

SCRIPT TITLE

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THE PICTURE OF JONATHAN LASLOW

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INT. STUDY - NIGHT

We're in a plush, Georgian style study, crammed with exquisite examples of fine art. An old style gramophone stands proudly in one corner.

JONATHAN LASLOW (mid 30's), expensively dressed in a tailored suit, holds an antique, ivory phone to an ear.

LASLOW
Yes Edward.

He listens to the voice at the other end.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
Of course.

He nods.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
I'll expect you presently.

He places the bone handle back on its receiver and reaches for a pack of cigarettes.

They're next to a beautifully bound book. We can easily read the title, "The Picture of Dorian Gray," by Oscar Wilde.

Laslow taps out a cigarette, lights it and reclines into a high backed leather chair.

He blows out a cloud of tobacco, watching it lazily. A smile plays across his lean, aquiline features.

He turns, regarding the self portrait of himself on the far wall. As we linger on it we realize that something isn't quite right, the painting has been altered, distorted by an untalented hand.

Specks of yellow and gray have been added to the skin, giving it an unhealthy, ghoulish pallor; the lips have been darkened with a charcoal pigment whilst the eyes are tinged with a red that makes them almost hellish.

In all it has quite a grotesque appearance.

Laslow laughs, sits upright and places the cigarette into an ashtray.

He pulls on a pair of velvet gloves.

Then reaches into an open draw, bringing out -

- a silver pistol.

- and a box of cartridges.

He studies the weapon for a moment, aiming it and squinting down the sight. Then he flips open the chamber. He loads three bullets, spins the barrel and snaps it shut.

He wipes the handle with a handkerchief then places it into the pocket of his waistcoat.

The study window lights up, a search beam flashing through the ornate cross frame. It passes over the study.

A car engine roars outside.

Laslow snaps out of his reverie, throwing a cruel look towards the night.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Laslow throws the door open to reveal a man in a shabby brown suit and hard-felt bowler hat, standing nervously outside. This is EDWARD GREEN, like Laslow he's somewhere in his mid thirties.

He licks his lip nervously.

LASLOW

Edward.

The man manages a smile. It looks like something squeezed out badly from a tube of toothpaste.

EDWARD

Jonathan.

The host flashes him a gracious smile.

LASLOW

Please.

He stands back and gestures behind him.

LASLOW (CONT'D)

I've given the servants the night off. And my wife is visiting her dreadful Aunt Beatrice.

He smiles.

LASLOW (CONT'D)

Just you and me.

Edward takes a step inside. Laslow places a hand on his shoulder.

LASLOW (CONT'D)

Let's go to my study.

INT. STUDY - NIGHT

Laslow leads his companion inside.

LASLOW
Have a seat.

He indicates a chair.

His guest obliges and Laslow proceeds to pour two drinks from a crystal decanter, a single measure and a much larger one, half filling the glass.

He hands the large one to his guest and takes his chair behind the desk, throwing long legs onto it.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
Cheers.

He takes a very small, measured sip of his drink, all the time watching that Edward takes a far larger one.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
So my old friend, what shall we talk about?

Edward regards him with surprise.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
Art, literature, music?

His guest shakes his head, perplexed.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
I do so miss our old talks. More than you could imagine. Did you know Wilde's Salome has opened at the Paradise Theater? The place has finally had electric lights fitted too, after all this time. We should go. Just like our old Cambridge days.

EDWARD
Jonathan, please!

He's flushed, shaking. He runs a hand through his hair.

EDWARD (CONT'D)
You know why I'm here.

Laslow arches a questioning eyebrow.

LASLOW
Do I? (A beat) Ah yes, you did mention something, your factory wasn't it?

He takes a small sip of his whisky, savoring the taste. His eyes never leave the other man.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
Some little problem or other I believe.

EDWARD
Not so little.

He takes a long drink, steadying frayed nerves.

EDWARD (CONT'D)
I desperately need fresh capital.

Laslow sighs.

LASLOW
How awful for you. Your father left you that textile mill, didn't he?

Edward eye's rise from his drink.

EDWARD
Yes.

LASLOW
But how did this happen? You were always the practical one, good head on your shoulders.

EDWARD
Well, business isn't as straightforward as they teach you at Cambridge. There have been ...

He swirls his drink around.

EDWARD (CONT'D)
Well, unforeseen problems.

Laslow puts on his most sympathetic expression.

LASLOW
I hear you like the gaming rooms these days.

Edward's eyes widen.

EDWARD
What? Where did you ...

He shrugs.

EDWARD (CONT'D)
It doesn't matter.

LASLOW
Cards in particular (a beat) I
hear.

Edward nods.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
I suppose one could lose a great
deal of money in these games?

His guest looks as if he might protest but then hangs his
head.

EDWARD
A great deal.

He drains his glass.

EDWARD (CONT'D)
I though I could win what I needed,
but I've only made it worse.

He clasps the drink between his hands, an unconscious gesture
of pleading

EDWARD (CONT'D)
You have to help me.

LASLOW
I'm honored.

Laslow refills his guest's glass, another generous measure,
and hands it back to him, guiding his hand so that he takes
another large drink.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
But how can I help?

Edward's face flushes with anger.

EDWARD
You know how.

LASLOW
Money?

The other man nods.

EDWARD
Of course money.

Laslow's amiable mask slips a little.

LASLOW
How much?

EDWARD

I was hoping (a beat) twenty thousand.

He winces as he says this.

LASLOW

That's a considerable amount of money, a considerable amount.

EDWARD

Your father's a lord Jonathan, a very rich lord. You could spare that amount without even noticing it.

LASLOW

Perhaps.

He arches an eyebrow.

LASLOW (CONT'D)

For a friend.

He studies the other man for some moments.

LASLOW (CONT'D)

You are my friend aren't you old chap?

The question takes his guest by surprise.

EDWARD

Of course.

For the briefest of moments, Laslow's face is cold, predatory then a good humored smile lights it up again.

LASLOW

Twenty thousand pounds. I think we could arrange that.

Edward laughs, clapping his hands in relief.

EDWARD

I'll pay you back of course, maybe over ...

Laslow holds up a hand.

LASLOW

We can talk details later.

His eyes drift to the portrait on the wall. Edward follows his gaze.

EDWARD

I remember that painting.

LASLOW
Indeed, the self portrait I did at
Cambridge.

He picks up the book.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
I got the idea from this.

His guest reads the title.

EDWARD
The Picture of Dorian Gray.

Laslow regards the book affectionately.

LASLOW
I adore this tale. A painting that
records the sins and crimes of an
individual, leaving the man himself
untouched.

Edward glances back at the painting.

EDWARD
You've altered it.

Laslow regards him amused.

LASLOW
Of course I have, and will do so
again. Drink up.

It's almost a command. His guest drains his glass.

Laslow stands.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
Now.

His hand touches his waistcoat pocket.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
I also have something of a problem.
One only a true friend could help
me with.

EDWARD
Really, of what nature?

LASLOW
Well, it's perhaps best if I show
you.

He waves towards the door.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
Shall we?

INT. WINE CELLAR - NIGHT

The cellar's in near darkness, lit dimly by light from outside.

Footsteps echo on stone steps. Edward appears at the doorway, stopping on the threshold.

EDWARD
What is this?

He looks worried as he peers into the gloom.

Laslow appears at his shoulder.

LASLOW
My private wine cellar.

EDWARD
Why are we here?

Laslow lays a hand on his shoulder, guiding him inside.

LASLOW
To deal with that little problem I mentioned.

EDWARD
I don't like this Jonathan.

LASLOW
Calm yourself my dear fellow.

He picks up a bottle of champagne.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
This is probably the most the most expensive bottle in the country. I would like us to drink it together.

He caresses it lovingly.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
Later.

He replaces the bottle and pulls on a cord dangling close by.

Lights come on. The cellar, we now see, is made of heavy stone brick and has a medieval feel to it. Rows of dust covered bottles line the walls.

In many respects it's no different from any other wealthy individual's wine cellar.

- apart from one thing

- the hooded figure, bound to a chair by the far wall. We have no idea who it is but the heavy work boots and canvas overalls suggest a laborer of some type.

Laslow closes the door behind them.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
First to the matter in hand.

Edward looks on in amazement.

EDWARD
I don't understand.

LASLOW
I caught this fellow breaking in to my estate. It hasn't been the first time. I believe him to be the leader of a gang that has targeted me for some time.

EDWARD
Haven't you called the police?

LASLOW
The police?

His tone is incredulous.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
My dear fellow, of course not. These people, why they buy off the local constabulary, pay them to look the other way as it were.

He sighs.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
No. This is something I must deal with myself. Or rather (a beat) something we must deal with.

Edward shakes his head and turns to go.

Laslow takes out a key and locks the door.

Then slides a hand into his waistcoat, taking out the pistol.

He moves forward and places it into his companion's palm.

Edward stares at him.

EDWARD
You can't be serious.

LASLOW
But I am, very.

He takes Edward's wrist and guides his arm until the weapon points at the captive.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
I want you to kill him.

Edward turns incredulous eyes on his friend.

EDWARD
No!

Laslow looks disapproving.

EDWARD (CONT'D)
Just let me go. No one has to know about this. I won't breath a word, I promise.

Laslow waves towards the door.

LASLOW
If you so wish.

Edward moves past him, tries to open the door but it's now locked.

He holds out a hand.

EDWARD
Key.

Laslow twirls it around in his gloved hand.

LASLOW
You'll be ruined, you know that.

He sighs, shaking his head theatrically.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
A debt ridden bankrupt, a compulsive gambler who threw away his inheritance. No one would want to know you anymore.

Edward slams a fists against the door.

EDWARD
You're asking me to murder someone.

LASLOW
I'm asking you to help an old friend, one who wants to help you in return.

Edward turns, glaring at the other man.

EDWARD
Why me?

LASLOW
My dear fellow, who else could I
trust?

He smiles, approaching the other man.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
Do this for your own sake, and for
that of our friendship.

He places an arm round him and leads him back into the middle
of the cellar.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
Something you've cruelly neglected
in recent years.

He guides Edward's arm towards the target once more.

The smaller man utters a soft whimper.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
Do it Edward.

Laslow leans in, brushing his lips to his companion's ear.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
Do it.

He slides snake like gloved fingers over the trigger hand.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
Things will be just like old times.

Edward's arm wavers, sweat drips into his eyes.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
(Yell) Do it!

The pistol explodes.

A crimson patch appears in the hooded figure's chest that
rapidly spreads.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
Again.

A second shot. The covered head slumps forward. The body
though is still convulsing.

Laslow's hand tightens and a third shot explodes.

The body jerks then falls still.

Laslow takes the pistol from his friend, wraps it in the
kerchief and places it back in his waistcoat pocket.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
Excellent.

He slaps him on the back and walks over to the dead figure.
He places a hand to the hood.

EDWARD
I don't want to see.

LASLOW
I think you do.

He pulls the hood free.

All we see at first is a shock of long, blond hair.

He tilts the head back, revealing the face of a pretty woman
somewhere in her late twenties.

Laslow grins.

Edward looks on in horror.

EDWARD
No!

He bites his fist.

EDWARD (CONT'D)
Please God no!

LALSOW
You know what destroys friendship
Edward? Women, the female of the
species. In our case(a beat) my
late wife Sarah.

Tears are forming in Edward's eyes.

LASLOW
We had what you might call a
marriage of convenience, my father
ordered me to do it, you know that.
He though it might ...

He waves a hand around, searching for the correct phrases.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
Cure me, I believe his phrase was.

He laughs.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
Anyway, that's why I turned a blind
eye to you two. I knew all about
your secret trysts, those little
letters to each other, trips away.
(MORE)

LASLOW (CONT'D)

In a way you were doing me a favour, keeping her out of my way. But I missed you though old friend, missed our time together. I've always considered our friendship (a beat) special.

His expression darkens.

LASLOW (CONT'D)

So, you can imagine how it hurt me when I learnt you were planning to elope together once you had my money. I might have expected this from her, a woman, but from you...

EDWARD

How could you know?

LASLOW

One of the many advantages of being wealthy. I could afford the best private detective in the country. I'm very disappointed in you Edward.

Anger flashes in his eyes.

LASLOW (CONT'D)

Very disappointed.

Edward looks away, almost contrite.

EDWARD

So what happens now?

LASLOW

Now?

CUT TO:

INT. STUDY - NIGHT

Edward, eyes red and cried out, is sat down, looking at the cheque on the table in front of him. A glass of champagne and the priceless bottle stand next to it.

Laslow, his own champagne to his slips, is in the middle of putting touches of red to his portrait's hands, giving us the impression of blood running down them.

He's in good spirits.

LASLOW

It will be like old times, you'll see.

He stands back, inviting a comparison of himself and the painting.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
By the way, that cheque. It's not a loan, it's an investment, for fifty percent of your company.

He smiles, puts his brush down and walks over to his friend.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
We're partners Edward.

He places a hand on his friend's shoulder.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
From now on...

The hand squeezes the man's shoulder gently, affectionately. He giggles girlishly.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
... it'll be just you and me.

THE END