

# Leo Irving

## Act II

### First Scene

*Two weeks or so later.  
Dr. Givings and Leo,  
in the operating theater.*

**LEO.** And then she left, very abruptly, for Italy.

**DR. GIVINGS.** I see.

**LEO.** It was a terrible shock.

I had been studying in Florence for the year. They are exacting masters over there – the line must be just so – the proportion just so – there is no freedom – you sharpen your pencil with a knife, as Leonardo sharpened his pencil. It was heaven. Not to have freedom. No freedom in art, but in life, life! The peaches there tasted like peaches, the rain like rain. I met the woman in question in Florence. A very beautiful woman. (I know. No one ever said: I fell in love with a woman in Italy – a very ugly woman.) But she *was* beautiful. Perhaps not classically, but nevermind... We met at the Uffizi. She was looking at the sculptures with no embarrassment, no embarrassment at all. I painted her face all summer. When she kissed she kissed with her whole body, not like American women who kiss only with their lips.

**DR. GIVINGS.** Mm.

**LEO.** You are perhaps shocked, doctor, that I kissed her before marriage. I am a devotee of nature and I wished to avoid the fate of my boyhood friend. On his wedding night he was repulsed by his wife's body. He said, when she disrobed for the first time, he saw something

LEO. (*cont.*) monstrous. What, what? I asked. She had body hair, he said, down there! Like a beast! You see, he had seen the female form only in marble statues – no body hair! You are a scientist, that must amuse you.

DR. GIVINGS. What men do not observe because their intellect prevents them from seeing would fill many books.

LEO. Indeed.

DR. GIVINGS. What happened to your friend?

LEO. He is now a very famous art critic. His marriage went unconsummated for three years and was then annulled. I did not wish such a fate for myself, and so, while lips were willing and free and soft, I kissed them. Oh yes, I kissed them.

She did not come from a good family and her English was not very good but I did not care. Her soul lept out of her eyes. When I painted her I felt I could paint souls. Her soul hovered, just here, and I could see it. (*He gestures to a place about two inches from the eyes.*) So when I painted I painted two inches away from the eyes, not the eyes themselves – it was a revelation! – I digress.

*Mrs. Givings enters the other room and arranges tea things.*

LEO. She journeyed with me to England to meet my parents, to announce the engagement. And then, the following morning, she fled. Back to Italy! No word, no letter! No answer to my inquiries! Nothing! And my whole body revolted against me. Headaches, eyesight, weakness, nausea...

DR. GIVINGS. And this weakness has persisted, for, what – ?

LEO. Nine months.

DR. GIVINGS. In your extremities?

LEO. Yes. But the weakness in my eyes is perhaps the worst, because of my inability to paint.

DR. GIVINGS. So you haven't painted for nine months?

LEO. You can't paint in the dark.

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DR. GIVINGS. It is very rare, a case of hysteria in a man, but  
of course we do see it.

LEO. Is it treatable?

DR. GIVINGS. I believe it is. I'd like you to undress to your  
underthings and lie down on the table. Annie, my  
assistant, will be in shortly.

*Elizabeth enters the living room with the baby.*

LEO. I did not know there would be a lady in attendance.

DR. GIVINGS. She is the soul of tact and reserve.

*Leo undresses.*

*Meanwhile, in the living room:*

MRS. GIVINGS. *(to Elizabeth)* Was she a good eater?

ELIZABETH. An angel.

MRS. GIVINGS. Thank you, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH. I think that babies are angels when they drink  
only milk, that first year. They could fly right back  
to where they came from, to the milk in the clouds.  
When they get teeth it is the beginning of the end,  
they become animals and there's no going back.

MRS. GIVINGS. Yes.

ELIZABETH. But this one's still an angel, no teeth.

*Elizabeth touches the baby's cheek.*

*The baby smiles.*

*Mrs. Givings is jealous.*

MRS. GIVINGS. Well.

That will be all now, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH. I'll just get my things.

*Elizabeth exits to the nursery.*

*Leo is now undressed.*

*Dr. Givings enters the operating theater.*

*Mrs. Givings is holding the baby.*

*Annie has draped a sheet over Leo.*

*Mrs. Givings alone with the baby.*