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# THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

BY OSCAR WILDE

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## CHARACTERS

ACTOR1	ALGERNON MONCRIEFF
ACTOR 2	MR JACK WORTHING / MOULTON (Gardener)
ACTOR 3	GWENDOLEN FAIRFAX / MISS PRISM (Governess)
ACTOR 4	CECILY CARDEW / LANE (Servant)
ACTOR 5	LADY BRACKNELL/ REV. CANON CHASUABLE/ MERRIMAN (Butler)

## THE SCENES OF THE PLAY

ACT I.	Algernon Moncrieff's Flat in Half-Moon Street, London (Town).
ACT II.	The Garden at the Manor House, Woolton, Hertfordshire (Country).
ACT III.	Drawing-Room at the Manor House, Woolton, Hertfordshire (Country).
TIME:	Summer, 1895.



# THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

## FIRST ACT

*Morning-room in Algernon's flat in Half-Moon Street. The room is luxuriously and artistically furnished.*

*[Lane is setting up for afternoon tea. Algernon enters from music room.]*

- ALGERNON: Did you hear I was playing the piano Lane?
- LANE: I did not think it courteous to listen, sir.
- ALGERNON: I am sorry for your sake. I do not play accurately – anyone can play accurately – but I play with marvellous expression.
- LANE: Yes, sir
- ALGERNON: Have you got the cucumber sandwiches cut for Lady Bracknell?
- LANE: Yes, sir. *[Hands them on a salver]*
- ALGERNON *[Inspects them, takes two, and sits down on the sofa, doorbell rings]* Answer the door, Lane.
- LANE: Yes, sir.
- LANE: Mr. Ernest Worthing.  
*[Enter Jack. Lane goes out.]*
- ALGERNON: How are you, my dear Ernest? What brings you up to town?
- JACK: Oh, pleasure, pleasure! What else should bring one anywhere? Eating as usual, I see, Algy!
- ALGERNON: *[Stiffly.]* I believe it is normal in good society to take some slight refreshment at five o'clock. Where have you been since last Thursday?
- JACK: *[Sitting down on the sofa.]* In the country.
- ALGERNON: What on earth do you do there?
- JACK: *[Pulling off his gloves.]* When one is in town one distracts oneself. When one is in the country one distracts other people. It is excessively tedious. Hallo! Why all these cups? Why cucumber sandwiches? Who is coming to tea?
- ALGERNON: Oh, simply Aunt Augusta and Gwendolen.
- JACK: How perfectly marvellous!

ALGERNON: Yes, that is all very well; but Aunt Augusta will not approve of your being here.

JACK: May I ask why?

ALGERNON: My dear fellow, the way you flirt with Gwendolen is perfectly reprehensible. It is almost as bad as the way Gwendolen flirts with you.

JACK: I am in love with Gwendolen. I have come up to town expressly to propose to her.

ALGERNON: I thought you had come up for pleasure? . . . I call that business.

JACK: How absolutely unromantic you are!

ALGERNON: I really do not see anything romantic in proposing.

*[Jack puts out his hand to take a sandwich. Algernon at once interferes.]*

ALGERNON: Please do not touch the cucumber sandwiches. They are ordered specially for Aunt Augusta. *[Takes one and eats it.]*

JACK: Well, you have been eating them all the time.

ALGERNON: That is quite a different situation. She is my aunt. Have some bread and butter. The bread and butter is for Gwendolen.

JACK: *[Advancing to table and helping himself.]* And very good bread and butter it is too.

ALGERNON: My dear fellow, you behave as if you were married to her already. Gwendolen is my first cousin. And before I permit you to marry her, you will have to resolve the whole question of Cecily. *[Rings hand bell.]*

JACK: Cecily! What on earth do you mean, Algy, by Cecily?! I do not know any one of the name of Cecily.

*[ Enter Lane.]*

ALGERNON: Bring me that cigarette case Mr. Worthing left in the smoking-room the last time he dined here.

LANE: Yes, sir. *[Lane goes out.]*

JACK: Do you mean to say you have had my cigarette case all this time. I have been writing frantic letters to the police about it. I was very nearly offering a large reward.

ALGERNON: Well, I wish you would offer recompense. I am more than usually poor.

JACK: There is no good offering a large reward now that the thing is found.

*[Enter Lane with the cigarette case on a salver. Algernon takes it at once. Lane goes out.]*

ALGERNON: I think that is very mean of you, Ernest. *[Opens case and examines it.]* However, it makes no difference, for, now that I look at the inscription inside, I find that the thing is not yours after all.

JACK: Of course it is mine. *[Moving to him.]* You have seen me with it a hundred times, and you have no right whatsoever to read what is written inside. I simply want my cigarette case back.

ALGERNON: Yes; but this is not your cigarette case. This cigarette case is a gift from some one of the name of Cecily, and you said you did not know any one of that name.

JACK: Well, if you want to know, Cecily is my aunt.

ALGERNON: Your Aunt!

JACK: Yes. Marvelous old lady she is, too. Lives in Tunbridge Wells. Just give it back to me, Algy.

ALGERNON: But why does she call herself little Cecily if she is your aunt? *[Reading.]* 'From little Cecily with her affectionate love.'

JACK: My dear fellow, what on earth is there in that? Some aunts are tall, some aunts are not tall. For Heaven's sake give me back my cigarette case.

ALGERNON: Yes. But why does your aunt call you her uncle? 'From little Cecily, with her affectionate love to her dear Uncle Jack.' There is no objection, to an aunt being a small aunt, but why an aunt, tall or small, should call her own nephew her uncle, I cannot quite comprehend. Finally, your name is not Jack; it is Ernest.

JACK: It is not Ernest; it is Jack.

ALGERNON: You have always told me it was Ernest. You answer to the name of Ernest. You look as if your name was Ernest. It is perfectly absurd you saying that your name is not Ernest. It is on your cards. Here is one of them. *[Taking it from case.]* 'Mr. Ernest Worthing, B. 4, The Albany, London' I will keep this as a proof that your name is Ernest if ever you attempt to deny it to me, or to Gwendolen, or to anyone else.

JACK: Well, my name is Ernest in town and Jack in the country, and the cigarette case was given to me in the country.

ALGERNON: Yes, but that does not account for the fact that your small Aunt Cecily, who lives at Tunbridge Wells, calls you her dear uncle. Come, you had much better tell the truth at once. I should mention that I have always suspected you of being a secret Bunburyist.

JACK: Bunburyist? What on earth do you mean by a Bunburyist?

ALGERNON: I will reveal to you the meaning of that expression as soon as you are courteous enough to inform me why you are Ernest in town and Jack in the country.

JACK: Well, produce my cigarette case first.

ALGERNON: Here it is. *[Hands cigarette case.]* Now produce your explanation. *[Sits on sofa.]*

JACK: Old Mr. Thomas Cardew, who adopted me when I was a little boy, made me in his testament guardian to his grand-daughter, Miss Cecily Cardew. She refers to me as

her uncle and lives at my house in the country under the supervision of her governess, Miss Prism.

ALGERNON: Where is that house in the country?

JACK: That is nothing to you, dear boy. You are not going to be invited.

ALGERNON: Why are you Ernest in town and Jack in the country?

JACK: My dear Algy, I do not know whether you will be able to understand my real motives. When one is a guardian, one has to adopt a very high moral tone on all subjects. It is one's obligation to do so. To facilitate my getting to town I invented an imaginary younger brother of the name of Ernest, who lives in London, and gets into terrible situations. That, my dear Algy, is the whole truth pure and simple.

ALGERNON: The truth is rarely pure and never simple. What you really are is a Bunburyist. I was quite right in saying you were a Bunburyist. You are one of the most advanced Bunburyists I know.

JACK: What on earth do you mean?

ALGERNON: You have invented a very useful younger brother called Ernest, in order that you may be able to come up to town as frequently as you like. I have invented an invaluable invalid called Bunbury, so that I may be able to go down to the country whenever I like. Now that I know you to be a confirmed Bunburyist I naturally want to tell you the rules.

JACK: I am not a Bunburyist at all. If Gwendolen accepts me, I am going to assassinate my imaginary brother. Cecily is a little too much interested in Ernest. So I am going to exterminate him. And I strongly advise you to do the same with your invalid friend who has the absurd name.

ALGERNON: Nothing will induce me to part with Bunbury, and if you ever get married, you will be very happy to know Bunbury. A man who marries without knowing Bunbury has a very tedious time of it.

JACK: That is stupid. If I marry a fascinating girl like Gwendolen I certainly will not want to know Bunbury.

ALGERNON: Then your wife will. You do not seem to appreciate that in married life three is company and two is none.

*[SFX – electric doorbell. Enter Mrs Lane.]*

LANE: Lady Bracknell and Miss Fairfax. *[Exit Mrs Lane. Enter Lady Bracknell and Gwendolen.]*

BRACKNELL: Good afternoon, dear Algernon, I hope you are behaving very well.

ALGERNON: I'm feeling very well, Aunt Augusta.

LADY BRACKNELL: That is not quite the same thing. In fact the two things rarely go together *[Sees Jack and bows to him with icy coldness.]*

ALGERNON: *[To Gwendolen.]* Dear me, you are smart!

GWENDOLEN: I am always smart! Am I not, Mr. Worthing?

JACK: You are quite perfect, Miss Fairfax.

GWENDOLEN: Oh! I hope I am not that. It would leave no room for developments, and I intend to develop in many directions.

*[Gwendolen and Jack sit down together in the corner.]*

LADY BRACKNELL: I am sorry if we are a little late, Algernon, but I was obliged to call on dear Lady Harbury. I will have a cup of tea, and one of those delicious cucumber sandwiches you promised me.

ALGERNON: Certainly, Aunt Augusta. *[Goes over to tea-table.]*

LADY BRACKNELL: Won't you come and sit here, Gwendolen?

GWENDOLEN: Thanks, mamma, I am quite comfortable here.

ALGERNON: *[Picking up empty plate in horror.]* Good heavens! Why are there no cucumber sandwiches? I ordered them specifically. I am greatly distressed, Aunt Augusta, about there being no cucumbers.

LADY BRACKNELL: It really is not important, Algernon. I had some crumpets with Lady Harbury.

*[Algernon crosses and hands tea.]*

LADY BRACKNELL: Thank you.

ALGERNON: I am sorry, Aunt Augusta, I will have to give up the pleasure of dining with you to-night.

LADY BRACKNELL: *[Frowning.]* I hope not, Algernon. It would put my table plan completely out.

ALGERNON: It is very tedious, and a terrible tragedy to me, but the fact is I have just had a telegram to say that my invalid friend Bunbury is very ill again. *[Exchanges glances with Jack.]* They seem to think I should be with him.

LADY BRACKNELL: It is very strange. This Mr. Bunbury seems to suffer from curiously bad health.

ALGERNON: Yes; poor Bunbury is a terrible invalid.

LADY BRACKNELL: Well, I must say, Algernon, I think it is time that Mr. Bunbury made a decision whether he is going to live or to die. I should be much obliged if you would ask Mr. Bunbury, not to deteriorate on Saturday, for I depend on you to organise my music for me. It is my final summer party, and one wants something that will encourage conversation.

ALGERNON: I will speak with Bunbury. I think I can promise you he will be well by Saturday. Of course, the music is a greater difficulty. If one plays good music, people do not listen,

and if one plays bad music they do not talk. I will reveal to you my proposition, please come into the music room for a moment.

LADY BRACKNELL: Thank you, Algernon. It is very thoughtful of you *[Rising, and following Algernon.]* I am sure your proposition will be marvellous. Gwendolen, you will accompany me.

GWENDOLEN: Certainly, mamma.

*[Lady Bracknell and Algernon go into the music-room, Gwendolen remains behind.]*

JACK: Glorious day it has been, Miss Fairfax.

GWENDOLEN: Please do not talk to me about the weather, Mr. Worthing. Whenever people talk to me about the weather, I always feel quite certain that they mean something else. And that makes me so nervous.

JACK: I do mean something else.

GWENDOLEN: I thought so. In fact, I am never wrong.

JACK: And I would like to take advantage of Lady Bracknell's temporary absence.

GWENDOLEN: I would certainly counsel you to do so. Mamma has a way of coming back rapidly into a room.

JACK: *[Nervously.]* Miss Fairfax, ever since I met you I have adored you more than any girl I have ever met since . . . I met you.

GWENDOLEN: Yes, I am quite conscious of the fact. And I frequently desire that in public, you had been more demonstrative. For me you have always had an irresistible fascination. Even before I met you I was not indifferent to you. *[Jack looks at her in amazement.]* We live, as I hope you know, Mr. Worthing, in an era of ideals and my ideal has always been to love some one of the name of Ernest. There is something in that name that inspires absolute assurance. The moment Algernon first mentioned to me that he had a friend called Ernest, I knew I was destined to love you.

JACK: You really love me, Gwendolen?

GWENDOLEN: Passionately!

JACK: Darling! You do not know how happy you have made me.

GWENDOLEN: My own Ernest!

JACK: But you do not really mean to say that you could not love me if my name was not Ernest?

GWENDOLEN: But your name is Ernest.

JACK: Yes, I know it is. But supposing it was something else? Personally, darling, to speak quite candidly, I do not much like the name Ernest . I do not think the name suits me at all.



GWENDOLEN: It suits you perfectly. It is a divine name. It has a music of its own. It produces vibrations.

JACK: Well, really, Gwendolen, I must say that I think there are lots of other much nicer names. I think Jack, for example, a fascinating name.

GWENDOLEN: Jack? . . . No, there is very little music in the name Jack, if any at all, indeed. It does not thrill. It produces absolutely no vibrations. I have known several Jacks, and they all, without exception, were more than usually simple. The only really secure name is Ernest.

JACK: Gwendolen, I must get baptized at once—I mean we must get married at once.

GWENDOLEN: Married, Mr. Worthing?

JACK: *[Astounded.]* Well . . . surely. You know that I love you, and you led me to believe, Miss Fairfax, that you were not indifferent to me.

GWENDOLEN: I adore you. But you have not proposed to me yet. Nothing has been said at all about marriage. The subject has not even been broached.

JACK: Well, can I propose to you now?

GWENDOLEN: I think it would be an excellent opportunity. And to save you any possible embarrassment, Mr. Worthing, I think it only courteous to tell you that I am fully determined to accept you.

JACK: Gwendolen!

GWENDOLEN: Yes, Mr. Worthing, what have you got to say to me?

JACK: You know what I have got to say to you.

GWENDOLEN: Yes, but you do not say it.

JACK: *[Goes on his knees]* Gwendolen, will you marry me?

GWENDOLEN: Of course I will, darling. How long you have been about it! I am afraid you have had very little experience in how to propose.

JACK: My own one, I have never loved anyone in the world but you.

GWENDOLEN: Yes, but men often propose for practice. I know my brother Gerald does. All my girl-friends tell me so. What marvellous blue eyes you have, Ernest! They are quite, quite, blue

*[Enter Lady Bracknell.]*

LADY BRACKNELL: Mr. Worthing! Rise, sir, from this semi-reclined posture. It is most inappropriate.

GWENDOLEN: Mamma! *[he tries to rise; she restrains him]* I must beg you to leave. This is no place for you. Besides, Mr. Worthing has not quite finished.

LADY BRACKNELL: Finished what, may I ask?

GWENDOLEN: I am espoused to Mr. Worthing, mamma. *[They rise together]*

LADY BRACKNELL: Pardon me, you are not espoused to anyone. When you do become espoused to someone, I, or your father, will inform you of the fact. An engagement should come on a young girl as a surprise, pleasant or unpleasant. It is hardly an affair she could be permitted to arrange for herself. And now I have a few questions to put to you, Mr. Worthing. While I am making these inquiries, you, Gwendolen, will wait for me below in the carriage.

GWENDOLEN: *[Reproachfully.]* Mamma!

LADY BRACKNELL: In the carriage, Gwendolen!

*[Gwendolen goes to the door. She and Jack blow kisses to each other behind Lady Bracknell's back. Lady Bracknell looks vaguely about as if she could not understand what the noise was. Finally turns round.]*

Gwendolen, the carriage!

GWENDOLEN: Yes, mamma. *[Goes out, looking back at Jack]*

LADY BRACKNELL: *[Sitting down.]* You can take a seat, Mr. Worthing.  
*[Looks in her pocket for note-book and pencil.]*

JACK: Thank you, Lady Bracknell, I prefer standing.

LADY BRACKNELL: *[Pencil and note-book in hand.]* I feel obliged to tell you that you are not on my list of auspicious young men. However, I am quite ready to include your name, if your answers be what a really affectionate mother requires. Do you smoke?

JACK: Well, yes, I must admit I smoke.

LADY BRACKNELL: I am happy to hear it. A man should always have an occupation of some type. There are far too many lethargic men in London. How old are you?

JACK: Twenty-nine.

LADY BRACKNELL: A very good age to be married at. What is your revenue?

JACK: Between seven and eight thousand per annum.

LADY BRACKNELL: *[Makes a note in her book.]* In property or in investments?

JACK: In investments, principally.

LADY BRACKNELL: That is sufficient.

JACK: I have a country house with some land, of course, attached to it, about one thousand five hundred acres, I believe; but I do not depend on that for my real revenue.

LADY BRACKNELL: A country house! How many bedrooms? Well, that point can be resolved afterwards. You have a town house, I hope? A girl with an elegant nature, like Gwendolen, could not be expected to reside in the country.

JACK: Well, I do own a town house in Belgrave Square, London

LADY BRACKNELL: What number in Belgrave Square?

JACK: 149.

LADY BRACKNELL: *[Shaking her head.]* The unpopular side. I thought there was something suspicious. However, that can be easily altered. Now to minor considerations. Are your mother and father living?

JACK: I have lost both my parents.

LADY BRACKNELL: To lose one parent, Mr. Worthing, may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like negligence. Who was your father? He was evidently a man of some riches.

JACK: I am afraid I really do not know. The fact is, Lady Bracknell, I said I had lost my parents. It would be nearer the truth to say that my parents seem to have lost me. I was...well, I was found.

LADY BRACKNELL: Found!

JACK: The late Mr. Thomas Cardew, an old gentleman of a very benevolent and good disposition, found me, and gave me the name of Worthing, because he had a first-class train ticket for Worthing in his hand at the time.

LADY BRACKNELL: Where did this benevolent gentleman find you?

JACK: *[Gravely.]* In a hand-bag.

LADY BRACKNELL: A hand-bag?

JACK: *[Very seriously.]* Yes, Lady Bracknell. I was in a hand-bag—a somewhat large, black leather hand-bag, with handles to it – an ordinary hand-bag in fact.

LADY BRACKNELL: In what locality did this Mr. Thomas Cardew find this ordinary hand-bag?

JACK: In the cloak-room at Victoria Train Station. It was given to him in error for his own.

LADY BRACKNELL: The cloak-room at Victoria Train Station?

JACK: Yes. The Brighton line.

LADY BRACKNELL: The line is immaterial. Mr. Worthing, I confess I feel quite perplexed by what you have just told me. A cloak-room at a train station could hardly be considered as an assured basis for a recognised position in good society.

JACK: Can I ask you then what you would recommend me to do. I would do anything in the world to ensure Gwendolen's happiness.

LADY BRACKNELL: I would strongly recommend, Mr. Worthing, you try and acquire some relations as soon as possible, and make a definite effort to produce a parent, of either sex, before the summer is quite over.

JACK: Well, I do not see how I could possibly manage to do that. I can produce the hand-bag at any moment. It is in my dressing-room at home. I really think that should satisfy you, Lady Bracknell.

LADY BRACKNELL: Me, sir! What has it to do with me? You cannot think that I and Lord Bracknell would consent to our only daughter—a girl nurtured with the maximum of care—to marry into a cloak-room, and form an alliance with a package? Good morning, Mr. Worthing!

*[Lady Bracknell sweeps out in majestic indignation.]*

JACK: Good morning! *[Algernon, from the music room, strikes up the Wedding March. Jack looks perfectly furious and goes to the door.]* For Heaven's sake, please do not play that terrible tune, Algy.

*[The music stops, and Algernon enters cheerily.]*

ALGERNON: Did it not go well, old boy? You do not mean to say Gwendolen refused you?

JACK: As far as she understands, we are engaged. Her mother is perfectly intolerable. She is a monster! *[A pause.]* You do not think there is any possibility of Gwendolen transforming into her mother in about a hundred and fifty years, do you?

ALGERNON: All women transform into their mother, Jack. By the way, did you tell Gwendolen the truth about your being Ernest in town, and Jack in the country?

JACK: *[In a very patronising manner.]* My dear fellow, the truth is not the type of thing one tells to a nice, sweet, elegant girl.

ALGERNON: What about your brother, "Ernest"?

JACK: Oh, before the end of the week I shall assassinate him. I will say he died rapidly in Paris

ALGERNON: But I thought you said that . . . Miss Cardew was a little too much interested in your poor brother Ernest? Won't she feel afflicted by his assassination?

JACK: Oh, that is all right. Cecily is not a stupid romantic girl, I am happy to say. She has got a capital appetite, goes on long walks, and pays no attention to her lessons.

ALGERNON: I would rather like to see Cecily.

JACK: I will take every precaution that you never do. She is excessively beautiful, and she is only just eighteen.

ALGERNON: Have you told Gwendolen that you have an excessively beautiful dependant who is only just eighteen?

JACK: Oh! One does not exclaim these things. Cecily and Gwendolen are perfectly certain to be extremely good friends. I am sure that half an hour after they have met, they will be calling each other sister.

ALGERNON: Women only do that when they have called each other a lot of other things first.  
[Enter Gwendolen.]

Good heavens, Gwendolen!

GWENDOLEN: Algy, please turn your back. I have something very particular to say to Mr. Worthing.

ALGERNON: Really, Gwendolen, I do not think I can permit this at all.

JACK: My own darling!

GWENDOLEN: Ernest, we may never be married. From the expression on mamma's face I fear we never shall. But although she may prevent us from becoming man and wife nothing that she can possibly do can alter my eternal devotion to you.

JACK: Dear Gwendolen!

GWENDOLEN: The story of your romantic origin, as related to me by mamma, with horrible comments, has naturally agitated the deeper fibres of my nature. Your town address at the Albany I have. What is your address in the country?

JACK: The Manor House, Woolton, Hertfordshire.

*[Algernon, who has been carefully listening, smiles to himself, and writes the address on his shirt cuff. Then picks up the Railway Guide.]*

GWENDOLEN: There is a good postal service, I imagine? It may be necessary to do something desperate. I will communicate with you every day. How long do you remain in town?

JACK: Till Monday.

GWENDOLEN: Good! Algy, you can turn round now.

ALGERNON: Thanks, I have turned round already. *[Rings hand-bell]*

JACK: You will let me accompany you to your carriage, my own darling?

GWENDOLEN: Certainly.

*[Exit Gwendolen and Jack. Enter Lane]*

ALGERNON: Tomorrow, Lane, I am going Bunburying.

LANE: Yes, sir.

ALGERNON: I will probably not return till Monday. You can prepare my dress clothes, my smoking jacket, and all the Bunbury suits.

LANE: Yes, sir. *[begins to clear table or some other business]*

ALGERNON: I hope tomorrow will be a fine day, Lane

LANE: It never is, sir.

ALGERNON: Lane, you are the perfect pessimist.

LANE: I do my best, sir.

*[Exit Lane. Enter Jack.]*

JACK: There is a sensible, intellectual girl! The only girl I ever cared for in my life

*[Algernon is laughing immoderately.]*

What on earth are you laughing at?

ALGERNON: Oh, I am a little anxious about poor Bunbury, that is all.

JACK: If you do not pay attention, your friend Bunbury will get you into a seriously risky situation

ALGERNON: I love risks. They are the only things that are never serious.

JACK: Oh, that is stupid, Algy. You never talk anything but stupidity.

ALGERNON: Nobody ever does, old boy!

*[Jack looks indignantly at him and leaves the room. Algernon lights a cigarette, reads his shirt-cuff, and smiles.]*



## SECOND ACT

*Garden at the Manor House. The garden, an old-fashioned one, full of roses. Time of year, July. Chairs, and a table covered with books, are set under a large yew-tree.*

*[Miss Prism discovered seated at the table. Cecily is watering the flowers]*

MISS PRISM: *[Calling.]* Cecily, Cecily! The watering of flowers is Moulton's responsibility not yours. Your German grammar is on the table. Please open it at page fifteen. We will repeat yesterday's lesson.

CECILY: *[Coming over very slowly.]* But I do not like German. It is not at all an attractive language. I look quite ugly after my German lessons.

MISS PRISM: Child, you know how anxious your guardian is that you should better yourself in every way. He was emphatic regarding your German as he was leaving for town yesterday.

CECILY: Dear Uncle Jack is so very serious! Sometimes he is so serious that I think he cannot be quite well.

MISS PRISM: Mr. Worthing has many problems in his life. You must remember his constant anxiety about that unfortunate young man his brother.

CECILY: I wish Uncle Jack would permit that unfortunate young man, his brother, to come here sometimes. We might have a good influence over him, Miss Prism.*[Cecily begins to write in her diary.]*

MISS PRISM: You must put away your diary, Cecily. I really do not see why you should keep a diary at all.

CECILY: I keep a diary to enter the marvellous secrets of my life. If I did not write them down, I should probably forget all about them.

MISS PRISM: Memory, my dear Cecily, is the diary that we all carry about with us.

CECILY: I believe that memory is responsible for more fantasy than reality. Just like the fiction of the three-volume novels.

MISS PRISM: Do not speak badly of the three-volume novel, Cecily. I wrote one myself in earlier days.

CECILY: Did you really, Miss Prism? How marvellously intelligent you are! I hope it did not end happily? I do not like novels that end happily. They depress me so much.

MISS PRISM: The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means.

CECILY: Was your novel ever published?

MISS PRISM: Alas no. The manuscript unfortunately was lost or mislaid. To your work, child, these speculations are profitless.

CECILY: *[Smiling.]* But I see dear Dr. Chasuble coming up through the garden.

MISS PRISM: *[Rising and advancing.]* Dr. Chasuble! This is indeed a pleasure.

*[Enter Canon Chasuble.]*

CHASUBLE: And how are we this morning? Miss Prism, you are, I trust, well?

MISS PRISM: My name is Laetitia, Doctor.

CHASUBLE: A classical allusion, merely drawn from the Pagan authors.

CECILY: Miss Prism has just been complaining of a slight headache. I think it would do her so much good to have a short walk with you in the Park, Dr. Chasuble.

MISS PRISM: Cecily, I have not mentioned anything about a headache.

CECILY: No, dear Miss Prism, I know that, but I felt instinctively that you had a headache. Indeed, I was thinking about that and not my German lesson.

CHASUBLE: Were I fortunate enough to be Miss Prism's student, I would hang upon her lips.

MISS PRISM: I think, dear Doctor, I will have a walk with you. I find I have a headache after all.

CHASUBLE: With pleasure, Miss Prism, with Pleasure.

MISS PRISM: Cecily, you will read your Political Economy in my absence.

*[Prism exits with Dr. Chasuble.]*

CECILY: *[Picks up books and throws them back on table.]* Horrible Political Economy! Horrible Geography! Horrible, horrible German!

*[Enter Moulton the head gardener with a card.]*

MOULTON: Mr. Ernest Worthing has just driven over from the train station. He has brought his baggage with him.

CECILY: *[Takes the card and reads it.]* 'Mr. Ernest Worthing, B. 4, The Albany, W ' Uncle Jack's brother! Did you tell him Mr. Worthing was in town?

MOULTON: Yes, Miss. He seemed very much sad about it. I mentioned that you and Miss Prism were in the garden. He said he was anxious to speak to you privately for a moment.

CECILY: Ask Mr. Ernest Worthing to come here. I suppose you had better talk to the housekeeper about a bedroom for him.

MOULTON: Yes, Miss. *[Moulton goes off and perhaps takes the watering can]*

CECILY: I have never met any really bad person before. I feel rather anxious. I am so nervous he will look just like everyone else.

*[Enter Algernon, very gay and debonnair.]*

He does!

ALGERNON: *[Raising his hat.]* You are my little cousin Cecily, I am certain.

CECILY: You make a grave error. I am not little. In fact, I believe I am more than usually tall for my age. *[Algernon is rather taken aback.]* But I am your cousin Cecily. You, I see from your card, are Uncle Jack's brother, my bad cousin Ernest.

ALGERNON: Oh! I am not really bad at all, cousin Cecily.

CECILY: If you are not bad, then you have certainly given a false impression. I hope you have not been leading a double life, masquerading as bad and being really good all the time. That would be hypocrisy.

ALGERNON: *[Looks at her in amazement.]* Oh! Naturally, I have been rather imprudent.

CECILY: I do not think you should be so proud of that, though I am sure it must have been fun.

ALGERNON: It is more fun being here with you.

CECILY: I cannot understand how you are here at all. Uncle Jack will not be back till Monday afternoon.

ALGERNON: That is a very sad. I am obliged to go up by the first train on Monday morning.

CECILY: I think you had better wait till Uncle Jack arrives. I know he wants to speak to you about your emigrating.

ALGERNON: About my what?

CECILY: Your emigrating. He has gone to buy your ticket. Uncle Jack is sending you to Australia.

ALGERNON: Australia! I would sooner die.

CECILY: Well, he said at dinner on Wednesday night, that you would have to choose between this world, the next world, and Australia.

ALGERNON: Well, this world is good enough for me, Cousin Cecily.

CECILY: Yes, but are you good enough for it?

ALGERNON: I am afraid I am not. That is why I want you to reform me. You might make that your mission, if you do not mind, Cousin Cecily.

CECILY: I am sorry I have no time, this afternoon.

ALGERNON: Well, would you mind me reforming myself this afternoon?

CECILY: I think you should try.

ALGERNON: I will. I feel better already.

CECILY: You are looking a little worse.

ALGERNON: That is because I am hungry.

CECILY: How thoughtless of me. I should have remembered that when one is going to lead a completely new life, one needs regular and wholesome meals. Won't you come in?

ALGERNON: Thank you. Can I have a buttonhole flower first? I never have any appetite unless I have a buttonhole flower first.

CECILY: *[ Picks up scissors.]* A yellow rose?

ALGERNON: No, I would prefer a pink rose.

CECILY: Why? *[Cuts a flower.]*

ALGERNON: Because you are like a pink rose, Cousin Cecily.

CECILY: I do not think it can be appropriate for you to talk to me like that. Miss Prism never says such things to me.

ALGERNON: Then Miss Prism is a blind old lady.

*[Cecily puts the rose in his buttonhole.]*

You are the prettiest girl I ever saw.

CECILY: Miss Prism says that all good looks are a trap

ALGERNON: They are a trap that every sensible man would like to be entrapped in.

CECILY: Oh, I do not think I would like to entrap a sensible man. I should not know what to talk to him about.

*[Algernon and Cecily exit into the house. Miss Prism and Dr Chasuable enter from the park.]*

MISS PRISM: You are too much alone, dear Dr Chasuable. You should be married. By remaining single, a man converts himself into a permanent public temptation.

CHASUABLE: But is a man not equally attractive when married?

MISS PRISM: No married man is ever attractive except to his wife. But where is Cecily?

*[Enter Jack slowly from the back of the garden. He is dressed in the deepest mourning]*

MISS PRISM: Mr. Worthing! This is indeed a surprise. We did not look for you until Monday afternoon.

CHASUABLE: I trust this sober aspect does not mean there has been some terrible tragedy?

JACK: My brother.

MISS PRISM: More deplorable debts and extravagance?

JACK: *[Shaking his head.]* Dead!

MISS PRISM: Your brother Ernest dead?

JACK: Quite dead.

CHASUABLE: Mr. Worthing, I offer you my sincere condolences.

JACK: Poor Ernest! He had many problems, but it is a sad, sad blow.

MISS PRISM: Very sad indeed. Were you with him at the end?

JACK: No. He died in Paris, in fact. I had a telegram last night from the manager of the Grand Hotel.

CHASUABLE: Was the cause of death mentioned?

JACK: A severe chill, it seems.

MISS PRISM: As a man sows, so shall he reap.

CHASUABLE: Will the funeral take place here?

JACK: No. He expressed a desire have his tomb in Paris.

CHASUABLE: You would no doubt want me to make some mention of this tragic domestic suffering next Sunday. I have a sermon can be adapted to any occasion, joyful or distressing. I have preached it at baptisms, days of humiliation and festivals.

JACK: Ah! That reminds me. You mentioned baptisms I suppose you know how to baptise all right?

CHASUABLE: Is there any particular infant in whom you are interested, Mr. Worthing?

JACK: But it is not for any child, dear Doctor. The fact is, I would like to be baptised myself, this afternoon.

MISS PRISM: But surely, Mr. Worthing, you have been baptised already?

JACK: I do not remember anything about it.

MISS PRISM: At what hour would you want the ceremony performed?

JACK: Oh, I might trot round about five thirty if that is convenient?

CHASUABLE: Perfectly, perfectly! I will not intrude any longer into this house of sadness.

*[Exit Chasuable. Enter Cecily from the house.]*

CECILY: Uncle Jack! Oh, I am pleased to see you back. But what horrible clothes you have got on! Do go and change them.

MISS PRISM: Cecily!

*[Cecily goes towards Jack; he kisses her brow in a melancholy manner.]*

CECILY: What is the problem, Uncle Jack? You look as if you had toothache, and I have got such a surprise for you. Who do you think is in the dining-room? Your brother!

JACK: Who?

CECILY: Your brother Ernest. He arrived about half an hour ago.

JACK: What an imagination! I haven't got a brother.

CECILY: Oh, do not say that. However badly he may have behaved to you in the past he is still your brother. I will tell him to come out.*[Runs back into the house.]*

MISS PRISM: A miracle!

JACK: My brother is in the dining-room? I do not know what it all means. I think it is perfectly absurd.

*[Enter Algernon and Cecily hand in hand. They come slowly up to Jack.]*

JACK: Good heavens!

ALGERNON: Brother Jack, I have come down from town to tell you that I am very sorry for all the trouble I have given you, and that I intend to lead a better life in the future.

*[Jack glares at him and does not take his hand.]*

CECILY: Uncle Jack, you are not going to refuse your own brother's hand?

JACK: Nothing will make me take his hand. I think his coming here deplorable. He knows perfectly well why.

CECILY: Uncle Jack, do be nice. There is some good in every one. Ernest has just been telling me about his poor invalid friend Mr. Bunbury. And surely there must be much good in one who is benevolent to an invalid.

JACK: Oh! He has been talking about Bunbury, has he?

CECILY: Yes, he has told me all about poor Mr. Bunbury, and his terrible state of health.

JACK: Bunbury! Well, I won't have him talk to you about Bunbury or about anything else. It is enough to drive one perfectly frantic.

ALGERNON: Of course, I admit that the problems were all on my side. But I must say that I think that Brother Jack's coldness to me is peculiarly painful considering it is the first time I have come here.

CECILY: Uncle Jack, if you do not shake hands with Ernest I will never forgive you.

JACK: Never forgive me?



CECILY: Never, never, never!

JACK: Well, this is the last time I shall ever do it. *[Shakes with Algernon and glares.]*

MISS PRISM: It is miraculous, is it not, to see so perfect a reconciliation? I think we might leave the two brothers together. Cecily, come with me.

*[They all go off except Jack and Algernon.]*

JACK: You young devil, Algy, you must get out of this place as soon as possible. I do not allow any Bunburying here.  
*[Enter Merriman.]*

MERRIMAN: I have put Mr. Ernest's things in the bedroom next to yours, sir. I suppose that is all right?

JACK: What?

MERRIMAN: Mr. Ernest's baggage, sir. I have unpacked it and put it in the bedroom next to your own.

JACK: His baggage?

MERRIMAN: Yes, sir.

ALGERNON: I am sorry I cannot stay more than a week this time.

JACK: Merriman, order the dog-cart at once. Mr. Ernest has been suddenly called back to town.

MERRIMAN: Yes, sir. *[Goes back into the house.]*

ALGERNON: What a terrible liar you are, Jack. I have not been called back to town at all.

JACK: Yes, you have. Your obligation as a gentleman calls you back.

ALGERNON: Well, your Cecily is a darling.

JACK: You are not to talk of Miss Cardew like that. I do not like it.

ALGERNON: Well, I do not like your clothes. Why on earth don't you go up and change? It is perfectly childish to be in deep lamenting for a man who is actually staying for a whole week with you in your house as a guest.

JACK: You are certainly not staying with me for a whole week as a guest or anything else. You have got to leave by the four-five train.

ALGERNON: I certainly won't leave you so long as you are lamenting.

JACK: Well, will you go if I change my clothes?

ALGERNON: Yes, if you are not too long. I never saw anybody take so long to dress, and with such little result.

JACK: Your vanity is ridiculous, your conduct offensive, and your presence in my garden completely absurd. However, you have got to catch the four-five train and I hope you will have a pleasant journey back to town. This Bunburying, as you call it, has not been a great success for you. *[Goes into the house.]*

ALGERNON: I think it has been a great success. I am in love with Cecily, and that is everything.

*[Enter Cecily at the back of the garden with watering can and begins to water the flowers.]*

But I must see her before I go. Ah, here she is.

CECILY: Oh, I simply came back to water the roses. I thought you were with Uncle Jack.

ALGERNON: He has gone to order the dog-cart for me.

CECILY: Oh, is he going to take you for a nice drive?

ALGERNON: He is going to send me away.

CECILY: Then have we got to part?

ALGERNON: I am afraid so. It is a very painful parting.

CECILY: It is always painful to part from people whom one has known for a very brief space of time.

*[Enter Merriman.]*

MERRIMAN: The dog-cart is at the door, sir.

*[Algernon looks appealingly at Cecily.]*

CECILY: It can wait, Merriman for . . . five minutes.

MERRIMAN: Yes, Miss.

*[Exit Merriman.]*

ALGERNON: I hope, Cecily, I will not offend you if I state quite frankly and openly that you seem to me to be in every way the visible personification of absolute perfection.

CECILY: I think your frankness does you great credit, Ernest. If you will allow me, I will copy your remarks into my diary. *[Goes over to table and begins writing in diary.]*

ALGERNON: Do you really keep a diary? I would give anything to look at it. Can I?

CECILY: Oh no. *[Puts her hand over it.]* But please, Ernest, do not stop. I delight in taking down from dictation. I have reached 'absolute perfection'. You can go on.

ALGERNON: Cecily, ever since I first looked upon your marvellous and incomparable beauty, I have dared to love you wildly, passionately, devotedly, desperately.

CECILY: I do not think that you should tell me that you love me wildly, passionately, devotedly, desperately. Desperately doesn't seem to make much sense, does it?

*[Enter Merriman.]*

MERRIMAN: The dog-cart is waiting, sir.

ALGERNON: Tell it to come round next week, at the same hour.

MERRIMAN: Yes, sir.

*[Merriman exits]*

CECILY: Uncle Jack would be very much agitated if he knew you were remaining on till next week, at the same hour.

ALGERNON: Oh, I do not care about Jack. I do not care for anybody in the whole world but you. I love you, Cecily. You will marry me, won't you?

CECILY: You silly boy! Of course. Why, we have been engaged for the last three months.

ALGERNON: For the last three months?

CECILY: Yes, it will be exactly three months on Thursday.

ALGERNON: But how did we become engaged?

CECILY: Well, ever since dear Uncle Jack first confessed to us that he had a younger brother who was very bad, you have formed the principal topic of conversation between myself and Miss Prism. And obviously, a man who is much talked about is always very attractive. I confess it was stupid of me, but I fell in love with you, Ernest.

ALGERNON: Darling! And when was the engagement actually confirmed?

CECILY: On the 14th of February last. Tired by your complete ignorance of my existence, I determined to resolve the question one way or the other, and after a long battle with myself I accepted you under this dear old tree here.

And this is the box in which I conserve all your dear letters.

*[Kneels at table, opens box, and produces letters tied up with blue ribbon.]*

ALGERNON: My letters! But, my own sweet Cecily, I have never written you any letters.

CECILY: You need not remind me of that, Ernest. I remember only too well I had no alternative but to write your letters for you.

ALGERNON: Oh, do let me read them, Cecily?

CECILY: Oh, I could not possibly. *[Replaces box.]* The three letters you wrote me after I had finished the engagement are so beautiful, and so badly spelled, that even now I cannot read them without crying a little.

ALGERNON: But was our engagement ever finished?

CECILY: Of course it was. On the 22nd of last March. You can see the entry if you like. *[Shows diary.]* 'To-day I finished my engagement with Ernest. I feel it is better to do so. The weather still continues gloriously.'

ALGERNON: But why on earth did you finish it? What had I done?

CECILY: It would not have been a really serious engagement if it had not been finished at least once. But I pardoned you before the week was complete.

ALGERNON: *[Crossing to her, and kneeling.]* What a perfect angel you are, Cecily.

CECILY: You dear romantic boy.

*[He kisses her, she puts her fingers through his hair.]*

ALGERNON: You will never finish our engagement again, Cecily?

CECILY: I do not think I could finish it now that I have actually met you. Besides, there is the magnetism of your name.

ALGERNON: *[Nervously.]* Yes, of course.

CECILY: You must not laugh at me, darling, but it had always been a girlish dream of mine to love someone whose name was Ernest.

*[Algernon rises, Cecily also.]*

There is something in that name that seems to inspire absolute assurance.

ALGERNON: But, my dear child, do you mean to say you could not love me if I had some other name?

CECILY: But what name?

ALGERNON: Oh, any name you like—Algernon—for example

CECILY: But I do not like the name of Algernon.

ALGERNON: I really cannot see why you should object to the name of Algernon. It is not at all a bad name. In fact, it is quite an aristocratic name. But seriously, Cecily *[Moving to her]* if my name was Algy, couldn't you love me?

CECILY: I might respect you, Ernest, I might admire your character, but I suspect that I would not give you my undivided attention.

ALGERNON: Your Rector here is, I suppose, thoroughly experienced in the ceremonials of the Church?

CECILY: Oh, yes. Dr. Chasuble is a most erudite man.

ALGERNON: I must see him at once on a most important baptism I mean on most important business.

CECILY: Oh!

ALGERNON: I will not be away more than half an hour.

CECILY: Couldn't you make it twenty minutes?

ALGERNON: I will be back in no time *[Kisses her and rushes down the garden.]*

CECILY: What a spontaneous boy he is! I must enter his proposal in my diary.

*[Enter Merriman.]*

MERRIMAN: A Miss Fairfax has just called to see Mr. Worthing. On very important business, Miss Fairfax says.

CECILY: Isn't Mr. Worthing in his library?

MERRIMAN: Mr. Worthing went over in the direction of the Chapel some time ago.

CECILY: Please ask the lady to come out here; Mr. Worthing is sure to be back soon. And you can bring tea.

MERRIMAN: Yes, Miss.

*[Merriman exits and returns]*

MERRIMAN: Miss Fairfax.

*[Enter Gwendolen. Exit Merriman.]*

CECILY: Please let me introduce myself to you. My name is Cecily Cardew.

GWENDOLEN: Cecily Cardew? What a very sweet name! Something tells me that we are going to be great friends. My first impressions of people are never wrong.

CECILY: Please sit down.

GWENDOLEN: *[Still standing up.]* I may call you Cecily, may I not?

CECILY: With pleasure!

GWENDOLEN: And you will always call me Gwendolen, won't you?

CECILY: If you like.

GWENDOLEN: Then that is quite decided, is it not?

CECILY: I hope so. *[A pause. They both sit down together.]*

GWENDOLEN: Perhaps this will be a favourable opportunity for my mentioning who I am. My father is Lord Bracknell. You have never heard of papa, I suppose?

CECILY: I do not think so.

GWENDOLEN: You are here on a brief visit?

CECILY: Oh no! I live here.

GWENDOLEN: *[Severely.]* Really? Your mother, no doubt, or some female relative of advanced years, resides here also?

CECILY: Oh no! I have no mother, nor, in fact, any relations.

GWENDOLEN: Indeed?

CECILY: My dear guardian, with the assistance of Miss Prism, has the arduous responsibility of protecting me.

GWENDOLEN: Your guardian?

CECILY: Yes, I am Mr. Worthing's ward.

GWENDOLEN: Oh! It is strange he never mentioned to me that he had a ward. How secretive of him! I do adore you, Cecily; I have liked you ever since I met you! But now that I know that you are Mr. Worthing's ward, I cannot help expressing a desire that you were—well, just a little older than you seem to be—and not quite so beautiful in appearance. To speak frankly, I wish that you were fully forty-two, and more than usually ugly for your age. Ernest is the very essence of strength and ...

CECILY: I beg your pardon, Gwendolen, did you say Ernest?

GWENDOLEN: Yes.

CECILY: Oh, but it is not Mr. Ernest Worthing who is my guardian. It is his brother—his elder brother.

GWENDOLEN: Ernest never mentioned to me that he had a brother.

CECILY: I am sorry to say they have not been amicable for a long time.

GWENDOLEN: Ah! That explains it. Cecily, you have lifted a load from my mind. It would have been terrible if any problem had divided a friendship like ours, would it not? Of course you are quite, quite sure that it is not Mr. Ernest Worthing who is your guardian?

CECILY: Quite sure. *[A pause.]* In fact, I am going to be his.

GWENDOLEN: *[Inquiringly.]* I beg your pardon?

CECILY: *[Rather shy and confidingly.]* Dearest Gwendolen, there is no reason why I should make a secret of it to you. Mr. Ernest Worthing and I are engaged to be married.



GWENDOLEN: *[Quite politely, rising.]* My darling Cecily, I think there must be some slight error. Mr. Ernest Worthing is engaged to me.

CECILY: *[Very politely, rising.]* I am sorry you must be confused. Ernest proposed to me exactly ten minutes ago.

GWENDOLEN: It is certainly very curious, for he asked me to be his wife yesterday afternoon at 5.30. I am so sorry, dear Cecily, if it causes you sadness, but my proposal came first.

CECILY: It would sadden me dear Gwendolen, if it caused you any mental or physical anguish, but evidently after Ernest proposed to you he changed his mind.

GWENDOLEN: If the poor fellow has been entrapped into any stupid promise, I shall consider it my obligation to save him at once, and with a strong hand.

CECILY: Whatever unfortunate difficulty my dear boy may have got into, I will never criticise him for it after we are married.

GWENDOLEN: Do you allude to me, Miss Cardew, as a difficulty? You are presumptuous.

CECILY: Do you suggest, Miss Fairfax, that I entrapped Ernest into an engagement? How dare you?

*[Enter Merriman. He carries a salver, tablecloth, and plate stand. Cecily is about to retort. The presence of the servant exercises a restraining influence, under which both girls chafe.]*

MERRIMAN: Shall I lay tea here as usual, Miss?

CECILY: *[Sternly, in a calm voice.]* Yes, as usual.

*[Merriman begins to clear table and lay cloth. A long pause. Cecily and Gwendolen glare at each other.]*

GWENDOLEN: Are there many interesting walks in the vicinity, Miss Cardew?

CECILY: Oh! Yes! a great many. From the top of one of the hills one can see five counties.

GWENDOLEN: Five counties! I don't think I should like that - far too many people.

CECILY: *[Sweetly.]* I suppose that is why you live in town?

*[Gwendolen bites her lip and beats her foot nervously.]*

GWENDOLEN: *[Looking round.]* Quite a well-kept garden this is, Miss Cardew.

CECILY: So glad you like it, Miss Fairfax.

GWENDOLEN: I had no idea there were any flowers in the country.

CECILY: Oh, flowers are as common here, Miss Fairfax, as people are in London. May I offer you some tea, Miss Fairfax?

GWENDOLEN: *[With elaborate politeness.]* Thank you.

CECILY: *[Sweetly.]* Sugar?

GWENDOLEN: *[Superciliously.]* No, thank you. Sugar is not fashionable anymore.

*[Cecily looks angrily at her, takes up the tongs and puts four lumps of sugar into the cup.]*

CECILY: *[Severely.]* Cake or bread and butter?

GWENDOLEN: *[In a bored manner.]* Bread and butter, please. Cake is rarely seen at the best houses nowadays.

CECILY: *[Cuts a very large slice of cake and puts it on the tray.]* Hand that to Miss Fairfax.

*[Merriman does so, and goes out. Gwendolen drinks the tea and makes a grimace. Puts down cup at once, reaches out her hand to the bread and butter, looks at it, and finds it is cake. Rises in indignation.]*

GWENDOLEN: You have filled my tea with lumps of sugar, and though I asked most distinctly for bread and butter, you have given me cake. I am known for the gentleness of my disposition, but I warn you, Miss Cardew, you may go too far.

CECILY: To save my poor, innocent, boy from the dishonesty of any other girl there are no limits to which I would not go.

GWENDOLEN: From the moment I saw you I suspected you. I felt that you were false and duplicitous. My first impressions of people are invariably right.

CECILY: It seems to me, Miss Fairfax, that I am intruding on your valuable time.

*[Enter Jack.]*

GWENDOLEN: *[Catching sight of him.]* Ernest! My own Ernest!

JACK: Gwendolen! Darling! *[Offers to kiss her.]*

GWENDOLEN: *[Draws back.]* A moment! May I ask if you are engaged to be married to this young lady? *[Points to Cecily.]*

JACK: *[Laughing.]* To dear little Cecily! Of course not! What could have put such an idea into your pretty little head?

GWENDOLEN: Thank you. You may! *[Offers her cheek.]*

CECILY: *[Very sweetly.]* I knew there must be some misunderstanding, Miss Fairfax. The gentleman whose arm is at present round your waist is my guardian, Mr. Jack Worthing.

GWENDOLEN: I beg your pardon?

CECILY: This is Uncle Jack.

GWENDOLEN: *[Receding.]* Jack? Oh!

*[Enter Algernon.]*

CECILY: Here is Ernest.

ALGERNON: *[Goes straight over to Cecily without noticing anyone else.]* My own love!  
*[Offers to kiss her.]*

CECILY: *[Drawing back.]* A moment, Ernest! May I ask you—are you engaged to be married to this young lady?

ALGERNON: *[Looking round.]* To what young lady? Good heavens! Gwendolen!

CECILY: Yes! To good heavens, Gwendolen, I mean to Gwendolen.

ALGERNON: *[Laughing.]* Of course not! What could have put such an idea into your pretty little head?

CECILY: Thank you. *[Presenting her cheek to be kissed.]* You may. *[Algernon kisses her.]*

GWENDOLEN: I felt there was some slight error, Miss Cardew. The gentleman who is now embracing you is my cousin, Mr. Algernon Moncrieff.

CECILY: *[Breaking away from Algernon.]* Algernon Moncrieff! Oh! Are you called Algernon?

ALGERNON: I cannot deny it.

GWENDOLEN: Is your name really Jack?

JACK: *[Standing rather proudly.]* I could deny it if I liked. But my name certainly is Jack. It has been Jack for years.

CECILY: *[To Gwendolen.]* A gross dishonesty has been practiced on both of us.

GWENDOLEN: My poor offended Cecily!

CECILY: My sweet, victimised Gwendolen!

GWENDOLEN: You will call me sister, will you not?

CECILY: Certainly.  
*[They embrace. Jack and Algernon groan and walk up and down.]*

GWENDOLEN: Mr. Worthing, there is just one question I would like to ask you. Where is your brother Ernest? We are both engaged to be married to your brother Ernest, so it is a matter of some importance to us to know where your brother Ernest is.

JACK: *[Slowly and hesitatingly.]* Gwendolen—Cecily—it is very difficult for me to speak the truth. However, I will tell you quite frankly that I have no brother Ernest. I have no brother at all.

CECILY: *[Surprised.]* No brother at all?

JACK: *[Cheerily.]* None!

GWENDOLEN: *[Severely.]* Had you never a brother of any type?

JACK: *[Pleasantly.]* Never. Not even of any type.

GWENDOLEN: I am sorry it is quite obvious, Cecily, that neither of us is engaged to be married to anyone.

CECILY: Let us go into the house. They will hardly venture to come after us there.

*[Gwendolen and Cecily exit into the house with scornful looks.]*

JACK: This horrible state of things is what you call Bunburying, I suppose?

ALGERNON: Yes, and a perfectly marvellous Bunbury it is.

JACK: Well, the only small satisfaction I have in the whole of this miserable affair is that your friend Bunbury is quite exploded. You won't be able to run to the country quite so frequently as you used to do, dear Algy.

*[Throughout this section Algernon helps himself to tea]*

ALGERNON: Your brother is a little off colour, isn't he, dear Jack? You won't be able to go to London quite so frequently as was your bad habit.

JACK: As for your conduct towards Miss Cardew, I must say that your dishonesty to a sweet, innocent girl like that is quite unpardonable

ALGERNON: I can see no possible defence at all for your dishonesty to a brilliant, intelligent young lady like Miss Fairfax.

JACK: I wanted to be engaged to Gwendolen, that is all. I love her.

ALGERNON: Well, I simply wanted to be engaged to Cecily. I adore her.

JACK: There is certainly no possibility of your marrying Miss Cardew.

ALGERNON: I do not think there is much possibility, Jack, of you and Miss Fairfax being united.

JACK: Algy, I wish to goodness you would go.

ALGERNON: You cannot possibly ask me to go without having some dinner. Besides I have just made arrangements with Dr. Chasuble to be baptized at 5:45 under the name of Ernest.

JACK: I made arrangements this morning with Dr. Chasuble to be baptized myself at 5.30, and I naturally will take the name of Ernest. We cannot both be baptized Ernest. It is absurd. Besides, I have a perfect right to be baptized if I like. There is no evidence at all that I have ever been baptised by anybody. You have been baptised already.

ALGERNON: Yes, but I have not been baptised for years.

JACK: Yes, but you have been baptised! Algernon! I have already told you to go. I do not want you here. Why don't you go!

ALGERNON: I haven't quite finished my tea yet! And there is still one muffin left.

## THIRD ACT

Morning-room at the Manor House. Gwendolen and Cecily are at the window, looking out into the garden.

GWENDOLEN: The fact that they did not follow us at once into the house shows that they have some sense of ignominy left.

CECILY: They have been eating muffins. That looks like penitence.

GWENDOLEN: They don't seem to notice us at all. Couldn't you cough?

CECILY: But I have not got a cough.

GWENDOLEN: They are looking at us

CECILY: They are approaching.

GWENDOLEN: Let us preserve a dignified silence.

CECILY: It is the only thing to do.

*[Enter Jack followed by Algernon. They whistle some dreadful popular air eg. 'O Sole Mio']*

GWENDOLEN: This dignified silence seems to produce a horrible effect.

CECILY: A most disgusting one.

GWENDOLEN: But we will not be the first to speak.

CECILY: Certainly not.

GWENDOLEN: Mr. Worthing, I have something very particular to ask you. Much depends on your response.

CECILY: Gwendolen, your prudence is inestimable. Mr. Moncrieff, please answer me the following question. Why did you pretend to be my guardian's brother?

ALGERNON: In order that I could have an opportunity of meeting you.

CECILY: *[To Gwendolen.]* That certainly seems a satisfactory explanation, does it not?

GWENDOLEN: Yes, dear, if you can believe him.

CECILY: I do not. But that does not affect the marvellous beauty of his answer.

GWENDOLEN: Mr. Worthing, what explanation can you offer for pretending to have a brother? Was it in order that you could have an opportunity of coming to town to see me as frequently as possible?

JACK: Can you doubt it, Miss Fairfax?

GWENDOLEN: I have the gravest doubts on the subject. But I intend to ignore them.

[Moving to Cecily.] Their explanations appear to be quite satisfactory, especially Mr. Worthing's.

CECILY: I am more than content with what Mr. Moncrieff said.

GWENDOLEN: Then you think we should pardon them?

CECILY: Yes... I mean no.

GWENDOLEN: True! I had forgotten. Which of us should tell them?

CECILY: Could we not both speak at the same time?

GWENDOLEN: An excellent idea!

GWENDOLEN & CECILY: [Speaking together.] Your Christian names are still an impossible barrier. That is all!

JACK & ALGERNON: [Speaking together.] Our Christian names! Is that all? But we are going to be baptised this afternoon.

GWENDOLEN: *[To Jack.]* For me, you are prepared to do this terrible thing?

JACK: I am.

CECILY: *[To Algernon.]* To please me you are ready to face this horrible event?

ALGERNON: I am!

GWENDOLEN: *[To Jack.]* Darling!

CECILY: *[To Algernon.]* Darling!

*[They fall into each other's arms. Enter Lady Bracknell who coughs loudly, seeing the situation.]*

JACK: Good heavens!

*[The couples separate in alarm.]*

LADY BRACKNELL: Gwendolen! What does this mean?

GWENDOLEN: Simply that I am engaged to be married to Mr. Worthing, mamma.

LADY BRACKNELL: Come here. Sit down immediately. *[Turns to Jack.]* Informed, sir, of my daughter's rapid departure by her honest maid, I followed her with velocity by a baggage train. You will obviously understand that all communication with yourself and my daughter must cease immediately from this moment. On this point, as indeed on all points, I am unalterable.

JACK: I am engaged to be married to Gwendolen Lady Bracknell!

LADY BRACKNELL: You are nothing of the kind, sir.  
*[Gwendolen exits crying]*



And now, as regards Algernon! . . . Algernon!

ALGERNON: Yes, Aunt Augusta.

LADY BRACKNELL: May I ask if it is in this house that your invalid friend Mr. Bunbury resides?

ALGERNON: [Stammering.] Oh! No! Bunbury does not live here. Bunbury is somewhere else at present. In fact, Bunbury is dead.

LADY BRACKNELL: Dead! When did Mr. Bunbury die? His death must have been extremely rapid.

ALGERNON: [Airily.] Oh! I killed Bunbury this afternoon. I mean poor Bunbury died this afternoon.

LADY BRACKNELL: What did he die of?

ALGERNON: Bunbury? Oh, he was quite exploded.

LADY BRACKNELL: Exploded! Was he the victim of a revolutionary outrage?

ALGERNON: My dear Aunt Augusta, I mean he was found out! The doctors found out that Bunbury could not live, that is what I mean—so Bunbury died.

LADY BRACKNELL: He seems to have had great confidence in the opinion of his medics. And now that we have finally got rid of this Mr. Bunbury, can I ask, Mr. Worthing, who is that young person whose hand Algernon is holding in what seems to me a peculiarly unnecessary manner?

JACK: That lady is Miss Cecily Cardew, my dependant ward.

[Lady Bracknell bows coldly to Cecily.]

ALGERNON: I am engaged to be married to Cecily, Aunt Augusta.

LADY BRACKNELL: I beg your pardon?

CECILY: Mr. Moncrieff and I are engaged to be married, Lady Bracknell.

LADY BRACKNELL: [With a shiver and sitting down.] I do not know whether there is anything peculiarly exciting in the air of Hertfordshire, but the number of engagements seems to me considerably high. Mr. Worthing, is Miss Cardew at all connected with any of the larger train stations in London?

JACK: [In a clear, cold voice.] Miss Cardew is the grand-daughter of the late Mr. Thomas Cardew of 149 Belgrave Square, S.W.; Gervase Park, Dorking, Surrey; and the Sporrin, Fifeshire, N.B.

LADY BRACKNELL: That sounds not unsatisfactory. Three properties always inspire confidence. But what proof have I of their authenticity?

JACK: I have carefully preserved the Court Guides of the period. They are open to your inspection, Lady Bracknell.

LADY BRACKNELL: [Grimly.] I have known strange errors in that publication.

JACK: Miss Cardew's family solicitors are Messrs. Markby, Markby, and Markby.

LADY BRACKNELL: Markby, Markby, and Markby? A firm of the very highest position in their profession. So far I am satisfied.

JACK: *[Very irritably.]* How extremely kind of you, Lady Bracknell! I have also in my possession, you will be pleased to hear, certificates of Miss Cardew's birth, baptism, whooping cough, registration, vaccination, confirmation, and the measles; both the German and the English variety.

LADY BRACKNELL: Ah! A life abundant with incident, I see. The time approaches for our departure. As a matter of form, Mr. Worthing, I had better ask you if Miss Cardew has any little fortune?

JACK: Oh! About a hundred and thirty thousand pounds in the Funds. That is all. Goodbye, Lady Bracknell. So pleased to have seen you.

LADY BRACKNELL: *[Sitting down again.]* A moment, Mr. Worthing. A hundred and thirty thousand pounds! And in the Funds! Miss Cardew seems to me a most attractive young lady, now that I look at her. *[To Cecily.]* Come over here, dear. Pretty child! your dress is sadly simple, and your hair seems almost as Nature might have left it. But we can soon alter all that. Kindly turn round, sweet child. *[Cecily turns completely round.]* No, the side view is what I want. *[Cecily presents her profile.]* Yes, quite as I expected. There are distinct social possibilities in your profile. Algernon!

ALGERNON: Yes, Aunt Augusta!

LADY BRACKNELL: There are distinct social possibilities in Miss Cardew's profile.

ALGERNON: Cecily is the sweetest, dearest, prettiest girl in the whole world. And I don't care two pence about social possibilities.

LADY BRACKNELL: Never speak disrespectfully of Society, Algernon. Only people who can't get into it do that. *[To Cecily.]* Dear child, of course you know that Algernon has nothing but his debts to depend upon. Well, I suppose I must give my consent.

ALGERNON: Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

CECILY: Thank you, Lady Bracknell.

LADY BRACKNELL: You may also call me Aunt Augusta for the future.

CECILY: Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

LADY BRACKNELL: The marriage, I think, had better take place quite soon.

JACK: I beg your pardon for interrupting you, Lady Bracknell, but this engagement is quite out of the question. I am Miss Cardew's guardian, and she cannot marry without my consent until she comes of age. That consent I absolutely decline to give.

LADY BRACKNELL: Upon what grounds may I ask?

JACK: It pains me very much to have to speak frankly to you, Lady Bracknell, about your nephew, but the fact is that I do not approve at all of his moral character. I suspect him of being dishonest.

*[Algernon and Cecily look at him in indignant amazement.]*

LADY BRACKNELL: Dishonest! My nephew Algernon? Impossible!

JACK: I fear there can be no possible doubt about the matter. This afternoon during my temporary absence in London he obtained admission to my house by means of the false pretence of being my brother and succeeded in alienating the affections of my only ward. He was perfectly well aware that I have no brother, that I never had a brother, and that I do not intend to have a brother.

LADY BRACKNELL: Ahem! Mr. Worthing, after careful consideration I have decided entirely to overlook my nephew's conduct to you.

JACK: That is very generous of you, Lady Bracknell. My own decision, however, is unalterable. I decline to give my consent.

LADY BRACKNELL: *[To Cecily.]* Come here, sweet child. How old are you, dear?

CECILY: Well, I am really only eighteen.

LADY BRACKNELL: Well, it will not be very long before you are of age and free from the restrictions of tutelage. So, I do not think your guardian's consent is, after all, a matter of any importance.

JACK: Please excuse me, Lady Bracknell, for interrupting you again, but it is only fair to tell you that according to the terms of her grandfather's testament Miss Cardew does not come legally of age till she is thirty-five.

LADY BRACKNELL: That does not seem to me to be a grave objection.

CECILY: Algy, could you wait for me till I was thirty-five?

ALGERNON: Of course I could, Cecily. You know I could.

CECILY: Yes, I felt it instinctively, but I could not wait all that time. I hate waiting even five minutes for anybody. I am not punctual myself, I know, but I do like punctuality in others, and waiting, even to be married, is quite out of the question.

ALGERNON: Then what is to be done, Cecily?

CECILY: I do not know, Mr. Moncrieff.

LADY BRACKNELL: My dear Mr. Worthing, as Miss Cardew states positively that she cannot wait till she is thirty-five I would beg of you to reconsider your decision.

JACK: But my dear Lady Bracknell, the matter is entirely in your own hands. The moment you consent to my marriage with Gwendolen, I will most happily permit your nephew to form an alliance with my ward.

LADY BRACKNELL: *[Rising and drawing herself up.]* You must be quite aware that what you propose is out of the question.

JACK: Then a passionate celibacy is all that any of us can look forward to.

LADY BRACKNELL: That is not the destiny I propose for Gwendolen. Algernon, of course, can choose for himself. *[Pulls out her watch.]* Please have someone call Gwendolen, we have already missed five, if not six, trains.

JACK: And I will go inform Dr Chasuble and Miss Prism that we are to cancel the baptisms.

LADY BRACKNELL: Miss Prism! Did I hear you mention a Miss Prism?

JACK: Yes, Lady Bracknell. She is waiting for us in the chapel.

LADY BRACKNELL: Is this Miss Prism a female of repellent aspect, remotely connected with education?

JACK: Miss Prism, Lady Bracknell, has been for the last three years Miss Cardew's esteemed governess and valued companion.

LADY BRACKNELL: I must see her at once. Let her be sent for.

JACK: She approaches. *[Enter Miss Prism hurriedly.]*

MISS PRISM: Mr Worthing, Dr Chasuble and I have been waiting for you in the chapel for an hour and three-quarters.

*[Catches sight of Lady Bracknell, who has fixed her with a stony glare. Miss Prism grows pale and quails. She looks anxiously round as if desirous to escape.]*

LADY BRACKNELL: *[In a severe, judicial voice.]* Prism! *[Miss Prism bows her head in shame.]* Come here, Prism! *[Miss Prism approaches in a humble manner.]* Prism! Where is that baby? *[General consternation.]* Twenty-eight years ago, Prism, you left Lord Bracknell's house in charge of a baby carriage that contained a baby of the male sex. You never returned. A few weeks later the baby carriage was discovered standing by itself in a remote corner of Bayswater Train Station. It contained the manuscript of a sentimental three-volume novel. *[Miss Prism starts in involuntary indignation.]* But the baby was not there! *[Everyone looks at Miss Prism.]* Prism! Where is that baby?

*[A pause.]*

MISS PRISM: Lady Bracknell, I do not know. I only wish I did. On the morning of the day you mention I prepared to take the baby out in its carriage. I had also with me an old hand-bag in which I had intended to place the manuscript of a three-volume novel that I had written. In a moment of mental distraction for which I never can forgive myself, I deposited the manuscript in the carriage, and placed the baby in the hand-bag.

JACK: *[Who has been listening attentively.]* But where did you deposit the hand-bag?

MISS PRISM: Do not ask me, Mr. Worthing.

JACK: Miss Prism, this is a matter of no small importance to me. I insist on knowing where you deposited the hand-bag that contained that baby.

MISS PRISM: I left it in the cloak-room of one of the larger train stations in London.

JACK: What train station?

MISS PRISM: *[Quite crushed.]* Victoria. The Brighton line.

JACK: I must return to my dressing room for a moment. *[Exit Jack in great excitement.]*

ALEGERNON: What do you think this means?

LADY BRACKNELL: I dare not even suspect. I need hardly tell you that in families of high position strange coincidences are not supposed to occur. They are hardly considered the thing.

*[Noises heard overhead as if someone was throwing trunks about. Everyone looks up.]*

CECILY: Uncle Jack seems strangely agitated.

LADY BRACKNELL: This noise is extremely unpleasant.

ALGERNON: *[Looking up.]* It has stopped now.

CECILY: This suspense is terrible.

*[Enter Jack with a hand-bag of black leather in his hand.]*

JACK: *[Rushing over to Miss Prism.]* Is this the hand-bag, Miss Prism? Examine it carefully before you speak. The happiness of more than one life depends on your answer.

MISS PRISM: *[Calmly.]* It seems to be mine. Yes, here, on the lock, are my initials. The bag is undoubtedly mine. I am happy to have it so unexpectedly returned to me.

JACK: *[In a pathetic voice.]* Miss Prism, more is returned to you than this hand-bag. I was the baby you placed in it.

MISS PRISM: *[Amazed.]* You?

JACK: *[Embracing her.]* Yes . . . mother!

MISS PRISM: *[Recoiling in indignant astonishment.]* Mr. Worthing! I am unmarried!

JACK: Unmarried! I do not deny that is a serious transgression. But after all, who has the right to throw a stone at the afflicted. Mother, I pardon you. *[Tries to embrace her again.]*

MISS PRISM: *[Still more indignant.]* Mr. Worthing, there is some error. *[Pointing to Lady Bracknell.]* There is the lady who can tell you who you really are.

*[Miss Prism exits]*

LADY BRACKNELL: My dear Cecily, would you be so kind as to find Gwendolen for me. I believe that this is something she must also hear.

CECILY: Of course Aunt Augusta. *[Exit Cecily]*

JACK: *[After a pause.]* Lady Bracknell, I hate to seem curious, but would you kindly inform me who I am?

*[Algernon interrupts to buy a little extra time for quick change]*

ALGERNON: I don't suppose you have any more of those muffins, Jack? I'm still rather hungry.

JACK: Do be quiet, Algy!

LADY BRACKNELL: I am afraid that the news I have to give you will not altogether please you. *[Enter Cecily and Gwendolen]* You are the son of my poor sister, Mrs. Moncrieff, and consequently Algernon's elder brother.

JACK: Algy's elder brother! Then I have a brother after all. I always said I had a brother! Cecily,—how could you have ever doubted that I had a brother? *[Seizes hold of Algernon.]* Gwendolen, my unfortunate brother. Algy, you young devil.

ALGERNON: Good heavens!  
*[Shakes hands.]*

GWENDOLEN: *[To Jack.]* My own! But what own are you? What is your Christian name, now that you have become someone else?

JACK: Good heavens! . . . I had quite forgotten that point. Your decision on the subject of my name is irrevocable, I suppose?

GWENDOLEN: I never change, except in my affections.

CECILY: What a noble nature you have, Gwendolen!

JACK: Then the question had better be resolved at once. Aunt Augusta. At the time when Miss Prism left me in the hand-bag, had I been baptized already?

LADY BRACKNELL: Every luxury that money could buy, including baptism, had been given to you by your affectionate and adoring parents.

JACK: Then I was baptised! That is settled. Now, what name was I given? Let me know the worst.

LADY BRACKNELL: Being the eldest son you were naturally named after your father.

JACK: *[Irritably.]* Yes, but what was my father's Christian name?

LADY BRACKNELL: *[Meditatively.]* I cannot at this present moment recall what the General's Christian name was. But I have no doubt he had one.

JACK: Algy! Can't you recollect what our father's Christian name was?

ALGERNON: My dear boy, we were never even on speaking terms. He died before I was a year old.

JACK: His name would appear in the Military Lists of the period, I suppose, Aunt Augusta?

LADY BRACKNELL: I have no doubt his name would appear in any military directory.

JACK: The Military Lists of the past forty years are here. These marvellous records should have been my constant study. [Rushes to bookcase and tears the books out.] M. Generals . . . Mallam, Maxbohm, Magley, what horrible names they have—Markby, Migsby, Mobbs, Moncrieff! Lieutenant 1840, Captain, Lieutenant-Colonel, Colonel, General 1869, Christian names, Ernest Jack. [Puts book very quietly down and speaks quite calmly.] I always told you, Gwendolen, my name was Ernest, didn't I? Well, it is Ernest after all.

GWENDOLEN: Ernest! My own Ernest! I felt from the first that you could have no other name!

JACK: My own one!

ALGERNON: Cecily! *[Embraces her.]* At last!

JACK: Gwendolen! *[Embraces her.]* At last!

LADY BRACKNELL: My nephew, you seem to be demonstrating signs of frivolity.

JACK: On the contrary, Aunt Augusta, I've now realised for the first time in my life the vital Importance of Being Earnest.

THE END