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The Valiant

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

BY HOLWORTHY HALL AND
ROBERT MIDDLEMASS

ADAPTED BY LEE WILSON

CHARACTERS

WARDEN HOLT, *ABOUT 60*
FATHER DALY, *THE PRISON CHAPLAIN*
JAMES DYKE, *THE PRISONER*
JOSEPHINE PARIS, *THE GIRL, ABOUT 18*
WILSON, *A JAILER*

SCENE – *THE WARDEN'S OFFICE IN THE STATE'S PRISON AT WETHERSFIELD,
CONNECTICUT.*

TIME – *ABOUT HALF-PAST ELEVEN ON A RAINY NIGHT.*

We hear the start of a letter in darkness. "Dear Warden Holt, my name is Marjorie Atkinson and I am writing in great interest of your prisoner, James Dyke." The letter continues as we hear another letter start; "Dear Warden Holt" etc. Several voices and letters start and overlap in a crescendo as the lights slowly rise on the stage. As the lights get to full and the letters are almost at an uncomfortable volume; we hear a large thunder clap that cuts off the letters immediately. The thunderclap has an eerie resemblance to the sound of the gallows. A light rain is heard fading up.

The WARDEN's office in the State's Prison at Wethersfield, Connecticut. It is a large, cold, unfriendly room, with bare floors and staring, whitewashed walls; it is furnished only with the WARDEN's flat-topped desk, and swivel chair, with a few straight-backed chairs, one beside the desk and others against the walls, with a water-cooler and an eight-day clock. On the WARDEN's desk are a telephone instrument, a row of electric push buttons, and a bundle of forty or fifty letters. At the back of the room are two large windows, crossed with heavy bars; at the left there is a door to an anteroom, and at the right there are two doors, of which the more distant leads to the office of the deputy warden, and the nearer is seldom used. This seldom used door will be used tonight.

WARDEN HOLT, dressed in a dark-brown sack suit, with a negligee shirt and black string tie, carelessly knotted in a bow, is seated at his desk, reflectively smoking a long, thin cigar. He is verging toward sixty, and his responsibilities have printed themselves in italics upon his countenance. His bearing indicates that he is accustomed to rank as a despot, and yet his expression is far from that of an unreasoning tyrant. He is no sentimentalist, but he believes that in each of us there is a constant oscillation of good and evil; and that all evil should be justly punished in this world, and that all good should be generously rewarded – in the next.

Behind the WARDEN, the prison chaplain stands at one of the barred windows, gazing steadily out into the night. FATHER DALY is a slender, white-haired priest of somewhat more than middle age; he is dressed in slightly shabby clericals. His face is calm, intellectual, and inspiring; but just at this moment, it gives evidence of a peculiar depression.

The WARDEN blows a cloud of smoke to the ceiling, inspects the cigar critically, drums on the desk, and finally peers over his shoulder at the chaplain. He clears his throat and speaks brusquely.

THE WARDEN: Has it started to rain?

FATHER DALY: (answers without turning) Yes. It has.

THE WARDEN: (impatiently tossing his cigar aside) It would rain tonight.

FATHER DALY: It's past eleven o'clock. (Breath) We haven't much longer to wait.

THE WARDEN: No, thank God! (*Moves towards water cooler for a drink; with the glass halfway to his lips he pauses*) Was he quiet when you left him?

FATHER DALY: Yes...yes, he was perfectly calm. I believe he'll stay that way to the very end.

THE WARDEN: (*moves back to his seat and lights another cigar*) Well, you've got to hand it to him, father; I never saw such nerve in all my life. It isn't a bluff, and it isn't a trance, either, like some of 'em have – its plain nerve.

FATHER DALY: That's the pity of it – that a man with all this courage hasn't a better use for it. Even now, it's very difficult for me to reconcile his character, as I see it, with what we know he's done.

THE WARDEN: He's got my goat, all right.

FATHER DALY: Yes, and he's got mine, too.

THE WARDEN: When he sent for you tonight, I was hoping he was finally going to talk.

FATHER DALY: He did talk, very freely.

THE WARDEN: What about?

FATHER DALY: Most everything.

THE WARDEN: Himself?

FATHER DALY: No. That seems to be the only subject he isn't interested in.

THE WARDEN: He still won't give you any hint about who he really is?

FATHER DALY: Nope. He doesn't intend to, either. He intends to die as a man of mystery to us. Sometimes I wonder if he isn't just as much of a mystery to himself.

THE WARDEN: Oh, he's trying to shield somebody, that's all. James Dyke is not his real name – we know that; and we know all the rest of his story is a fake, too. But, what's his motive? I'll tell you where it is. It's to keep his family and his friends, wherever they are, from knowing what's happened to him. Lots of 'em have the same idea, but I never knew one to carry it as far as this, before. You've certainly got to hand it to him. All we know is that we've got a man under sentence; and we don't know who he is, or where he comes from, or anything else about him, any more than we did four months ago.

FATHER DALY: It takes moral courage for a man to shut himself away from his family and his friends like that. They would have comforted him.

THE WARDEN: Not necessarily. What time is it?

FATHER DALY: Half-past eleven.

THE WARDEN: (*walks over to peer out one of the barred windows*) Well, it's official, I'm finally getting to old for this sort of thing. A necktie party didn't use to bother me so much; but every time one comes along nowadays, I've got the blue devils beforehand and afterward. I think I've just about had it.

FATHER DALY: It certainly isn't a pleasant responsibility. Even with the worst of them.

THE WARDEN: But what gets me is why I should hate this one more than any of the others. The boy is guilty as hell.

FATHER DALY: Yes, he killed a man. Wilfully. Deliberately. With malice.

THE WARDEN: And he pleaded guilty. He deserves just what he's going to get.

FATHER DALY: That is the law. Has it ever occurred to you, Warden, that every now and then when a criminal behaves in a rather gentlemanly fashion to us, we instinctively think of him as just a little less of a criminal?

THE WARDEN: Yes, it has. This front of his bothers the hell out of me. Jesus! Sorry, Father. He pleaded guilty all right, but he doesn't act guilty. I feel as if tonight I was going to do something every bit as criminal as he did. I am always certain in these circumstances. For the first time I am not. And when I am not certain, it is time for my resignation.

FATHER DALY: His attitude has been very remarkable. He reminds me of a Christian martyr being carried to his death, and yet –

THE WARDEN: He's no martyr.

FATHER DALY: I know it. And he's anything in the world but a Christian. That was exactly what I was going to say.

THE WARDEN: Has he any religious streak in him at all?

FATHER DALY: I'm afraid not. He listens to me very attentively, but – It's only because I offer him companionship. Anybody else would do quite as well – and any other topic would suit him better.

THE WARDEN: Well, if he wants to face God as a heathen, we can't force him to change his mind.

FATHER DALY: No, but we can never give up trying to save his immortal soul. And his soul tonight seems as dark and foreboding to me as a haunted house would seem to the small boys down in Wethersfield. But I haven't given up hope.

THE WARDEN: No – you wouldn't.

FATHER DALY: Are you going to talk with him again yourself?

THE WARDEN: (*opens up his desk drawer and brings out a large envelope*) I'll have to. I've still got these Liberty bonds that belong to him. Funny thing – when the newspaper syndicate offered him twenty-five hundred for his autobiography, he jumped at it so quick I was sure he wanted the money for something or other. But now the bonds are here, waiting for him, he won't say what to do with 'em. Know why? Why, of course you do! Because the story he wrote was pure bunk from start to finish and the only reason he jumped at the chance of writing it was so's he could pull the wool over everybody's head a little further. He didn't want the bonds, but I've got to do something with 'em. (*Pushes a button on the desk*) And besides, I want to make one more try at finding out who he is.

FATHER DALY: Shall I go with you to see him, or do you want to see him alone?

THE WARDEN: Father, you gave me a thought – I am going to do something that I have never done before. I am going to bring that boy in here with you and me until the time comes for us all to walk through that door to the execution room.

FATHER DALY: What's the point of that?

THE WARDEN: Because maybe if he sits here awhile with just you and me, and we go at him right, he'll loosen up and tell us about himself. It'll be different from being in his cell; it'll be sort of free and easy, and maybe he'll weaken. And then, besides, if we take him to the scaffold through this passageway, maybe I can keep the others quiet. If they don't know when the job's being done, they may behave themselves. I don't want any such yelling and screeching tonight as we had with that Greek. (*WILSON, A JAILER enters from the deputy's room and stands waiting*) Wilson, I want you to get Dyke and bring him to me here. Just do what I say, please.

WILSON: Yes, sir. (*Goes to leave*)

THE WARDEN: Oh, Wilson!

WILSON: Yes, sir? They'll be all set in ten or fifteen minutes, sir. Twenty minutes max.

THE WARDEN: Now, I don't want any hitch or delay in this thing tonight. Understand?

WILSON: There won't be any, sir.

THE WARDEN: When everything's ready – not a second before – you let me know.

WILSON: Yes, sir.

THE WARDEN: I'll be right here with Dyke and Father Daly.

WILSON: Here?

THE WARDEN: Yes. Here.

WILSON: Yes, sir.

THE WARDEN: When everything and everybody is ready, you come from the execution room through the passage – (*he gestures toward the nearer door on the right*) open that door quietly and stand there.

WILSON: Yes, sir.

THE WARDEN: You don't have to say anything, and I don't want you to say anything. Just stand there. That all clear?

WILSON: Yes, sir.

THE WARDEN: That'll be the signal for us to start-understand?

WILSON: Yes, sir.

THE WARDEN: All right. Now bring Dyke to me.

WILSON: Yes, sir.

FATHER DALY: What about the witnesses and the reporters?

THE WARDEN: They're having their sandwiches and coffee now – the deputy'll have 'em seated in another ten or fifteen minutes. Let 'em wait. I'd like to poison the lot of 'em. Reporters! Witnesses! (*The telephone bell rings*) Hello-yes-yes-what's that? -Yes, yes, right here-who wants him? Father, it's the Governor!

FATHER DALY: What! Why is he - Is it about Dyke?

THE WARDEN: Sshh. Yes, this is Warden Holt speaking. Hello-oh, hello, Governor Fuller, how are you? Oh, I'm, well this isn't my idea of a picnic exactly-yes-yes-Oh, I should say in about half an hour or so-everything's just about ready. Oh, no, there won't be any slip-up - yes, we made the regular tests, one this afternoon and another at nine o'clock tonight - Oh, no, Governor, nothing can go wrong - Well, according to the law I've got to get it done as soon as possible after midnight, but you're the Governor of the state - How long? - Certainly, Governor, I can hold it off as long as you want me to - A Girl! You're going to send her to me? - You *have* sent her! - She should be here anytime. All right, Governor, I'll ring you up when it's over. Good-bye. *(He hangs up the receiver, mops his forehead with his handkerchief, and turns to FATHER DALY)*

Did you get that? Some girl thinks Dyke's her long-lost brother, and she's persuaded the old man to let her come out here to-night - he wants me to hold up the job until she's had a chance to see him. She's due here any minute, he says - in his own car - escorted by his own private secretary! Can you beat it?

FATHER DALY: Poor girl!

THE WARDEN: For a minute there I thought it was going to be a reprieve at the very least.

FATHER DALY: So did I.

The door from the deputy's room is opened, and DYKE comes in, followed immediately by WILSON the JAILER. DYKE halts just inside the door and waits passively to be told what to do next. He has a lean, pale face, good eyes, and a strong chin; his mouth is ruled in a firm straight line. His wavy hair is prematurely grey. His figure has the elasticity of youth, but he might pass among strangers either as a man of forty, or as a man of twenty-five, depending upon the mobility of his features at a given moment. He is dressed in a dark shirt open at the throat, dark trousers without belt or suspenders, and soft slippers. WILSON receives a nod from the WARDEN, and goes out promptly, closing the door behind him.

THE WARDEN: *(swings half-way around in his swivel-chair)*. Sit down, Dyke.

DYKE: Thanks.

THE WARDEN: Dyke, you've been here under my charge for nearly four months, and I want to tell you that from the first to last you've behaved yourself like a true gentleman.

DYKE: Why should I make you any trouble?

THE WARDEN: Well, you haven't made me any trouble, and I've tried to show what I think about it. I've made you every bit as comfortable as the law would let me.

DYKE: You've been very kind to me. (*He glances over his shoulder at the chaplain*)
And you, too, Father.

THE WARDEN: I've had you brought in here to stay from now on. No, you won't have to go back to your cell again. You're to stay right here with Father Daly and me.

DYKE: All right.

THE WARDEN: You don't seem to understand that I'm doing something a long way out of the ordinary for you.

DYKE: Oh, yes, I do, but maybe *you* don't understand why it doesn't give me much of a thrill.

FATHER DALY: My son, the Warden is only trying to do you one more kindness.

DYKE: I know he is, Father, but the Warden isn't taking very much of a gamble. From now on, one place is about the same as another.

THE WARDEN: What do you mean?

DYKE: (*faintly sarcastic*). Why, I mean that I'm just as much a condemned prisoner here as when I was in my cell? That door leads right *back* to my cell. Outside those windows are armed guards every few feet. You yourself can't get through the iron door in that anteroom (*he indicates the door to the left*) until somebody on the outside unlocks it; and I know as well as you do where *that* door leads to.

THE WARDEN: (*stiffly*). Would you rather wait in your cell?

DYKE: Oh, no, this is a little pleasanter. Except –

THE WARDEN: Except what?

DYKE: In my cell, I could smoke.

THE WARDEN: What do you want – cigar or cigarette?

DYKE: A cigarette if it's all the same.

The WARDEN opens a drawer of his desk, takes out a box of cigarettes, removes one and hands it to DYKE. The WARDEN striking a match, lights DYKE's cigarette, and then carefully puts out the match.

DYKE: Thanks. You're a good host.

THE WARDEN: Dyke, before it's too late I wish you'd think over what Father Daly and I've said to you so many times.

DYKE: I've thought of nothing else.

THE WARDEN: Then – as man to man – and this is your last chance – who are you?

DYKE: (*inspecting his cigarette*). Who am I? James Dyke – a murderer.

THE WARDEN: That isn't your real name, and we know it.

DYKE: You're not going to execute a name – you're going to execute a *man*. What difference does it make whether you call me Dyke or something else?

THE WARDEN: You had another name once. What was it?

DYKE: If I had, I've forgotten it.

FATHER DALY: Your mind is made up then, my son?

DYKE: Yes, Father, it is.

THE WARDEN: Dyke.

DYKE: Yes, sir?

THE WARDEN: (*fingers them*). Every one of these letters is about the same thing and all put together we've got maybe four thousand of 'em. These here are just a few samples.

DYKE: What about them?

THE WARDEN: We've had letters from every State in the Union and every province in Canada. We've had fifteen or twenty from England, four or five from France, two from Australia and one from Russia.

DYKE: Well?

THE WARDEN: Do you know what every one of those letters says – what four thousand different people are writing to me about?

DYKE: No, sir.

THE WARDEN: (*speaks slowly and impressively*). Who *are* you – and are you the missing son – or brother – or husband – or sweetheart?

DYKE: (*flicks his cigarette ashes to the floor*). Have you answered them?

THE WARDEN: No, I couldn't. I want you to.

DYKE: How's that?

THE WARDEN: I want you to tell me who you are. Can't you see you *ought* to do it?

DYKE: No, sir, I can't exactly see that. Suppose you explain it to me.

THE WARDEN: (*suddenly*). You're trying to shield somebody aren't you?

DYKE: No. I'm not.

THE WARDEN: Who is it? Your family?

DYKE: I said I'm not.

THE WARDEN: Dyke, just listen to me a minute. Don't be narrow; look at this thing in a big, broad way. Suppose you should tell me your real name, and I publish it, it'll bring an awful lot of sorrow, let's say, to *one* family, *one* home, and that's your own. That's probably what you're thinking about. Am I right? You want to spare your family and I don't blame you. On the surface, it sure would look like a mighty white thing for you to do. But look at it *this* way: suppose you came out with the truth, flat-footed, why, you might put all that sorrow into *one* home – your own – but at the same time you'd be putting an immense amount of relief in four thousand others. Don't you get that? Don't you figure you owe something to all these people?

DYKE: Not a thing.

FATHER DALY: My boy, the Warden is absolutely right. You do owe something to the other people – you owe them peace of mind – and for the sake of all those thousands of poor, distressed women, who imagine God knows what, I beg of you to tell us who you are.

DYKE: Father, I simply can't do it.

FATHER DALY: Think carefully, my boy, think very carefully. We're not asking out of idle curiosity.

DYKE: I know that, but please don't let's talk about it any more. (*To the WARDEN*) You can answer those letters whenever you want to, and you can say I'm not the man they're looking for. That'll be the truth, too. Because I haven't any mother – or father – or sister – or wife – or sweetheart. That's fair enough, isn't it?

FATHER DALY: As you will, my son.

THE WARDEN: Dyke, there's one more thing.

DYKE: Yes?

THE WARDEN: Here are the Liberty Bonds that belong to you. Twenty-five hundred dollars in real money.

DYKE: (*removes the bonds and examines them*) Good-looking, aren't they?

THE WARDEN: What do you want me to do with them?

DYKE: Well, I can't very well take them with me, so, under the circumstances, I'd like to put them where they'll do the most good.

THE WARDEN: Who do you want me to send 'em to?

DYKE: Now, Warden Holt, you didn't think you were going to catch me that way, did you?

THE WARDEN: Who'll I send 'em to? I can't keep 'em here, and I can't destroy 'em. What do you want to do with 'em?

DYKE: (*tosses envelopes on desk*) I don't know. I'll think of something to do with them. I'll tell you in just a minute. Is there anything else?

THE WARDEN: Not unless you want to make some sort of statement.

DYKE: No, I guess I've said everything. I killed a man and I'm not sorry for it – that is, I'm not sorry I killed that particular person. I –

FATHER DALY: (*raises his hand*) Repentance –

DYKE: (*raises his own hand in turn*). I've heard that repentance, Father, is the sick bed of the soul – and mine is very well and flourishing. The man deserved to be killed; he wasn't fit to live. It was my duty to kill him, and I did it. I'd never struck a man in anger in all my life, but when I knew what that fellow had done, I knew I had to kill him, and I did it deliberately and intentionally – and carefully. I knew what I was doing, and I haven't any excuse – that is, I haven't any excuse that satisfies the law. Now, I learned pretty early in life that whatever you do in this world you have to pay for in one way or another. If you kill a man, the price you must pay is this (*he makes a gesture that sweeps the entire room*) and that (*he points to the nearer door on the right*) and I'm going to pay it. That's all there is to that. And an hour from now, while my body is lying in there, if a couple of angel policemen grab my soul and haul it up before God –

FATHER DALY: My boy, my boy, please –

DYKE: I beg your pardon, Father. I don't mean to trample on anything that's sacred to you, but what I do mean to say is this; If I've got to be judged by God almighty for the crime of murder, I'm not afraid, because the other fellow will certainly be there, too, won't he? And when God hears the whole story and both sides of it, which *you* never heard and never will – and they never heard in the court room, either – why, then, if he's any kind of a God at all, I'm willing to take my chances with the other fellow. That's how concerned I am about the hereafter. And, if it'll make you feel any better, Father, why I *do* rather think there's going to be a hereafter. I read a book once that said a milligram of musk will give out perfume for seven thousand years, and a milligram of radium will give out light for *seventy* thousand. Why shouldn't a soul – mine, for instance – live more than twenty-seven? But if there *isn't* any hereafter – if we just die and are dead and that's all – why, I'm still not sorry and I'm not afraid, because I'm quits with the other fellow – the law is quits with me, and it's balanced on the books. And that's all there is to that.

WILSON enters from the anteroom

WILSON: Visitor to see you, sir. With note from Governor Fuller. (*Presents the note*)

THE WARDEN: Oh! A young woman?

WILSON: Yes, sir.

THE WARDEN: Is Mrs. Case there?

WILSON: Yes, sir.

THE WARDEN: Have the girl searched, and then take her into the anteroom and wait till I call you.

WILSON: Yes, sir. (*Exits*)

THE WARDEN: Dyke, a young woman has just come to see you – do you want to see her?

DYKE: I don't think so. What does she want?

THE WARDEN: She thinks maybe she's your sister, and she's come a thousand miles to find out.

DYKE: She's wrong. I haven't any sister.

THE WARDEN: Will I tell her that, or do you want to tell it to her yourself?

DYKE: Oh, you tell her.

THE WARDEN: All right. (*Starts to rise*)

DYKE: Just a second – she's come a thousand miles to see me, did you say?

THE WARDEN: Yes, and she's got special permission from the Governor to talk to you – that is, with my O.K.

DYKE: A year ago, nobody'd have crossed the street to look at me, and now they come a thousand miles!

FATHER DALY: This is one of your debts to humanity, my boy. It wouldn't take you two minutes to see her, and, if you don't, after she's made that long journey in hope and dread and suffering –

DYKE: Where can I talk with her – here?

THE WARDEN: Yes.

DYKE: Alone? Why, you don't need to be afraid. I haven't the faintest idea who the girl is, but if she happens to be some poor misguided sentimental fool, with a gun or a pocket full of potassium cyanide, she's wasting her time. I wouldn't cheat the sovereign state of Connecticut for anything in the world – not even to please a young lady.

THE WARDEN: Dyke, there's something about you that gets everybody.

DYKE: How about the jury?

THE WARDEN: You've got a sort of way with you –

DYKE: How about that spread-eagle district attorney?

THE WARDEN: I'm going to let you talk with that girl in here – alone.

DYKE: Thanks.

THE WARDEN: It's a sort of thing that's never been done before, but if I put you on your honour –

DYKE: My Honour! Thank you, so much.

FATHER DALY: Warden, are you sure it's wise?

DYKE: Father, I'm disappointed in you. Do you imagine I'd do anything that could reflect on Warden Holt – or you – or the young lady – or *me*?

THE WARDEN: Father, will you take Dyke into the deputy's room? I want to speak to the young lady first.

FATHER DALY: Certainly. Come, my boy. (*FATHER and DYKE start to leave*)

THE WARDEN: I'll call you in just a couple of minutes.

DYKE: We promise not to run away. (*They leave*)

THE WARDEN: Wilson! (*WILSON enters from the left*)

WILSON: Yes, sir.

THE WARDEN: Is the girl there?

WILSON: Yes, sir.

THE WARDEN: Frisked?

WILSON: Yes, sir.

THE WARDEN: Everything all right?

WILSON: Yes, sir.

THE WARDEN: (*throws away his cigar*) Bring her in.

WILSON: Yes, sir. (*He speaks through the door at the left*) Step this way, Miss. This here's the Warden.

A young girl appears on the threshold, and casts about in mingled curiosity and apprehension. She is fresh and wholesome, and very pretty; but her manner betrays a certain spiritual aloofness from the ultra-modern world – a certain delicate reticence of the flesh – which immediately separates her from the metropolitan class. Indeed, she is dressed far too simply for a metropolitan girl of her age; she wears a blue tailored suit with deep white cuffs and a starched white sailor-collar, and a small blue hat which fits snugly over her fluffy hair. Her costume is not quite conservative enough to be literally old-fashioned, but it hints at the taste and repression of an old-fashioned home. She is neither timid nor aggressive; she is self-unconscious. She looks at the WARDEN squarely, but not in boldness, and yet not in feminine appeal; she has rather the fearlessness of a girl who has lost none of her illusions about men in general. Her expression is essentially serious; it conveys, however, the idea that her seriousness is due to her present mission, and that ordinarily she takes an active joy in the mere pleasure of existence.

THE WARDEN: (*he had expected a very different type of visitor, so that he is somewhat taken aback*) All right, Wilson.

WILSON: Yes, sir. (*Leaves*)

THE WARDEN: Will you sit down?

THE GIRL: Why – thank you very much. (*Sits in same chair as DYKE did*)

THE WARDEN: (*he is palpably affected by her youth and innocence, and he is not quite sure how best to proceed, but eventually he makes an awkward beginning*) You've had an interview with the Governor, I understand?

THE GIRL: Yes, sir. I was with him almost an hour.

THE WARDEN: And you want to see Dyke, do you?

THE GIRL: Yes, sir. I hope I'm not – too late.

THE WARDEN: No, you're not too late. (*Appraising her carefully*) But I want to ask you a few questions beforehand. (*Her reaction of uncertainty induces him to soften his tone*) There isn't anything to get upset about. I just want to make it easier for you, not harder. Where do you live?

THE GIRL: In Ohio.

THE WARDEN: What place?

THE GIRL: In Pennington, sir. It's a little town not far from Columbus.

THE WARDEN: And you live out there with your father and mother?

THE GIRL: No, sir – just my mother and I. My father died when I was a little baby.

THE WARDEN: Why didn't your mother come here herself, instead of sending you?

THE GIRL: She couldn't. She's sick.

THE WARDEN: I see. Have you any brothers and sisters?

THE GIRL: Just one brother, sir – this one. He and I were the only children. We were very fond of each other.

THE WARDEN: He was considerably older than you?

THE GIRL: Oh, yes. He's ten years older.

THE WARDEN: Why did he leave home?

THE GIRL: I don't really know, sir, except he just wanted to be in the city. Pennington's pretty small.

THE WARDEN: How long is it since you've seen him?

THE GIRL: It's eight years.

THE WARDEN: As long as that? Hm! And how old are you now?

THE GIRL: I'm eighteen.

THE WARDEN: Eighteen. Hm! And are you sure after all this time you'd recognize your brother if you saw him?

THE GIRL: Well – Of course I think so, but maybe I couldn't. You see, I was only a little girl when he went away – he wasn't a bad boy, sir, I don't think he could ever be really bad – but if this *is* my brother, why he's been in a great deal of trouble and you know that trouble makes people look different.

THE WARDEN: Yes, it does. But what makes you think this man Dyke may be your brother – and why didn't you think of it sooner? The case has been in the papers for the last six months.

THE GIRL: Why, it wasn't until last Tuesday that Mother saw a piece in the *Journal* – that's the Columbus paper – that he'd written all about himself, and there was one little part of it that sounded so like Joe – like the funny way he used to say things – and then there was a picture that looked the least little *bit* like him – well, Mother just wanted me to come East and find out for sure.

THE WARDEN: It's too bad she couldn't come herself. She'd probably know him whether he'd changed or not.

THE GIRL: Yes, sir. But I'll do the best I can.

THE WARDEN: When was the last time you heard from him, and where was he, and what was he doing?

THE GIRL: Why, it's about five or six years since we had a letter from Joe. He was in Seattle, Washington.

THE WARDEN: What doing?

THE GIRL: I don't remember. At home, though, he worked in the stationery store. He liked books.

THE WARDEN: Huh. Why do you suppose he didn't write home?

THE GIRL: I - couldn't say. He was just – thoughtless.

THE WARDEN: Was he in trouble of any kind?

THE GIRL: Oh, *no!* Never. That is – unless he's – here now.

THE WARDEN: (*Deliberates*) How are you going to tell him?

THE GIRL: I don't know what you mean.

THE WARDEN: Why, you say maybe you wouldn't know him even if you saw him – and I'll guarantee this man Dyke won't help you out very much. How do you think you're going to tell? Suppose he don't want to be recognized by you or anybody else? Suppose he's so ashamed of himself he –

THE GIRL: I'd thought of that. I'm just going to talk to him – ask him questions – about things he and I used to do together – I'll watch his face, and if he's my brother, I'm sure I can tell.

THE WARDEN: (*With tolerant doubt*) What did you and your brother ever used to do that would help you out now?

THE GIRL: He used to play games with me when I was a little girl, and tell me stories – that's what I'm counting on mostly – the stories.

THE WARDEN: I'm afraid –

THE GIRL: Especially Shakespeare stories.

THE WARDEN: Shakespeare!

THE GIRL: Why, yes. He used to get the plots of the plays – all the Shakespeare plays – out of a book by a man named Lamb, and then he'd tell me the stories in his own words. It was wonderful!

THE WARDEN: I'm certainly afraid he –

THE GIRL: But best of all he'd learn some of the speeches from the plays themselves. He liked to do it – he was sure he was going to be an actor or something – he was in all the high school plays, always. And then he'd teach some of the speeches to me, and we'd say them to each other. And one thing – every night he'd sit side of my bed, and when I got sleepy there were two speeches we'd always say to each other, like good night – two speeches out of *Romeo and Juliet*, and then I'd go to sleep. I can see it all. (*The WARDEN shakes his head*) Why do you do that?

THE WARDEN: This boy isn't your brother.

THE GIRL: Do you think he isn't?

THE WARDEN: I *know* he isn't

THE GIRL: How do you?

THE WARDEN: This boy never heard of Shakespeare – much less learned him. (*He presses a button on his desk*) Oh, I'll let you see him for yourself, only you might as well be prepared. (*WILSON enters from the anteroom*) Tell Dyke and Father Daly to come in here – they're in the deputy's room.

WILSON: Yes, sir. (*He crosses behind the WARDEN, and goes off to the right.*)

THE WARDEN: If he turns out to be your brother – which he won't – you can have, say, an hour with him. If he don't, you'll oblige me by cutting it as short as you can.

THE GIRL: You see, I've got to tell Mother something perfectly definite. She's worried so long about him, and – *now* the suspense is perfectly terrible for her.

THE WARDEN: I can understand that. You're a plucky girl.

THE GIRL: Of course, it would be awful for us if this *is* Joe, but even that would be better for Mother than just to stay awake nights, and wonder and wonder, and never *know* what became of him.

WILSON opens the door of the Deputy's room, and when DYKE and FATHER DALY have come in, he crosses again behind the WARDEN, and is going out at the left when the WARDEN signs to him and he stops.

THE WARDEN: (*gets to his feet*) Dyke, this is the young lady that's come all the way from Pennington, Ohio, to see you.

DYKE: (*who has been talking in an undertone to FATHER DALY, raises his head quickly*) Yes, sir?

THE WARDEN: I've decided you can talk with her here – alone. (*THE GIRL has risen, breathless, and stands fixed; DYKE inspects her coldly from head to foot.*)

DYKE: Thank you. It won't take long.

THE WARDEN: (*has been scanning the girl's expression; now, as he sees that she has neither recognized DYKE nor failed to recognize him, he makes a little grimace in confirmation of his own judgment*). Father Daly and I'll stay in the deputy's office. We'll leave the door open. Wilson, you stand in the anteroom with the door open.

DYKE: My honour!

THE WARDEN: What say?

DYKE: I didn't say anything.

THE WARDEN: (*to the GIRL*) Will you please remember what I told you about the time?

THE GIRL: Oh, yes, sir.

THE WARDEN: Come, Father.

They go off into the deputy's room, and WILSON, at a nod from the WARDEN, goes off at the left. DYKE and the GIRL are now facing each other; DYKE is well poised and insouciant and gives the impression of complete indifference to the moment. The GIRL, on the other hand, is deeply agitated and her agitation is gradually increased by DYKE's own attitude.

THE GIRL: *(after several efforts to speak)* Mother sent me to see you.

DYKE: *(politely callous)* Yes?

THE GIRL: *(compelled to drop her eyes)* You see, we haven't seen or heard of my brother Joe for ever so long, and mother thought – after what we read in the papers –

DYKE: That I might be your brother Joe?

THE GIRL: *(obviously relieved)* Yes, that's all.

DYKE: Well, you can easily see that I'm not your brother, can't you?

THE GIRL: *(stares at him again)* I'm not sure. You look a little like him, just as the picture in the paper did, but then again, it's so long – *(she shakes her head dubiously)* and I'd thought of Joe so differently –

DYKE: *(his manner is somewhat indulgent, as though to a child)* As a matter of fact, I couldn't be *your* brother, or anybody else's brother, because I never had a sister. So that rather settles it.

THE GIRL: Honestly?

DYKE: Honestly.

THE GIRL: *(unconvinced, becomes more appealing)* What's your real name?

DYKE: Dyke – James Dyke.

THE GIRL: That's sure enough your name?

DYKE: Sure enough. You don't think I'd tell a lie at this stage of the game, do you?

THE GIRL: No, I don't believe you would. Where do you come from – I mean where were you born?

DYKE: In Canada, but I've lived all over.

THE GIRL: Didn't you ever live in Ohio?

DYKE: No. Never.

THE GIRL: What kind of work did you do – what was your business?

DYKE: Oh, I'm sort of Jack-of-all-trades. I've been everything a man *could* be – except a success.

THE GIRL: Do you like books?

DYKE: Books?

THE GIRL: Yes – books to read.

DYKE: I don't read when there's anything better to do. I've read a lot here.

THE GIRL: Did you ever sell books – for a living, I mean?

DYKE: No.

THE GIRL: (*growing confused*) I hope you don't mind my asking so many questions. But I –

DYKE: No – go ahead, if it'll relieve your mind any.

THE GIRL: You went to school somewhere, of course – high school?

DYKE: No, I never got that far.

THE GIRL: Did you ever want to be an actor? Or *were* you ever?

DYKE: No, just a convict.

THE GIRL: (*helplessly*) Do you know any poetry?

DYKE: Not to speak of.

THE GIRL: (*delays a moment, and then, watching him very earnestly, she recites just above her breath*)

Thou knowst the mask of night is on my face
Else would a maiden blush bepaint my cheek
For that which –

Realizing that DYKE'S expression is one of utter vacuity she falters, and breaks off the quotation, but she continues to watch him unwaveringly

Don't you know what that is?

DYKE: No, but to tell you the truth, it sounds sort of silly to *me*. Doesn't it to you?

THE GIRL: (*her intonation has become slightly forlorn, but she gathers courage, and puts him to one more test*)

Good night, good night, parting is such sweet sorrow
That I shall say good night till it be morrow.

DYKE: (*his mouth twitches in amusement*) Eh?

THE GIRL: What comes next?

DYKE: Good Lord, *I* don't know.

THE GIRL: (*gazes intently, almost imploringly, at him as though she is making a struggle to read his mind. Then she relaxes and holds out her hand*) Good-bye. You – you're not Joe, are you? I – had to come and find out, though. I hope I've not made you too unhappy.

DYKE: (*ignores her hand*) You're not going now?

THE GIRL: (*spiritless*) Yes. I promised the – is he the Warden? That man in there? – I said I'd go right away if you weren't my brother. And you aren't, so –

DYKE: You're going back to your mother?

THE GIRL: Yes.

DYKE: I'm surprised that she sent a girl like you on a sorry errand like this, instead of –

THE GIRL: She's very sick

DYKE: Oh, that's too bad.

THE GIRL: (*twisting her handkerchief*) No, she's not well at all. And most of it's from worrying about Joe.

DYKE: Still, when you tell her that her son isn't a murderer – at least, that he isn't *this* one – that'll comfort her a good deal, won't it?

THE GIRL: (*reluctantly*) Yes, I think maybe it will, only –

DYKE: Only what?

THE GIRL: I don't think Mother'll ever be *really* well again until she finds out for certain where Joe is and what's become of him.

DYKE: (*compassionately*) Mothers ought not to be treated like that. I wish I'd treated *mine* better. By the way, you didn't tell me what your name is.

THE GIRL: Josephine Paris.

DYKE: Paris? Paris. Huh, that's an unusual name. I've heard it somewhere, too.

THE GIRL: Just like the name of the city – in France.

DYKE: (*knitting his brows*) Paris. Wait. Ha, and your brother's name was Joseph?

THE GIRL: Yes – they used to call us Joe and Josie – that's funny; isn't it?

DYKE: (*thoughtfully*) No, I don't think it's so very funny. I rather like it. (*He puts his hand to his forehead as if trying to coerce his memory*)

THE GIRL: What's the matter?

DYKE: Paris...Joseph Paris...Wait a minute. Joseph Anthony Paris. Not Joseph *Anthony* Paris.

THE GIRL: (*amazed*) Why, yes. That's his name! That's Joe! How did you ever -

DYKE: I can't believe it. Now listen carefully to what I say, and don't interrupt me, because we've only got a minute, and I want you to get this all straight, so you can tell your mother. I don't believe it. When the war came along, I enlisted and I was overseas for four years – with the Canadians. Early one morning we'd staged a big trench raid, and there was an officer who'd been wounded coming back and was lying out there in a shell-hole under fire. The Jerries were getting ready for a raid of their own, so they were putting down a box barrage with light guns and howitzers and a few heavies. This officer was lying right in the middle of it. Well, all of a sudden, a young fellow dashed out of a trench not far from where I was, and went for that officer. He had to go through a curtain of shells and, more than that, they opened on him with rifles and machine guns. The chances were just about a million to one against him, and he must have known it, but he went out just the same. He got the officer in his arms and started back, but he'd only gone a few yards when a five point nine landed right on top of the two of them. Afterward, we got what was left – the identification tag was still there – and *that* was the *name* – I will never forget that man or that *name*. I can still see the tag as clear as anything. Joseph Anthony Paris!

THE GIRL: Oh!

DYKE: If that was your brother's name – I can't believe it – I mean the odds...well, then you can tell your mother that he died like a brave man and a soldier...three years ago. In France.

THE GIRL: Joe – my brother Joe – is dead?

DYKE: On the field of battle. I'm sorry. It was one of the wonderful, heroic things that went almost unnoticed, as so many of them did. If an officer had seen it, there'd have been a decoration for your mother to keep and remember him by.

THE GIRL: And you were there – and saw it?

DYKE: I was there and saw it. It was three years ago. That's why you and your mother haven't heard from him. And if you don't believe what I've said, why, you just write up to Ottawa and get the official record. The records may not have all the details but at least they can tell you what battalion he fought with, when he went overseas. Only you mustn't be surprised no matter whether they say he was killed in action, or died of wounds, or is missing, or even went through the whole war with his outfit, and was honourably discharged. They really don't know what happened to half the men. But I've told you the truth. And it certainly ought to make your mother happy when she knows that her boy died as a soldier. And *not* as a criminal.

THE GIRL: Yes. Yes it will.

DYKE: And does it make you happy, too?

THE GIRL: Very happy – after we were both afraid of – I can hardly wait to tell her.

DYKE: (*struck by a sudden inspiration*) I want to give you something else to take to her. (*He picks up from the desk the envelope containing the Liberty Bonds and seals it*) I want you to give this to your mother from me. Tell her it's from a man who was at Vimy Ridge and saw your brother die, so it's sort of a memorial for him. (*He touches her arm as she absently begins to tear open the envelope*) No, don't you open it – let her do it.

THE GIRL: What is it? Can't I know?

DYKE: Never mind now, but give it to her. It's all I've got in the world and it's too late now for me to do anything else with it. And have your mother buy a little gold star to wear for her son – and you get one, too, and wear it – here- (*he touches his heart*) Will you?

THE GIRL: Yes – I will. And yet somehow I'll almost feel that I'm wearing it for you, too.

DYKE: Oh no! You mustn't ever do that. I'm not fit to be mentioned in the same breath with a boy like your brother...and now I'm afraid it *is* time for you to go. I'm sorry, but – you'd better. I'm glad you came before it was too late, though.

THE GIRL: (*gives him her hand*) Good-bye, and thank you. You've done more for me – and Mother – than I could possibly tell you. And – and I'm so sorry for you – so *truly* sorry – I wish I could only do something to make you a tiny bit happier, too. Is there anything I can do?

DYKE: (*stares at her and by degrees he becomes wistful*) Why – yes, there is. Only I –

THE GIRL: What is it?

DYKE: No, I never should have let myself think of it.

THE GIRL: Please tell me. I want you to. For – for Joe's sake, tell me what I can do.

DYKE: (*his voice is low and desolate*) Well – in all the months I've been in this hideous place, you're the first girl I've seen. I didn't ever expect to see one again. I'd forgotten how much like angel's women look. I've been terribly lonesome tonight, especially, and if you really do want to do something for me – for your brothers sake – you see, you're going to leave me in just a minute and – and I haven't any sister of my own, or anybody else, to say good-bye to me – so, if you could – *really* say good-bye –

She gazes at him for a moment, understands, flushes, and then slowly moves into his outstretched arms. He holds her close to him, touches his lips to her forehead twice, and releases her.

DYKE: (*thickly*) Good-bye, my dear.

THE GIRL: Good night. (*She endeavours to smile, but her voice catches in her throat*) Good-bye.

DYKE: What is it?

THE GIRL: (*shakes her head*) N-nothing.

DYKE: Nothing?

THE GIRL: (*clutches her handkerchief tight in her palm*) I was thinking – I was thinking what I used to say to my brother – for good night. (*Breaking down*) If I only could have – have said it to him just once more – for good-bye.

DYKE: What was it?

THE GIRL: I – I told it to you once, and you said it was silly.

DYKE: (*softly*) Say it again.

THE GIRL: (*she cannot quite control her voice*)

Good night, good night, parting is such sweet sorrow
That I shall say good night till it be morrow.

She goes uncertainly toward the anteroom, hesitates, almost turns back, and then with a choking sob she hurries through the door and closes it behind her. For several seconds DYKE stands rigidly intent upon that door; until at length, without changing his attitude or his expression, he speaks very tenderly and reminiscently...

DYKE:

Sleep dwell upon thine eyes, peace in thy breast;
Would I were sleep and peace, so sweet to rest.

The WARDEN and FATHER DALY come in quietly from the Deputy's room. It is time. WILSON follows them and DYKE slowly walks over just in front of the WARDEN and FATHER DALY. DYKE turns around so that his back is to them. Wilson starts to prepare

him for the gallows attaching a body and foot restraint. While this is happening DYKE starts to speak:

Of all the wonders that I yet have heard,
It seems to me most strange that men should fear;
Seeing that death, a necessary end,
Will come when it will come.

The WARDEN and CO. look at each other perplexed.

Cowards Die many times before their death;
The valiant never taste of death but once.

WILSON hesitates and then places a small cotton bag over his head (Like a flour bag.) The breathing becomes heavier in the bag as evident by the vacuum-like motion of the bag.

The WARDEN nods to the others to confirm it is time to move.

THE WARDEN: *(swallows hard)* Dyke.

FATHER DALY: *(brushes past the Warden and lifts his hand as though in benediction)*
My son!

DYKE: All right, let's go. *(With his head high and proud, and with breathing that has slowed and calmed; they leave)*

Light on the stage slowly begins to fade as we hear offstage the following dialogue.

FATHER DALY: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills--"

DYKE: "The valiant never taste of death but once."

FATHER DALY: "From whence cometh my help."

DYKE: "The valiant never taste of death but once."

FATHER DALY: "My help cometh from the Lord which made Heaven and earth."

DYKE: "The valiant never taste of death - but once."

There is a pause of about 5 seconds before we hear a huge thud of the gallows. Any remaining light on stage goes to black instantly when gallows heard. In black we hear a rope swinging for several seconds.

THE END

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