

THE PICTURE OF JONATHON LASLOW

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FADE IN.

INT. STUDY - NIGHT

A plush, 1920's gentleman's study, crammed with exquisite examples of fine art.

JONATHAN LASLOW (mid 30's), dressed in a tailored suit, holds a phone receiver to his ear.

LASLOW
Yes Edward.

He listens to the voice at the other end.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
Of course.

He nods.

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

He replaces the receiver and reaches for a packet of cigarettes.

Next to it is a beautifully bound book, The Picture of Dorian Gray by Oscar Wilde.

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

He blows out a cloud of tobacco, watching it.

Then he turns, regarding a self portrait of himself on the far wall. The painting has been altered, made grotesque with specks of yellow mottling the skin, charcoal on the lips and touches of red about the eyes.

Laslow sits upright and places the cigarette into an ashtray.

He pulls on a pair of velvet gloves.

And reaches into an open draw, bringing out -

- a silver pistol.

- and a box of cartridges.

He studies the weapon, squinting down the sight. Then he loads the bullets into it.

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

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

A car engine roars outside.

Laslow glances out into the night.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

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

LASLOW
Edward.

EDWARD
Jonathan.

The host smiles.

LASLOW
Please.

He stands back and gestures behind him. Edward looks nervously over the man's shoulder.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
It's all right. I've given the servants the night off.

EDWARD
And Sarah?

LASLOW
My wife's tied up at the moment.

He smiles.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
Just you and me old friend.

Edward steps inside.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
Let's go to my study.

INT. STUDY - NIGHT

Laslow leads his companion inside.

LASLOW
Have a seat.

He indicates a chair.

His guest obliges and Laslow pours two drinks from a crystal decanter.

He hands one to his guest and takes his chair behind the desk.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
To old times.

He takes a sip of his drink.

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

Edward regards him with surprise.

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

His guest shakes his head.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
I do so miss our old talks. Did you know Wilde's Salome has opened at the Paradise Theater? The place has finally had electric lights fitted too. About time to. It is the nineteen twenties for goodness sake. We should go. Just like our old Cambridge days.

EDWARD
Jonathan, please!

He runs a hand through his hair.

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

Laslow arches an eyebrow.

LASLOW
Do I? (A beat) Ah yes, you did mention something, your factory wasn't it? Some little problem or other.

EDWARD
Not so little.

He takes a long drink.

EDWARD (CONT'D)
I need fresh capital. If I don't get it ...

He shrugs.

EDWARD (CONT'D)
... I'm finished.

Laslow sighs.

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

Edward eyes rise from his drink.

EDWARD
Yes.

Laslow nods.

LASLOW
And you've thrown it all away. I
heard about your gambling.

EDWARD
I thought I could win what I needed,
but I've only made it worse.

He clasps the drink between his hands.

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

LASLOW
But how?

Edward scowls.

EDWARD
You know how. I was hoping maybe (a
beat) twenty thousand.

LASLOW
That's a considerable amount of
money.

EDWARD
Your father's a lord Jonathan. You
could loan me that amount without
even noticing it.

LASLOW
Perhaps, for a friend.

He studies the other man for a moment.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
You are my friend aren't you old
chap?

EDWARD
Of course.

Laslow smiles.

LASLOW
Twenty thousand pounds. I think we
could arrange that.

Edward heaves a sigh of relief.

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

Laslow holds up a hand.

LASLOW
We can talk details later.

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

EDWARD
I remember that painting. The self
portrait you did at Cambridge.

Laslow picks the book up.

LASLOW
I got the idea from this.

He regards the book affectionately.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
A painting that records the sins
and crimes of an individual,
leaving the man himself untouched.
Fascinating idea.

EDWARD
(Looking at the painting) You've
altered it.

LASLOW
And will do so again.

Laslow stands.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
Now.

His hand touches his waistcoat pocket.

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

EDWARD
Really, of what nature?

LASLOW
It's perhaps best if I show you.

He waves towards the door.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
Shall we?

INT. WINE CELLAR - NIGHT

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

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

EDWARD
What is this?

He looks worried as he peers into the gloom.

Laslow appears at his shoulder.

LASLOW
My private wine cellar.

He lays a hand on Edward's shoulder, guiding him inside.

EDWARD
I don't like this.

LASLOW
Calm yourself dear fellow.

He picks up a bottle of champagne.

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

He caresses it.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
Later.

He replaces the bottle and pulls a cord hanging close by. Lights come on. The cellar is made of heavy stone brick and has a medieval feel to it. Rows of dust covered bottles line the walls.

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

- apart from one thing

- the hooded figure, bound to a chair by the far wall. The individual's identity isn't clear but the heavy work boots and canvas overalls suggest a laborer of some type.

Laslow closes the door behind them.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
After we deal with my little problem.

EDWARD
I don't understand.

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

EDWARD
Haven't you called the police?

LASLOW
The police?

His tone is incredulous.

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

Edward turns to go.

Laslow takes out a key and locks the door.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
This is something I must deal with myself. Or rather something we must deal with.

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

He places it into his companion's palm.

EDWARD
You can't be serious.

LASLOW
But I am.

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

Edward turns incredulous eyes on his friend.

EDWARD

No!

Laslow looks disapproving.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

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

Laslow waves towards the exit.

LASLOW

If you so wish.

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

He holds out a hand.

Laslow twirls the key in his gloved hand.

LASLOW (CONT'D)

You'll be ruined, you know that.

He sighs.

LASLOW (CONT'D)

A debt ridden bankrupt, a compulsive gambler who threw away his inheritance. No one would want to know you anymore.

Edward slams a fists against the door.

EDWARD

You're asking me to kill someone.

LASLOW

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

Edward turns.

EDWARD

Why me?

LASLOW

My dear fellow, who else should I trust?

He smiles, approaching the other man.

LALSOW

Do this for your own sake, and for that of our friendship.

He leads him back from the door and guides his arm towards the target once more.

LASLOW
Something you've cruelly neglected
in recent years.

Edward utters a whimper.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
Do it Edward.

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

LASLOW (CONT'D)
Do it!

Laslow slides snake like fingers over the trigger hand.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
You have no choice.

Edward's arm wavers - then - the pistol explodes.

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

LASLOW (CONT'D)
Again.

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

Laslow's hand tightens and a third shot explodes.

The body falls still.

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

LASLOW (CONT'D)
Excellent.

He slaps him on the back and walks over to the dead figure.

He places a hand to the hood.

EDWARD
I don't want to see.

LASLOW
I think you do.

He pulls the hood free, revealing a shock of long, blond hair.

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

Laslow grins. Edward looks on in horror.

EDWARD

No!

He bites his fist.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

Please God no!

LALSOW

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

Tears are forming in Edward's eyes.

LASLOW

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

He waves a hand, searching for the correct phrase.

LASLOW (CONT'D)

Cure me, I believe his phrase was.

He laughs.

LASLOW (CONT'D)

That's why I turned a blind eye to you two. I knew all about your secret trysts, those little letters to each other, trips away. In a way you were doing me a favour, keeping her out of my way. But I missed you old friend, missed our time together. I've always considered our friendship special.

His frowns.

LASLOW (CONT'D)

That's why it hurt so much when I learnt you were planning to elope together once you had my money.

EDWARD

How could you know?

LASLOW

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

He sighs.

LASLOW (CONT'D)
Very disappointed.

EDWARD
So what happens now?

LASLOW
Now?

CUT TO:

INT. STUDY - NIGHT

Edward, eyes red and cried out, looks down at the cheque on the table in front of him.

Laslow's in the middle of putting touches of red to his portrait's hands, giving the impression of blood running down them. He's in good spirits.

LASLOW
It will be like old times.

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

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

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

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

He places a hand on his friend's shoulder.

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

The hand squeezes the man's shoulder.

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

FADE OUT.