

## ALL SAVE ONE

### ACT ONE SCENE ONE

Lights up on SIMS, sitting in a large wing chair. The room is a sunny study somewhere in Hollywood, 1950. It is a rented house, the owner being an absent member of the English expat community. It is a perfect blend of cluttered writer's den and gracious mid-20<sup>th</sup> century resort decor.

At first, it appears that SIMS is addressing the audience. He is not. He is rehearsing a speech to be used to open a filmed version of his work. This becomes clearer as he goes along. His confident pronouncement of the first few sentences falters, and he looks heavenward in hesitation thereafter.

SIMS

Many have noted that everything that has happened in my life has insinuated itself into my work. This is truer than even they might imagine. From my somewhat overdecorated—

He hesitates.

From my somewhat exaggerated contributions in the Great War to my rather famous friendships, nothing has escaped my .... Oh, balls!

He realizes he's lost his place.

I hope to God they've got a good editor. This is going to require several takes.

He searches his memory to find a place he remembers. He finds it. He seems to have regained his full composure. He stands resolutely, and experiments, rather badly with clever gestures (perhaps with a pipe or his glasses).

From my somewhat exaggerated contributions in the Great War to my rather...fuck! Oh well, this part I know....

The film you are about to see is an anthology of sorts. Three short plays of mine have been adapted to the cinema and I couldn't be more pleased.

(Aside).

Yes, I could, but they're paying me absolute gondolas of money.

(Back to the script:)

In each, a man of the world meets with an unexpected visitor. The results are, in order of appearance, ironic, tragic and romantic. At least that is my hope.

He bows his head, returns to his chair and puts a “button” on his last phrase by sitting down, smiling beatifically at an unseen camera and murmuring:

Enjoy the goddamn—

(to himself:)

—must watch this language—

(to unseen audience:)

Enjoy the film.

He then rewards himself by jumping up rather surprisingly well and wheeling a full drinks trolley from behind the wing chair.

As for me, this calls for a cocktail.

During the next bit he methodically mixes a cocktail.

Occasionally he looks off to make sure no one approaches. He re-rehearses this bit, considering it thoughtfully.

From my somewhat exaggerated contributions to the Great War to my rather...to my rather...ah, yes!...to my *rather fraught personal trials*, I have endeavored to distill all my experiences to find universal truths.

Damn right. To my universal truths!

(He drinks.)

And to my kind of writing. (*He drinks again.*) And to hell with William Fuck-all Faulkner.

(Another sip.)

“*Sound and Fury*” alright...signifying *nothing*... Stream of consciousness, my arse. Tell them a good story.

He suddenly falters. He looks about to weep. BASIL enters. SIMS pulls himself together.

BASIL

No need to hide the tears from me.

SIMS

I'm just feeling nostalgic for home.

BASIL

Which one?

SIMS

Home is always the cottage!

BASIL

Too bad you're never there.

SIMS

What, and pay the bloody British government 90 percent of what I make? After all I did for them.

BASIL

Well, the little island is a bit broke still.

SIMS

Oh, the war, the war! God damn it, we won the war, didn't we?

BASIL

If you say so.

SIMS

Join me in a drink?

BASIL

Sims! You've been coming to California off and on since before talkies! Set your watch, for God's sake! It's only noon!

SIMS

I've been up for hours.

BASIL

*Really* working, or trying out various readings of this silly film intro?

SIMS

Both.

BASIL

Are you up to discussing the news of the day?

SIMS takes a sip from his drink.

SIMS

Barely. Start slowly.

BASIL

Well, I could start with the bad news.

SIMS

Always start with the bad news, you know that.

BASIL

Yes I do. Edna St. Vincent Millay is dead.

A slight moment where it looks as if SIMS is affected emotionally by the news

SIMS

How old?

BASIL

Fifty-eight.

Another slight moment.

SIMS

How?

BASIL

Rather grimly, actually. She fell down the stairs.

SIMS recovers brightly.

SIMS

Ah.

BASIL

It may have been a heart attack that sent her pitching forward.

SIMS is less bright. A pause.

SIMS

I remember that every time Tallulah Bankhead heard the name “Edna St. Vincent Millay,” she would then say, in rhythm, “Boom, Boom!” Try it.

BASIL

Try what?

SIMS

(Emphasizing the meter of her name:)

Say “EDna St. VINcent MillAY.”

BASIL

“EDna St. VINcent MillAY.”

SIMS

Boom boom!

He waits for BASIL to laugh. BASIL does not.

BASIL

Ah. Speaking of Tallulah, she’s in town to do a radio show and wants to throw you a party.

SIMS

Fine.

BASIL

She’ll want to invite everyone from her heyday in London.

SIMS

If she can dig them up, I’ll be happy to see them.

BASIL

I want you to acknowledge my tact in referring the 20s as *her* heyday.

SIMS

Move along. Any more bad news?

BASIL

No, we can move on to the merely banal.

SIMS

Oh, let's not. Let's skip it till after lunch. Then we can begin *in medias res*. Still the best way to begin anything.

BASIL

Ever since Sophocles.

SIMS

Damn right.

A pause.

BASIL

Have you prepared yourself for Claire?

SIMS

What do you mean, prepared myself?

BASIL

He hesitates, as if about to say something and thinks better of it.

With her latest film over, she'll be in need of a role to play while she's between engagements. As such, when she crosses our threshold, she will immediately resume playing the role of Mrs. Sims Glendenning, gracious wife and occasional Oscar-winning actress. In turn, she'll expect you to enact Sims Glendenning, devoted husband of an international treasure. And an occasional scribbler in his own right.

SIMS

That's rather funny, Basil.

BASIL

I'm so glad you're amused.

SIMS

I've missed Claire. There is something about a woman in the house that puts things in order.

BASIL

Yes.

SIMS

Oh, I didn't mean that you're not the master of order around here. Look how you take care of things. I wouldn't have known about poor Edna Millay if it weren't for you. BASIL You could pick up a newspaper.

SIMS

I'm already an ink-stained wretch from putting my own thoughts to paper. Why should I add to the smut on my fingers when I have you?

BASIL

Speaking of smut, where is the dear little chap?

SIMS

Stop.

BASIL

Sorry, where is little Conrad?

SIMS

Little Conrad's name is actually Clay, as you very well know. He seems to be out for a swim.

BASIL

To bathe his own stained fingers?

SIMS

Don't be disgusting.

BASIL

May I expect *Clay* to join us for lunch?

SIMS

Clay may have other engagements.

BASIL

Good. He might return with a little pocket money of his own for a change, instead of putting out his tan and manly hand—palms up—in your direction.

SIMS

I meant that Clay may have an audition or interview somewhere.

BASIL

Indeed he may.

SIMS

God knows he's got the looks.

BASIL

Mmm.

SIMS

You were once a breathtakingly handsome boy with no visible means of support, too, as I recall.

BASIL

And along came you. Perhaps I should have your towels monogrammed "VMS" for Visible Means of Support.

SIMS

Anything further?

BASIL

Yes. Your absurdly good-looking "technical advisor" is due in an hour and your absurdly good-natured producer in a mere twenty minutes. I couldn't space them out any further than that. Something about a baptism for one and a script meeting for the other, I think. Since you've drunk breakfast, may I suggest that you ingest something solid for lunch?

SIMS

That would be divine.

BASIL

Does Mr. Grant keep, as they say, kosher?

SIMS

Mr. Grant is Jewish?

BASIL

Less Jew. More "ish."

SIMS

Ah! Which reminds me.. Sit down for a moment and be amazed at how much religious trivia I have absorbed whilst creating my latest play.

(He consults some notes on his desk).



Keeping kosher was, of course, part of the Jewish law under the Old Testament. However, once Christ's teachings went beyond the Jews, the Gentiles needed to know that they were included into the Christian fold equally with those Jews who converted. The implication? Jesus arrived, became the Messiah, and many of the old laws, including keeping kosher, became null and void.

BASIL

And our Mr. Grant, as a modern Jewish man, does not see Jesus as anything but an ambitious upstart who really didn't change things?

SIMS

(Flaring)

The Jews are still God's Chosen!

BASIL

(Reacting to Sims's sudden passion)

Where in the world did that come from?

SIMS

I have great respect for Mr. Grant and his people.

BASIL

Producers?

SIMS

Don't be disrespectful.

BASIL

(Flaring himself now)

And don't order me about as if I'm some hired toady!

They both take a moment.

SIMS

Will Claire be here in time for lunch?

BASIL

I haven't the vaguest idea. And for all I know, she's reducing again and will want nothing but alfalfa or sagebrush or some such.

SIMS

So that everyone is accommodated, let's have a simple chef's salad. No ham. Perhaps a cold soup.

BASIL

Fine.

BASIL starts to leave.

SIMS

Basil—

BASIL

What?

SIMS

I can't seem to get that bloody film introduction into my brain. Am I going senile?

BASIL

No.

SIMS

The new play isn't coming along very well, either.

BASIL

May I be frank?

SIMS

Please.

BASIL

When I met you, lo these many, you could write a play in 28 days. You also accepted every party invitation and indulged in every sybaritic activity you could dream up. Why? You were young and the martinis hadn't quite done their damage. Now, you're in the full flower of middle age. You've been given the task of introducing a film based on three old stories about that old generation, which is now equally middle aged.

As to your last few plays, they haven't quite hit the mark. Your old producers are dead. Mr. Grant isn't in a position to throw advance money at you the way you're used to. Nor should he. This is a different time and a different place. What is it that Darwin said? "Adapt or die."

SIMS (Pause.)

Darwin never said that. Christ—I mean—gosh, I hate when the great are misquoted. It happens to my work all the time. In future, be less frank.