

**THE WILDERNESS: A
COMEDY IN
THREE ACTS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649368303

The Wilderness: A Comedy in Three Acts by H. V. Esmond

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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H. V. ESMOND

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THE WILDERNESS

A Comedy in Three Acts

BY
H. V. ESMOND

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NEW YORK
SAMUEL FRENCH
PUBLISHER
26 WEST 22D STREET

LONDON
SAMUEL FRENCH, LTD.
PUBLISHERS
89 STRAND

23477.55.55



*Gift of
Miss G. G. G.*
CHARACTERS.

*Produced at the St. James's Theatre, London,
11th April, 1901.*

SIR HARRY MILANOR.....	Mr. George Alexander.
LADY MILANOR, <i>his mother</i>	Miss Le Thiere.
ETHEL GLYNDON, <i>his cousin</i>	Miss Dora Barton.
JOSRPH TREVOR, <i>his uncle</i>	Mr. H. H. Vincent.
THE HON. JACK KENNERLY.....	Mr. W. Grahame Browne.
LADY HONORIA PAWSON.....	Mrs. Edward Saker.
MR. GILBERT PAWSON, <i>her son</i> ...	Mr. Lennox Pawle.
MRS. BUCKLEY WESTON.....	Miss M. Talbot.
MABEL, <i>her daughter</i>	Miss Eva Moore.
GRINSTEAD WORNBURN, <i>a rich brewer</i>	Mr. Edward Arthur.
HUGH GRAEME.....	Mr. C. Aubrey Smith.
EDITH CADOGAN.....	Miss Julie Opp.
HAROLD { <i>Mrs. Buckley West-</i> }	Master Vyvian Thomas.
MARJORIE { <i>on's twins</i> }	Miss Phyllis Dare.
MISS ANSTRUTHER, <i>Ethel's aunt</i> ..	Miss Henrietta Cowen.

ACT I.—THE NIGHT.

THE SCENE OF ACT I. is a fashionable afternoon tea-room
in Bond Street.

ACT II.—THE DARK HOUR BEFORE THE DAWN.

THE SCENE OF ACT II. is a lonely spot in the Borcambe
woods.

ACT III.—THE DAY.

THE SCENE OF ACT III. is the drawing-room in Sir Harry
Milanor's house, Chesterfield Street, Mayfair.

THE WILDERNESS.

ACT I.

THE NIGHT.

SCENE.—Fashionable tea-rooms in Bond Street. A large room at back opening on to balcony, overlooking the street. Near the centre of the stage an arch, and the lower tea-room, in the front. Tea-tables everywhere. A band somewhere at the back playing at intervals during the Act. The maids are smart, lady-like girls. At the table to the right, in the lower room nearest the audience, are seated LADY HONORIA PAWSON and her son GILBERT PAWSON. LADY HONORIA is a funereal remnant of past splendor. Her son GILBERT is about forty-five and has lived too well; he is short, fat and bilious. Two maids are in the act of setting tea and muffins before them when the curtain rises. Many of the tables are empty, a few are occupied; during the Act all the tables fill, and occasionally the chatter is so general that pauses occur in the principal dialogue.

LADY H. (*ferreting a handkerchief out of a small bag at her large waist*) That was Sir Charles at the corner table.

MR. GILBERT. (*puffily eating*) No, it wasn't; it was Worburn the brewer.

LADY H. (*powdering her nose, then pulling her veil over it*) It wasn't; it was Sir Charles.

MR. GILBERT. It was Worburn. I lunched with him to-day.

LADY H. (*returning her handkerchief to her bag and shutting it with a snap*) It was Sir Charles. I bowed to him.

MR. GILBERT. Worburn don't mind, he's accustomed to it.

LADY H. I never forget a face. I've a royal memory. Gilbert, you're getting stouter.

MR. GILBERT. (*in a huff*) Whenever I disagree with you, you say I am stouter.

LADY H. Everything that disagrees with one makes one stouter.

MR. GILBERT. (*sadly contemplating his muffin*) Everything disagrees with me—but one must eat. Everybody does. (*GRINSTEAD WORNBURN comes down from the upper room, evidently looking for some one. He is a man of about fifty, very cold and dignified in his manner—his costume rather suggests the stock period—he is more aristocratic in his manner and appearance than the oldest duke in the peerage. MR. GILBERT rises effusively*) My dear Worburn, we meet again—delightful lunch you gave us. May I present you to my mother? (*he does so*)

WORNBURN. (*gravely*) My dear Lady Pawson, I'm so glad. I had heard you were indisposed—east wind, purely east wind—it affects even me.

LADY H. I have heard so much of you from Gilbert lately, that I positively recognized you as I came in. (*her son is a little staggered by her tact and untruthfulness*)

WORNBURN. (*bows slightly—then moves a little apologetically*) I have a few young people to entertain this afternoon; but, like most young people, I fear they have no notion of punctuality. I am now wondering whether by any chance they are waiting for me in the rooms below.

LADY H. My dear Mr. Worburn, find them by all means; don't let us detain you.

WORNBURN. (*gravely*) Thank you, I hope to see you on my return. (*he bows, and goes up*)

LADY H. A brewer! Surely a Queen's Counsel?

MR. GILBERT. (*sadly*) A brewer, and a most immoral one, owns most of the shares in a certain theatre and—gets his money's worth.

LADY H. Why don't you tell me more about these people?

MR. GILBERT. It's so dull to talk about other people when one's present oneself: besides, one couldn't discuss Worburn thoroughly with one's mother, he really is so cold-blooded.

LADY H. Shocking!

MR. GILBERT. It's all right, he's decided to marry and settle down at last. (*he turns to a passing maid*) I have no spoon.

MAID. I beg your pardon, sir. (*she gives him one*)

LADY H. (*eating her muffin*) Who's he going to marry?

MR. GILBERT. Oh, anybody! I don't think he's made up his mind. He's making 'em all show their paces—that's one advantage in being a millionaire, they're all ready to do it. (*he passes his mother the muffin*) Won't you? (*MABEL BUCKLEY WESTON is seen in the upper room; she*

hurries down to the left table in the lower room and seats herself behind it. She is an exceedingly beautiful girl about eighteen, and appears happily excited and flushed. The HON. JACK KENNERLY joins her and sits left of her, first helping her to remove her cloak. He is a smart young man about town, of about five-and-twenty)

JACK. It's all right, they didn't see us!

MABEL. Thank the fates, old Worburn's as blind as a bat. Oh, Jack, what a ripping day we have had!

JACK. We've been jolly lucky too, considering we haven't been spotted once.

MABEL. *(with a long drawn breath)* Oh, if one could only go on doing what one shouldn't all one's life, wouldn't it be exciting!

JACK. *(doubtfully)* Um'm!

MABEL. Where are the muffins? Oh, Jack, doesn't it run to muffins?

JACK. *(looking at dish)* Aren't they—how silly of 'em. I ordered 'em. *(the muffins are brought)* Oh, here they are. Cut into 'em, Mab. If we don't clear out of this before the afternoon gang arrives we're bound to be spotted. *(MABEL pours out the tea)*

MABEL. As soon as I'm fortified by tea, I shall be ready to face even mamma.

JACK. Thanks, I shan't.

MABEL. *(puts down her cup and gives a long sigh)* Oh, Jack, do you realize that this is absolutely the last time we can do this sort of thing?

JACK. Oh, one never knows.

MABEL. I know. My future is looming very obviously just now, and tête-à-tête teas with a detrimental must take a back seat. Oh, Jack, I'm so glad you're a detrimental, and needn't be taken seriously; you're really just as useful as a brother and much more exciting.

JACK. *(laughs a little)* I'm glad. *(then gloomily)* I say, do you really want to go to the Aquarium? *(MABEL nods her head vehemently, her mouth being full of muffin)* But it's a deadly place in the afternoon.

MABEL. The deadlier the better; it's our last day of freedom, so let's finish it off feeling fearfully tomby.

JACK. Ranelagh's more fun.

MABEL. Jack, don't be silly. Harry's sure to be there. A nice thing for me if he saw me alone with you. All mamma's castles in the air would topple on top of her.

JACK. It's all very well to pretend that it's only your mother who builds castles upon Sir Harry. You do a bit of building on your own.

MABEL. *(making a little grimace)* I know I do. I've got to marry him for heaps of reasons. Firstly, he's the richest man in the market just now; secondly—well,

that's all; secondly is the same as firstly, and so's thirdly.

JACK. You mercenary little devil!

MABEL. Am I? (*a pause—then rather sadly*) No, I'm not really! It's only a part of what mamma calls the great social scheme. We're all parts of a great social scheme, Jack—you're a part, I'm a part. Fat old Worburn's a part—these girls that wait on us are a part, only I suppose they failed in their parts, so that's why they have to wait on the other parts. (*then she tosses her head as if to shake off unpleasant thoughts—and turns in her chair, looking round the room*) I wish they'd play the "Belle of New York." (*she turns back and meets JACK's glance. So they remain for an instant*) Jack, don't look at me as if you didn't know me.

JACK. (*gravely*) I wonder, do I?

MABEL. Don't you?

JACK. You're ready to marry a man for his money?

MABEL. Of course I am. (*she laughs*) What else is there for a girl to do if she doesn't? Spend her days carrying muffins to the old woman in that corner? No, thank you. Jack, I've been well brought up, so I know now that it's a girl's first duty to marry money, money with position if possible, but money anyhow.

JACK. It's beastly!

MABEL. Is it—how?

JACK. Oh, I can't explain.

MABEL. Well, anyhow, whatever it is—it's what's drummed into us from the word go. It's all part of the great social scheme. It's our one outlook. No, there are others: be a governess—I don't want to. Go on the stage—I'm much too good an actress to have a chance on the stage. No, Jack, if you were a girl you'd be told it from morning till night, *marry well*. Mind you marry well, it's everything; and so you see, rightly or wrongly, we begin to believe it at last, and we jump at £10,000 a year. (*then she leans a little towards him, half closing her eyes in a smile*) But the scheme has its compensations, it makes us enjoy a day like to-day, doesn't it, Jack?

JACK. I suppose so.

MABEL. Dear old Jack, may I have another muffin? There's not enough butter on this. (*more muffins, which she really doesn't want, are set before her—then she becomes a trifle pensive*) And when I'm married to Sir Harry you'll come and stay with us often, won't you, and cheer me up?

JACK. Do you think you'll want cheering up?

MABEL. Oh, I expect so. Most of the girls who marry well seem to be able to do with a lot of cheering up.

JACK. Is that part of the scheme too?

MABEL. I suppose so.

JACK. I'm rather glad I'm not a girl.

MABEL. So am I, Jack. *(there's a pause—he fiddles with his cup, and her eyes rove round the room)*

JACK. *(suddenly)* In this scheme, doesn't it strike you that something has been left out?

MABEL. What?

JACK. Well, there's a curious, somewhat old-fashioned emotion that crops up sometimes even in modern life.

MABEL. What's that?

JACK. Love.

MABEL. *(bursts into a little laugh of surprise)* Of course, we've left that out! How could one have a workable scheme with love in it? No scheme would hold together for a minute.

JACK. I see—so you ignore it.

MABEL. One can't afford to waste one's time on love nowadays. Life's much too serious a problem. Love's all very well when one's quite young, but one can't let it stand in the way of tangible things, can one?

JACK. No, I suppose not.

MABEL. I think, personally, that love would die out altogether if it weren't for the prolificosity of the modern novelist.

JACK. *(sarcastically)* You know more about it than I do, you're eighteen.

MABEL. *(quite lightly—putting on her gloves)* No, I don't really know anything about it—it's not one of my subjects. I've always let that sort of thing slide.

JACK. Some day it may enter into your head to take it up.

MABEL. Well, when I do, Jack, you shall teach me the rudiments.

JACK. That's a bargain. You won't find it half so dull a thing as you imagine.

MABEL. Shan't I? Perhaps not. But I'm not going to think about it now.

JACK. I wonder what Milanor's views on the subject of love are.

MABEL. Oh! I hope to goodness he hasn't got any. I—I'm afraid I should laugh if he began to get romantic, and that would be awful, wouldn't it?

JACK. You'd never be my Lady Milanor then.

MABEL. Oh, never, and I'd never be mistress of that lovely place in Derbyshire with that divine trout stream.

JACK. Or the little house in Chesterfield Street with the green shutters.

MABEL. I've quite made up my mind to do away with those shutters. Oh, you will dine with us often and often, won't you, Jack?

JACK. Perhaps Milanor won't approve.