

WILDE WEST

Written by

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INSPIRED BY TRUE EVENTS

FADE IN:

INT. READING GAOL WHEEL HOUSE - DARK

CHYRON: IN 1896, OSCAR WILDE WAS CONVICTED OF INDECENCY AND SENTENCED TO TWO YEARS OF HARD LABOR AT READING GAOL, ENGLAND'S NOTORIOUSLY VIOLENT PRISON.

Several prisoners turn a heavy wheel which grinds grain into flour, each at a spoke, pushing with all their might. They have been pushing for twelve hours already.

OSCAR WILDE is among them. Dirty and gaunt, strong from hard labor but emaciated from malnutrition, dressed in tattered prison garb, his hair cut carelessly short.

Oscar is a far cry from the stylishly coiffed premier aesthete we see in photographs today.

Another prisoner snaps at Oscar.

PRISONER ONE

Bloody poof, put your back into it!

A nearby guard hears this, and begins whipping the man who spoke, until he falls to the ground. The prisoner holds up his hands, trying to ward off the vicious blows.

GUARD

What's the number one rule at Reading Gaol?!

PRISONER ONE

No talking--

The guard strikes him, cutting him off.

GUARD

That's right, no talking! So, keep your bloody gob shut! That goes for all you lot!

The prisoner stumbles to his feet and returns to the wheel.

GUARD (CONT'D)

Back to work!

Guard cracks the whip again, and they begin to push the huge wheel again.

EXT. EXERCISE YARD - AFTERNOON

Oscar sits near another man on the ground, leaning against the high wall surrounding the prison.

They have all become good at speaking in very low voices without moving their mouths.

PRISONER TWO

I'm sorry for you, mate. A man like you ought not to be in a place like this. You ain't no more like us than a canary's like a blue jay.

OSCAR

Thank you, my friend. Truly. But we all suffer alike.

The prisoner who had previously insulted Oscar walks up.

PRISONER ONE

You are an abomination.

He spits a huge one in Oscar's face. Then he attacks, throwing a wild, vicious punch at Oscar.

Oscar scrambles to his feet and fights back. A crowd gathers.

After ducking a wild punches, he throws a jab, then lands a well-placed right hook that knocks Prisoner One out cold.

OSCAR

Is it not enough that the guards beat us constantly?

Oscar feels a hand on his shoulder. He spins around and throws a punch before realizing...

It is the guard from before. He is joined by two more guards. They hit at Oscar with their truncheons, dazing him, then snatch hold of him and drag him off.

INT. OSCAR'S CELL - DAY

A dirty cot. Filthy toilet. Dark. The only light provided by one small, narrow window.

Oscar's face shows the signs of his beating. He sits at a small desk, writing.

Then, a VOICE from outside the cell door.

VOICE

Mail!

A small door slides open and a LETTER is pushed through.

Oscar goes over to get the letter. He looks at it: no return address. He opens the letter, then sits down in the small shaft of sunlight to read it.

A MAN'S VOICE OVER as Oscar reads...

MAN'S VOICE

Dearest Oscar, I read of your travails in a Cheyenne newspaper. I will address this letter to Reading Gaol in the hope that it will find its way to you. I have news, my friend, and I'm afraid it is not of the good variety...

The man's voice GOES OUT as Oscar continues reading. And as he reads, tears fill his eyes. Start streaking down his filthy face.

He finishes reading the letter, overcome with emotion.

He starts singing softly to himself:

OSCAR

*Oh Susanna, don't you cry for me,
'cause I come from Alabama with a
banjo on my knee...*

As he sings, MOVE CLOSER to Oscar, all the way into...

CLOSE-UP - OSCAR'S EYE

...golden with sunlight. From this image...

MATCH CUT:

A HUGE SETTING SUN

...painting sheer red cliffs a fiery gold.

EXT. RED CLIFFS - SUNSET

TWO RIDERS galloping through a shallow stream at the base of the cliffs. They are shirtless.

Horses' hooves splash up water, fragmented by the sun's rays.

MOVE CLOSER

To see that one of them is Oscar. Fourteen years younger. Vibrant, healthy. His body bronzed by sun. His long hair flowing behind him.

The other man is about Oscar's age. Handsome, dashing and mustachioed. (More about him later.)

The two men look at each other as they ride. Laughing. Lost with each other in this incredible moment.

CUT BACK TO:

OSCAR - IN HIS CELL

A beautiful smile comes to his lips. In his eyes are both joy and immense sorrow.

EXT - SS ARIZONA - ATLANTIC OCEAN

The strongest, fastest ship in the world is coming into New York harbor.

The whistle blows three times.

CHYRON: NEW YORK HARBOR - 1882

INT. SS ARIZONA - SALOON - DAY

The SS Arizona was a luxury liner in the vain of the Titanic, but with less room for luggage and steerage passengers.

Oscar Wilde is holding court in the ship's saloon, where first class passengers surround him, drinking, laughing, talking.

It is pure elegance. A grand piano is being played by a man in a tuxedo. A skylight above, just beginning to illuminate with the sun's first light, flowers and plants and luxurious decor make this one of the finest passenger ships of the day.

Oscar is dressed in his signature flamboyant style. Deep purple velvet coat, silk stockings under knee-length breeches. A lily pinned to his lapel. His hair is shoulder length, unheard of in the day.

Everything about him is scandalous, except that he is the inimitable Oscar Wilde, and societal rules simply do not apply.

He lounges extravagantly on a settee, sipping whiskey and smoking a cigarette.

Everything he does is with practiced flair.

New Years decorations adorn the saloon. Some passengers continue to celebrate after an all-night party.

Oscar pontificates...

OSCAR

To the Aesthete, beauty itself is not the goal, but rather the pursuit of beauty, that is what defines an aesthetic life.

The ship's horn blows again, interrupting his speech.

A PORTER enters.

PORTER

The *SS Arizona* has been cleared to dock at Staten Island. All passengers please return to your staterooms and prepare to disembark. Welcome to New York!

The passengers give a cheer.

FEMALE PASSENGER

(a hand to her stomach)

Thank the Good Lord... I've nothing left to retch!

OSCAR

How a ship so beautifully appointed causes such universal unease, calls to my memory a certain femme fatale I once courted.

He stands for the punchline:

OSCAR (CONT'D)

I thank God daily that I disembarked that sickly ship!

Laughter and applause from those in attendance as he exits with his usual flair.

EXT. DECK - DAY

A dazzling, clear, cold day. Oscar standing there, a brisk wind in his face. He looks out at...

NEW YORK CITY. Even in 1882 an awesome sight. Ships and boats dot the harbor. Oscar can feel the energy even from here.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. STATEN ISLAND CUSTOMS - DAY

The bustling, energized crowd of just-off-the-boat immigrants flowing through customs. Oscar is among them, feeding off their energy.

He gets to one of the desks manned by a CUSTOMS OFFICER.

CUSTOMS OFFICER
Do you have anything to declare?

OSCAR
Nothing except my genius.

The customs officer gives him a flat look as he stamps Oscar's passport.

CUSTOMS OFFICER
Wise guy, eh?

OSCAR
The likes of which you have never seen.

EXT. STATEN ISLAND FERRY TERMINAL - DAY

A group of REPORTERS is waiting. One of them spots Oscar emerging from the ferry.

REPORTER
There he is!

They rush him. Start shouting questions...

REPORTER ONE
Mr. Wilde, how was your voyage?

OSCAR
I was very much disappointed in the Atlantic Ocean. It was so tame. I expected it to roar about and be beautiful in its storms.

REPORTER TWO
What are your first impressions of America?

OSCAR

More stormy so far than the tepid Atlantic. There is an energy here that is palpable.

REPORTER THREE

What attraction do you want to see most in New York City?

He takes a breath to answer, but is cut off by...

... A wiry, diminutive man pushes his way past the reporters to Oscar. COL. SAMUEL F.W. MORSE, Oscar's manager. Well dressed in a ramshackle way. He puffs on a cigar.

He walks up to Oscar. Stands a good foot shorter than him.

MORSE

Oscar Wilde!
(looks up at him)
Good God, man, you're a veritable giant!

He grabs Oscar's hand and gives it several exuberant pumps.

MORSE (CONT'D)

A tree in full bloom! Magnificent!

OSCAR

Colonel Morse, I presume?

MORSE

That would be me. Let's get you settled, shall we? Your coach awaits!

He turns to the reporters.

MORSE (CONT'D)

Clear the way, scurvy gaggle!

He grabs Oscar by the arm and walks him away.

EXT. CARRIAGE - DAY

The carriage positively hurtling along the cobblestone street.

INT. CARRIAGE - CONTINUOUS

The carriage bounces as it speeds along, jostling Oscar and the Colonel. Oscar is looking out the window like a kid in a candy store, taking in the sights of the city.

Carriages crowd the city streets. Men and women are wearing the height of 1880s fashion, all corsets and bustles, with long capes and muffs to warm their hands. Snow floats through the air, making the scene all the more magical.

Morse puffs on his perpetual stogie. He is his own kind of whirlwind.

MORSE

Not going too fast for you, are we, Wilde?

OSCAR

Impossible. I adore velocity.

MORSE

Good. This coach will be at your disposal for the duration of your stay. Tonight you will be rubbing elbows with Manhattan's finest.

OSCAR

Elbow rubbing is what I do best.

MORSE

Rub whatever you like, just don't let the press see you doing it. They are ravenous, insatiable parasites.

OSCAR

There is no such thing as bad publicity, Morse.

MORSE

There's bad and there's fatal, Wilde. Just be sure you know where the line is.

OSCAR

But how does one know where the line is unless one crosses it?

MORSE

You've been warned, Wilde.

(beat)

As I was saying, tonight at the Mayor's mansion-- oh!

He digs in his pocket and pulls out an invitation which he hands to Oscar.

MORSE (CONT'D)
You'll need this.

Oscar considers it with amusement.

OSCAR
"Cordially invited," dear me.

MORSE
And here are two tickets to
"Patience" for Saturday night,
where I'm afraid you might not
receive quite so cordial a
reception.

He hands Oscar two tickets to Gilbert & Sullivan's "Patience"

Oscar pulls a face.

OSCAR
Yes, I've seen the show in London.
Rather a low brow depiction of
me...

MORSE
Never mind that, Wilde, you'll have
plenty of opportunity to make a
good impression during your tour.
I've booked lectures in 150 cities.
It's a grueling schedule, old boy,
but I know you'll charm the socks
off of 'em!

OSCAR
Colonel Morse, if I may, when might
I expect to receive compensation
for the initial leg of the tour?

MORSE
Don't tell me you've already spent
the advance?

OSCAR
I needed appropriate attire to
present myself to your American
audience, did I not? One has but a
single opportunity to make a first
impression, wouldn't you agree?

MORSE
Well, yes, I suppose...

He fishes in his breast pocket and pulls out some bills.

MORSE (CONT'D)

This should get you to the end of the week. Your next payment won't be until Chicago, so mind yourself, lad.

He waggles a finger at Oscar, then raps on the carriage roof with his walking stick.

MORSE (CONT'D)

Here we are, Stanley! Just here!

They pull up in front of the GRAND HOTEL, an upscale hotel at 31st and Broadway.

MORSE (CONT'D)

It's not Fifth Avenue, but I think you'll find it's the best on Broadway.

Morse jumps out with Oscar and pumps his hand again.

MORSE (CONT'D)

I'll send you a secretary tomorrow to help with all your arrangements.

OSCAR

A secretary!

Oscar is impressed. Morse laughs heartily and claps Oscar on the shoulder.

INT. GRAND HOTEL - DAY

Bellboys carrying his luggage, Oscar enters through a great revolving door. The hotel interior is lavish and beautiful, as are the guests. Oscar nods, smiles.

OSCAR

Well, hello, America.

The concierge approaches him.

CONCIERGE

Ah, Mr. Wilde. We've been expecting you. The bellmen will show you to your suite. At half past seven your carriage will take you to the Mayor's mansion. It is a black tie affair.

EXT. MAYOR'S MANSION - NIGHT

Guests arrive at the mansion dressed in their finest. The place is resplendent. Everyone who is anyone in attendance. We follow one of them through the door, and we hear Oscar's voice inside.

He is holding court, as usual. He is wearing a tie, but it is not black. Rather it is brightly colored, tied loosely about his neck, with a matching handkerchief in his pocket and a lily boutonniere.

OSCAR

It's really quite simple.
Aestheticism is an attempt to
elevate the commonplace, to color
the drab, to bring beauty to the
fore everywhere.

GUEST

Even in ol' Cosgrove here?

He raps his friend on the back, a rosy, rotund, sweating old man. Cosgrove lets out a bellowing laugh.

OSCAR

Indeed, even old Cosgrove. Look at
that gorgeous head of hair. Many of
my friends back home would pay
handsomely for half the coiffure.

Laughter.

ACROSS THE ROOM

A stunning woman surrounded by men, spots Oscar. This is LILLIE LANGTRY. Famous British born American socialite and actress. She shouts:

LILLIE

Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Willis
Wilde!

Oscar sees her, smiles hugely.

OSCAR

Emilie Charlotte Le Breton Langtry,
you gorgeous thing!

Lillie walks over to him. They embrace. She plants a kiss right on his lips, to the shock and delight of many in attendance.

Oscar turns back to the group he was talking to...

OSCAR (CONT'D)

This spectacularly ravishing creature, ladies and gentlemen, is the very embodiment of Aestheticism! Its pinnacle. And a perfect example of one of its rules: Perfect beauty cannot be improved upon.

LILLIE

Oh, Oscar, your flattery will get you positively everywhere!

(to group)

Might I borrow Mr. Wilde from you awhile?

She takes Oscar by the hand and leads him away.

LILLIE (CONT'D)

Good God, what a bunch of stiffs.

She snatches two glasses of champagne from a passing waiter. Hands one to Oscar.

LILLIE (CONT'D)

What on earth are you doing here, Oscar?

OSCAR

Officially, a speaking tour across America to bolster ticket sales to that Gilbert & Sullivan abomination.

She rolls her eyes sympathetically.

LILLIE

And unofficially?

OSCAR

Unofficially, a speaking tour to bolster sales of my somewhat poorly performing book of poems.

LILLIE

(cringes)

Oh, yes, I heard about that. Nevermind, what do critics know of true art?

OSCAR AND LILLIE

(together)

Nothing.

LILLIE
 Idiots, the lot!

She raises her glass.

LILLIE (CONT'D)
 To your conquest of America!

They clink glasses and drink.

LILLIE (CONT'D)
 Speaking of which, there is someone
 here you simply must meet.

She leads him toward a very colorful figure standing by
 himself in a corner...

His clothes very avant garde in this roomful of high fashion
 socialites. Most notable the fez atop his head. This is the
 famous photographer, NAPOLEON SARONY.

LILLIE (CONT'D)
 Napoleon!

He looks up, sees Lillie and Oscar coming toward him. Lillie
 greets him with a kiss on the cheek.

LILLIE (CONT'D)
 I'd like you to meet a dear friend
 of mine. Napoleon Sarony, Oscar
 Wilde.

Oscar extends his hand. Sarony shakes.

OSCAR
 A pleasure, my good sir.

SARONY
 So this is the fellow over whom all
 of Manhattan is atwitter.

OSCAR
 (with false modesty)
 Not at all!

LILLIE
 Oscar, you must sit for Napoleon!
 He will guarantee your rise to fame
 in America!

Sarony scrutinizes Oscar up and down, as Oscar strikes a
 pose.

SARONY
Come to my studio tomorrow.

He hands Oscar a card with his photograph on it.

OSCAR
Well, isn't that grand!

SARONY
I will make one for you. Your
calling card to the world.

OSCAR
Well now, I like the sound of that.

LILLIE
And now, Oscar, you must dance with
me!

MONTAGE:

-- Oscar and Lillie dancing the night away. And he's a very good dancer, and a very good drinker, which he does all night.

-- Oscar regaling the movers and shakers of New York society.

-- Dancing... Drinking... Regaling... Drinking... Drinking.

INT. OSCAR'S HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Oscar, still clothed, passed out face-down on his bed.

A LOUD KNOCK at the door. Oscar wakes with a start. Lifts his head. The hangover hits him like a brick. He lays his head back down, closes his eyes. But there's another KNOCK.

OSCAR
Go away!

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Mr. Wilde, Colonel Morse sent me.

His face still buried in the bed...

OSCAR
All right, come in. What time is
it?

MAN'S VOICE
7 a.m., sir.

OSCAR
(groans)
I've only just gone to bed.

The door opens. Someone enters, but we don't see him yet.

Oscar still doesn't lift his face from the bed.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
What do you want?

YOUNG MAN
I'm to be your secretary. With
your approval, of course.

Oscar finally lifts his face from the bed. Sees...

An extraordinarily handsome young man standing there:
Cornflower blue eyes. Thick, blonde locks combed back from
his angelic face. Wearing a smart suit with pinstripes and a
daisy in his lapel.

OSCAR
I approve.

YOUNG MAN
My references...

He pulls a piece of paper from his breast pocket.

OSCAR
If they're good enough for Morse
they're good enough for me.

Oscar stands, catches sight of his reflection in the mirror.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
Oh, good God.
(turns to the young man)
Please forgive my atrocious
appearance, dear boy, I'm afraid I
had rather a late night of revelry.

The young man smiles a nervous, but fetching smile.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
What is your name?

YOUNG MAN
Hemmerschmidt. Poindexter Von
Hemmerschmidt.

As the young man walks in, Oscar watches his every move.

OSCAR

Well that's a mouthful even for one
as large as mine.

YOUNG MAN

(smiles)

Call me Dex. All my friends do.

OSCAR

Your first task, Dex, will be to
make us both a drink. And from now
on, you're not to knock on my door
before ten, at the absolute
earliest.

DEX

Yes sir, Mr. Wilde!

EXT. MANHATTAN STREET - NIGHT

Oscar and Dex arm in arm, staggering down the street.

They are now drinking straight from a fifth of whiskey.

They explode with laughter. Oscar swigs from the bottle,
offers it to Dex, who is looking green around the gills.

DEX

No, I can't drink another drop...

OSCAR

You work for me now, Poindexter Von
Hemmerschmidt!

Oscar hands him the bottle. Dex steels himself then takes
another swig. It does not go down smoothly. He hands the
bottle back to Oscar.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

So, is there a young lady in the
young man's life?

DEX

Uh, no, not at the moment.

OSCAR

A young man perhaps?

Oscar looks at him closely, awaiting a response.

DEX

What are you insinuating?...

OSCAR
 Nothing, dear boy. I apologize.
 None of my business. Have a drink.

Oscar hands the bottle back to him. Dex waves it away.

DEX
 Please, no more--

Oscar waves the bottle under his nose. Dex can hold it in no longer. He staggers over to some bushes and vomits into them.

OSCAR
 (Irish brogue)
 Ah, me favorite Irish lullaby,
 which me dear ol' papa used to sing
 me every night.

INT. OSCAR'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Dex is now flat out on the bed. Oscar is gently dabbing a wet washcloth to his forehead.

Dex is still out of it, barely able to keep his eyes open...

DEX
 There was a young man.

OSCAR
 I'm sorry?

DEX
 In college. There was a young man.
 (pause)
 We were discovered. Terrible
 scandal. He killed himself.

OSCAR
 Oh, Dex, I'm so sorry.

Dex nods sadly. Then, he can no longer keep his eyes open.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
 Good night, dear boy.

He leans forward and gives Dex a kiss on the forehead.

INT. SARONY'S STUDIO - DAY

The studio is replete with artifacts: An actual mummy, a large Buddha head, Samurai armor.

PHOTOS OF Sarah Bernhardt, Nicola Tesla, Mark Twain and more, adorn the walls.

Dex is on a chair in the corner, fast asleep.

Oscar naps on a fainting couch dressed in a resplendent version of his usual outfit. His long ungainly legs stretched in front of him.

Sarony is behind his camera. Assistants wheel in large racks with hanging oriental rugs and tapestries to use as backdrops.

Sarony directs them, shouting in French. They hurry to do his bidding.

Finally he is ready.

SARONY
Wilde, wake up!

He claps his hands once, and Oscar's eyes snap open.

SARONY (CONT'D)
When I signal you, do not move and
do not blink! Mr. Wilde!

Oscar rests his face in his hand, holding a book on his knee. He looks up from its pages and stares languidly into the camera.

SARONY (CONT'D)
That's it! Don't move!

The sodium light flashes. The camera man removes the lens cap for one second, then two, and replaces it.

The finished PHOTOGRAPH of OSCAR comes ON SCREEN. A very famous photo.

Followed by other FAMOUS PHOTOS taken by Sarony:

One of him leaning against a wall, dressed in a dinner jacket. Gazing off reflectively.

Another of him dressed in a fur coat and hat.

Another of him in dashing slouch hat and cape.

INT. CHICKERING HALL - NIGHT

Oscar on stage before a PACKED HOUSE. Elegantly coiffed.

He speaks passionately to the crowd, his effervescent spirit entirely contagious.

OSCAR

Although the English Renaissance has been described as a mere revival of Greek thought and Medieval feeling, the art of nineteenth century England springs from the union of a calm possession of beauty with an intensified individualism... the passionate calm of the romantic spirit.

Dex stands in the back, hanging on Oscar's every word.

EXT. CHICKERING HALL - NIGHT

Oscar and Dex leaving the hall.

DEX

How do you do it? You've got them wrapped around your little finger!

OSCAR

Passion is contagious, dear boy.

As they walk, they catch SNIPPETS of a conversation between two men walking ahead of them.

MAN ONE

He's a charlatan. What is "aestheticism", anyway? He made it up! And we're to gobble it up, like hungry chimps?

MAN TWO

I do not blame a clever hum-bug like Wilde for taking advantage of people's fatuous snobbery.

MAN ONE

His shameless self promotion has rendered him famous.

MAN TWO

Famous for being famous!

MAN ONE

Well, he'll never be famous for that book of stolen poetry he "wrote".

(MORE)

MAN ONE (CONT'D)

No wonder he's run off to
America... they probably threw him
out of England!

Dex is outraged.

DEX

Why, the nerve of those men!

He starts toward the men, but Oscar grabs his arm, stopping
him.

OSCAR

Dex, they're talking about me.

DEX

Of your vainglory and infamy!

OSCAR

Dear boy, there is only one thing
in the world worse than being
talked about, and that is not being
talked about.

(beat)

Besides, they're right. My poems
were panned in England. If I don't
make something of myself in
America, I fear I'll be finished as
a writer.

INSERT: PRODUCTION POSTER

"Patience" by Gilbert and Sullivan. The character Bunthorne,
is clearly drawn in the likeness of Oscar. An unflattering
likeness: a buffoon in short pants and long hair.

INT. THEATER BOX SEATS - NIGHT

The large, opulent theater is full, and everyone knows he is
there. They whisper and point.

Oscar sits with Dex on one side, and a journalist on the
other. She has her note pad in hand, making Who's Who notes.

JOURNALIST

Mr. Wilde, what a delight you've
decided to come to our little
theatre.

OSCAR

But of course. I've seen two productions of "*Patience*" in England, and found it a most excellent cure for insomnia.

The journalist raises an eyebrow and writes in her notebook.

INT. THEATRE - LATER

The audience is laughing heartily at the farce.

The character meant to be Oscar (BUNTHORNE) is doing a monologue:

BUNTHORNE

Am I alone, and unobserved? I am!
Then let me own I'm an aesthetic
sham!
This air severe is but a mere
vener!
This cynic smile is but a wile of
guile!
This costume chaste is but good
taste misplaced!

The audience laughs, glancing nervously at Oscar, who is grinning ear to ear.

DEX

Oscar, how can you laugh at this?
They're making a fool of you.

Oscar replies to Dex, so that everyone around him can hear...

OSCAR

Caricature is the tribute which
mediocrity pays to genius.

The crowd titters. The journalist scribbles.

MONTAGE - OSCAR MAKING HIS WAY WEST

CITY NAMES, SPINNING NEWSPAPERS, TRAINS fly across the screen as we see Oscar on stage after stage, lecturing to audiences across America.

EXT. TRAIN - DAY

The train chugging across a dramatic desert landscape. Rock formations rising like cathedrals from the desert floor.

MOVE UP AHEAD, AROUND A BEND...

Well out in front of the train, and as yet unseen by the engineer, PIECES OF THE TRACK HAVE BEEN REMOVED.

INT. TRAIN DINING CAR - SUNSET

Oscar looks out the window.

OSCAR

It's amazing that one country can have so many different landscapes. Where are we now?

DEX

Nevada. But Wait until you see California. Deserts in one breath, redwoods in the next. The Pacific Ocean. And San Francisco!

OSCAR

Have you been to San Francisco?

DEX

Yes. A few years back.

OSCAR

Is it like New York?

Before Dex can respond, there's a LONG SQUEAL from the train's brakes. Then suddenly, the train lurches and rocks violently as it goes off the tracks.

SCREAMS from the passengers. Finally, the train lurches to a violent halt. The car now sitting at a slant.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Good god! What on earth has happened?!

A porter storms through the dining car, headed for the front of the train.

PORTER

Just stay in your seat sir. Nothing to worry about.

But it is clear from the porter's attitude that there is something very much to be worried about.

Suddenly, a SHOT RINGS OUT. Screams. A woman faints. All eyes look toward the sound, to see...

A BANDIT steps into the car. Bandana over his nose and mouth. His cowboy hat pulled low.

He holds a leather satchel with one hand and a Colt Peacemaker in the other, which he fires again for effect.

The shot flies over passengers' heads and hits the back window, shattering it.

More screams from the ladies. A couple grab hold of each other, frozen with fear.

The bandit does a little catch step, then starts gliding down the aisle.

IT IS THE VOICE FROM THE LETTER OSCAR RECEIVED IN READING GAOL:

BANDIT

All right, ladies and gentlemen, everyone stay calm. I have merely dropped in to relieve you of your "unnecessaries." No need to thank me...

(beat)

Watches, wallets, and jewels, if you please. Bank notes, money clips, etc. etc...

He moves from passenger to passenger.

BANDIT (CONT'D)

Please move with alacrity as my social calendar is positively teeming with engagements.

The passengers drop their valuables in his satchel. Women weep as they hand over their jewelry.

The bandit is hyper aware; he scans the car like a fighter pilot as he moves through it.

One of the women puts her ring finger in her mouth. When she pulls it out, the huge diamond ring is gone.

When the bandit gets to her, her husband puts his wallet and pocket watch in the satchel, careful not to make eye contact with the bandit. She removes her necklace and puts it in the bag.

MAN

Cough it up, madame.

She frowns, feigning ignorance.

BANDIT

Let's just see how much you love
your darling husband here, shall
we?

He places the barrel of his Colt to her husband's head.

She hesitates.

The bandit sighs and clicks back the hammer.

Finally, the woman spits the ring into the satchel. Scowls at
her husband.

A few rows behind him, one of the passengers slowly reaches
into the breast of his coat.

BANDIT (CONT'D)

(to the woman)

Much obliged, ma'am--

Suddenly, the bandit swivels and fires...

...hitting the man, who has removed a revolver from his coat.
He hits the man in the shoulder. The man drops the gun and
falls back into his seat, clutching his bloody shoulder.

BANDIT (CONT'D)

Please, no more heroes, I am not in
the mood.

Finally, the bandit gets to Oscar.

Oscar puts his wallet in the satchel, then empties his
pockets. There's some money, and one of the calling cards
from Sarony.

The bandit snatches the card from Oscar's hand before he can
put it in the satchel. He looks from the card to Oscar. His
eyes smile above his mask. He does a little card trick move
with it and slips it into the pocket of his vest.

Oscar's eyes lock with his. A real moment here.

Then, the bandit turns and addresses the car at large.

BANDIT (CONT'D)

I have so enjoyed our visit, but I
fear I must away to my next
engagement!

He strides to the door. Before he exits, he turns back to
Oscar...

BANDIT (CONT'D)

"O waving trees, O forest liberty!
 Within your haunts at least a man
 is free, and half forgets the weary
 world of strife: The blood flows
 hotter, and a sense of life wakes
 in the quickening veins, while once
 again the woods are filled with
 gods we fancied slain."

Oscar has risen to his feet during the bandit's oration,
 and his mouth stands agape; he is, for once, speechless.

The bandit does a slow spin, tips his hat to Oscar and exits.

Oscar runs to the open door.

DEX

Oscar! Are you mad? Sit down!

Oscar stands in the open doorway and watches as the bandit
 jumps atop his steed and rides off.

Finally, Dex walks over to him.

OSCAR

That was Ravenna.

DEX

Who?

OSCAR

My poem, Ravenna.

His heart pounding, he watches as the bandit's figure recedes
 into the splendid sunset.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Oh my word!

INT. SAN FRANCISCO HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Another hotel in another city. Two beds. Oscar sits on his
 and bounces a little to test the springs. They squeak. He
 groans.

Dex sets about getting things arranged the way Oscar likes
 them.

There's a knock on the door. Dex answers it. The valet offers
 a tray with a telegram on it.

DEX
 (to Oscar)
 It's for you.

Oscar opens the envelope and reads. We hear the message in VOICE OVER. It is a woman's voice.

CONSTANCE (O.S.)
 My Darling Oscar, It seems you have
 been gone a lifetime! I so look
 forward to our special day when you
 return. I have ordered the flowers
 and the cake, and you will go mad
 when you see the dress! What do you
 think of a honeymoon in Paris?
 Hurry home, Oscar dear. As ever,
 Your dotting fiancée, Constance

Oscar heaves a heavy sigh.

DEX
 Good news? Or bad?

OSCAR
 Yes.
 (beat)
 Let's get drunk.

EXT. SAN FRANCISCO, BARBARY COAST - NIGHT

Oscar and Dex walk along the sidewalk.

The neighborhood gradually changes from respectable to naughty... From middle class Victorian to the "underground" section of the city:

Sailors, ruffians, ladies of the night, and finally...

Men dressed as ladies leaning against the exteriors of bar after bar waiting for a john.

Oscar takes notice.

OSCAR
 My, my, right on the street! Aren't
 they afraid of being arrested?

DEX
 The police avoid this neighborhood
 like the plague. I don't think we
 should be here either...

One of the young men notices Oscar. He is scantily clad in ladies clothes, wearing too much rouge and lipstick and mascara, obviously high on something slurry.

PROSTITUTE

Hello, handsome. Are you looking for a date? I can do things your little friend here wouldn't dare even imagine.

The prostitute takes his own hand and shoves the entire thing into his mouth. Dex watches on in semi-disgust. Oscar smiles.

OSCAR

Impressive. Perhaps another time, darling.

He and Dex walk away. The prostitute extricates his hand from his mouth...

PROSTITUTE

Don't forget me, now, you long, tall drink of water!

INT. BARBARY COAST GAY BAR - BACK ROOM - NIGHT

Dex sits by himself at a small table by the door, looking across the room at...

Oscar, who sits on a delapidated chaise lounge, surrounded by beautiful young men in various states of undress. One in women's lingerie.

The bar is decorated in oriental style, dark reds and blues, with paper lanterns and portraits of topless geisha. It was once an opulent room, but on closer examination is run down, over used, and smells of rotting fruit and stale tobacco.

Dex gets up and walks over to him.

DEX

Oscar, we really should be going.

OSCAR

Join us, Dex.

DEX

No. I'm going back to the hotel.

OSCAR

But I thought... the young man of whom you spoke.

DEX
 I loved him.
 (looks at the scene)
This is not that.

He turns to Oscar.

DEX (CONT'D)
 Be careful here, Oscar.

Oscar watches Dex leave. Considers going with him. Until...

One of the young men walks over to him. Hands him an ornate opium pipe.

OSCAR
 What, pray tell, is this?

YOUNG MAN
 Breath of the dragon, lover. Opium.

Oscar takes a hit from the pipe. He feels the effects immediately. He drifts back over to the chaise lounge and falls back into the arms of his consorts.

EXT. BARBARY COAST GAY BAR - NIGHT

Dex exits the bar into the dark, foggy night. A teenage boy approaches.

TEENAGE BOY
 Would you like some company,
 handsome?

DEX
 No. Thank you.

Dex walks off into the fog. The man follows him. Shooting a look at two other FIGURES as he does. They take off down a side street.

Up ahead, Dex turns down another small side street. Hears the teenage boy's FOOTSTEPS following him. Dex swivels on him...

DEX (CONT'D)
 What do you want?!--

Dex is cut off as the other figures -- TWO LARGE THUGS -- come up behind him and grab hold of him.

Dex can only watch helplessly as the teenage boy rushes him and stabs him with a knife.

TEENAGE BOY
Fuckin' queer!

The strike is deep. The blood pulses black.

Eyes wide, Dex stumbles backwards, clutching at his bloody chest. He crumples to the ground. The thugs continue to beat him until he is unconscious.

Then they ransack his body for valuables. His wallet. Pocket watch. A ring. They even steal his boots.

Then, they run off into the night.

INT. BARBARY COAST GAY BAR - BACK ROOM - NIGHT

The meager gaslight illuminates...

Oscar lying naked and passed out on the chaise lounge, next to the young man who gave him the opium.

A FIGURE appears from the dark shadows of the room. He treads softly over to the chaise lounge and sets up a camera, which he quickly readies. Then, he holds up the flash pan and takes a photograph.

POOF! The flash powder fires.

Oscar blinks awake at the bright flash. Takes him a couple of seconds to remember where he is.

Then, he sees the camera.

The young man lying with Oscar scurries to his feet, starts hurriedly gathering up his clothes.

OSCAR
What the hell do you think you're doing?!

PHOTOGRAPHER
This photograph will be quite "illuminating" to your fans, Mr. Wilde. The Examiner will pay handsomely for it.

The photographer pulls the plate from the back of the camera. Holds it up.

PHOTOGRAPHER (CONT'D)
But nobody ever has to see it. I'll give you first dibs. But it won't be cheap.

OSCAR
You blackmailing scoundrel, I'll
thrash you to within an inch of
your life!

Oscar, with no concern for his nakedness, starts after the photographer, but suddenly...

...the young man comes up behind him and strikes him on the back of the head with a leather sap. He was in on it all along.

Oscar's eyes roll back in his head. He topples to the ground, unconscious.

INT. BARBARY COAST GAY BAR - MAIN ROOM - DAWN

Oscar stumbles through the main room. Stops to take stock of the sad sight in the cold light of day...

Empty bottles everywhere. Ashtrays overflowing with butts.

The shabby room reveals itself, far from the opulent Opium Den it purports itself to be.

Passed out patrons, worn out "ladies" of the night, who now appear anything but beautiful.

EXT. BARBARY COAST GAY BAR - DAWN

Oscar steps from the bar into the gray dawn light. He walks off, passing...

...the alley where Dex was attacked. A little crowd gathered there, looking down at something.

Oscar wants to continue away, but can't. But something draws him down the alley. Then, he sees Dex, lying at the feet of the gawkers.

He runs over, shoving past the crowd.

OSCAR
Out of the way!

He sees immediately that Dex is dead. His shirt completely soaked in blood.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
Oh God. No...

He crouches beside Dex's body. Takes the young man into his arms and cradles him. Sees all the gawkers staring at him.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

For God's sake, somebody get some help!

THE SAME - LATER

Dex's shrouded body is being placed on a horse drawn ambulance.

Two San Francisco COPS are with Oscar.

COP ONE

Did you get a look at the killer, sir?

OSCAR

No. I found him like...
(looks at Dex's body one last time)
...that.

COP ONE

Then I'm afraid there's nothing we can do.

OSCAR

What?! You're a bloody policeman! He's been murdered!

Cop Two chimes in.

COP TWO

The degenerate got what he deserved.

Oscar, furious, goes for him. But Cop One steps between them. He tries to be more sympathetic.

COP ONE

I'm sorry, sir, but the powers that be don't care much about what happens in this part of town.

OSCAR

He was not a degenerate! He was a fine, good young man, with his whole life ahead of him. For God's sake, how can you be so callous?! He was only here to look after me.

COP TWO

Is that right? Well maybe you should come down to the station for questioning. Maybe the boy looked a little too close, and it was you who run him through.

OSCAR

What?! How dare you!!

COP ONE

Come on lad, that'll do. My partner's in a foul mood today.

Oscar's backs away, tears flowing in sorrow and in shame.

OSCAR

I'm so sorry, Dex. This is all my fault.

INT. ST. PAUL'S CATHOLIC CHURCH - DAY

The church is empty except for...

Oscar, who sits in the front pew, staring up at the CRUCIFIX hanging behind the altar. Oscar's anguished expression is a match for Christ's.

A priest walks in and sits next to Oscar.

PRIEST

I don't believe I've seen you here before, my son.

OSCAR

No.

PRIEST

You're troubled, I can see it.

OSCAR

I am, father.

PRIEST

Are you Catholic?

OSCAR

I fear I've allowed my membership to expire.

PRIEST

Never too late to renew. Would you like to pray with me?

OSCAR

I would, but I'm not sure I believe
there's anyone listening.

PRIEST

I have two ears, son. And they've
listened to many who are struggling
with their faith.

(beat)

Would you like to make a
confession?

OSCAR

How much time have you got?

INT. OSCAR'S DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Oscar sits at his dressing table, staring sadly at his
reflection in the mirror. He just can't shake it.

A KNOCK at the door.

VOICE (O.S.)

Mr. Wilde, the theater is full.
The crowd is getting restless.

Oscar realizes he must go on.

OSCAR

I'm coming.

He sighs. Wipes tears from his eyes. Then pours himself a
whiskey and drinks it down.

INT. THEATRE - NIGHT

IN THE CROWD

A DARK FIGURE, seen from behind, watching Oscar.

OSCAR

Finding beauty in the commonplace
is...

Oscar trails off. He is distracted. The crowd begins to
murmur.

INT. STAGE - SAME

Behind Oscar now, we see the crowd getting uncomfortable.

Oscar tries again.

OSCAR

An aesthetic life demands the
courage to be unique. It is only
through individuation that one's
expression becomes more than idle
mimicry...

Another pause. He looks around the theatre and sighs.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

I can't.

He shakes his head and walks offstage.

The crowd gets louder. Booing and hissing. Oscar walks to his
dressing room and gets his coat and the bottle of whiskey,
then heads down the hallway to the back door of the theatre.

The stage manager chases after him, shouting his name like an
accusation.

STAGE MANAGER

Mr. Wilde! Mr. WILDE!! You can't
just...

Oscar slams the door behind him.

EXT. THEATER - NIGHT

Oscar walking briskly away from the theater. A couple of
beats later, the DARK FIGURE is catching up with him. Still
seen ONLY FROM BEHIND.

Oscar hurries down the street, when suddenly he is confronted
by...

The photographer.

PHOTOGRAPHER

Ah, Mr. Wilde...

OSCAR

You again. Someone please wake me
from this nightmare.

PHOTOGRAPHER

Have you thought about my offer,
Mr. Wilde? I believe twelve hundred
dollars is a fair price.

He pulls the plate of the photograph from his bag. Waves it in Oscar's face.

OSCAR

Yes.

PHOTOGRAPHER

And?

OSCAR

Here's my counter offer...

Oscar reaches into his pocket and pulls out a penny. He flicks the penny into the photographer's face and charges him, but...

A big, hard looking dude steps in behind Oscar, grabs him roughly. Raises his fist to punch Oscar, but suddenly...

A GUNSHOT. The man's fist explodes in a shower of blood. He screams, clutching his bloodied paw.

All, including Oscar, turn to see who fired the shot...

It's the figure who followed Oscar from the theater. His Colt is leveled at the rough looking dudes.

Oscar is transfixed by the man's devastatingly handsome face, most particularly, HIS EYES, which Oscar seems to recognize.

MAN

Leave him alone, boys, unless you want your heads to go the way of his hand.

When Oscar hears the man's voice, he realizes it is the bandit from the train.

The rough looking dude runs off into the night, leaving the photographer standing there shaking in his boots.

The bandit steps closer.

BANDIT

What seems to be the problem, Mr. Wilde?

OSCAR

This pusillanimous blackmailer was attempting to extract twelve hundred dollars in exchange for a rather unflattering photo.

The bandit puts the barrel of his pistol to the photographer's head.

The photographer trembles. His eyes close. Piss spreads on the front of his pants.

BANDIT
"Piss"illanamous, more like.

He smiles at Oscar, who is too overwrought to enjoy the joke.

BANDIT (CONT'D)
Now, sir, you will apologize to
this great poet...

PHOTOGRAPHER
I'm... I'm sorry.

BANDIT
"I'm sorry, Mr. Wilde, whose boots
I am unworthy to lick."

The photographer hesitates. Bandit clicks back the hammer on his pistol.

BANDIT (CONT'D)
Say it!

PHOTOGRAPHER
I--I'm sorry, Mr. Wilde -- what was
the rest?

BANDIT
Whose boots I am unworthy--

PHOTOGRAPHER
Oh yeah! Whose boots I ain't worthy
to lick.

BANDIT
I'll take that, if you don't mind.

He snatches the photographic plate from the photographer's hand.

BANDIT (CONT'D)
Now, on your way, mangy mongrel!

He turns the photographer around and gives him a swift kick in the butt. The photographer starts running as fast as his legs will carry him.

He turns back around and he and Oscar take each other in.

BANDIT (CONT'D)
 Honor to meet you - again - Mr.
 Wilde. Jasper Fellows at your
 service.

Jasper pulls a wallet out of his pocket and hands it to Oscar.

JASPER
 I believe this belongs to you.

OSCAR
 A droplet of kindness, for a
 change. Thank you. But how...?

JASPER
 I am a loyal member of your
 Aesthetic Movement. Just happened
 to be in Frisco, so I caught your
 show tonight.
 (beat)
 I particularly enjoyed your
 comments on individuation.

Oscar observes Jasper's rough clothes. But on closer examination...

They are rough, but intentional. He has a silk handkerchief in the pocket of his vest. His vest offsets the colors in his shirt beautifully. And once again, a flower in his hat.

He is an aesthetic ruffian.

JASPER (CONT'D)
 Seems you're having a bit of a
 rough night.

OSCAR
 It appears I'm on a run of rough
 nights. But thank you...

He waggles the wallet.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
 ...for this.

He points after the photographer.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
 And that. If you'll excuse me, I
 really need to go.

Oscar backs away from Jasper, then turns and walks into the darkness.

JASPER

Wait! Listen, I know you've got money in that wallet there, so what do you say you buy me a drink as an expression of your gratitude?

OSCAR

I'm really not in the mood...

JASPER

For a drink? Looks to me like you're headed off to spend the rest of the night in a bottle.

He points at the whiskey in Oscar's pocket. Oscar doesn't deny it.

JASPER (CONT'D)

Might be better not to do that alone. Especially with all those unhappy customers roaming around the city.

INT. NOB HILL BAR - NIGHT

Oscar and Jasper sit at a small table.

JASPER

I consider myself an aesthetic artist. Much like you.

OSCAR

Is that right?

JASPER

I am my art. As are you. We just express ourselves in different ways. You pontificate. I appropriate. Although both have a kind of poetry to them, don't you think?

OSCAR

I daresay yours has a bit of the dance as well.

He smiles. The first time he has smiled since Dex died. A waiter brings drinks. Sazeracs. Oscar holds his up, examining it skeptically.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

I am normally satisfied with a glass of whiskey. Simple and neat.

JASPER

This is a Sazerac. Mostly rye. Born in New Orleans.

OSCAR

Ah, yes, I lectured there. Wonderful town.

They clink glasses. Oscar takes a sip.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Oh my, that's lovely.

Jasper smiles.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

You're not from "these here parts," as they say out here. You don't have that western twang to your speech.

JASPER

New York, born and bred.

OSCAR

I definitely detect some breeding.

JASPER

"Breeding." My family is obsessed with it. Talk about people as if they're poodles.

OSCAR

So, what brought you out here, to your line of work?

JASPER

I didn't want to be in my father's "line of work." I'm a great disappointment to him. Jedediah Fellows, Esquire is no easy man to please.

OSCAR

And what is his line of work?

JASPER

He is what they call a Captain of Industry.

OSCAR

Sounds impressive.

JASPER

Doesn't it?

(wry smile)

He's a brick maker. Manufactured most of the bricks that built modern Manhattan. And me being the only boy in the family, I was naturally expected to follow in his footsteps.

(beat)

Even though I am a bastard.

OSCAR

I beg your pardon?

JASPER

Born out of wedlock to a mother who died giving me life.

Oscar takes this in. It helps to think about another person's difficulties for a moment.

JASPER (CONT'D)

Those bricks father made would have built the walls of my prison.

(beat)

But I escaped. And came west.

OSCAR

Well, then. To the west!

He raises his glass; Jasper clinks it with his glass.

JASPER

The "Wilde" west!

OSCAR

(smiles)

Touche!

EXT. STREETS OF SAN FRANCISCO - NIGHT

JASPER

So, where to next?

OSCAR

Leadville, Colorado.

JASPER

Silver mining town.

OSCAR

Is that right?

JASPER

Yes, sir. Round about the end of the month all the seasonal prospectors will be heading home with what they've coaxed out of the mountain.

OSCAR

I see.

JASPER

And I mean to be on that train to coax it right back out of them.

OSCAR

But they will have worked hard for that silver! It belongs to them!

JASPER

(shrugs)

They shouldn't be so greedy.

OSCAR

Can you really be that callous?

JASPER

I have spent a lifetime growing my callouses.

INT. SAN FRANCISCO TRAIN STATION - DAY

Oscar standing at a train car, as Jasper loads his horse aboard.

He takes a carrot out of his pocket and gives it to the horse. As the horse munches, Jasper strokes her neck.

JASPER

There you go, Calliope. I'll be back to check on you later.

Oscar notices the gentleness with which Jasper treats the animal.

Jasper joins Oscar. They head to their car. Jasper carrying one tasteful carpet bag.

Oscar followed by a PORTER wheeling Oscar's mountain of luggage.

JASPER (CONT'D)

Why do you drag all that luggage around?

OSCAR

One must be prepared for any social occasion.

Jasper holds up his one bag.

JASPER

One must be prepared to make a hasty escape.

OSCAR

Speaking of which.

Oscar nods at a poster on the wall...

It's a WANTED POSTER. A DRAWING OF JASPER. With his hat pulled down and a bandana across his face, all you can see are his eyes. Oscar smiles.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Masterful likeness.

JASPER

(only half joking)

I'd be more worried if they had a picture of my horse up there.

OSCAR

Oh, no, my dear, I beg to differ. Your eyes... are positively unmistakable.

INT. TRAIN - DAY

Oscar and Jasper in the dining car, drinking whiskey.

JASPER

Why on earth are you going to Leadville?

OSCAR

I have an engagement there.

JASPER

In Leadville, Colorado? Are you sure?

OSCAR

Of course I'm sure. Why?

JASPER

Well, it's a pretty rough and tumble town. Can't imagine they'd be too interested in Aesthetics.

OSCAR

The men may be rough and tumble, but their wives thirst for culture.

JASPER

But you're traveling alone now? Don't you have an assistant?

OSCAR

A personal secretary, yes. I... lost him in San Francisco.

JASPER

The blonde chap. Handsome fellow. Did you two have a falling out?

OSCAR

Something like that.

He leaves it at that.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

But listen, I could use someone with a keen eye for trouble. And good aim.

JASPER

I told you, I have a train to catch.

OSCAR

But perhaps you could help me instead. Just for a little while?

Jasper pulls a DERRINGER from his pocket and slides it over to Oscar.

JASPER

Here. Take this.

OSCAR

I thought I just hired you to point guns at things.

JASPER

I don't know, Oscar. Anyway, even if I agree, I can't be by your side every moment. Leadville isn't quite so "civilized" as San Francisco.

OSCAR

San Francisco civilized? My friend
Dex would have said otherwise.

JASPER

Take the gun, Oscar. I'm just
letting you borrow it, until we
leave Leadville.

Finally, Oscar takes it.

OSCAR

"We..."

EXT. TABOR OPERA HOUSE - LEADVILLE COLORADO - NIGHT

Completed in 1880, the grand, ornate edifice stands out among
the wooden plank and rough brick buildings of main street.

INT. TABOR OPERA HOUSE - LEADVILLE COLORADO - NIGHT

The interior is even grander than the exterior. 65-foot high
dome painted with golden sun and clouds. Plush mohair seats
and curved balconies face the stage, upon which...

Oscar finishes his speech with a flourish. We DO NOT HEAR
HIM, but the crowd reacts wildly.

More precisely, the women, who rise as one to give him a
standing ovation.

INT. TABOR OPERA HOUSE LOBBY - LEADVILLE COLORADO - NIGHT

Oscar walks into the lobby. He is flocked and fussed over by
the townswomen, all dressed in their fluffiest finery.

The men of Leadville watch on. Dressed in their "Sunday
best." Their starched collars scraping at their stubbled
necks, they eye Oscar suspiciously.

One of them spits tobacco juice into a nearby spittoon.

Jasper stands back enjoying the show, cautiously considering
the men too. Oscar catches his eye. Jasper smiles.

CUT TO:

INT. SALOON - NIGHT

Oscar and Jasper sitting in a rough hewn saloon. No women allowed in here, except for the "working variety."

A group of men sit at a table, eyeing Oscar and Jasper.

A couple of them exchange words, then the angriest looking one of the bunch gets up and heads toward the two men.

JASPER

(whispers)

You got that Derringer I gave you?

Before Oscar can answer, the man appears at their table. A very hard looking man. His name is MICHAEL O'CONNOR.

O'CONNOR

Mr. Wilde...

OSCAR

Yes, sir?

O'CONNOR

Me and the boys was wondering if you and your "friend" might like to see the thing that built the fine opera house you spoke at tonight. The thing that built this whole blessed town, matter of fact.

OSCAR

I would be honored, sir.

O'CONNOR

Just a little forewarning, there may be some imbibing of spirits involved. And I ain't talking about the sissy water they serve in this clip joint.

The look he gives them when he says "sissy" is not lost on Oscar and Jasper.

EXT. LEADVILLE SILVER MINE - NIGHT

They arrive at the mouth of the mine, a dark, rough doorway at the top of a mountain. A BUCKET BAILER sits at the opening.

O'CONNOR

After you...

He gestures that Oscar and Jasper should get in one of the buckets. Oscar looks at Jasper. They talk aside to each other.

JASPER
You sure about this?

OSCAR
My curiosity is irrevocably piqued.

Oscar climbs in, Jasper follows. O'Connor throws the switch. The bucket lurches into action, almost tossing the men, then starts its journey deep into the mine.

JASPER
You have that Derringer?

OSCAR
I have it, I have it. Honestly,
Jasper, I thought you were the
adventurous type.

JASPER
Didn't you see how they were
looking at us? I doubt they want to
discuss the marriage of Helenism
and individualism in nineteenth
century art.

OSCAR
Well, it's too late to turn back
now.

Oscar looks at the black mouth of the tunnel in front of them.

The bucket disappears into that darkness.

SMASH CUT TO:

CLOSE-UP - OSCAR

Throwing back a shot of whiskey.

INT. MINE CAVERN - NIGHT

They are deep inside a dark cavern in the bowels of the silver mine. Lit by gas lamps.

Some of the men have already passed out. Jasper is attentively watching...

Oscar in a drinking contest with a huge, BURLY FELLOW. Several pre-filled shots of whiskey in a row in front of each of them, their dead soldiers inverted to the side.

Oscar throws back another shot, his eyes glued to his competitor's, and smacks down the empty glass next to the others.

Burly Fellow reaches for another shot, but he cannot keep up.

The miners urge Burly Fellow to continue. But then...

Before he can take another shot, Burly Fellow hiccups and passes out, face first on the table in front of him, spilling precious whiskey all over. They recoil, BOOING him.

Oscar daintily lifts one of the remaining shots from Burly Fellow's side of the table and drains it, inverting the empty glass with finesse.

OSCAR

Which of you bloody Yanks is next?!

All he gets is GROANS and hand gestures indicating "No more!"

Jasper smiles.

O'Connor watches in disbelief.

O'CONNOR

By God, for a damned Limey, you sure can put it away!

Oscar turns on him.

OSCAR

Limey?! Bite your tongue, sir! I am an Irishman.

O'CONNOR

Irishman?

OSCAR

Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde, at your service!

O'CONNOR

Michael Patrick O'Connor. Put 'er there...

He extends his hand. Oscar gives it a hearty shake.

O'CONNOR (CONT'D)
 My people hail from Glendalough in
 County Wicklow. Do you know of it?

OSCAR
 Know of it? Of course I know of it.
 The Valley of the Two Lakes.

O'CONNOR
 I've never been there myself. But
 my daddy used to say...

Oscar goes full Irish Brogue for this line...

OSCAR
 ...'tis among the fairest spots on
 all our fair isle, Mr. O'Connor.

O'CONNOR
 You sound just like him! Please.
 Call me Mike.

OSCAR
 Have a drink with me, Mike.

O'CONNOR
 I'd be delighted, Mr. Wilde.

OSCAR
 Nay, call me Oscar!

O'CONNOR
 Oscar.

O'Connor smiles as Oscar reaches for another bottle, pours a
 couple of glasses. Raises his for a toast...

OSCAR
 (Gaelic for "health")
Slainte!

O'Connor clinks Oscar's glass and they drain their drinks.

CUT TO:

THE SAME - LATER

Everyone is passed out, except for Oscar, O'Connor and
 Jasper, who is barely hanging in, watching...

Oscar and O'Connor, arms thrown around each other, loudly and
 passionately singing an old Irish song, "The Wild Rover":

OSCAR/O'CONNOR

*I've been the wild rover for many's
the year, and I've spent all the
money on whiskey and beer. But now
I'm returning with gold in great
store, and I never will play the
wild rover no more.*

Jasper continues to watch Oscar, fascinated.

OSCAR/O'CONNOR (CONT'D)

*And it's no, nay, never, no, nay,
never no more, will I play the wild
rover, no never no more!*

CUT TO:

THE SAME - LATER

All now passed out, except for...

Oscar and Jasper. Who sit back against the mine wall, away from the others.

Oscar's attention is taken by the wall of the mine, as if he hadn't seen it before. He holds his lantern up to it, illuminating...

A shimmering vein of silver. Oscar reaches out and runs his fingers across it, spellbound.

OSCAR

Astonishing.

But Jasper is looking at the passed out miners.

JASPER

Yes, you really are.

Oscar turns to him.

JASPER (CONT'D)

I mean, you really showed them.

OSCAR

(going Irish again)

Aye and sure I did, and I didn't
need your wee Derringer to do it.

JASPER

There's that Irish version of you
coming out again.

OSCAR

What?

JASPER

Irish when it suits you.
Aristocratic English aesthete when
that does. You're what you need to
be when you need to be it...

He stumbles to his feet.

JASPER (CONT'D)

But, what are you, really, Oscar?
Who are you?

With that, Jasper staggers off into the darkness of the mine shaft. Oscar shouts after him...

OSCAR

I suppose I could ask the same of
you! You dandy bandit with a flower
in your hat...

Oscar gets up, grabs a lantern and follows him into the mine.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Why did you agree to come with me?
Was it your "love of aesthetics?" I
daresay robbing trains is more
lucrative than being my assistant,
so it wasn't for the money.

Oscar continues to follow him deeper into the mineshaft.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Who are you, Jasper? What is it you
want?...

Suddenly, Jasper turns and walks right up to Oscar. Takes his face into both hands and kisses him. At first, Oscar is taken by surprise and just stands there with his eyes open.

Just as he begins to relax into it...

Jasper suddenly pulls away from him, turns and disappears into the darkness of the shaft.

Leaving Oscar flushed and weak in the knees.

EXT. LEADVILLE - DAY

Oscar talking to a couple of townswomen, when he sees Jasper riding toward him.

OSCAR
Excuse me, ladies.

Oscar walks toward Jasper, who stops his horse.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
Where are you off to?

JASPER
I need to give her some exercise
before I put her back on that
train.

Jasper spurs his horse, trots away down main street.

OSCAR
(shouts after him)
The train leaves at five!

A MAN AND WOMAN walking down the street. When the man sees Jasper riding down the street, he stops. Says something to his wife.

But Jasper never sees them.

JASPER
C'mon, girl, let's run!

He gives the reins a shake. The horse responds and starts to gallop hard.

CUT TO:

THE SAME - LATER

Jasper returning after his ride. His horse has worked up a good lather. He trots down main street, when suddenly...

A man gallops out from behind a building and stops his horse in front of Jasper.

He raises a rifle and gets Jasper in his crosshairs.

Jasper starts to reach for his sidearm, but from behind him...

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Wouldn't do that if I were you.

Jasper looks back and sees the owner of the voice standing there behind him. His rifle aimed at Jasper too.

Jasper also catches sight of other armed men around.

Now, the Leadville Sheriff - JOHN CARRUTHERS - walks out into the street with the man and woman who watched Jasper ride out of town earlier.

CARRUTHERS

That him?

MAN

You mean *her*.

Carruthers looks confused.

The man points at the very distinctive WHITE ARROW MARK on Jasper's otherwise chestnut horse.

MAN (CONT'D)

Never forget that arrow on her face.

Jasper's earlier comment about his horse and the WANTED POSTER was prescient.

INT. JAILHOUSE - DAY

Carruthers sitting at his desk. His deputy, BOYLE, the man who rode out in front of Jasper, sitting nearby.

Jasper is their only prisoner at the moment. An uneaten plate of moldy bread and beans sitting on the floor untouched.

Suddenly, the door flings open and Oscar strides through. He shoots a look at Jasper sitting there behind bars, then turns on the sheriff...

OSCAR

I demand that you release this man!
You have no right to hold him!

CARRUTHERS

And who might you be?

OSCAR

I am Oscar Wilde, and I am here under the patronage of Colonel Samuel F.W. Morse! He will be none too happy when he hears you have falsely arrested my assistant.

CARRUTHERS

Assistant? You a train robber too?

BOYLE

I doubt it, Sheriff. Think we'da done caught him already... dressed like that he stands out like a sunflower in a briar patch.

He and Carruthers share a smile.

OSCAR

Oh. You think this is amusing, do you? Well, you won't after I telegraph Colonel Morse...

CARRUTHERS

Morse? Like the code?

OSCAR

Yes. He invented the bloody machine, you ignoramus...

Carruthers is suddenly not amused.

CARRUTHERS

Now, listen here, friend, you better watch your tongue before I arrest you as an accomplice to your "assistant" here.

OSCAR

You arrested him based on the identification of a horse?! That will never hold up in court...

CARRUTHERS

Well, court in these parts ain't exactly like court in wherever the devil you're from.

BOYLE

Yeah, we hang horse thieves on a lot less than that.

Oscar shoots a look at Jasper, who just smiles a wry smile. Oscar turns back to the sheriff.

OSCAR

I will return. And you will be sorry.

Oscar swivels and leaves.

Carruthers and Boyle look at each other and bust out laughing.

This is not lost on Jasper.

INT. TELEGRAPH OFFICE - DAY

Oscar pacing, waiting for a telegram. Which comes.

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR
Your telegram, sir.

He hands it to Oscar.

INSERT - TELEGRAM

OSCAR, SORRY TO INFORM YOU THAT I
AM UNABLE TO ASSIST YOU IN THIS
MATTER. COLORADO IS A SOVEREIGN
STATE AND AS SUCH, GUIDED BY ITS
OWN LAWS. YOURS, MORSE.

P.S. CONGRATULATIONS ON LEADVILLE.
WORD HAS IT YOU WERE A SMASHING
SUCCESS.

Oscar looks up from the telegram, crestfallen.

INT. JAILHOUSE - NIGHT

Carruthers sitting there. Boyle swishes and sashays. He imitates Oscar, doing a terrible British accent...

BOYLE
(very effeminate)
"I demand that you release this
man!"--

As if on cue, Oscar strides through the door followed by A WAITER pushing a draped, rolling tray.

Oscar heads straight for the cell.

CARRUTHERS
Hey, whoa... where you think you're
going?

OSCAR
Even in a lawless town like this, a
man deserves to have food that is
suitable for human consumption.

He shoots a dirty look at the uneaten moldy bread and beans.

BOYLE

Bringin' in vittles from the
outside ain't allowed--

CARRUTHERS

This ain't a damn restaurant,
pardner.

OSCAR

I am not your "pardner", sir, but I
would be willing to offer an
exchange.

Oscar pulls a bottle of whiskey from under the cart draping.

BOYLE

Sheriff, that's a bribe! Let's
arrest him too!

CARRUTHERS

Simmer down, son.

Carruthers goes over. Lifts the lid from the tray...

Underneath, a beautiful roast chicken with potatoes and other
vegetables. He takes in the aroma. Touches the chicken. Licks
his finger. Grabs a potato and pops it in his mouth.

CARRUTHERS (CONT'D)

Nothin' wrong with a prisoner
getting a decent meal.

There is a knife and fork on the tray, which Carruthers
takes.

CARRUTHERS (CONT'D)

These we'll hold onto, though.

OSCAR

But how will he eat?

CARRUTHERS

He can eat with his thievin'
fingers.

Carruthers pulls back the draping on the cart and checks the
shelf underneath. Nothing there.

Then, he takes the bottle of whiskey from Oscar.

CARRUTHERS (CONT'D)

Open the door, deputy.

BOYLE
But sheriff--

CARRUTHERS
Open the damn door!

Boyle opens the cell door. The waiter rolls in the cart, leaving it in front of Jasper.

Oscar hands the waiter a tip and he leaves hurriedly.

OSCAR
(aside to Jasper)
The capon is exquisite. Especially
the stuffing. Chanterelle mushroom
I believe...

A look exchanged between him and Jasper.

The smell of the chicken is making Boyle salivate.

BOYLE
(to Oscar)
All right, you made your delivery.
Now get on outa there!

Oscar leaves. Boyle slams the cell door shut.

OSCAR
Thank you, sheriff.

CARRUTHERS
All right then. But honestly, an
upstanding fella like yourself
oughtta steer clear of this here
thievin', murderin' scoundrel.
He'll bring you nuthin' but
trouble.

OSCAR
I shall take it under
consideration.

Oscar gives a courteous bow and leaves.

Carruthers smiles, lifts the bottle, takes a swig.

CUT TO:

THE SAME - LATER

The bottle is half empty. Carruthers and Boyle are feeling no pain.

IN THE CELL

Jasper has nearly finished the meal. He shoots a look at Carruthers and Boyle, who are paying him no mind. Then he...

...reaches inside the chicken and quickly removes the DERRINGER hidden there. He slips it into his pocket.

JASPER

Hey, you boys want the rest of this chicken? I'm stuffed to the gills.

BOYLE

(hopefully)
Sheriff?

CARRUTHERS

Well, don't just sit there. Go get the dang bird!

Boyle gets up, staggers over to the cell. Opens it.

He grabs the cart and is trying to navigate the wheels to turn it around, when...

Jasper jumps up, clamps his arm around Boyle's neck and puts the Derringer to his head.

Boyle tips over the cart. It CRASHES to the floor.

Carruthers looks up at the sound. He jumps to his feet, drawing his sidearm. He starts toward the cell.

Jasper clicks back the hammer on the Derringer.

JASPER

Hold it right there, sheriff, you don't want me to put a hole in his head.

Carruthers stops.

JASPER (CONT'D)

Now lower that piece.

BOYLE

Shoot the sumbitch, sheriff!

Carruthers tries to get a bead on Jasper, but Jasper moves directly behind Boyle.

Finally, Carruthers lowers his gun.

JASPER
Put it on the desk.

Carruthers places his pistol on the desk.

JASPER (CONT'D)
Now, walk over here, nice and slow.

Carruthers walks toward the cell, passing Jasper. Their eyes locked the whole time. Carruthers is fuming.

JASPER (CONT'D)
Get in the cell.

Carruthers starts into the cell.

JASPER (CONT'D)
You join him--

But suddenly, Boyle drops down, trying to extricate himself from Jasper's grasp.

Jasper fires the Derringer. It blasts off Boyle's ear.

Boyle screams, clutches his bloody, shredded ear.

BOYLE
Aaaah! He shot off my dang ear!

Jasper pushes him into the cell with Carruthers. Slams the door shut.

Then, he runs over and gets his gun belt, which is hanging from a hook. Runs out through the door.

Boyle clutches his ear. Blood runs through his fingers. He's crying.

BOYLE (CONT'D)
Shit, Uncle John, that hurts like the dickens!

Carruthers shoots him a withering look.

CARRUTHERS
Shut up, Timmy.

EXT. JAILHOUSE - NIGHT

Jasper runs out into the dark, moonless night. Starts off down the street. Hears a WHISTLE from an alley between the jailhouse and adjacent building. He looks over...

Oscar standing there with Jasper's horse in tow.

Jasper ducks into the alley. Oscar hands him the reins.
Jasper climbs aboard. Offers Oscar a hand up.

OSCAR

What? No, I can't go with you!

JASPER

You're on the hook for this now.

OSCAR

I'll be all right. I've got
O'Connor on my side now.

JASPER

He'll turn on you so fast it'll
make your head swim.

OSCAR

I have a lecture in New York...

JASPER

We'll get you to New York.
Eventually. Meantime, we need to
lay low a spell.

OSCAR

But, my trunk... my things...

JASPER

"Things" is all they are. You
won't need them where we're going.

Oscar considers what Carruthers said about Jasper. Finally,
he takes Jasper's hand, who helps him mount up.

JASPER (CONT'D)

(quietly, in his horse's
ear)

Come on, Jenny, let's go!

He gives her a nudge and they gallop off into the night.

Oscar lurches in the saddle, throws his arms around Jasper
and hangs on.

EXT. MOUNTAIN TRAIL - DAWN

The sun coming up over the Rocky Mountains. A breathtaking
sight.

Oscar looking out of place in his fancy suit and slouch hat.

JASPER
Will you just look at that?

But Oscar is having none of it.

OSCAR
If it's not eggs and bacon, I'm not
interested.
(beat)
I'm famished.

JASPER
All right, lets get you something
to eat.

EXT. MOUNTAIN MEADOW - DAY

Jasper, now on foot, Winchester '73 in hand, tracking
something. Oscar trying to keep up.

OSCAR
Slow down...

JASPER
Ssshh!

Jasper raises his Winchester. Finally, we see what he is
tracking...

A good sized RABBIT.

Jasper aims and FIRES.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAIN MEADOW - EVENING

Oscar sitting on the ground, staring at...

THE FACE of the rabbit, which is on a spit roasting above a
fire. It's teeth exposed, the thing grins its leporine grin
at Oscar.

Jasper tears off a leg and thigh from the meaty rabbit and
hands it to Oscar.

Oscar looks down at the leg, back at the face, then, what the
hell...

He takes a bite of the leg. And, guess what? It's pretty
good.

OSCAR

Well, that is entirely passable.

JASPER

Wild marjoram and rosemary. Little salt I carry with me in my saddlebag.

He watches Oscar tearing into the leg. Smiles.

JASPER (CONT'D)

Everything you need is all around you out here, Oscar. Except maybe a horse. We need to get you one of those.

He looks over at his horse, who is contentedly munching grass.

JASPER (CONT'D)

Ravenna won't be able to carry us both over those mountains. You're quite a load, Oscar.

OSCAR

Are you trying to say I'm fat?

JASPER

No, not fat. Large...

(Oscar frowns)

Tall. I mean. You are a man of stature.

Oscar smiles, knows Jasper is buttering him up.

OSCAR

Calliope is a nice name.

JASPER

My step-mother's name. She was a good woman.

OSCAR

So, she?...

JASPER

(nods)

Passed when I was twelve.

OSCAR

So you lost two mothers. Dear me.

Jasper tries to shrug it off.

JASPER
Ancient history.

But Oscar sees the pain that still lives in Jasper.

OSCAR
Still... Some wounds never do heal.

JASPER
She had such kindness in her heart.
She loved me like I was her own
flesh and blood. She always knew I
was "different." But she never told
my father, or anybody else. And she
never judged me for it.

Jasper catches himself getting a little too emotional.

JASPER (CONT'D)
Well, we'd better get moving.

OSCAR
Wait. There's something I need to
tell you.

He fishes in his pocket, and pulls out the telegram from
Constance. He looks at it for a moment, then hands it over to
Jasper.

Jasper reads it. Looks at Oscar.

JASPER
I see. Congratulations, Oscar.

OSCAR
No. I...

JASPER
You hadn't struck me as the
marrying type.

OSCAR
I don't love her, Jasper. Not
like...

JASPER
Then why?

OSCAR
Because it is what one does.

It's as if he hadn't really considered it before.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

I do want children. And she seems a good match for me, in some ways. Irish, writer, activist and free-thinker... But damn it all, if I had met you, I would never have... I should call it off. Yes, that's what I'll do, I'll...

JASPER

Now don't do anything rash on account of me. I'm a bandit and that's a solitary life. I'm nobody's wife.

Jasper throws his coffee on the fire, stands up and goes over to prepare his horse to leave.

EXT. ANOTHER MEADOW - DAY

A small herd of WILD HORSES munching grass. Suddenly...

Jasper gallops into their midst. Spinning a lasso above his head, he makes a beeline for the horse he has selected. It's an Appaloosa.

He tosses the lasso. Perfect shot. Jasper jerks the rope taut on the Appaloosa's neck and it goes nuts.

All the other horses scatter, leaving the field to Jasper and the Appaloosa, which bucks and kicks wildly.

CUT TO:

SHOTS - JASPER TAMING THE WILD HORSE

Jasper begins the process of breaking the horse. This is not his first rodeo. He uses a combination of fierce mastery and gentle horse whispering.

Oscar watches him with wonder...

MONTAGE - JASPER BREAKING THE APPALOOSA

-- Jasper has the Appaloosa tied to a tree. Jasper sits, watching as the horse kicks and bucks violently.

-- The Appaloosa has tired enough for Jasper to approach. Jasper unties him from the tree and wraps the rope around his hand. The Appaloosa still does not quite trust him.

-- Later. The Appaloosa has quieted, his eyes softened, as Jasper becomes more intimate with him. He strokes its neck, speaking in hushed tones.

-- Jasper tries to mount the Appaloosa for the first time. No way. The horse bucks him immediately, tries to bolt, but Jasper holds on tightly to the rope.

-- Jasper tries again. But instead of trying to sit the horse, he gets on its back stomach first, and gets it in a kind of hug around the neck. He stays here for a few beats.

He swings his leg over as gently as he can. The horse starts to buck a little, but not as fiercely. Jasper keeps his arms wrapped around the horse's neck and whispers in his ear.

The horse quiets for a few moments, until Jasper sits up, and it throws him again. Jasper gets up and goes right back to the horse.

-- Night is falling. Oscar looks on, marveling at Jasper's patience and resolve. Finally, he can keep his eyes open no longer.

CUT TO:

THE SAME - NEXT MORNING

Oscar is awakened by the SOUND of a horse munching grass right next to him. It's the Appaloosa. He looks up...

Jasper is sitting the horse bareback. He holds Jenny's reins.

JASPER

Morning.

Oscar gets up.

OSCAR

I must be dreaming. This can't be possible.

JASPER

Possible and actual.

He holds Jenny's reins out to Oscar.

JASPER (CONT'D)

You ride Jenny.

OSCAR

Are you sure?

JASPER

Well you sure as hell can't ride
Oscar. He's a one man horse right
now.

Oscar smiles at this.

OSCAR

Yes he is.

JASPER

You do ride, don't you?

OSCAR

I'm an English gentleman. What do
you think?

JASPER

I thought you were Irish.

Oscar shoots him a look, then snatches the reins and climbs
aboard Jenny.

Before he is completely set, Jasper gives Jenny's hindquarter
a slap.

Jenny takes off like a rocket, almost spilling Oscar. But he
holds on as the horse gallops away.

Jasper smiles, spurs the Appaloosa and takes off after Oscar.

EXT. FOOTHILLS TO THE ROCKIES - DAY

Oscar and Jasper riding on a trail in a stunning mountain
pass.

OSCAR

My father, like yours, was
something of a "bounder."

Jasper turns to him.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

He sired bastards. Two or three. Or
more. Depending upon whom you ask.

JASPER

Are you close to them?

OSCAR

Close? Never even met them.
(beat)

(MORE)

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Ireland is positively teeming with
the poor, unfortunate souls.

They ride in silence for a few steps. Then, Jasper stops,
turns his horse to look back at the valley spread out down
below.

JASPER

How 'bout that for a view?

OSCAR

Stunning.

Suddenly, Jasper spots something way down in the valley. Tiny
puffs of dust. He knows what they are.

JASPER

There's a spyglass next to you.
Hand it to me.

Oscar pulls the spyglass from Jasper's saddle and hands it
over to him. Jasper pulls it out to its full length. Looks
through it...

HIS POV - THRU SPYGLASS

RACKING FOCUS ON the dust clouds, which are now clearly THREE
MEN ON HORSEBACK.

JASPER (CONT'D)

Shit.

OSCAR

What is it?

JASPER

Posse. Let's go!

He spurs the Appaloosa and takes off at full gallop. Oscar
follows suit.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRAIL - DAY

Oscar and Jasper heading higher into the foothills. Oscar is
lagging well behind and suffering.

Jasper circles back to him.

JASPER

You need to keep up, Oscar.

OSCAR

I need to get off this horse. I am
in excruciating pain.

JASPER

You're just a little saddle sore is
all.

OSCAR

A little? My arse is on fire!

JASPER

I thought you said you could ride.

OSCAR

Trotting along an English country
trail is a far cry from... this.

Jasper suddenly stops. Pulls his spyglass. Looks back down
the hill. Then hands it to Oscar.

JASPER

Take a look through there.

Oscar raises the spyglass to his eye.

OSCAR'S POV - THE POSSE

The three cowboys riding relentlessly after them. Gaining on
them.

JASPER (CONT'D)

They're gaining on us. And they
won't stop 'til they catch us. You
want to get your head blown off or
you gonna deal with a little pain
in your ass?

With that, he spurs his horse. Oscar hesitates, then groans
and rides after him.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - DAY (LATER)

THREE COWBOYS tracking Oscar and Jasper. Following the hoof
prints on the narrow trail. When, suddenly...

Jasper steps out onto the trail in front of them, Colt
leveled at them.

JASPER

All right boys, that's far enough.
Get down off your horses.

COWBOY ONE sizes him up. His hand moves ever so slightly toward the gun in his holster.

JASPER (CONT'D)

You sure you wanna do that? I'm already drawn, cowboy.

COWBOY ONE

Looks like three to one to me. I don't care how fast you can shoot that thing, you can't get us all before one of us shoots the shit out of you.

He is suddenly cut off by the sound of Oscar CLEARING HIS THROAT behind them. Cowboy one turns, sees...

Oscar standing on the trail behind them. Bandana covering his face. Jasper's Winchester aimed at them.

Oscar is far enough away that Cowboy One doesn't see the Winchester shaking slightly in his hands.

JASPER

My partner there can shoot the legs off the lice in your short hairs, cowboy.

(beat)

Now dismount, or we're gonna shoot the shit out of you.

Cowboy One looks at his partners, then all three dismount.

JASPER (CONT'D)

Take out your sidearms real slow and toss 'em on the ground.

They do as he says. Jasper goes to the horses, grabs the reins of two of them, and slaps the other one on the rump. It takes off into the hills.

JASPER (CONT'D)

That'll be all, boys.

(beat)

You'd best start walkin'. It's twenty miles to the nearest township.

Cowboy One grumbles and they start away.

JASPER (CONT'D)

Oh, now, hang on a second!

They stop.

JASPER (CONT'D)
 I almost forgot. I'm gonna need you
 to leave the up front money I know
 they paid you to track us.

They hesitate.

COWBOY ONE
 Aw, hell no--

Suddenly, Oscar fires the Winchester just over their heads.
 Then, in his roughest desperado voice...

OSCAR
 The money, now!

The cowboys reach into their pockets, pull out bills and toss
 them on the ground.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
 Now away, brigands!

They start off back down the trail.

EXT. FARTHER UP THE TRAIL - DAY

Oscar and Jasper, the two horses in tow, walk up to their own
 horses, which have been tied off to a tree.

JASPER
 Mr. Wilde, I do believe you have a
 penchant for this line of work.

OSCAR
 Are you joking? I bloody well
 nearly soiled my trousers!

JASPER
 I don't believe that for a second.

He smiles.

JASPER (CONT'D)
 "Now away, brigands!"

Which brings a smile to Oscar's face too.

EXT. MOUNTAIN TRAIL - SNOWLINE - DAY

As Oscar and Jasper, with the two horses in tow, riding up a
 very steep pass to the snowline.

JASPER

I'm taking us on the easiest route,
but we are gonna have to cross that
hill there.

He points at what looks more like a mountain than a hill.

OSCAR

Hill? That's Goddamned Everest!

JASPER

I know a trail through. We'll avoid
the steepest part.

OSCAR

We'll never make it.

JASPER

Oscar, I've done it many times.

OSCAR

All right, I'll never make it.

JASPER

Yes you will. Because you've got
me to guide you. And you've got no
choice.

Oscar just sits there staring apprehensively at the mountain.

JASPER (CONT'D)

Look, you already showed me you got
some grit. You can do this. I know
you can.

OSCAR

Like those poor bastards you sent
off on foot? No food, no money, no
firearms... At least they've got
grit.

JASPER

You feel sorry for them?

OSCAR

You could have let them take one
horse.

JASPER

(pissed)

Those two-bit bounty hunters split
a hundred measly dollars in
exchange for my life. Our life.

(MORE)

JASPER (CONT'D)
They'd've shot you dead in a
heartbeat.

With that, he takes off at a gallop. Oscar has no choice but to follow.

EXT. HIGHER UP - DAY

Hard to tell it is still day. The sky on the horizon is BLACK AND ANGRY. A huge storm brewing.

JASPER
Blizzard coming.

OSCAR
Blizzard?! It's June!

JASPER
That's the Rockies for you.

Oscar says nothing. Just sits there mesmerized by the black, roiling sky.

JASPER (CONT'D)
We're going to have to bunk down
here for the night.

EXT. TREELINE - DAY

PRESSURE DROP before the storm. An ominous stillness.

Jasper digging a hole in the snowpack in a spot as protected by the trees as he could find.

Oscar sees how exhausted he is.

OSCAR
Give me the spade.

JASPER
I'm all right.

OSCAR
Give me the deuced spade!

Jasper climbs out of the hole. Hands Oscar the shovel. Oscar gets down into it and starts digging furiously.

CUT TO:

THE SAME - LATER

The wind has picked up. Snow begins to fall.

Oscar and Jasper lying cut tree branches across the hole.

CUT TO:

THE SAME - LATER

A BLIZZARD. The wind is HOWLING through the trees. Snow falling sideways.

IN THE HOLE

Oscar and Jasper are huddled together. The tree branches covering them. Jasper's saddle blanket pulled around them.

Jasper puts his arms around Oscar, trying to draw him closer. But it's awkward because Oscar is taller, with longer limbs. So Oscar wraps his arms around Jasper and draws him closer.

THE WIND HOWLS THROUGH THE TREES.

CUT TO:

COMPLETE SILENCE

The storm rages around them. THE ONLY SOUND IS THEIR BREATHING.

CUT TO:

MONTAGE - CLOSE-UPS...

--THEIR HANDS. Clutching each other tightly. Then, moving up underneath each other's shirts.

--THEIR EYES. Looking out at the storm, eventually finding each other's gaze.

--THEIR MOUTHS touch, but they do not quite kiss. They breathe each other's misting breath.

They are aware that their very bodies are keeping each other alive, and this profound intimacy is electrifying.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - A MOUND OF SNOW

...atop the branches on the hole.

Jasper's hand breaks through the snow. He emerges. Reaches back for Oscar's hand. Helps him out of the hole.

EXT. TREELINE - DAY

They are cold, but alive. And the day is glorious.

Oscar is shivering. But suddenly, a big smile breaks across his face.

OSCAR
We're alive!

JASPER
That appears to be the case.

OSCAR
Dance with me!

JASPER
What?

Oscar grabs hold of him and starts waltzing him around, "la la la"-ing some tune as they dance.

EXT. PLAIN - DAY

Oscar and Jasper riding down the last incline from the foothills to the vast plain below.

As up as Oscar was before, he is now very low. Lagging behind. Pale. His body shivering convulsively.

Jasper turns and rides back to him.

JASPER
Oscar, you all right?

OSCAR
(voice very weak)
Freezing... I c-can't get warm.

Jasper rides up beside him. Reaches over and touches his forehead.

JASPER
You're burning up.

OSCAR
How can that be... when I'm so cold?

Suddenly, he slumps over in the saddle. Jasper catches him before he falls.

CUT TO BLACK:

FROM THE BLACK, A STRANGE, LOW CHANTING.

FADE IN:

INT. TIPI - DAY, BUT DARK INSIDE

CLOSEUP: A NATIVE AMERICAN WOMAN. Ancient. Deep set eyes. Her skin impossibly wrinkled. Toothless. Tribal tattoos on her face. She is the source of that low chant.

CUT TO:

CLOSEUP - OSCAR

Unconscious, on his back, covered by a buffalo skin. His face beaded with sweat.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL a fire, and the old woman, waving smoke from a smoldering pile of herbs toward Oscar, smudging the sickness out of him.

Oscar wakes. He is shocked at the sight of the old woman. He throws off the buffalo skin, and scrambles out the door, from the dark of the tipi into the blinding light of day.

When he realizes he is naked, he ducks back inside.

He grabs the skin and takes one more look at the old woman, who is smiling at Oscar, then ducks back out the door of the tipi.

The old woman CACKLES CRAZILY.

EXT. TIPI - ARAPAHO VILLAGE - DAY

Oscar wraps the buffalo skin around himself and looks around.

People are going about their daily business. Grinding flour. Cleaning animal skins. Stringing beads. Sharpening tools.

As Oscar emerges from the tipi, everyone turns to see.

JASPER
There's our sleeping beauty.

Oscar turns, sees Jasper sitting beside a middle-aged Arapahoe man. Oscar walks over to them.

JASPER (CONT'D)
Oscar, this is my good friend,
Chief Walking Bird.

WALKING BIRD
Hebe.

This is an Arapaho greeting between men, pronounced "heh beh"

WALKING BIRD (CONT'D)
Jasper has told me much about you.

He offers his hand. Oscar shakes it.

The old woman stands at the opening of the tipi, still laughing away.

JASPER
That medicine woman is his mother,
who brought you back from the dead.
(beat)
She also washed your clothes for
you.

CUT TO:

THE SAME - LATER

Jasper walking Oscar through the small village. Oscar is back in his clothes.

JASPER
Walking Bird is an outlier. One of
the last of the Arapaho rebels. But
the federals will catch up to him
soon enough. Force him and his
people onto the reservation.

OSCAR
How dreadful.

JASPER
It's brutal what we're doing to
these people. And we call them
savages.

They continue walking. Then, Oscar spots something.

OSCAR

No savage could make something as remarkable as that...

He walks over to what he was looking at...

A gorgeous BLANKET being weaved by one of the Arapaho women. The blanket is almost complete.

Oscar walks close to it, examining its fine craftsmanship. Its stunning colors.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

This is sublime.

The Arapaho woman says something to Oscar in her native tongue.

Oscar frowns. Jasper translates.

JASPER

She's asking if you'd like to trade for it.

OSCAR

Trade what? I have nothing to offer.

The woman eyeballs Oscar's slouch hat.

EXT. ARAPAHO VILLAGE - DAY

Oscar and Jasper riding out of the village. The blanket is rolled up and lying across Oscar's saddle.

Walking Bird and other villagers waving good bye. Including the woman who weaved the blanket...

She is wearing Oscar's slouch hat.

JASPER

You're gonna regret trading your hat.

OSCAR

Nonsense. I feel like I robbed the poor woman.

EXT. RED ROCK CLIFFS - DAY

Oscar and Jasper riding. A blazing, noon sun.

Hatless, Oscar's face is scorched red and peeling. He holds his hand above his eyes, trying to shade his face from the sun.

Jasper looks at him, smiles.

JASPER
Told you so.

OSCAR
From a blizzard to the blazing
sun... What God forsaken underworld
have you brought me to?

JASPER
I thought your near death
experience might temper your
incessant complaining.

Jasper stops his horse. Puts his fingers to his lips and lets out two short WHISTLES. Stops. Then one more.

A few beats, then the whistle pattern is answered from somewhere up in the red rocks.

Jasper smiles.

JASPER (CONT'D)
This will cheer you up.

CUT TO:

EXT: RED ROCKS - MOMENTS LATER

Jasper and Oscar ride through a narrow opening in the rocks and down into...

EXT. HOLE-IN-THE-WALL - DAY

The famous hideout of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid and their outlaw gang.

A few rough hewn cabins. With some rough hewn characters to go along with them.

BUTCH CASSIDY among them.

BUTCH
Well, look what the cat drug in.

JASPER
How are you, Butch?

Jasper dismounts.

BUTCH
Fair to middlin', Jasper. And you?

JASPER
Well, I ain't in jail, so I'd say
all is well.

They hug.

The SUNDANCE KID appears in the background, eyes Oscar suspiciously.

SUNDANCE
Who's your friend?

JASPER
Hey Sundance. This here is Mr.
Oscar Wilde. A great outlaw poet.

SUNDANCE
Is that so?

He steps over to Oscar, eyeing him suspiciously.

SUNDANCE (CONT'D)
Let's hear one.

OSCAR
One what?

SUNDANCE
A poem.

OSCAR
Now?

JASPER
Come on, Sundance, don't put him on
the spot...

But Oscar is ready with some lines from his poem "The Burden of Itys"...

OSCAR
"Sing on! Sing on! I would be drunk
with life, drunk with the trampled
visage of my youth, I would forget
the wearying wasted strife, the
riven vale, the Gorgon eyes of
Truth!"

Total silence for a few beats, broken by Sundance...

SUNDANCE

Good poem.

He tips his hat, turns and walks away.

BUTCH

Well, I'll tell ya, you boys showed
up on the right day. Just happens
to be entertainment night tonight.

EXT. HOLE-IN-THE-WALL - NIGHT

A "stage" -- a large flat rock -- is illuminated by torches.
A dozen or so outlaws are gathered, watching...

One of their own singing a song. He is wearing a dress and a
messy wig. His five o'clock shadow clashes with the blush on
his cheeks and his painted lips. He sings in a FALSETTO...

OUTLAW

*Why don't the men propose, mama,
why don't the men propose? Each
seems just coming to the point, and
then away he goes. It is no fault
of yours, mama, that everybody
knows; you fete the finest men in
town, yet, oh, they won't propose!*

Everybody is loving it. Laughing their asses off.

Including Oscar, who seems right at home.

The outlaw finishes his song. Takes a deep bow. Applause.

Butch takes the stage.

BUTCH

Who's in the mood for a fight
break?

A few hoots from the crowd.

Butch grabs two sets of boxing gloves from the side of the
stage.

BUTCH (CONT'D)

As our reigning champ, the Kid will
defend his title.

Sundance takes off his shirt, revealing his impressive
physique. Butch hands him a pair of gloves.

BUTCH (CONT'D)
Any challengers?

Oscar immediately jumps to his feet.

OSCAR
I'll have a go!

Jasper looks at him incredulously.

JASPER
What? No...

BUTCH
Okay, Mr. Wilde.

He hands the other pair of gloves to Oscar, who starts putting them on...

JASPER
Oscar, I've seen him fight. He'll take you apart.

But Oscar moves onto the slab to fight Sundance.

OSCAR
Marquess de Queensberry rules?--

SUNDANCE
Ain't no rules.
(to Butch)
Say one, two, three, go.

BUTCH
One, two three, go!

Sundance immediately attacks, catching Oscar off guard.

He throws big punches. A couple connect. Then he hits Oscar with a haymaker, which catches him right on the chin.

Oscar goes down. Butch starts to count him out, but...

Oscar stumbles back to his feet, tasting blood in his mouth.

Sundance immediately moves in for the kill...

But Oscar feints and hits him with a beautifully placed punch as he passes. Sundance is staggered slightly.

Oscar follows up with two sweet jabs, which also find their mark.

Sundance is mad now. He throws more big punches. One hits Oscar, but doesn't have the same effect.

And now, Oscar goes on the attack. Two left jabs followed up by a big right hook which rocks Sundance.

Finally, Oscar lands a thunderous, chin-crunching uppercut. Down goes Sundance.

Butch COUNTS HIM OUT.

BUTCH (CONT'D)

The winner, by knockout, the Outlaw
Poet, Mr. Oscar Wilde!

The other outlaws look on in stunned silence. Jasper breaks it by applauding. Finally, the others join in.

Oscar winks as he passes Jasper...

OSCAR

Middle weight boxing champion at
Oxford, two years running.

CUT TO:

THE SAME - LATER

Butch announcing the next act:

BUTCH

And now, for our next act, a friend
we haven't seen around here for
awhile. Big round of applause for
Mr. Jasper Fellows.

Applause, as Jasper walks out on stage. The clapping stops. Jasper pauses, then starts reciting...

JASPER

"Thou, nature, art my goddess; to
thy law my services are bound.
Wherefore should I stand the plague
of custom, and permit the curiosity
of nations to deprive me?"...

Oscar recognizes the speech immediately: Edmund's bastard soliloquy from KING LEAR.

JASPER (CONT'D)

"For that I am some twelve or
fourteen moonshines lag of a
brother? Why bastard?

(MORE)

JASPER (CONT'D)

Wherefore base? When my dimensions
are as well compact, my mind as
generous, and my shape as true as
honest madam's issue?"

Everybody listening with rapt attention.

JASPER (CONT'D)

"Why brand they us with base? With
baseness, bastardy? Base, base?
Who, in the lusty stealth of nature
take more composition and fierce
quality than doth, within a dull,
stale, tired bed, go to the
creating of a whole tribe of fops
got 'tween sleeping and wake?"

Oscar is mesmerized; stunned what a great actor Jasper is.

JASPER (CONT'D)

"Well then, legitimate Edgar, I
must have your land. Our father's
love is to the bastard Edmund as to
the legitimate. Fine word,
legitimate! Well, my legitimate, if
this letter speed and my invention
thrive, Edmund the base shall top
the legitimate. I grow, I prosper:
Now gods, stand up for bastards!"

Pin drop silence.

Everybody jumps to their feet to give Jasper a standing
ovation.

CUT TO:

THE SAME - LATER

Everybody sitting around a roaring campfire, drinking.
Someone plays a mournful guitar.

Oscar and Jasper sitting off to the side together...

OSCAR

That was... sublime.

JASPER

I wanted to be an actor. As you
can imagine, that didn't sit well
with dear P'pa.

OSCAR
But you're good... very good.

JASPER
(dismissively)
Thank you.

OSCAR
Come to London with me. I'll write
plays for you.

JASPER
Oscar, you're crazy.

OSCAR
No, I'm not! Well, maybe I am. But
I have ideas. Good ones. I'm
positively bursting with them. You
will be my Burbage.

(Note: Richard Burbage was Shakespeare's greatest actor.)

JASPER
Oscar, I'm flattered, but--

OSCAR
(cuts him off)
Jasper, I'm in love with you.

CUT TO:

THE SAME - LATER

Oscar and Jasper outside the door of one of the small
ramshackle cabins.

Jasper opens the door.

OSCAR
But... is this allowed?

JASPER
Allowed?

OSCAR
I mean, the others, what will
they?...

JASPER
I don't know if you noticed
earlier, but Butch and the Kid went
into that cabin there.

He points out one of the cabins.

OSCAR
You mean they?...

JASPER
Who knows what they do in there?
It's nobody's business but their
own. Here, a man is free to be what
he wants to be. Here -- what was it
Caliban said in *The Tempest*--

He pauses, remembering.

JASPER (CONT'D)
"Be not afeard, the isle is full of
noises, sounds and sweet airs"...

OSCAR
(finishes the line)
..."that give delight and hurt
not."

Jasper smiles, offers Oscar his hand. Oscar takes it. They go into the cabin, shutting the door behind them.

EXT. RED CLIFFS - SUNSET

The scene Oscar remembered in his cell at Reading Gaol. Stunning sunset orange on sheer red cliffs.

Oscar and Jasper, shirtless, riding their horses fast in the shallow stream at the base of the rocks.

The ONLY SOUND is JASPER'S VOICE SOFTLY SINGING "OH! SUSANNAH":

JASPER
*Well, I come from Alabama with my
banjo on my knee, and I'm bound for
Louisiana, my true love for to see.
Well it rained all night the day I
left, the weather it was dry, the
sun so hot I froze myself. Susanna
don't you cry.*

EXT. RIVER BANK - DAY

Jasper lying back in Oscar's lap; Oscar idly playing with his hair. Jasper finishes the song:

JASPER

*Oh! Susanna, don't you cry for me,
well I come from Alabama with a
banjo on my knee.*

Now, silence except for the soft rush of the river and the gentle whisper of the wind.

The red rocks are aflame with the light from the dying sun. The sky streaked red and purple and orange and all the colors in between.

Oscar is transfixed by the magnificent sight

OSCAR

I've been pontificating on and on for weeks about aesthetics. And now, I finally find myself struck dumb... by this.

He pauses, taking it all in.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

My words are too puny and insignificant to describe the beauty of those rocks. Or that sky.
(looks down at Jasper)
Or your eyes.

Jasper smiles.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

This place has a kind of magic.

He pauses, thinking.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

I'm Irish, but Ireland never felt like home. I always longed to be in England, but felt like a stranger there too.

He looks around.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

But here, at this moment, for the first time in my life, I feel comfortable in my own skin.
(beat)
I can't even imagine being back in London.

JASPER

Well that complicates things...

He turns to Oscar.

JASPER (CONT'D)
I've been thinking about your offer
to go there with you.

OSCAR
Have you?

JASPER
I want to be your Burbage, Oscar.

OSCAR
You've just made me the happiest
man on earth!

Oscar leans forward and kisses him.

From the SILENCE of this scene...

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. TRAIN STATION - PHILADELPHIA

THE CHAOS OF THE STATION. SCREECHING OF TRAIN BRAKES. TRAIN
WHISTLES. PEOPLE SHOUTING.

Jasper and Oscar step off the train. Jasper immediately
feeling the noise and claustrophobia of the place.

OSCAR
Are you all right?

Jasper forces a nod and a smile.

JASPER
I thought you had a lecture in New
York.

OSCAR
I just need to make a quick stop
here.

JASPER
A quick stop in Philly? What for?

OSCAR
It's a surprise, Burbage. Don't you
trust me?

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Oscar knocks on the door. Jasper gives him a "what the hell?" look. He still has no idea where they are.

They wait. No answer.

Oscar raps on the door for a second time.

WHITMAN
(from inside)
Just a god damned minute!

Finally, the door flies open. A striking looking older man grey hair and long beard stands at the door.

WHITMAN (CONT'D)
This had better be a fucking emergency! Somebody had better be dying, I swear to god! I was napping, goddammit!!

Oscar laughs. Jasper is starstruck.

JASPER
Walt Whitman.

WHITMAN
Present and accounted for. Who wants to know?

OSCAR
Oscar Wilde, at your service.

Oscar bows with a flourish.

WHITMAN
Oscar Wilde? Well, I'll be snookered.

Oscar presents one of his calling cards from Sarony.

Their repartee is immediate, and they share a lively exchange.

WHITMAN (CONT'D)
(considers the card)
What a fine portrait. Silver nitrate?

OSCAR
Albumen, I believe.

WHITMAN
Albumen! Isn't that fantastic?

OSCAR
Is it?

WHITMAN
I have no idea.

They both laugh heartily.

Whitman shakes Oscar's hand, and drags him into his house, patting him on the back exuberantly.

Jasper lingers there at the doorway, still struck a little dumb.

OSCAR
Are you coming?

Finally, Jasper follows.

INT. WALT WHITMAN'S HOUSE - DAY

The house is both spare and in disarray. Empty wine and whiskey bottles everywhere. Lots of books, too. Covering every available shelf space. Stacked on the floor.

A cat strolls through.

WHITMAN
If you'd called ahead I could have arranged food, libations...

OSCAR
Worry not, Mr. Whitman, it is your company we seek.

WHITMAN
What are you drinking? Whiskey?

OSCAR
My drug of choice.

Whitman picks up an empty bottle and wiggles it to be sure.

WHITMAN
Sorry young man, I seem to have finished it.

He opens a cabinet.

WHITMAN (CONT'D)
How about some Elderberry wine?

OSCAR
Delightful.

Whitman gathers up a couple of glasses and a tea cup for himself. As he does...

WHITMAN
Who's your silent friend, Mr. Wilde?

OSCAR
Where are my manners?
(beat)
Walt Whitman, allow me to present my dear friend, Jasper Fellows.

Whitman and Jasper shake.

WHITMAN
Well met, dear friend Jasper Fellows. You must be a fine fellow indeed, judging from the company you keep.

JASPER
Mr. Whitman, it's an honor to meet you.

Jasper keeps shaking Whitman's hand, a little too long.

WHITMAN
Jasper, I'll need that hand to pour the wine.

JASPER
Oh...

Jasper, embarrassed, releases him.

Whitman pours them all a glass of wine. Holds up his glass.

WHITMAN
Bottoms up!

They smack their glasses together and drink.

INT. WALT WHITMAN'S HOUSE - LATER

Walt is rocking in his squeaky chair. Oscar and Jasper sit in front of him on small stools. They appear as students, or children.

WHITMAN

(to Jasper)

I couldn't agree more. The wild places of America are its crown jewels. And the west! The vastness of it. The grandeur. Nature's epic poem writ sublime.

JASPER

"After you have exhausted what there is in business, politics, conviviality, and so on, have found that none of these finally satisfy, or permanently wear, what remains? Nature remains."

WHITMAN

Couldn't agree more, dear boy. I could have written that myself.

JASPER

You did!

WHITMAN

Ha! So I did!

(beat)

So tell me, Mr. Wilde, what is your next project?

OSCAR

After one or two more lectures, we are away to London. I have some plays brewing, and Jasper will be my Burbage.

Whitman throws a knowing glance between them.

WHITMAN

(to Jasper)

An actor, eh?

Jasper shrugs, and nods.

WHITMAN (CONT'D)

(to Oscar)

And I suppose that makes you Shakespeare...

OSCAR

I wish.

WHITMAN

How grand for you both. And where
are you two beauties off to next?

OSCAR

New York City.

INT. GRAND CENTRAL STATION - DAY

Oscar and Jasper disembarking from the train. Both dressed in
fine new suits.

Oscar is swarmed immediately by the PRESS shouting out
questions:

PRESS

Mr. Wilde, how was your tour of the
west?... You missed some dates...
where were you?...

As Oscar is mobbed, Jasper is pushed into the background.
Oscar looks at him apologetically.

EXT. DELMONICO'S - NIGHT

New York's most famous restaurant at the time.

INT. DELMONICO'S - NIGHT

Lavishly appointed. Filled with the movers and shakers of
Manhattan.

But most eyes are on Oscar and Jasper. Aside remarks being
exchanged. A titter or two.

Oscar and Jasper sitting at a table, waiting for their
dinner. Jasper feels everybody watching them.

JASPER

Is it always like this?

OSCAR

Like what?

JASPER

Everybody gawking at you?

OSCAR

Are they? Hadn't noticed, dear boy.

A WAITER comes to their table, delivers their meal. Two beautiful, thick steaks with all the trimmings.

Jasper cuts into his steak. Takes a bite. Closes his eyes.

JASPER

Damn. I'd forgotten what a Delmonico's steak tasted like.

OSCAR

A little tastier than wild hare?

Jasper smiles.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

In London, we'll dine at Wilton's. They serve the most exquisite seafood...

Oscar cuts himself off when he sees someone sitting across the room.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Oh my God, that's Mark Twain.

Sure enough, Mark Twain is sitting alone at a table, dressed in his signature white linen suit. And he is looking right at Oscar.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Is he... looking at me?

As if to answer, Twain gets up and walks straight over to their table.

TWAIN

Oscar Wilde.

Oscar is positively starstruck, like Jasper was with Walt Whitman.

OSCAR

Uh... yes... And you're... Mark Twain.

TWAIN

Last I checked.

(beat)

You've been making quite the stir across our fair country, Mr. Wilde.

Oscar just sits there gazing at him.

TWAIN (CONT'D)
 Might I join you?

OSCAR
 Of course, of course...

He jumps up, pulls out a chair for Twain to sit in.

CUT TO:

THE SAME - LATER

Dinner over. All three men are drinking brandy and smoking cigars.

TWAIN
 I've been meaning to catch your lecture.

OSCAR
 I have one left in New York. I will make sure you get a ticket.

Twain takes a puff on his cigar.

TWAIN
 I quite enjoyed your volume of poetry, Oscar.

OSCAR
 Well, that is high praise indeed, coming from you, sir.

TWAIN
 Yes, I think your writing shows great promise.

Uh-oh.

OSCAR
 Promise?

TWAIN
 Yes. Don't get me wrong, your echoes of Milton, Tennyson, Homer, Baudelaire show a deep understanding of the masters. To paint a replica of the Mona Lisa requires skill, no doubt.

(MORE)

TWAIN (CONT'D)

But once you start serving up your own style, instead of Swinburne and Ruskin with a side of Dante, I expect great things from you.

OSCAR

(disappointed)

I see...

TWAIN

Oscar all young writers begin by swinging about on the jungle gym built by those who designed the playground. I went through a Melville stage myself. Though I greatly admire his work, I finally found his voice too weighty for my simple tongue.

(beat)

You'll get there, son. Just keep at it.

EXT. DELMONICO'S - NIGHT

Oscar and Jasper walking away from the restaurant. More looks from the people they pass.

OSCAR

"Promise?!" Swinburne and Ruskin with a side of Dante? The nerve!

JASPER

He was being complimentary.

OSCAR

Who does he think he is?!

JASPER

How can you call yourself a writer if you can't abide criticism?

Oscar just continues to pout.

JASPER (CONT'D)

Even Shakespeare had critics. Samuel Pepys called *Midsummer Night's Dream* the "most insipid and ridiculous play I ever saw in my life."

OSCAR

Then Samuel Pepys was an idiot.

They walk in tense silence for a few steps, then suddenly Jasper bursts out laughing.

Oscar tries to resist, but finally he lets out a big laugh, too. Then...

OSCAR (CONT'D)

He's right, you know. Swinburne and Ruskin were whispering in my ear when I wrote those poems.

JASPER

You'll grow deaf to them, and then your voice will sing.

Oscar smiles, grabs hold of Jasper's arm. They continue down the street arm in arm.

EXT. BROADWAY - NIGHT

Oscar and Jasper walking onto Broadway. The Grand Hotel up ahead. Jasper sees...

A group of reporters outside.

He withdraws his arm from Oscar's. Stops.

OSCAR

What are you doing?

JASPER

Reporters. I can't walk in with you.

OSCAR

Nonsense...

JASPER

No. Fact. If we go into that hotel together tonight, the tongues will be wagging tomorrow.

OSCAR

So what?...

JASPER

I'll come in through the service entrance later.

He starts away.

OSCAR

Jasper...

But Jasper continues walking away.

INT. CAFE - MORNING

Oscar and Jasper having breakfast. Oscar reading a newspaper. He reads aloud to Jasper...

OSCAR

"Who is the dashing young man who has been seen about town with Oscar Wilde?"

JASPER

Keep it down.

Jasper lowers in his seat.

OSCAR

Jasper, why are you behaving this way?

JASPER

Can you really be that naive?

INT. LECTURE HALL - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Oscar prepares for a lecture. It's the first since he and Jasper returned from their adventures. He is visibly nervous.

JASPER

You're going to be great, just like you always are.

Oscar just shakes his head and wipes his perspiring hands on his coat.

OSCAR

I don't know, Jasper.

JASPER

What's come over you? This isn't like you.

OSCAR

You asked me: Who is Oscar Wilde? I fear I've lost my hold on him. And after what Twain said... I keep going over the lectures in my mind, and not one of them seems authentic anymore.

JASPER

You don't have to go on if you
don't want to...

OSCAR

Oh yes I do. I have a contract.

The stage manager signals to Oscar that it's time. Oscar
gathers himself.

Oscar takes a breath, and becomes the Oscar Wilde of the
stage. He strides onto the stage to wild applause.

Beside him on the stage is the Arapaho blanket, hanging on a
stand.

The crowd finally stops applauding and Oscar begins...

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Ladies and gentlemen, I had a
speech planned for this evening
months ago. But after traveling
your great country, those words now
seem feeble and insufficient.

INT. CARRIAGE - NIGHT

Oscar and Jasper riding through the city. They watch the
scene going by, holding hands, as lovers do.

Oscar's speech CONTINUES IN V.O.

OSCAR (V.O.)

What I have come to learn, is that
aestheticism is a living,
breathing, changing thing. And as
aesthetes, we must allow the world
to change us.

INT. LECTURE HALL - NIGHT

Oscar continuing his speech.

OSCAR

On my tour, I spent time with the
Arapaho Indians...

He steps over to the blanket.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

...who generously gave me this blanket, which I believe to be as fine a tapestry as any I have seen hanging in the Louvre or the Vatican. The remarkably intricate stitching, the ravishing vibrancy of the dye. This is a masterwork of aestheticism. Woven by the hands of a native woman whose culture is being systematically eradicated.

He pauses, lets that sink in.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

But I also want to speak to you tonight about the actual concept of beauty. Not manufactured beauty, but that of nature itself.

(beat)

What is beauty? A perfectly formed rose? Certainly. But so is the hollowed skull of the Longhorn cattle, picked clean by carrion crow.

The crowd doesn't quite know how to process this.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

The white of its bone, the curve of its horn, the finality of its death. It serves as a reminder that life is fleeting, and that we must live it to its absolute fullest, as if each moment might be our last... and what could be more beautiful than that?

EXT. FIFTH AVENUE MANSION - NIGHT

A massive, imposing edifice. A carriage pulls up out front.

INT. CARRIAGE - NIGHT

Oscar and Jasper. Jasper looking nervously out at the mansion.

JASPER

I don't know if I can do this.

OSCAR

You must do it. If you do not, his shadow will be hanging over you the rest of your life.

Still, Jasper hesitates.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Jasper, you have given me the courage to do things I never dreamed possible. Let me be your courage now.

(beat)

Go in there and face him. Just tell him the truth. Your truth.

Jasper nods, finally leaves the carriage.

Oscar watches him walk toward the front door of the mansion.

OSCAR (V.O.)

On my tour, I had the pleasure to spend an illuminating evening deep inside a Colorado silver mine. My hosts were the miners who coax the silver from the earth. They are a different breed of people than you or I. Their clothes are worn. Their hands and faces dirty. They are uneducated, academically speaking. They have rough hands and they use rough words.

Jasper finally makes it to the front door. Takes a deep breath. Knocks.

INT. LECTURE HALL - NIGHT

Oscar continuing.

OSCAR (V.O.)

No, they are not like we are. I daresay, they are better than we could ever hope to be. They give their lives, quite literally, to extract silver out of that mountain, and yet they will never even see the ornate candelabras or intricate tea sets hewn from that ore.

INT. FIFTH AVENUE MANSION - NIGHT

Jasper sitting in a beautifully appointed lounge. A MAID serving him tea from a fine silver tea pot.

The maid leaves the pot on a gorgeously etched silver tray, then walks away. Jasper sits nervously.

OSCAR (V.O.)

All they ever see is that slender,
jagged finger of silver, pointing
them ever deeper into the mountain.

Jasper looks closely at the silver tea pot, his REFLECTION WARPED by its curve.

OSCAR (V.O.)

But allow me to assure you, that
radiant vein of silver is a
thousand times more beautiful than
the pinky posing teapots of which
we "refined folk" are so enamored.

INT. LECTURE HALL - NIGHT

Oscar continues.

OSCAR

I believe in aestheticism now more
than ever. I still believe that we,
as aesthetes, can and must improve
upon the uninspired dull and drab
of the commonplace. But I have also
learned to seek beauty in the rough
and the mundane. Because I see the
world with new eyes. And I can find
only one explanation for that: My
eyes have come under the sway of my
heart.

INT. FIFTH AVENUE MANSION - NIGHT

A BUTLER approaches.

BUTLER

He's ready for you, Mr. Fellows.

INT. FIFTH AVENUE MANSION - NIGHT

Jasper being led by a BUTLER down a long hallway in the absurdly ornate house. They stop at a door. Butler knocks.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Enter.

The butler opens the door. Jasper pauses, then walks through it.

INT. STUDY - NIGHT

The gaudy opulence continues. Has the feel of a museum. Bookshelves with books from floor to ceiling.

Sitting behind a gigantic desk, smoking a gigantic cigar, Jasper's father JEDEDIAH FELLOWS. He barely looks up.

JEDEDIAH

Sit.

Jasper sits in a chair that seems to have been placed in front of the desk for him. He sinks into the soft chair; this too seems by design, to make him look smaller.

A long, few seconds tick by, timed by the loud tick of the grandfather clock.

JASPER

Father, I--

JEDEDIAH

Would you mind terribly if I began?

Jasper knows it would be pointless to argue. It's the same old song and dance.

JASPER

No, of course not.

JEDEDIAH

So, is it you who has been galavanting around town with this English fop?

Jasper is taken off guard by this.

JEDEDIAH (CONT'D)

I have eyes and ears everywhere, so don't lie to me.

JASPER

He's my friend.

JEDEDIAH

"Friend." Don't think I don't know about your proclivities, boy.

(MORE)

JEDEDIAH (CONT'D)

If you want to return to this family you are to put all that nonsense behind you.

He doesn't let Jasper get a word in edgewise...

JEDEDIAH (CONT'D)

You left here, without a word, five years ago. Left your family. Left your job. I don't know where you went or what you were doing. I hope whatever it was, you got it out of your system. I do not intend to ever ask you about it.

He puffs on his cigar.

JEDEDIAH (CONT'D)

I am willing to take you back. Even give you back your old job. But there will be conditions. First, you will have to learn the meaning of duty. Second, you will have to work harder than anybody else to advance in my company.

He stands, comes out from behind the desk.

JEDEDIAH (CONT'D)

Third, you will marry. Produce some heirs. There's a Vanderbilt girl available. She'd be a perfect match.

Jedediah is now standing above Jasper, forcing him to look up to him.

Suddenly, Jasper smiles, then starts chuckling.

JEDEDIAH (CONT'D)

You think this is funny?

JASPER

Yes. I do.

Finally, Jasper stands up. And he's a head taller than his father.

JASPER (CONT'D)

I don't want my old job back, father. I don't give a shit about bricks. Or duty. Or producing heirs. I find all of this to be grotesque... your house...

(MORE)

JASPER (CONT'D)
 your "company"... and your mountain
 of money.

JEDEDIAH
 Why you insolent little--

He tries to slap Jasper; Jasper catches his wrist. Looks him
 hard in the eyes...

JASPER
 Oh no. You don't get to do that any
 more either. I only wish I'd been
 old enough to protect my mother
 from this hand.

Which he finally lets go of.

JASPER (CONT'D)
 Good bye, father.

He turns and starts away.

JEDEDIAH
 Do you know what the penalty for
 sodomy is in this state?!

Jasper just keeps walking.

JEDEDIAH (CONT'D)
 You walk out that door, you will
 never walk back through it!

Jasper finally stops, turns back to him. Smiles.

JASPER
 How is it possible that I was ever
 afraid of you?

With that, he turns and walks out the door.

EXT. NEW YORK HARBOR - DAY

Oscar and Jasper heading toward the S.S. Arizona, the same
 ship that brought Oscar to America.

Jasper is quiet and withdrawn. Anxious. He sees the MOB OF
 REPORTERS at the gangplank to the ship, all waiting for
 Oscar.

Jasper ducks back around a corner. Oscar goes to him.

OSCAR
 What is it, my love?

JASPER

Oscar, I...

OSCAR

(playfully)

Don't worry, the Arizona won't make you saddle sore.

But he sees Jasper's anxiety.

JASPER

London will be New York all over again. The noise. The crowds. "High society."

He sneaks a glance at the reporters.

JASPER (CONT'D)

The press will scrutinize everything we do. It'll kill me. It will kill us.

(beat)

My father reminded me, in no uncertain terms, that what we do with each other is a crime.

OSCAR

"Do with each other?" I love you, that's not...

JASPER

The world doesn't see it that way.

OSCAR

It will be different in London. My reputation will protect us there. I am Oscar Wilde...

JASPER

As worldly as you are, you are also so incredibly naive. I adore that about you, but...

Jasper smiles. Then...

JASPER (CONT'D)

Come back west with me.

OSCAR

To be a train robber's assistant? That's illegal too, by the way. Besides, you know I can't do that. I have to go home. And start writing in earnest.

JASPER

I know you do. And there's this.

He produces a worn piece of paper from his pocket. It is the telegram from Oscar's fiancée.

Oscar pauses, looking into Jasper's eyes. Burning them into his memory.

OSCAR

But I don't...

JASPER

What? You don't love her?

OSCAR

No, I do not... I love you.

JASPER

So what, I'm to be your mistress, waiting backstage at the theatre until you can break free for a sordid moment of passion?

Oscar knows it's impossible. Knows there's no way out or in.

OSCAR

So this is it, then?

He takes a painful pause, and his eyes fill with tears.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Good bye, my Burbage.

Another long, painful pause..

OSCAR (CONT'D)

You're breaking my heart, you know.

JASPER

And you have healed mine.

They kiss one last time. Then, Oscar forces himself to pull away and walks toward the gangplank.

Jasper watches him, his eyes racked with hurt.

As Oscar arrives at the gangplank, reporters converge upon him. He looks back one last time, and...

Jasper is gone.

FADE OUT.

MONTAGE - NEWSPAPER HEADLINES

"Oscar Wilde's "The Importance of Being Ernest" a Huge Hit"

"Oscar Wilde finds success again in "An Ideal Husband""

"Wilde Seen About Town with Young Nobleman"

"Oscar Wilde convicted of Indecency, sentenced to Two Years Hard Labor"

"Released From Prison, Oscar Wilde Falls Ill in Paris"

FADE UP:

CHYRON: PARIS, NOVEMBER 30, 1900

INT. GARRET - NIGHT

A small, modest room. Some meager furniture. Hideous wallpaper. Lit by candle light.

Oscar is on his death bed. His breathing is coarse and labored.

A DOCTOR examines him.

A MAN, a few years younger than Oscar, stands back behind the doctor. This is ROBBIE ROSS, Oscar's oldest friend.

The doctor comes away from Oscar and goes over to Robbie. He shakes his head. Robbie knows what that means. And it breaks his heart.

The doctor leaves.

Oscar, his voice terribly weak, barely audible:

OSCAR

Robbie...

Robbie goes over to the bed, sits on it beside Oscar.

ROBBIE

What is it, dear?

Oscar gestures him closer, whispers something in his ear.

Robbie nods, gets up and goes over to a small desk. He pulls out a piece of folded paper, walks back over to Oscar and gives it to him.

Then, Robbie goes over and sits on a chair in the corner.

Oscar lifts the paper close to his face. It is the letter Jasper wrote him when he was in Reading Gaol.

With shaking hands, Oscar reads the letter by the candle light. He reads it, though he knows it by heart.

JASPER (V.O.)

Dearest Oscar, I read of your travails in a Cheyenne Newspaper. I have news, dear friend, and not of the good variety. My dastardly past has finally caught up with me. I have been tried and convicted and I fear I will hang tomorrow, unless someone appears with a Derringer stuffed chicken.

Oscar continues to read.

JASPER (V.O.)

On a happier note, I recently saw "The Importance of Being Earnest" in San Francisco. It was wonderful, Oscar. I laughed myself to tears. As I watched, I couldn't help but imagine what my life might have been like had I become your Burbage.

This brings a smile to Oscar's eyes.

JASPER (V.O.)

Oscar Wilde, I have never loved another since you. Neither man nor woman. As the great Dane said, "Man delights me not, no not woman neither."

Oscar weakly whispers the line along with him, as the tears begin to fall.

JASPER (V.O.)

Unfortunately, my love, when you read this letter I will be dead. But let's not dwell on that. I find myself thinking only of life, and that time we spent together.

(beat)

Oh, how we rang the bell, didn't we?

INT. TRAIN - DAY

Oscar watching Jasper ride off after he just robbed the train.

JASPER
The freedom of those days...

EXT. MOUNTAIN MEADOW - DAY

Oscar watching Jasper tame the wild Appaloosa.

JASPER (V.O.)
The wildness of it all...

INT. MINE - NIGHT

Oscar running his hand along the silver vein.

JASPER (V.O.)
The crazy, aching beauty...

EXT. HOLE-IN-THE-WALL - NIGHT

Jasper taking Oscar by the hand and leading him into the cabin.

JASPER (V.O.)
The unfettered love...

EXT. THE HOLE - NIGHT

Oscar and Jasper clutching each other as the storm howls above them.

JASPER (V.O.)
Most men will live a life time and
never feel a fraction of what we
felt in those few, fleeting days.

INT. GARRET - NIGHT

Oscar reading the end of the letter.

JASPER (V.O.)
I go happily to my death, imagining
your sweet kiss on my lips as I
draw my final breath.

Oscar kisses the letter, then clutches it to his heart.

He draws a couple more breaths. A final tear falls.

And with that, Oscar Wilde is dead.

Pull out from the room, to the neighborhood, to Paris, to the streets of the Pere Lachaise graveyard.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. RED ROCK CLIFFS - DAY

SLOW MOTION: Oscar and Jasper galloping their horses in the shallow stream at the base of those stunning cliffs.

POSTSCRIPT:

FADE IN:

Oscar Wilde did two years of labor for having a love affair with the son of a wealthy nobleman.

He was posthumously pardoned in 2019.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

He died penniless in Paris of complications from a prison injury.

His oldest friend, Robbie Ross, was by his side.

Oscar was buried at *Pere Lachaise* cemetery.

Go visit him. He positively adores the company.