

**SIDES FOR *RUNNING WILDE* AUDITIONS:  
ERNIE AND OSCAR (ACT 1, SC. 2)  
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(OSCAR is the 27-year-old Oscar Wilde, in his hotel room in Kingston, Ontario, as part of his 1882 lecture tour of North America. ERNIE is a good-looking working-class Ontario man in his 40s, dressed in his Sunday best, who has asked to come in and talk with OSCAR, late in the evening.)

ERNIE: See, I was brought up to be a real man. I work hard, stand up for my beliefs, keep myself strong, clean an' healthy, and I don't back down from a fight. And I've made a few ladies pretty happy in my time, if you know what I mean.

OSCAR: Oh, you devil. Cigarette?

ERNIE: Love one, thank you. (Cigarette biz ensues.) But I was also taught that bein a real man means ignorin stuff like beauty and art and poetry and so on. That that stuff is for sissies and women.

OSCAR: A common, unfortunate misconception.

ERNIE: Yeah. I get that now. 'Cause I started readin about you in the papers, and then the last time I was in Toronto, I went in a bookstore – jeez, my buddies would laugh at me for even goin in a bookstore – and I bought your book of poems, and I gotta say, I love those poems.

OSCAR: How very kind!

ERNIE: So I was really lookin forward to your lecture tonight. And lemme tell you, that lecture was everything I hoped it would be.

OSCAR: Oh, thank you! I believe I did notice you in the audience.

ERNIE: Let me try somethin on you here.

OSCAR: Anything.

ERNIE: I have this strange talent for memorizin stuff while people are sayin it. So I'm gonna recite a bit of your –

OSCAR: Have you! We have that in common. A sign of keen intelligence, I believe.

ERNIE: Yeah? I believe that too. So you tell me if I got this part of the lecture right. “Art is no mere accident of existence which men may take or leave, but a very necessity of human life, if we are to live as nature intended us to live – that is, unless we are content to be something less than men.”

OSCAR: Word for word.

ERNIE: I thought so. And I am not content to be somethin less than a man!

OSCAR: I should hope not!

ERNIE: Lovin beauty and art doesn't make you less than a man, it makes you *more* of a man.

OSCAR: Precisely what I'm saying.

ERNIE: A *real* man *welcomes* artistic, uh –

OSCAR: Stimulation?

ERNIE: Yeah. And not just from art, right? All kinds of new, um –

OSCAR: Encounters?

ERNIE: Encounters. You are so good with words, Oscar.

OSCAR: Thank you, Ernie. That's the second time I've been told that today.

ERNIE: I'm not surprised, though that is a nice co-inky-dink. All right, I thought I'd be too shy to ask you this, but I guess I'm not. I just so happen to have your book right here.

OSCAR: My goodness!

ERNIE (producing book): Would you sign this for me?

OSCAR: I should be delighted. (Produces pen. Writing:) "To my new friend Ernie" –

ERNIE: Don't write "Ernie"! (OSCAR stops.) I mean, you don't *have* to.

OSCAR: Very well. (Writes.) "To my new friend, from one real man to another. Oscar Wilde, Kingston, eighteen eighty-two." (Hands it back.)

ERNIE: Thank you so much, my new friend. This'll make the book even more precious to me, if that's possible.

OSCAR: I'm so gratified to hear it.

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