PLEASE BE AWARE THAT
THIS PLAY IS FULLY PROTECTED BY COPYRIGHT

All plays, books, music and other materials published by Heartland Plays, Inc. are fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America and all countries which the United States has reciprocal relations including, but not limited to all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, The Universal Copyright Convention and the Berne Convention. All rights to the plays and materials on our website are strictly reserved including, and without limitation, professional and amateur performance rights; motion pictures; public reading; radio and television broadcasting; audio and video recording and reproduction of any type known or yet to be invented; information storage and retrieval systems of any type known or yet to be invented; and the rights of translation into any and all languages. No individual or organization whether amateur or stock may perform this or any play published by Heartland Plays, Inc. without first obtaining advance permission from Heartland Plays, Inc. and paying the appropriate fees including Royalties and Single-Use Copyright fees. Heartland Plays, Inc. collects royalties on behalf of the Playwrights whose plays it publishes. Unauthorized copying, transcribing or reproduction of this or any play or excerpt, or storage or transmittal in any form and by any means whether known or yet to be invented, is strictly forbidden except as provided by Agreement with Heartland Plays, Inc. Any unauthorized use is a violation of copyright laws and will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

FIVE SIMPLE RULES TO REMEMBER

1. DO take advantage of the free online perusal of our plays to help you make the best choice for your particular needs or production.

2. DO enjoy the convenience of our online purchase application for performance rights and single-use copyright.

3. DO understand that this play and all plays and materials on our website are controlled by Heartland Plays, Inc. and fully protected by copyright.

4. DO NOT attempt in any way to copy, transcribe or reproduce this play by any means or perform this play or use any play or material from our website without first receiving permission from Heartland Plays, Inc. Any attempt to use this or any other work without first obtaining permission is a violation of copyright and punishable by law.

5. DO NOT rob this Author or any of the Authors we represent of their right to be paid for the use of their property. It is a crime and it is wrong!
Campion's Will

by

Fred J. Abbate

A Play in One Act

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED
REPRODUCTION WITHOUT SPECIFIC WRITTEN PERMISSION PROHIBITED

Performance Rights Available Exclusively through
Heartland Plays, Inc. at heartlandplays.com
playsnow@heartlandplays.com
customer service: 406-431-7680

Copyright © 2014 by Fred J. Abbate
Campion’s Will
by Fred J. Abbate

CHARACTERS
1F/3M

EDMUND; a man of about forty
THE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE; a man in his fifties
SARA; a housemaid, a girl of about eighteen
WILL; a young man of sixteen

SETTING
The year is 1581, the Library of Rufford Hall, the home of Sir Thomas Hesketh, Lancashire.

SOME HISTORICAL (AND IMAGINED) BACKGROUND TO THE PLAY

Saint Edmund Campion (1540-1581) was an academic superstar at Oxford, an intellectual who dazzled the Queen herself when she visited the university in 1564. After having serious doubts about the Church of England, he converted to Catholicism and ultimately joined the Jesuit order in 1573. He was among the first Jesuit priests sent to England on a secret mission in 1580 to minister to and support Catholics who were feeling mounting pressure from Elizabeth’s government to conform to the Anglican religion. Campion became the object of a widespread manhunt throughout the country, constantly on the move, often changing his identity, hiding with dozens of families sympathetic to or covertly practicing Catholicism, and saying Mass and hearing confessions in secret, frequently from midnight to six in the morning. Among his houses of refuge were several in the Lancashire area, including Rufford Hall, the home of Sir Thomas Hesketh.

Several Shakespeare scholars—Stephen Greenblatt most compellingly in his book Will in the World—have suggested the fascinating possibility that the young play-writing genius could have met Campion when the 16-year-old—perhaps a burgeoning closet Catholic himself—was earning a living as a performer and sometime-schoolmaster in the Lancashire region in 1581. Although the evidence is quite slim for the reality of this interesting encounter, Rufford Hall would seem a likely prospect if we let our imaginations work some modest overtime.

Campion was finally captured on July 17, 1581 at Lyford Grange near Oxford. After refusing to forsake his Catholicism, and after months of horrific torture, he and his fellow priests were hanged and drawn and quartered at Tyburn on December 1. At least one writer has argued for the possibility that Shakespeare could have been in the crowd that witnessed the brutal execution.

Pope Paul VI canonized Edmund Campion in 1970.
Campion’s Will
by Fred J. Abbate

SETTING: The year is 1581, the Library of Rufford Hall, the home of Sir Thomas Hesketh, Lancashire. Upstage and slightly to Stage Right is a large desk, a chair behind it allowing the occupant to face downstage. There is a chair on either side of the desk facing downstage as well. The main entrance to the room is downstage Left, but another smaller locked door is visible upstage Right. Several bookcases with many leather-bound volumes line the back wall, except that a shuttered window takes up most of the wall to the Left of the desk, its bottom about five feet from the floor. Under the window is a small sideboard. It is 6:00 PM on a weekday.

AT RISE: At curtain rise stage lights are dim. EDMUND is seen sitting at the desk illuminated only by a spot. He is wearing the plain clothes of a commoner, perhaps a domestic worker, staring ahead into space as the voice begins to be heard. THE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE slowly appears from Stage Right into the outer fringes of the illuminating spot. He stares at EDMUND who continues to stare ahead without noticing the intruder.

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE
How say you now to the charge of treason and to the charge of murder?

EDMUND’S VOICE
You ask how we plead, your Honor, to the charge of treason? To murder? Our plea, sir, is for sanity. You have indicted me and my fellow priests for conspiring to destroy allegiance to the Queen. And now you allege something so monstrous that its absurdity would be evident to any child. You say we are murderers simply because we minister to those of the Roman religion? You say that we have schemed to slaughter the Queen herself and that we aim to incite a rebellion in this land? Your Lordship, we are priests of the Jesuit order. We have
pledged our lives to our Creator—yes, the Creator of life, your Lordship, the Creator of us all. What you do here is itself a criminal act. Let me now demonstrate how foolish such travesty of justice would appear to a mind not clouded by prejudice and show the utter falsity….

The LORD CHIEF JUSTICE withdraws as the voice begins to trail off during the last sentence and becomes inaudible as the lights come up.

Lights up. EDMUND begins writing for a few minutes, struggling with his thoughts. There is a knock on the door.

EDMUND (Jumping up) Who is there?

EDMUND immediately hides what he is writing in the center desk drawer and comes forward to sit on the Left front corner of the desk.

SARA, Offstage

It is I, sir.

EDMUND

Sara?

EDMUND

Yes, sir.

EDMUND

You are unaccompanied?

SARA, Offstage

I am quite alone, sir.

EDMUND

(Goes to door and slides back the bolt) You may come in, Sara. Quickly, now.

There is the sound of a key turning in the lock. SARA opens the door and enters carrying a tray of tea and biscuits. EDMUND bolts the door behind her.
SARA
(Curtsying) Please excuse me, sir. The master has asked me to bring you some apple wine and biscuits. Will it be acceptable, sir?

EDMUND
That would be very pleasant, Sara. Thank you very much.

EDMUND walks back to desk, sits, retrieves the papers from the drawer and begins writing again.

SARA
(Placing tray on the sideboard under the window) The house is very noisy today, sir.

EDMUND
(Still writing) Yes. Many people about, so I've heard. Your master’s home has always been a very popular place for visitors, has it not?

SARA
(Turns to EDMUND) There are players and music makers here as well, sir. We have all been told there will be actors performing and songs this night. It is all very exciting.

EDMUND
I’m sure that will be very enjoyable for all in the house, Sara.

SARA
Of course, not all of our visitors are so welcome, sir.

EDMUND
(Looking up, interested) And who might those unwelcome guests be, Sara?

SARA
A number of days past—before you came here to us, sir—there were some fearful men who arrived. And certainly without the Master's invitation. From the Queen herself, they claimed. Very, very rude personages, if I might say so, sir. They frightened many of the servants.

EDMUND
Yes. Sir Thomas has informed me of their visit.

SARA
They tramped through every room breaking things, looking into the master’s documents and every drawer in his chamber. Even the pots in our kitchen were not spared their meddling.

EDMUND
I am sorry to hear that, Sara, yet I expect they will be back again. No doubt much sooner than we would like.
SARA
Oh, dear. I hope not, Father. If they come back….

EDMUND
Sara? Have you forgotten what we carefully agreed upon? You must be very, very cautious when you address me.

SARA
Forgive me, Father. No. Not Father. Forgive me, sir. *(Emphasizing the third word)* I pray to our Lord and Savior that those ugly men will never come again.

EDMUND
As do I. Remember, however, that should anyone inquire of you or of anyone in the household – if anyone asks about me – you must say what?

SARA
That you are a member of Sir Thomas’s body of workers, just as I am myself. You are a gardener.

EDMUND
Exactly. That is all you must say. Will you be sure to remember?

SARA
I will, Father. No, not Father. Sir. I mean to say sir. That is what I mean to say, Father. *(Shakes her head)* Sir.

EDMUND
You are a good girl, Sara. I have great trust in you. And I thank you for bringing the apple wine to me.

*SARA hesitates to leave.*

EDMUND
Is there some other thing you wanted to ask of me, Sara?

SARA
Well, I was about to ask…will there be…? I mean…tonight?

EDMUND
I cannot say yet, Sara. Someone will tell you where and at what time. Not, however, until much later today. Please be patient with me.

SARA
God be with you, sir.

EDMUND
And with you, Sara. As I am very certain he is.
SARA exits Left. The door closes and one hears the sound of the key locking it. EDMUND ignores the tray on the sideboard, and resumes what he has been writing. For a few short minutes he puts his head in his hands as if trying to find the right words.

Again, there is the sound of a key in the lock. WILL opens the door and enters. Notices EDMUND hastily putting the papers away.

WILL
I beg your pardon, sir. I was told that this chamber was not occupied.

EDMUND
(Standing, visibly distressed, realizing he has forgotten to bolt the door from the inside) Who are you? How do you come to have a key to this room?

WILL
I see, sir, that I have greatly disturbed your work. I shall return at a later hour. (Turns and starts to leave)

EDMUND
(Moving toward WILL) Hold, young man! Do not move a single step! (WILL stops and turns to him.) Attend carefully to me. I am asking who gives you leave to enter this room.

WILL
I am here with a company of players, sir.

EDMUND
And do all performers have keys to the rooms in this house? That most assuredly cannot be true.

WILL
No it is not, sir. When we are not acting our parts, I sometimes serve as the children’s tutor. (Displays the key) Sir Thomas has given me this key and several others as well. It is of no consequence, sir. As I said, I will leave. (Begins to leave again)

EDMUND
(Moving closer) Stop! Please stay exactly as you are! (WILL stops in his tracks) What is your name?

WILL
(Turns to face him) I am William, but I am called Will by most. (Turning and edging in a bit more) My purpose, sir, was simply to explore the volumes our good host has collected here.
EDMUND

I see. A scholarly Will.

WILL

No, sir. Simply a curious Will.

EDMUND

Then, Mr. Will-So-Curious. If you are to stay in this room, what you must now do is lock the door with your key and slide the bolt closed.

WILL

But I shall leave, sir, as I have said.

EDMUND

(Firmly) You must stay now that you are here. I would like to ask you a number of questions when I am finished with my work. Is that idea comprehensible to you? Now, please do as I have asked and fasten the door quickly and securely.

WILL hesitates for a moment, but goes to door and locks and bolts it.

WILL

It is done, sir.

HE turns to EDMUND as if not knowing what to do next.

EDMUND

Thank you, Will. Now, please stay here and while I work I ask you to become like the white clouds in God’s heaven.

WILL

How do I do so, sir?

EDMUND

By being seen yet making not the smallest noise. You may look and you may read, but you will be on your guard lest even your breathing disturb my work.

WILL

I will leave, as I have said. (Starts to leave again)

EDMUND

(Forcefully) And when you have, at length, expended your scholarly curiosity, I ask you to sit on this chair (Indicates chair beside desk Left) and answer some simple questions that I will ask you. Have we reached an arrangement, young scholar?
WILL
One of us certainly has, and I think it best to follow his management.

EDMUND
Excellent! There are biscuits and apple wine on the sideboard. You may enjoy them with the good wishes of Sir Thomas.

He extracts the papers from the desk drawer, sits again and begins to write. WILL stands, still looking over at EDMUND for a moment, then looks over at the tray and walks to it. He begins to pour some wine from the decanter but immediately stops, stares, remains immobile.

EDMUND
(Noticing WILL) Is there some difficulty?

WILL
Turning toward EDMUND) Excuse me, sir.

EDMUND
(Looking up to heaven) Is this, then, how clouds sound to an actor?

I was about to say that…

EDMUND
(Becoming more annoyed) Yes?

WILL
…that there is only one cup.

EDMUND
And why is this discovery of such astonishing importance?

WILL
There being only one cup, sir, there will be no cup left for you if I employ it. Do you follow my reasoning, sir?

EDMUND
Ah, that reasoning seems very sound, young man. Very sound.

WILL
Thank you, sir.
EDMUND
And now may I add to the logic of your argument?

WILL
As you wish, sir.

EDMUND
Might it not also follow that I do not care to have any drink! Do you capture the complex methods of my own reasoning?

WILL
Yes, sir. Forgive me, sir.

WILL continues to pour the wine. As he replaces the decanter it slips from his hand and hits the tray with a crashing sound. During this distracting sequence, EDMUND looks to the ceiling again in obvious frustration while tapping his fingers on the desk.

EDMUND
Is all quite arranged for drinking yet?

WILL
Yes, sir. I am so sorry, sir.

WILL begins to pace around the room sipping his drink peering at books and other items on the shelves. EDMUND, trying to write, is clearly distracted by WILL’s movements back and forth before the desk, and looks up at him several times as he wanders from shelf to shelf. After a few moments of this business, WILL pulls a volume from a shelf and begins to read. EDMUND goes back to his writing. WILL begins to move his lips as he reads and walks and soon starts humming a tune softly but noticeably as he continues.

EDMUND
(Looking to the ceiling) Youthful player, I know that I will not be forgiven the sin of stopping an eager mind its chance to acquire knowledge. Yet, please God, must you insist on bringing song to your examination of the text?
WILL

Song? Oh, the humming.

EDMUND

The humming.

WILL

It is an actor’s trick, sir. You see, if I set a tune to match the words, it becomes much easier to recall them when needed. For example, the first lines of Virgil’s great poem would go thus…

EDMUND

I understand! No example, please! Thank you. (Aside) Actors!

You do not like actors, sir?

WILL

(Trying to go back to his writing) I do not... dislike them.

EDMUND

(Writing while replying) Well, he thought them to be very like liars in some ways. And liars, he was convinced, can damage the just arrangement of the perfect city.

WILL

I do not agree with the famous gentlemen if that is indeed what he said.

EDMUND

That is your privilege, of course. I am sure the great philosopher would be quite distressed to know of your difference of opinion. (WILL nods.) Yet are you not, in truth, a liar?

WILL

No, sir. I certainly am not.

EDMUND

(Not looking up, still writing throughout the next exchange) Do you not often pretend to be someone else in your plays and pageants—someone who is not yourself?

WILL

Yes, however….

EDMUND

Is not pretending a kind of lying?
WILL
Yes, I suppose one might say…

EDMUND
So you are a liar and you can see why Plato thought you and your fellows to be dangerous impostors.

WILL
Yet, if I may say…

EDMUND
(Looks up) Were you about to speak?

WILL
(Stands silently holding his cup, trying to formulate a reply) Yet, people come to a play expecting the actors to lie. If everyone who hears a person who lies knows that he is going to lie then, of a certainty that is not genuine lying.

EDMUND
So it is not genuine lying, then? It is insincere falsehood?

WILL
(Obviously pleased with himself) Exactly so!

EDMUND
And is that not even more evil? God might easily forgive a simple lie, but what in heaven’s name must he think of an insincere one?

EDMUND returns to writing trying not to show his smile.

WILL sits on chair by the desk, puts cup at corner Left. Makes no sound for a moment or two, thinking about his next move.

WILL
A fortnight ago I played the part of a pious young nun helping the poor. Surely that was not an evil thing?

EDMUND pauses for a moment. WILL begins to shake his head.

EDMUND
Must I say it?
WILL
No. You need not, sir. Yes, yes, I lied about being a pious nun.

EDMUND
*(Puts pen down and again trying to hide his smile)* Shall we proceed now with the questions?

WILL
Those queries were not the questions, then?

EDMUND
No. We’ll make a true start now.

WILL
I am ready, sir. May I begin? What is it that you are writing?

EDMUND
The questions were to be *of* you, not *by* you.

WILL
I am very sorry, sir. Then, of course, you must begin.

EDMUND
*(Feeling a bit guilty now)* Since you have asked, however, the answer is that I have been struggling much of this day to write what I foolishly believed to be a significant tract.

WILL
Not going easily, sir? It is surely my fault, I fear. I should have left you alone with your thoughts. I can leave now, if that is permissible.

EDMUND
The problem is not of your making, young man. Let us say only that upon considered inspection my written thoughts appear to have the same significance as the ravings of an idiot.

WILL
Perhaps you shall improve on it, sir. I, too, have tried to write, often with exceedingly putrid effect.

EDMUND
Ah, I see. A writer as well as a scholar!

WILL
What is your writing about, sir?

EDMUND
Another question already?
WILL
I beg your pardon, sir.

EDMUND
I would like to answer, yet it is, I fear, much too involved to explain.

WILL
You mean to a mere actor.

EDMUND
(Smiling) To anyone, I am afraid. I have made the device much too intricate for any human mind. (Standing, coming around to front of desk; leaning against front edge) So, you are called Will, young master. Named for that very faculty which moves the intellect to action?

WILL
(Smiling) The very same, sir, but not named for it.

EDMUND
Ah, an important distinction, indeed! Tell me, where are you from?

WILL
I was born a little distance from here. Stratford-upon-Avon.

EDMUND
I know of it. You mentioned the great poet Virgil. Do you know Latin?

WILL
I do, sir.

EDMUND
And Greek?

WILL
Better than some might suppose.

EDMUND
And your writings? What varieties do they embrace?

WILL
Nothing very eminent, sir. Some poems, a few scraps of plays.

EDMUND
A schoolmaster, an actor, a poet, a maker of plays! So many things! You are also an Englishman, of course, presuming there is space left to be some other thing as well.

WILL
(Smiling broadly, getting the joke) Indeed, sir.
EDMUND
Tell me, Will, are you loyal to the Queen?

WILL
I have no reason to believe that she would be offended by me.

EDMUND
Think you, then, that not giving offense is alike to loyalty?

WILL
So long as the Queen does not desire more.

EDMUND
Yet I am told... (Quickly raising his hand to stop WILL) Silence, please! (No one speaks for a moment) Did you hear something? Quiet! There is someone at the door!

EDMUND moves quickly to the door putting his ear by it.

I did not hear...

EDMUND
(Shaking his head to WILL and in a stage whisper) Silence!

WILL stands and remains immobile as EDMUND listens at the door for a few more seconds then goes to the window carefully opening the interior shutter a little and peeking out.

(In a loud, slow whisper) Are they gone?

EDMUND comes back to desk, sits behind it and puts his writing back into the center drawer.

EDMUND
I believe so. Most plausibly it was nothing. One can never be completely certain of late.

Certain of what, sir?

EDMUND
There are some men who often create commotion about this house, as they do in all of England.
WILL
Those who spy on others and sell what they discover?

EDMUND
And what do you know of these matters, young scholar?

WILL
Do you fear such men?

EDMUND
That was not my question. Of what were we speaking a moment ago?

WILL
Why, sir, do you fear them?

EDMUND
Have I claimed to fear anyone?

WILL
I have heard stories regarding a faction of men who have secretly come to England, and that they seek to rebel against the Queen and all her ministers.

EDMUND
And just who are these men believed to be?

WILL
They are called Jesuits. Could these be among the men whom you fear?

EDMUND
And who has been telling you such things, Will?

WILL
One of my fellow players has heard that these Jesuits wear disguises to conceal themselves. Have you heard of them?

EDMUND
(Shaking his head with a smile) Tell your friend that such talk is outright nonsense!

WILL
They are not, then dangerous?

EDMUND
Actors appear to allow their imaginations to overpower God-given reason. Now, what were we speaking about, Will?

WILL
Hmm… I believe it was about our Queen, if I recall aright.
EDMUND
I am going to ask you another question. I want you to think carefully on it before you answer, Will. Do you grasp my meaning?

WILL
I shall endeavor to reply as honestly as I can to question of such consequence, sir.

EDMUND
(Stands, comes around to front of desk and leans against the Right corner) Very well. What do you know of the Pope?

WILL
I have never met the man, sir.

EDMUND
I did not expect that you were friends! My meaning was… Well, let me put the question to you with some difference. Suppose that you have met him. How might you judge him?

WILL
I do not think he would meet someone such as me.

EDMUND
Pretend you have met him, will you not? Surely an actor who pretends can do that.

WILL
But that would be a lie, sir. As the great Plato has written…

EDMUND
(Slightly annoyed) You will be forgiven this once. Kindly do as I ask!

WILL
(Stands and closes his eyes, putting his head down as if getting in character for a major role) The Pope appears displeased. His face is increasing in color to a crimson tint as we speak.

EDMUND
Yes?

WILL
He tells me he does not like the Queen.

EDMUND
And?

WILL
(Eyes still closed) And he tells me that the Queen is not partial to him as well.
EDMUND

And what do you say?

WILL

(Again eyes closed, thinking seriously) I tell him... I do not comprehend politics.

EDMUND

Politics? Politics? Do you not comprehend religion?

WILL

Is religion not simply politics by another name?

EDMUND

Is this not a contemptuous outlook for one so young?

WILL

Is it, sir? (Counting off on his fingers) We appear to see nothing but papists hating what the Queen commands. The Queen then hates what the papists claim. The Puritans hate everyone. And, now, we are all afraid of Jesuits. Is that not politics, sir?

EDMUND

Religion is assuredly about being decent and honorable, about pleasing God. That is not politics. Politics is about pleasing men, not God.

WILL

Religion may be, then, in need of great touch of remedy, I respectfully propose. Those in power not only insist upon loyalty, as you have said, but tell us that God himself is firmly in their ranks and only there.

EDMUND

Do not these plays and entertainments that you yourself perform often instruct and inspire men to be decent and honorable? Is this not a moral purpose alike to religion with no politics in place to confound it?

WILL

Well, I do not truly think that plays are intended to make men righteous. They are simply entertainments, sir. They are no more than that.

EDMUND

And they merely amuse? Nothing further?

WILL

We can show the weakness, the folly, the confusion, and the cruelty of men—yes, even their horror-struck fears at times. These are seldom angels to be admired.
EDMUND
Yet, surely, many times plays do inspire souls to virtue. I remember as a boy seeing wonderful depictions of stories in our churches. Stories of miracles, of salvation, of saints doing good for others. They showed a splendid religious intention.

WILL
Were not those plays meant for children alone?

EDMUND
Yes, but surely…

WILL
Under present circumstances, our plays must especially take heed lest they inspire our audience by offending it. Some among our most attentive spectators are watch dogs who report their reflections to their political superiors. Saints, yes, can be very pure, but actors must be very vigilant.

EDMUND
(Nodding) I understand your caution, to be sure. It is the dilemma in which all now live.

WILL
And in which the politics have become so entwisted with religion that, like seeing Janus, we do not know which face we now witness.

EDMUND
(Nods) We must pray for better days, Will, days when the schemes of political men will no longer determine how we are allowed to speak—how we are allowed to live and to worship our God.

Lights dim as LORD CHIEF JUSTICE enters slowly Right as spot on EDMUND comes up. EDMUND stares ahead.

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE
Before the examination of the accused shall commence, he will be given leave to present arguments in his own defense. Proceed.

EDMUND’S VOICE
I repeat to you, your Lordship, that we have been given no time to prepare for this so-called examination. I have been pulled from my cell only moments ago, the marks from the shackles still raw and the pain of the rack yet pulsing throughout my limbs. I have been denied my books and my writings and I have no proper way to arrange my replies to the charges made against me and my fellow priests. This is nothing more than a biased charade. Your conclusions have been drawn well before convening this pretense of debate. The Dean of Saint Paul's sits here, but I believe that Saint Paul himself would be in tears to see such disdain for the integrity, for the common decency which is being destroyed here ....
EDMUND’S VOICE trails off to inaudibility during the last sentence as LORD CHIEF JUSTICE withdraws.

Lights come back up as and spot dims on EDMUND.

WILL
(Thinking) Of course, often there are unforeseen inspirations in our listeners when we perform our plays.

EDMUND
Of what kind?

WILL
On occasion those in attendance can make sounds quite unpleasant. One wonders if those who hear us have carried their pigs along as companions.

EDMUND
(Laughing, shaking his head) How was your apple wine? Do you desire more?

WILL
It was very superior, sir, but I am finished. Is it my turn now? With questions, I mean. (Sits)

EDMUND
Go on, then.

WILL
Is it not time to ask your name?

EDMUND
Are names of such consequence to our conversation? Are they not mere marks that we use to distinguish one thing from another?

WILL
May I ask the question by another means, then, with your permission?

EDMUND
Indeed.

WILL
What are you called more often than not?

EDMUND
(Laughing again) Let us say that I am called Edmund.
WILL
Edmund. That, too, is what I shall call you then, with your agreement.

EDMUND
Of course. So we are agreed on one thing, Will. This seems like a significant forward step.

WILL
Are you a visitor here like so many others? Forgive me, was it your turn?

EDMUND
I can answer. I am serving our host as his gardener for a time.

WILL
I see.

EDMUND
(Looks up at WILL) Do you, young master? Your face gives me a very different account of what you claim to see.

WILL
I did not intend…

EDMUND
You may speak aloud about whatever puzzles you, Will.

WILL
(Hesitating) It is that I have not chanced upon many gardeners who can read, or who can be seen writing intricate tracts and who converse with such firmness about the opinions of Plato.

EDMUND
Have you met so many gardeners?

WILL
Many more than Queens and Popes.

EDMUND
Yet are the words we speak and what we see in gardens so diverse?

WILL
I confess I have missed their resemblance.

EDMUND
Think of it, Will. Just like words, do not some plants fill us with pleasure, others with the pain of thorns or fever? Are not some words used to console, some to poison and some to destroy?

WILL
Yes, however…. 
EDMUND
Does not the suitor present flowers to his loved one as a sign and symbol of his intentions—a meaning as precise and as fervent as any poetic word can relate?

WILL
They do, indeed. I had not…

EDMUND
And like all living things, both words and plants need careful tending—do they not?—lest they become weak and dead and fail to do what God or the speaker intends. Is that not true?

WILL
I had not so considered it, Edmund. Yet it surely…

EDMUND
And was not God Himself a gardener? Was not Eden a place where the most marvelous of plants grew?

WILL
Yet are we not told it was a garden despoiled by the greatest of sins?

EDMUND
Ah, yes. However, since you know your Latin, corruptio optimi pessima. (Smiles)

WILL
The best, when befouled, becomes the most wicked.

EDMUND
Forgive me. I do not mean to go on with so much talk. My colleagues frequently tell me to control my penchant for constant lecture.

WILL
Your colleagues. The other 'gardeners' who also declaim in Latin and speak of Plato, you mean.

EDMUND
Well, not colleagues, precisely….

WILL
And so the plants have taught you to read?

EDMUND
I intended only to draw an analogy.

WILL
It was most instructive. I shall certainly remember it.
EDMUND
It was simply empty chatter of no consequence. It is best forgotten.

WILL
Empty or nor, it was enlightening to grasp that one can learn to speak Latin by tilling the earth and perhaps to read Greek by spreading manure.

EDMUND
(Laughing again) I must say that never have I met an actor or even seasoned schoolmaster who can use his words so well. Your power with words is to God’s great glory, Will, whatever noises emanate from your audience.

WILL
Oh, things more substantial, too, emanate from them at times. We are always on guard to dodge them, God help us.

EDMUND
Yes, God help us. ...Do you believe in God?

WILL
Who does not, sir?

EDMUND
Oh, there are many who claim with fierce ardor that they do, indeed, so believe, but their actions demonstrate the emptiness of their belief.

WILL
You mean those who are the sinners.

EDMUND
Are we not all sinners, Will? Those who recognize that they have sinned do so because they know in their hearts that they have offended God. To speak oddly, their very sin is evidence of their belief.

WILL
And what do we say of those who do not recognize that they have offended God?

EDMUND
We must pity them, for they are both sinful and ignorant. (Walks downstage Right and turns toward WILL) Have you not ever played a sinner on your stage?

WILL
Oh, yes. Sinners make the most excellent of roles. Actors always fancy playing the greatest sinners rather than the holiest of saints.

EDMUND
Why is that?
Saints appear to be buried under the weight of virtue. It is too easy to lose interest in them. Sinners, on the contrary, show us how profoundly human they are with every utterance and with each action they embark upon.

EDMUND
Saints, you say, seem to be less than human?

WILL
They do not appear to make grave mistakes. Drama must have such mistakes, whether the play be comical or tragic.

EDMUND
And do your great sinners know they have sinned?

WILL
There is no strict rule in our plays, I reflect. Some recognize their sin and may even shed tears for it. That can be excellent theater.

EDMUND
And the others?

WILL
Others appear not to know they have sinned. Perhaps they even believe they have done some noble thing. Yet that, too, can sometimes be good drama.

EDMUND
Are not the most moving dramas those where good men suffer for their very righteousness? Consider the Christian martyrs. Saint Peter, Saint Sebastian. Even the Titan Prometheus, he who brought fire to mortals.

WILL
Do not kings and queens determine what is righteous and what is not, what is sinful and what is not?

EDMUND
Rulers might believe such treacherous falsehood, but they are powerfully, vulgarly misguided.

WILL
Except that their subjects appear not to be.

EDMUND
The consent of the slave will never justify his slavery.

Is the Queen a sinner?
EDMUND  
If she is human, she is a sinner.

WILL  
Is she aware of her sin?

EDMUND  
I am not able to say what your Queen thinks, Will. For now we speak only of plays and pageants.

WILL  
*(Rising)* My Queen? Is she not your Queen as well, sir?

EDMUND  
She is the Queen of many.

WILL  
Not yours, however?

EDMUND  
Yes, mine as well, in matters of state.

WILL  
Only in matters of state? Is not religion her chief matter of state?

EDMUND  
Perhaps she is confused in this.

WILL  
Those men sent to the rack and to the scaffold would give us strong evidence to the contrary.

EDMUND  
Let us say that she is not confused in her aims. Only in her reasons.

WILL  
But sinner she is nonetheless?

EDMUND  
Without doubt. 

*There is a knock on the door. EDMUND jumps up.*

EDMUND  
Who is there?
SARA, Offstage

It is Sara, sir. May I enter?

EDMUND

Are you alone, Sara?

SARA, Offstage

Yes, sir.

EDMUND swiftly runs to door, and slides the bolt open.

EDMUND

Come in, then. Quickly.

The key turns and SARA enters Left. WILL straightens his posture and looks at her with a broad smile.

SARA

(Eying WILL as she speaks) Forgive me, sir. The master inquires if you will join the family for supper.

EDMUND

Please thank Sir Thomas, Sara, but I cannot do so this night.

SARA comes over to the desk, crosses WILL, takes his cup and moves over to the sideboard. She picks up the tray and begins to walk to the door.

SARA

I shall so inform him, sir. (Turns to EDMUND but looks at WILL) I hope the drink was satisfactory, sir.

EDMUND

(Glancing over at WILL) I have it on very good evidence that it was most agreeable. (Walks back to corner of desk)

WILL

(Stands, clears his throat and runs toward her) Please allow me to carry this for you, my Lady.

WILL tries to take the tray from her, but SARA resists. They struggle for a moment.
EDMUND
Leave Sara to her duties, Will.

WILL whispers to SARA; she smiles but does not release the tray.

EDMUND
Please let the girl be!

WILL
I seek to help the child only. Surely, helping our neighbor is the Christian behavior we are urged to perform. Is that not so?

EDMUND
Only when one’s motives are pure. Even a blind beggar would clearly see your intentions.

WILL
(Releases the tray) Do you like plays, Sara? I am an actor. (Bows dramatically) Tonight we perform a splendid story of love and passion. I would be most pleased if….

EDMUND
(Sternly) You may leave us, Sara!

SARA
(Curtsies, turns and begins to exit Left) Thank you, Father… Thank you, sir.

Just before going through the door, SARA turns and smiles at WILL, turns again and leaves. The key is heard turning in the lock from outside. Immediately there is a crash of the tray and its contents outside the door.

WILL
(Sits, this time at Right of desk) Perhaps the timbre of your voice has agitated her presence of mind.

EDMUND
(Walking back to the doors, bolts it, then back to desk) I urge you to concentrate on your own mind’s presence, my young friend. I have heard all about how actors behave and it is not the most enriching of stories. Plato is beginning to seem ever more perceptive by the moment.

WILL
But I was merely…
EDMUND
Yes, I know. Christians helping others, indeed! Now, of what thing were we speaking?
*(Leans against the left side front of the desk)*

WILL
*(Shrugs)* My recollection is that we were speaking once more of the Queen. We seem unable
to avoid her company. Yet we have agreed that she is a sinner.

EDMUND
Yes.

WILL
Yet she may not know that she has offended God?

EDMUND
That is possible, but it is for God and the Queen to judge.

WILL
Is the Pope also a sinner, Edmund?

EDMUND
He would, I am sure, admit it without question.

WILL
Does he know that he is one?

EDMUND
Of course. The Pope is a man of God. Even saints know they are sinners.

WILL
Saints, too? I confess my perplexity here. Are they not saints for the very reason that they are
not sinners?

EDMUND
Human beings will always be weak, Will, no matter what their station in the eyes of God.
That is why you should not think so scornfully that saints trade their humanity for virtue.
They often struggle with temptation, as do all of us. God sees us and understands our struggle.

WILL
God, we are told, sees every one of our sins, does he not?

EDMUND
Every one of them. Even those sins hidden in our hearts, sheathed in the metal of our
thoughts.

WILL
God, then, looks down from the place where he sits and witnesses everything we do.
EDMUND
Is that not in large part what it means to be God?

WILL
God, then, is very like one enjoying an exceptional play whose plot turns and curls and bends in so many directions.

EDMUND
That is unlikely. God is not merely an onlooker to his creation. He sustains it and tries to guide it.

WILL
(Stands, walks downstage Left a bit, considering) Possibly our sins are as interesting to the Godhead as they are to us, especially when the sinner is aware of his sin.

EDMUND
Sin, Will, offends God. His wish is for us to avoid committing it.

WILL
Perchance what we call an offense against God might not truly offend him. Can it not be that it is simply his fascination with our sinning? Might he not perhaps absorb it in the way that an audience takes pleasure in our plays when they hit their mark?

EDMUND
(Raising his voice) These thoughts are very near blasphemy, Will. Rid yourself of them at once. God does not take delight in our sinning, only in our victory over sin.

WILL
I mean not to disrespect the Deity, but does not the Bible say that we are all spectacles unto God?

EDMUND
Yes, those are the words of Saint Paul—in Corinthians, I believe. How come you to know such verses?

WILL
It is a much loved sentence by actors. Think on it, Edmund. It is as if we are—all of us—acting our parts for the Creator. Surely God should find such things of peculiar interest.

EDMUND
Saint Paul is not speaking of plays and performances, my young theologian. He is telling us that our strong faith shows the glory and goodness of God. That is the only role God wants for us. Unlike actors we make our own character and are free to play a different role than the one we deem we are assigned.

WILL
Do not our actions ever astonish the Deity?
EDMUND
No. God is not surprised by anything we do.

WILL
He would make, then, a very unsatisfactory audience of plays.

EDMUND
That may be. Yet he would certainly not generate ugly noises or hurl harmful objects at the players, you can be sure.

WILL
(Laughs) He would have the gratitude of my company companions for this.

EDMUND
(Smiles) I’m sure he would be grateful for your approval. (Rises, walks downstage Right and turns toward WILL shaking his head) Where has one so young acquired such ideas?

WILL
Where gardeners, perhaps, have learned the finely wrought themes of theology and Greek philosophy. Not, I expect, from kneeling so long in the muck of estates.

EDMUND
(Laughing) I speak not as gardener, but as any sinner—one who awakens daily to the certainty of his sinfulness.

WILL
(Sits) That seems quite a cheerless daybreak to face each morn.

EDMUND
Oh, not in the smallest sum, Will. Sins, we know, are forgiven. The darkness of our sins is made right again with the clear light of absolution. That is the Good News that Christ has sent us.

WILL
By his torture and death?

Lights dim as LORD CHIEF JUSTICE enters and the spot on EDMUND comes on. EDMUND closes his eyes, hands by his side.

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE
It is the judgment of this, Her Majesty's Privy Council, that you and those accused with you are guilty and merit the penalty of death. Is there any reason why you should not be so condemned?
EDMUND’S VOICE
You ask, your Lordship, if there is any reason why the sentence of death should not be given
to us. You ask it now that we have been condemned on evidence given by those who have
betrayed both God and man, those who have nothing left to swear by—neither their religion
nor their honesty. What we say to you is this: if our religion has made us traitors to England,
then we are worthy to be condemned. Yet, otherwise, we are as good subjects as ever the
Queen has had. By condemning us you condemn your own ancestors—priests, bishops and
kings—all that was once the glory of England, the island of saints, the most devoted child of
the See of Peter. What have we taught that they did not teach? You have no answer. There
can be no answer to that question. Yet you give it the name of treason! To be condemned with
these lights—not of England only, but of the world—by their degenerate descendants is both
gladness and a glory to us. We know what this judgment will be seen by… (VOICE trails off)

Lights slowly up as LORD CHIEF
JUSTICE withdraws and spot on
EDMUND dims.

EDMUND
(Turning to WILL) Yes, by his torture and death. That is what has saved us. And his rising
again. Do you believe that?

WILL
I was taught so as a child.

EDMUND
That is not what I asked. Can you answer?

WILL
I make such beliefs known to very few in these uncertain times.

EDMUND
A wise young man, indeed.

WILL
Wise, perhaps, but assuredly watchful. I honor the saints who have entered heaven as
martyrs, Edmund, but I am not eager to join their holy number. (Pauses, looking directly at
Edmund) Are you not afraid of death?

EDMUND
A martyr is rarely eager to die, Will. What martyrs are eager to do is live by their faith, to
live unimpaired in the union they seek with their God.

WILL
That is not what I asked, Edmund. Can you now answer?

EDMUND
(Smiling faintly) No, I am not eager to die.
WILL
I once inquired of my teachers why death was the only gateway to our eternal happiness. Could not God have arranged things in a less fear-provoking manner?

EDMUND
And how did your tutors reply?

WILL
With anger and several swings of the rod.

EDMUND
(Faint smile) Think you, then, that death is something to be feared?

WILL
Yet you yourself proclaim that you are not eager to die.

EDMUND
You are too young, Will, to understand that there are many things more terrifying than death.

WILL
Is it not also an end, Edmund? Surely you shall not be able to garden so favorably when you are dead.

EDMUND
We must pray, Will, and ask for strength, for help to meet death bravely. It is only an end to one kind of life.

WILL
And the pain of it? The rack and torture that I spoke of earlier?

EDMUND
God will take notice of our pain...and our fears of it.

WILL
Say, then, that you are afraid of the pain, will you not? Say it to me now.

EDMUND
Why is my answer of such interest to you? No man can answer such a question truly until the pain has become actual to him.

WILL
You do not agree as I have said, then, that we are spectacles for God?

EDMUND
Not in the way you have meant it. I do not agree. I cannot. We were not created for God’s entertainment, Will, but to seek and capture a heavenly reward.
WILL
Perhaps even poor players who are fooled by gardeners?

EDMUND
Fooled? What do you mean by that word?

WILL
And yet…. (Stops himself from continuing)

EDMUND
You were about to speak?

WILL
Does not one of us fool the other?

EDMUND
What are you saying?

WILL
Do you not endeavor to fool me even as you ask what I am saying?

EDMUND
And how have I fooled you?

WILL
Did you not swear to me that you are a gardener?

EDMUND
That is what I have told you.

WILL
And yet you say that you do not deceive me?

EDMUND
I have tried to tell you the truth, Will.

WILL
Since when do gardeners stay behind locked doors, alarmed by those who make a sound or dare to knock?

EDMUND
There are things that…

WILL
That girl knows who you are, does she not? She was about to address you as…
EDMUND
I have been working in Sir Thomas’s gardens this very morning.

WILL
Yes, I am sure that is true. And the remainder of your time?

EDMUND
It is best that our questions end for today.

WILL
Have the answers become suddenly perilous, then?

EDMUND
More than you can be aware, my young friend.

WILL
So you are not always gardening, then, Edmund?

EDMUND
That is all you need to know, Will. It has now come time to speak of other things.

WILL
You shall tell me no more?

EDMUND
What I have told you is all that I can relate to you now.

A clock chimes seven times loudly offstage. WILL stands for a moment trying to decide if the point is worth pursuing. He then begins to move Left as he fumbles for his key.

WILL
I am off to prepare for our comedy tonight, Edmund.

EDMUND
(Stands, comes over close to WILL) You must tell no one that we have spoken or even that you have seen me. This I urge above all. Say to me that you understand this, Will, and promise to abide by my desire.

WILL
I shall not betray you, Edmund. Do not be troubled.

EDMUND
I talk not of my betrayal. There are those who will accomplish such treachery soon enough, I am very sure. I speak now only of your own safety. Attend to me, Will!
WILL
Be at ease, Edmund. I shall lie like the very finest of actors.

EDMUND
I do not ask you to lie! Indeed, you must not lie, for those who question you will turn your lies back upon you. You could pay with your very life as the price. They are masters of such demonic arts.

WILL
(Orating) All who hear me shall be convinced that the gardener of Rufford Hall does not exist! Of course, it is quite possible that truly he does not exist, be that as it may.

EDMUND
Do not tell lies, Will. Simply say nothing of our encounter.

WILL
And if these masters of trickery you have named inquire about you?

EDMUND
Then say, truthfully, that you have, indeed, met a man who claimed he was the gardener of Rufford Hall.

WILL
In the library? Writing tracts too complex to comprehend?

EDMUND
Perhaps, then...say not in the library.

WILL
(Taking EDMUND’s hand) It is my sincere promise and I swear it on my oath.

EDMUND
(Puts his hand on WILL’s shoulder) There can be grave danger for you, my new friend. We are not playing parts on a stage here. You must realize that so much as knowing me can be very dangerous for you! They have tortured men for much less.

WILL
(Now visibly becoming concerned) Yet what of you? You say nothing of the peril you face? If you are discovered what suffering awaits you?

EDMUND
That is not of consequence. You must do as I ask. Mark all that I say, Will.

WILL
It has become of consequence to me, Edmund.
EDMUND
I have willingly chosen that peril, Will. And what comes with it. You have not.

WILL
What peril? Tell me more of the danger you face, Edmund. Perhaps I know of some men who can help shield you. I want to….

This is Not the End of the Play
Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Fred J. Abbate holds a Ph.D. in Philosophy from Columbia University, a Master’s degree from Boston College, and an A.B. from Fairfield University. He has taught on the Philosophy faculties of Rutgers University, Iona College, and the New York City University system and has been teaching philosophy at the Pennoni Honors College of Drexel University for the past several years, including classes on the Philosophy of Shakespeare. He was given the first ever Award for Outstanding Teaching by the Honors College in 2010.

He has published two books on philosophy--The Philosphic Impulse and Preface to the Philosophy of the State-- as well as numerous articles and monographs on politics and law, leadership theory, educational policy, and organizational decision-making; he also lectures, conducts seminars and consults widely in these areas. His play, The Idea of Edison, was produced by New Jersey Public Television, and he wrote, directed, and performed in Keeping Time, the official play of the New Jersey State House Bicentennial Celebration. His mystery novel, A Perfectly Logical Murder, was published in 2006 and he is the co-author of Journey to a High-Achieving School, published in 2013.