of Pilate's administration in Jerusalem, in the home of Pilate and Procula.

(The main court of Pontius Pilate's home. At one end is the entrance from a smaller, outer court. Around the court are entrances to rooms. Two young girl servants are working here. One is

sweeping, the other sprinkles water where the pavement has been swept. Both wear the same simple garment tied at the waist with a piece of braided cord. They are teasing each other and trying to appear unconscious of it. The sweeper attempts to brush dust back into the face of the waterer, while the waterer in response flings handfuls of water over the sweeper's head. They move together rhythmically and work with a delightful economy of movement that is the result of long practice and habit. They hum to themselves as they work; not a continuous melody, but turns and snatches, as though to emphasize a particular gesture. They are slowly moving towards the court entrance. Occasionally the sweeper, when she has been successful in brushing the dust into the other girl's face, will turn and grin at her, and the waterer will triumphantly giggle when she manages to douse the other's head.)

SWEEPER: (Singing) My mistress is sad.

WATERER: (Singing) I hate all Romans. (They work for a while.)

SWEEPER: (Singing) My master is sad.

WATERER: (Singing) I hate all Romans.

SWEEPER: (Turning to ask.) Why?

WATERER: (Impatiently) What a stupid question!

SWEEPER: (Continuing her work.) These people are kind to you.

WATERER: What difference does that make?

SWEEPER: Kinder than your own race.

WATERER: What difference does that make! I hate all Romans.

SWEEPER: Why? Why, Leah? Tell me why.

WATERER: I refuse to answer.

SWEEPER: If you don't know why, then you have no reason for hatred.

WATERER: I have reason.

SWEEPER: Then tell me what it is. (The other girl obstinately shakes her head. The sweeper sings.) Tell me, Leah . . . tell me, Leah . . . tell me Leah.

WATERER: (Sullenly) If you don't stop baiting me, I'll hit you over the head with this. (Holds

up water jar.)

SWEEPER: If I hated anyone like you say you hate Procula and Pilate, I'd not work for them.

WATERER: I have to eat.

SWEEPER: Anyway, I don't believe you hate them. You say you do, because you feel you ought to hate all Romans. Don't you, Leah? (Singing) Don't you, Leah? Don't you? (The waterer is about to advance and strike and her tormenter when she notices two men coming from the outer court. At once she becomes immersed in watering and the sweeper stops singing. Both bend their heads, though they manage to watch the men by taking quick, sneaking glances. The men stroll casually, talking as they go. One is many years older than the other, besides being much taller and heavier. His head is bent as if he broods on an apparently insoluble problem and hopes that chance may reveal a clue to its answer in the dust. His dress is plain, but it has all the dignity of a high Roman official. The other man, younger and smaller, seems in contrast ready to break into song and dance as he impatiently regulates his walk to that of his companion. His face is sharp and intelligent, but mischievous. He wears a carefully shaped and tended beard, and his dress, in contrast to that worn by the older man, is luxurious. The older man is Pontius Pilate; the younger, Herod Antipas. Herod notices the girls and at once changes direction in order to pass close to them. He cultivates a deliberate lisp.)

HEROD: Ah! This is the one house in Jerusalem where beauty is always to be found. Let me congratulate you, my dear Pilate.

PILATE: (He speaks as though reluctant to voice what he feels and thinks.) Hm! What are you talking about, Herod? No, no . . . come this way. We'll go to the room overlooking the gardens. It's cool there. (Herod sighs and turns to follow Pilate.)

HEROD: My dear Pilate, you have never . . . at least since I've known you . . . been able to see the obvious. Very well, let's go to the room where we discovered our incompatibility and accordingly fought.

PILATE: You mean that you ran like a whipped cur, don't you?

HEROD: (Giggling) My dear fellow, I may run . . . but never, never like a cur. Always I run as a Tetrarch should, as only a Tetrarch can. (He is forced to halt because of his giggles.) I practice for half an hour every day. Chin up . . . knees high . . . in case such emergencies should occur.

PILATE: (Showing impatience.) Come along, come along. It's too warm to stand here playing the fool.

HEROD: How you Romans hate the sun! Well, let's go to this room where dramatic fitness demands we resume our friendship. (They go on.) Shall we swear never to dogmatize that black

is white or green again? Shall I promise never to strip your Roman illusions from your eyes?

PILATE: Shall I promise to turn my eyes away from your tortured Jewish corruptions?

HEROD: How perfectly we agree on our defects! (They come to a room entrance. Herod juggles his body and cranes his neck so that he can see through the court entrance.) Hm! Do you think my best Tetrarch gallop would take me across here and through the outer gate in one minute flat? Will you have all obstructions and snares, such as those two girls I see before me, removed in case I am called on to exhibit my skill?

PILATE: (Opening the door, irritably gesturing.) Must you play the fool before servants?

HEROD: (Laughing) Before and with such servants as those two I would play anything . . . yes, anything . . . even on a flute. (He waves to the girls, then skips into the room. Pilate follows him. At once the girls lapse into giggles, and the sweeper indicates that they cross and listen by the doorway. They start creeping towards it, when Pilate comes out. He does not notice their abrupt halt and guilty bending of heads. He calls.)

PILATE: Will one of you go and tell the Lady Procula that I am returned and that Herod Antipas is with me? (He backs into the room. The girls, after looking at each other as if to say "Look at what we escaped," break, as young animals will, and race each other for the court entrance. The camera moves into the room, which is sparsely furnished and separated from a garden by a row of pillars. Across the terraces there is a fine view of the city. Pilate stands with his back to Herod, who has curled himself up on the only couch in the room.)

HEROD: Well, let me say once more that I am very glad we are friends once again.

PILATE: Hm.

HEROD: And once again you will receive the incalculable benefits of my company.

PILATE: Hm! (He appears surprised.) That hadn't occurred to me before. Hm!

HEROD: You are one of those horribly self-sufficient people, Pontius . . . while I, of course, am just the opposite.

PILATE: I realize that there is a slight difference between us.

HEROD: Don't you wish you possessed a few of my redeeming qualities?

PILATE: Do you mean your ability to deceive yourself?

HEROD: You are teasing me, my dear man. I don't deceive myself half so much as most men

do. I make a pretence at it.

PILATE: (Turning and coming over to the couch. Herod makes room for him, and he sits.) You are a king. What is that?

HEROD: You are a governor. What is that?

PILATE: In my case, being a governor is being the condoner of vicious acts.

HEROD: And in my case, being a king is being the originator of vicious acts.

PILATE: And what miserable states both are.

HEROD: (Complacently) Oh, I don't think mine's too bad. On the whole, I have an enjoyable time. Of course, I agree with you about your situation. But then all civil servants are miserable, aren't they? I know this from the few I've had around me at odd times. They're so arrogantly servile, if you know what I mean. And so stupid . . . though you, my dear, are the glorious exception. You are the one intelligent Roman in Judea. (He consolingly pats Pilate's arm.)

PILATE: (Giving a bow.) Thank you. For a moment I thought you were going to say, the Empire.

HEROD: God forbid! I don't want to make you more conceited than you are at present. (Giggles) You know, after our little difference --

PILATE: (Interrupting) -- Difference, did you say! I tell you that if you hadn't run, I'd have probably --

HEROD: -- Don't say it. Don't say it. (Pained) Why must you use such acrimonious words when I merely want to say that I am frequently depressed because I have no sensible person to chatter with. (He sighs.) Do let's allow it all to slip past and vanish. I promise never to prick your unbearable moral vanity again. (Giggling) Now if . . . just if . . . we had some wine, then we could swear our eternal --

PILATE: -- All right, all right. I'll give you a cup of wine. You don't have to do any swearing to get it.

HEROD: One! Only one! Have you always been so parsimonious?

PILATE: I am careful because I have been poor. I am temperate because it is my nature.

HEROD: What virtues! I admire them so much.

PILATE: (Politely) I'm delighted to hear it.

HEROD: Because I know I could never, never imitate them. In the same way, I admire continence in men . . . though not in women. There it's utterly useless. But in a man it has a certain value.

PILATE: This is most interesting. Do continue.

HEROD: Oh, you mustn't think I don't speak from experience. (Pilate leans back, laughing, his face relaxes a little.) It's a fact. I went on a military expedition once. Heaven knows why . . . except my military experts told me it was necessary. They also told me it would be over in a few days. You know how they exaggerate . . . and I was young and innocent in those days. (Pilate claps his hands as he laughs.) Well, the war, if you could call it that, was strung out for two months. And do you know that for the whole of that time I was continent? Believe me, my dear man, at the end of the expedition I was so positively martial that I'd have taken on a dozen Goliaths with only a captain's baton in my hands. (He closes one eye, looking at Pilate.) I hope you believe me.

PILATE: (Still laughing, he stands and pats Herod's shoulders.) Of course, I believe you. And if ever this phenomenon occurs again, do let me know, and I'll willingly journey for a month just to see such a sight. (Walking towards the entrance.) I'll even provide a few giants for you to slaughter.

HEROD: I expected sympathy from you.

PILATE: (Calling) Will you bring wine! (Returning to the couch.) Tell me why I must throw away so valuable a thing as sympathy on you?

HEROD: Then whom do you expend it on? (Quickly) Why don't you keep servants in the room?

PILATE: I expend it on those denied it by the mob. And I prefer my rooms to myself.

HEROD: (Gloomily) Fancy enjoying being alone. Still, it's the oddities of your character that I find interesting.

PILATE: Does the thought of being alone terrify you?

HEROD: (Full of mock heroism.) I do not know what fear is, or perhaps I should say, I know but I fear it not. Likes and dislikes rule my life rather than fears. Hm . . . how is your good wife?

PILATE: My wife? She is reasonably well. Why do ask?

HEROD: Why does she dislike me so much?

PILATE: You should ask her.

HEROD: You should command her to like me.

PILATE: I honour her too much to insult her.

HEROD: I assure you I honour women too.

PILATE: I am sure your honour of women is a very productive emotion.

HEROD: (Giggling) Oh, it is. But then, everything of mine is productive, which is where I differ from you. I turn every experience -- (He stops. Procula has entered. She is tall grey-haired and haggard of face. The impression given is of over-intensity and a deliberate exploitation of emotion. The total effect is harrowing. She carries a tray on which stands a flask of wine and two cups. With her comes the girl waterer, carrying a small table. Pilate is surprised to see Procula, and he quickly goes to take the tray from her. But she shakes her head, indicating refusal. The girl sets the table before Herod, and he causes much confusion in her by bestowing on her a very come-hither smile and suggestively patting the couch beside him. Her confusion appears to tickle him immensely.)

PILATE: (His hands on the tray, quietly, privately.) It wasn't necessary for you to come. I merely wanted to let you know Herod was with me, then you wouldn't be surprised if you accidentally came into the room. Now, let me take this tray.

PROCULA: No, no. I carried it only a few steps. And besides, it is my duty as your wife to attend your guests.

PILATE: (Patting her arm.) You mustn't stretch your notion of duty too far, my dear.

PROCULA: Do you want me to condemn myself completely? I have seen you face so much you detested.

PILATE: (Smiling) Well, well. I'd rather you face a thousand Herods than have to suffer one moment of self-condemnation.

PROCULA: (Returning the smile, but with a gentle reproach in her voice.) You are laughing at me, laughing at me.

PILATE: No, not at you. At myself. Now come here a moment, I want to show you something I noticed for the first time today. Oh, don't bother about Herod. He'll keep busy enough. (Pointing) See? Straight yonder, over the top of the olive trees.

HEROD: Isn't that table extremely heavy?

GIRL: (Whispering) No.

HEROD: No! You must have wonderfully strong arms and back muscles. (He sighs.) Where do you come from?

GIRL: From -- (She is unable to continue.)

HEROD: (Giggling) That's a delightful spot. Why don't you come and sit beside me for a few minutes? (The girl shakes her head.) I'll show you my war souvenirs. Come one, just for a few minutes.

PILATE: You see? The outline is the exact shape of a man's head. Do you see it?

PROCULA: (She hesitates.) Yes, yes. I see it. Yes, it is . . . it does look like that.

HEROD: Well, tell me your name then.

GIRL: Leah.

PILATE: (Turning from the view.) Well, it's of no importance. It reminded me of . . . Come along, we'll interrupt Herod's budding seduction. (They cross.)

HEROD: I once had a friend called Leah. Somehow that name always seems to go with beautiful and sympathetic women. But I don't think she was half so beautiful as -- (He stops as he becomes aware that Pilate and Procula are by the couch.) Lady Procula, I am delighted to make your acquaintance again.

PROCULA: (Pilate pours wine into the cups. Procula's voice is cold and dry.) You are welcome sir. Leah, will you bring a bowl of raisins? (The girl runs out, after glancing at Herod, who at once giggles, but quickly stops himself and grabbing a cup, raises it to Procula.)

HEROD: This wine, Lady, will increase in potency and flavour from having been carried by you.

PROCULA: I very much doubt that.

HEROD: (Giving her a mocking, theatrical bow.) Ah! Had I such a lady as you, I would aspire all the more to become the man I long to be.

PROCULA: As always, you deceive yourself. (Touching Pilate's face for an instant.) If you were

as he, you would discover many like me, who are ready to serve and to love. (The girl returns with the raisins, and Herod has difficulty attending to what Procula says. (Pilate laughs.)

HEROD: Madam, your husband is the one Roman I would imitate, if I could.

PROCULA: I had no part in his moulding.

HEROD: Lady, you have been accused of no crime.

PILATE: There is the answer to your question, Herod.

PROCULA: Answer! To what?

PILATE: (Smiling at Herod.) He asked me why you disliked him, and why I did not command you --

HEROD: (Turning from the girl.) -- I asked because I admire you, madam, as I admire your husband. And not unnaturally I wish to be tolerated by those I admire.

PILATE: He's admitting that you prick his bloated conceit by not gaping at him, like that silly girl does. (Herod giggles.) The trouble is, my dear, you and I have gone beyond the point where we can innocently gape at such a frightening phenomenon as Herod Antipas.

HEROD: Everything above the normal is frightening.

PILATE: Above the normal!

PROCULA: (Touching his face.) Please, please don't love. You only hurt yourself. Promise me.

PILATE: (Quickly) All right, I promise you. I won't. (Procula watches him anxiously for a moment, then gives Herod a cold, contemptuous bow and leaves, followed by the girl who glances back at Herod repeatedly and causes him to violently giggle. When the women are gone, he turns to Pilate.)

HEROD: Hurt what? What's the mystery?

PILATE: (Sitting, taking a cup of wine and sipping from it.) She sees me growing old, reaching conclusions about men . . . their conduct . . . (Pause) . . . and myself. Besides, she is overwrought. She sees a mutilating force in everything that's said . . . and in every relationship. (He sips.) It frightens her. Help yourself to wine. It's all very depressing. And hopeless.

HEROD: (Uneasily) So that's it! (He pours more wine.) But how wonderful to see the two of you together. And what solicitude! It's quite touching. My women are delighted at the slightest

ailment in me. You know how I enjoy sympathy. But since my stomach aches have a habit of becoming chronic cancers I've been forced to give up even self pity.

PILATE: (Looking away into the garden.) Hm?

HEROD: One of the greatest pleasures in my life is watching the reactions of young girls to my august presence. (He giggles, then sighs.) How old was Procula when you married her?

PILATE: Hm?

HEROD: I said, how old was your wife when you married her.

PILATE: Oh, quite young.

HEROD: (Leaning across to look into Pilate's face.) You know, you have aged lately. Aren't you twenty years older than your wife?

PILATE: Yes, somewhere around a score.

HEROD: (Nodding his head.) Hm hm! It could be . . . that her feelings are not unmixed.

PILATE: (Taking a few raisins.) In what way?

HEROD: (Also taking raisins, stuffing a handful into his mouth.) Well . . . say, even though she admires you as a man . . . your character and so forth . . . still, you are old and galloping towards senility.

PILATE: And so?

HEROD: Well, to put the matter bluntly --

PILATE: -- It's good of you to be so forthright.

HEROD: (Grabbing more raisins.) It's impossible to otherwise with you.

PILATE: Now for the blunt statement. Though you mustn't strain yourself making it.

HEROD: It's no trouble at all. Well . . . Procula's a comparatively young woman and an attractive one.

PILATE: (Enlightened) Oh! I see.

HEROD: The possibility always exists.

PILATE: Hm! (Standing) I must ask her. Excuse me a moment while I call her. Do help yourself to wine and a few raisins.

HEROD: (Grabbing Pilate's arm.) Don't you think that would be most unwise?

PILATE: Why? Isn't it better that we should always know the truth about ourselves?

HEROD: (Rapidly) Oh yes, yes, yes. But my dear friend, I was merely speculating . . . because the situation is common enough, though I don't say it is the case with you. You understand?

PILATE: Still, you've raised a serious question and certain doubts, and I feel I must ask.

HEROD: (Panicking) Oh, please don't, please don't. At least not while I'm in the house.

PILATE: Surely you're not afraid to have me face the truth?

HEROD: I am merely being sensible. I mean, a man may give away hornets, but he doesn't stay around to release them from the bag.

PILATE: That is the common excuse for cowardice.

HEROD: (Lying back on the couch.) I give in. I give in. Can't I ever get a rise out of you?

PILATE: (Sitting again and laughing.) I prefer taking one out of you.

HEROD: You devilish Roman! You had no intention of calling her, had you? (Pilate shrugs and Herod giggles.) Damn you! I was ready to do my Tetrarch gallop.

PILATE: What is it the mob calls you? The fearful flyer . . . or is it liar?

HEROD: The mob is notoriously ill-advised. You should know that. (He finishes off the wine in his cup and pours more.) Tell me, do you find condoning mob rule horribly degrading? Or has years of it stultified your senses?

PILATE: I find having to condone a mob's king is the worst of the lot. (Herod laughs.) And as for feeling degradation. When a man . . . even though he may have only an elementary sense of justice . . . is asked, over a period of time, to condone rabid injustice . . . he will surely end by being revolted to the core of his soul. And where this is not so, there must be a complimentary nature which neither time nor experience can alter, but which excess can worsen.

HEROD: Ah . . . forgive the question, but do you bring this harsh judgement to bear on your own actions?

PILATE: What a shoddy creature you are. Is my name Herod?

HEROD: (Complacently spitting out pips.) You are too hard on me. I fulfill my obligations that better men may draw high moral conclusions. The path to righteousness . . . so our paragons tell us . . . is outlined by monoliths of depravity. That being so, it seems hard, not to say unreasonable, to condemn a minority who sacrifice life, pleasure, immortal happiness and all the rest, merely to point the way and to enable the undeserving majority to reach salvation. Don't you agree?

PILATE: No.

HEROD: (Sighing) I wish you would agree with me once in a while. You know, one of our Hebrew kings remarked that unity among men was a delightful thing. He couldn't possibly have been cracking a joke or being ironic, because he was quite humourless fellow - not like me. He was a poet too, you know though no one could accuse either me or you of being in *that* condition of idiocy, could they? But he had a son Solomon who was even worse. The son was given to concocting snippets of wisdom. Things like "vanity of vanities".

PILATE: I've heard of it.

HEROD: Isn't it awful?

PILATE: I don't think so.

HEROD: Is there nothing we can agree on?

PILATE: My approaching senility . . . my tediousness?

HEROD: Those are indubitable facts, my dear. And like all facts, most boring.

PILATE: Hm.

HEROD: (Mocking) You have the most devastating "hm". What criminal could stand against it?

PILATE: Do you really think so? Tell me, Herod Antipas, do you think innocence is self evident?

HEROD: (Becoming cautious.) What are you getting at?

PILATE: I'm asking your opinion. Though please don't take examples from your own life.

HEROD: My dear friend, it's not necessary for me to do that. My virtues could never illustrate something which is a result of chance. And really, I question the intrinsic value of such commodities. A good example is virginity.

PILATE: (Raising his arms.) Ye gods, ye gods!

HEROD: (Pouting, pretending to be hurt.) Allow me to pipe my jig, and I'll come to your question eventually.

PILATE: So long as I know. I can always sleep in the meantime.

HEROD: (Laughing) What an impatient person you are. I can imagine you in your youth, as impetuous as a thunderbolt! (Pilate moves restlessly.) Patience! The core is at hand. Isn't innocence like a paper-thin vase? Its value lies in the ease with which it can be broken, so that if, after repeated droppings it still remains whole, we become suspicious and begin to suspect there may be some abnormality in this commodity. We feel that the best thing to do is to get rid of it, quickly and thoroughly. After all, the reason the broken do not get up and destroy the unbroken who strut in gaudy, brainless conceit like so many peacocks is because they know that breakage is but a matter of time. (He giggles.) We all moult, so to speak.

PILATE: I should have known better than to ask.

HEROD: (Annoyed) Don't we all say that when we get the wrong answer?

PILATE: Does it ever occur to you that there may exist qualities --

HEROD: -- Of course. But I discount them, and you would be wise to do so too.

PILATE: Why?

HEROD: Because at sixty, peace of mind is about all one has left.

PILATE: Should have left

HEROD: It is so with you, surely? I see a serenity of face that results from the performance of a long and painful duty. Tell me, do you regret your childlessness?

PILATE: Have you other engagements today?

HEROD: None. Since we became friends again I have cancelled everything. Surely you don't want to get rid of me?

PILATE: I'd rather you went of your own free will.

HEROD: (Laughing) Give me another cup of wine, and when the cup's empty, then I'll go.

PILATE: There's the flask. (Herod makes a face, pours some, spilling much of it onto himself.) Do you usually have someone around to clear up whatever you spill?

HEROD: You are too fastidious. And besides, I am a king. I ought to have my wine poured. (He is by now a little tipsy.) Tell me, Pilate, that girl . . . the one who brought in the table . . . tell me, in confidence have you ever managed to --

PILATE: -- And how is your step-daughter, Salome?

HEROD: (He is about to drink when this question is asked and is so shocked by it that he empties most of the wine down his front. He groans.) Please don't mention her. Please.

PILATE: Hah! I'll go on talking about her.

HEROD: If you have any regard for me . . . and you must have a little . . . please don't.

PILATE: (Laughing) What has she done now?

HEROD: Now! Oh, my dear Pilate, because of her I live in a state of trembling anticipation. (Pilate quietly laughs as Herod lists his troubles.) I am, as you know, not a vindictive man. If anything, quite the opposite . . . too good-natured. Why do you laugh? Mere cruelty has always repelled me. I have levied the number of executions and so forth usual for a king, but I've kept them to a minimum and for people who really deserve them. And it has always been a principle with me never to tamper with prophets -- real or fake ones. They all look alike, so how the devil is one to know which is which? And they are so malicious. (Pilate lies back, laughing outright.) My dear fellow, you're an alien here, so you can't know what harm those fellows can do to a man's reputation. Of course, I realize a prophet has to be vindictive, though with many of them it's just pure revenge for some imaginary insult, or love of going around and plaguing poor, inarticulate souls. Have you ever heard a prophet on the rampage?

PILATE: No. And since when have you been an articulate soul?

HEROD: Oh, I'm not concerned about myself. And what about that poor creature you asked me to examine? Didn't he rave at you? Do you remember him? He was tall and skinny. His face was too long, like a sad donkey's.

PILATE: Yes, I remember him. He said about five words. I've never known an accused man to be so silent.

HEROD: Oh! (Firmly) Then he definitely was not a prophet . . . not like *my* John. I saw it at

once. But I'm obliged to you for letting me see him. I'd heard of him. He was supposed to be able to do things, like curing the sick.

PILATE: He was innocent.

HEROD: Of course. Those poor loonys always are. But getting back to the subject of Salome. You've heard what she tricked me into doing?

PILATE: Why didn't you say No?

HEROD: (Sighing) I've never been able to refuse a woman anything, though mind you, it's rare for me to make a promise.

PILATE: (Herod pours more wine.) You must have known what she was after, didn't you?

HEROD: (Drinking) How wise are any of us?

PILATE: (Mocking him.) No one could accuse you of being in that state, could they?

HEROD: Please, please, or I'll positively weep. (Giggling) You know, after it happened I felt I ought to apologize -- but to which part, the head or the body? What a devastating quandary for a king to be in!

PILATE: You should have divided the apology into two equal parts.

HEROD: Ah! Why didn't I think of that! My dear Pontius, you are so clever! So practical!

PILATE: Tell me. Do you plan on staying long in Jerusalem?

HEROD: I hardly know. Why? Does my presence disturb you?

PILATE: No, I just want to know. I'd as soon have you causing trouble here as elsewhere.

HEROD: The troubles are there before I ever arrive. I merely provide the poultice. (Drinking) What is wrong, Pilate?

PILATE: Wrong? Wrong?

HEROD: I am serious now. I'll be gone in a few minutes. See, my cup's almost empty. And I'm a little drunk . . . so I can afford to be serious. (Putting his hand on Pilate's arm.) You know sentiment has no part in my makeup. I can claim that what I feel for you is quite genuine. Do you know I spent a bad hour or two trying to decide why I should feel so attracted to an elderly, unattractive man, but then I discovered that what I felt was affection and respect for his honesty

and perception. Even though you can be unbearably tedious at times. And I do believe my motive for becoming friendly with your wife is that I might have an opportunity to sit and talk with her about you. Isn't it a pity that two people who have an affection in common can't be friends? But it's often the case. (He sighs.) What I see in your face makes me most unhappy. My dear fellow, do tell me what is causing it and if I can assist you, I will. Even the shoddiest of creatures can betimes rise above himself.

PILATE: I know, I know. I am not so unappreciative as all that.

HEROD: Then tell me.

PILATE: I've tried to, many times. But you regard my convictions as so many enemies to be scattered by charging on them with wild speculation.

HEROD: (Gloomily) Probably I do. I begin to regret my deficiencies. I must be close to death.

PILATE: Don't start regretting them now! You're bearable only because you enjoy your vices.

HEROD: (Giggling) All right, I won't. But do tell me which of your convictions has drawn your face so much.

PILATE: (After a pause.) I condemned evil when goodness stood before me, demanding recognition and support.

HEROD: (Jumping from the couch to stand before Pilate where he excitedly skips and waves his arms.) And why . . . why did you agree? Because you had no choice in the matter! You may say you had, but I say no no no no no! And I am right, I am right! The biggest lie in the world is that one may choose and then settle the account at some unspecified time afterwards. I know what you are talking about and of whom you speak. I know, because I felt the goodness in him too. But, my dear friend, don't you see he would have been slaughtered anyway, and he knew it. That's why he was silent. Don't you see that such poor simpletons never never never stand a chance . . . not even with help from someone like yourself.

PILATE: Could he have been so simple if he knew he was going to die? Well?

HEROD: I know it all seems contradictory.

PILATE: Of course it is, if you make the man a fool.

HEROD: Make him what you please, and I still say the responsibility was not yours. You have no right to condemn yourself.

PILATE: What about self-disgust?

HEROD: That is even worse. (Taking a few steps towards the door, then returning.) Will you take some advice?

PILATE: What is it?

HEROD: Take your lady, and go as far away from this country as you can get.

PILATE: That's not very original advice. Anyway, it wouldn't work.

HEROD: Don't be so scornful. Good advice is always petty and commonplace. It's bad advice that's original and exciting. Now I must go. (Pilate gets up, slowly, tiredly.)

PILATE: It's not scorn. I wish it were. But certainty.

HEROD: Why don't you come and visit me? I'll get that aggressive step-daughter of mine to dance for you. (He giggles.) Maybe she'd ask for my head on a tray. It'd be just like her. (He walks into a wall.) Why is that wall there?

PILATE: The builder hoped you'd walk into it and get a black eye. Look . . . before you go . . . are you serious and honest when you talk about feeling the same quality in that fellow?

HEROD: Oh yes. It was what? Self-evident?

PILATE: It impressed you too?

HEROD: No, I wouldn't say that. It irritated me. He seemed complacent about it, and I can't stand complacency. But I admit it was there.

PILATE: You acknowledge more than the rest of the people in this damned city put together.

HEROD: Oh no, oh no. They saw it too and were frightened because they thought their mockery of a world would collapse about their ears if they acknowledged it. I happen to know better. If all men were like you, then they might bow before such an enemy. But they're not. They are grasping, envious, frightened fools who can either kill or be killed, or manipulated by superior men, such as myself.

PILATE: You are fortunate having a belief . . . such as it is. I have lost the belief I had in those things I once thought were so important. In sanity, in honesty . . . in justice.

HEROD: I am as sorry to hear of this as you were to hear I had begun to regret my vices.

PILATE: It is horrible to realize that only our defects makes us bearable.

HEROD: I find it consoling.

PILATE: I expect you do. You are going?

HEROD: Yes, (Touching Pilate's arm.) Please, please remember, you do not create men.

PILATE: I know all this.

HEROD: But don't you tend to discount the fact?

PILATE: What the man was, was apparent to everyone, even to one who had never seen him before, or cared nothing for the loves and hates of this bitter race.

HEROD: Then why not have faith in this quality the man had, since you prize it so much?

PILATE: The things one believes in must have one foot in the present. They must be tangible. One can't live on a whispered hope for the future. It is not enough.

HEROD: How can you so sure it isn't? Besides, the man stood before you. Isn't that tangible?

PILATE: Yes, but what is he now?

HEROD: Oh, you don't need to worry. There'll be hundreds more like him.

PILATE: But they bear no fruit . . . that is the trouble, they bear no fruit. They come out of the unknown darkness like comets to terrify and arouse hate by their demands for surrender and imitation. Those things I believed in came out of light and reason and sane control. To say this will be, this will come, is not enough . . . it can't be enough. Yet all I knew, all I'd believed, told me that this man should be allowed to live . . . because men such as he are rare flowers . . . of great beauty.

HEROD: Don't you find it strange that both of us should have crushed a rare flower?

PILATE: No, the strange thing is that we both should know it. (He seems to notice where they are standing.) Let's go the other way, down through the garden. I have some plants I want to show you. (They walk back across the room and out onto the terrace.)

HEROD: Do you enjoy your view of the city?

PILATE: No, I see too much in it. (They walk off along the terrace. A girl's voice whispers.)

SWEEPER: They're gone. (The two servant girls creep over to the pillars. They crane and push

each other in their anxiety to see Herod.)

SWEEPER: Tell me again what he said, Leah.

WATERER: I won't. I've already told you two dozen times.

SWEEPER: What could he mean by war souvenirs?

WATERER: I hate them all.

SWEEPER: I'll bet! If he winked you'd say that's as good as a nod and go trotting after him.

WATERER: (Shouting) I hate them all, and you know it. And if you don't stop baiting me -

SWEEPER: (Shouting) -- I'd sooner run after Herod than after the kind that get their heads chopped off, or strung up on a cross with murderers and thieves. (The waterer charges at her and grabs her hair. The sweeper screams from pain and habit but she manages to break away and runs from the room, yelling at the top of her voice.)

SWEEPER: Lady . . . Lady . . . Lady! (The waterer runs out after her.)

The End