

AN EXCERPT FROM THE PLAY
“THE WILDE SPIRIT”

Book, Music & Lyrics
By
Kerry Ashton

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WILDE
(as though on Opening Night)

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have enjoyed this evening immensely. The actors have given us a charming rendering of a delightful play, and your appreciation has been most intelligent. I congratulate you on the success of your performance, which persuades me to believe that you think almost as highly of the play as I do myself.

(He steps away from the podium as MUSIC fades.)

(to audience in present)

The critics attacked me viciously for that remark, calling me the most horrible egotist, which of course was perfectly true.

In reality, I was not nearly as arrogant as I pretended to be; it was part of the mirror and the mask. Though often accused of vanity, I never approved of it.

It was, in fact, the reason why I ended my friendship with James McNeill Whistler. Both Jimmy and I possessed a brilliant and often dangerous wit; but Jimmy used his gift to hurt and destroy others, and only for vanity's sake, while I sought--through wit--to provoke kindness, to enlighten, and to amuse.

Apparently, it worked because my second comedy, *A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE*, proved even more successful in London's West End! And suddenly, I was....wealthy!

I spent money faster than I made it, ate and drank exquisitely, and never ever exercised!

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I always had an aversion to physical activity. The only possible exercise for me was talking, not walking. Consequently, I grew somewhat portly. It was a duty I owed the dignity of letters.

I also became rather fond of absinthe--that marvelous French drink that makes one see things as you wish they were.

(WILDE pours himself a glass of absinthe and imbibes.)

What pleasures I knew then! Through Bosie, I met a marvelously corrupt young fellow, Alfred Taylor, who introduced both Bosie and me to the most delightful male prostitutes in London.

Make no mistake, these prostitutes were Bosie's playmates, not mine. At twenty-two, he had had more sexual partners than most of the prostitutes he paid for. He enjoyed lording it over them, used them sexually, and now left me to pay the bill.

My love was free, but I watched Bosie leave my bed time after time for the physical charms of more youthful, more attractive companions. To keep his love, I eventually found myself reminding him of the diversions and delights these young men could find in my arms as well.

And besides, I found the company of these rascals refreshingly honest. These were young men of the lowest class, never permitted to enter London's fine establishments--unless of course they were bought and paid for. Even then, it simply wasn't done. As a friend pointed out, *"it's quite acceptable to dally with such boys in secret, but one doesn't take them out into proper society for dinner!"*

Well, I could resist everything except temptation, and dined with the most handsome of these stable boys at London's most refined restaurants.

Truth be told, I offered them gifts and money and a generosity of which they took shameless advantage.

As I think of them now, I remember bright, handsome faces, Greek forms passing through Gothic cloisters, and what I loved best in the world: Poetry and Paradox dancing together!