**Author:** Oscar Wilde (1854-1900)

**Title:** The Importance of Being

Earnest

**Year:** 1895

Genre: Drama

**Big Idea:** The Quest for Truth and

Beauty

Grade: 12

**Country:** USA

# The Importance of Being Earnest

Oscar Wilde

London: St. James' Theatre: Lessee and Manager, Mr. George Alexander, February 14, 1895.

#### Characters

JOHN WORTHING, J.P. [Jack] Mr. George Alexander **ALGERNON MONCRIEFF** Mr. Allen Avnesworth REV. CANON CHASUBLE, D.D. Mr. H. H. Vincent MERRIMAN (Butler) Mr. Frank Dyall LANE (Manservant) Mr. F. Kinsey Peile LADY BRACKNELL Miss Rose Leclercq HON. GWENDOLEN FAIRFAX Miss Irene Vanbrugh **CECILY CARDEW** Miss Evelyn Millard MISS PRISM (Governess) Mrs. George Canninge

## The Scenes of the Play

Act I Algernon Moncrieff's Flat in Half Moon Street, W.Act II The Garden at the Manor House, Woolton.Act III Drawing-room of the Manor House, Woolton.

Time—The Present Place—London



#### Act I

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SCENE—Morning-room in ALGERNON'S flat in Half Moon Street. The room is luxuriously and artistically furnished. The sound of a piano is heard in the adjoining room.

[LANE is arranging afternoon tea on the table, and after the music has ceased, ALGERNON enters.]

ALGERNON: Did you hear what I was playing, Lane?

LANE: I didn't think it polite to listen, sir.

ALGERNON: I'm sorry for that, for your sake. I don't play accurately—anyone can play accurately—but I play with wonderful expression. As far as the piano is concerned, sentiment is my forte. I keep science for Life.

LANE: Yes, sir.

**ALGERNON:** And, speaking of the science of Life, 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]. Oh!...by the way, Lane, I see from your book that on Thursday night, when Lord Shoreman and Mr. Worthing were dining with me, eight bottles of champagne are entered as having been consumed.

LANE: Yes, sir; eight bottles and a pint.

**ALGERNON:** Why is it that at a bachelor's establishment the servants invariably drink the champagne? I ask merely for information.

**LANE:** I attribute it to the superior quality of the wine, sir. I have often observed that in married households the champagne is rarely of a first-rate brand.

**ALGERNON:** Good heavens! Is marriage so demoralising as that?

LANE: I believe it *is* a very pleasant state, sir. I have had very little experience of it myself up to the present. I have only been married once. That was in consequence of a misunderstanding between myself and a young person.

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#### The Importance of Being Earnest, cont.

35	ALGERNON: [Languidly]. I don't know that I am much
	interested in your family life, Lane.

**LANE:** No, sir; it is not a very interesting subject. I never think of it myself.

**ALGERNON:** Very natural, I am sure. That will do, Lane, thank you.

LANE: Thank you, sir.

[LANE goes out.]

ALGERNON: Lane's views on marriage seem somewhat lax.

Really, if the lower orders don't set us a good example, what on earth is the use of them? They seem, as a class, to have absolutely no sense of moral responsibility.

[Enter LANE.]

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 customary 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 amuses oneself. When one is in the country one amuses other people. It is excessively boring.

ALGERNON: And who are the people you amuse?

JACK: [Airily]. Oh, neighbours, neighbours.

**ALGERNON:** Got nice neighbours in your part of Shropshire?

JACK: Perfectly horrid! Never speak to one of them.

**ALGERNON:** How immensely you must amuse them! [Goes over and takes sandwich.] By the way, Shropshire is your county, is it not?



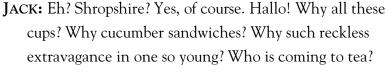
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ALGERNON: Oh! merely Aunt Augusta and Gwendolen.

**JACK:** How perfectly delightful!

**ALGERNON:** Yes, that is all very well; but I am afraid Aunt Augusta won't quite approve of your being here.

75 **JACK:** May I ask why?

**ALGERNON:** My dear fellow, the way you flirt with Gwendolen is perfectly disgraceful. 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 utterly unromantic you are!

ALGERNON: I really don't see anything romantic in proposing. It is very romantic to be in love. But there is nothing romantic about a definite proposal. Why, one may be accepted. One usually is, I believe. Then the excitement is all over. The very essence of romance is uncertainty. If ever I get married, I'll certainly try to forget the fact.

**JACK:** I have no doubt about that, dear Algy. The Divorce Court was specially invented for people whose memories are so curiously constituted.

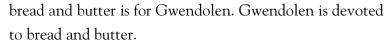
ALGERNON: Oh! there is no use speculating on that subject.

Divorces are made in Heaven—[JACK puts out his hand to take a sandwich. ALGERNON at once interferes.] Please don't 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 matter. She is my aunt. [*Takes plate from below.*] Have some bread and butter. The





- **JACK:** [Advancing to table and helping himself]. And very good bread and butter it is too.
- ALGERNON: Well, my dear fellow, you need not eat as if you were going to eat it all. You behave as if you were married to her already. You are not married to her already, and I don't think you ever will be.

JACK: Why on earth do you say that?

ALGERNON: Well, in the first place girls never marry the men they flirt with. Girls don't think it right.

JACK: Oh, that is nonsense!

**ALGERNON:** It isn't. It is a great truth. It accounts for the extraordinary number of bachelors that one sees all over the place. In the second place, I don't give my consent.

JACK: Your consent!

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- **ALGERNON:** My dear fellow, Gwendolen is my first cousin. And before I allow you to marry her, you will have to clear up the whole question of Cecily. [*Rings bell.*]
- JACK: Cecily! What on earth do you mean? What do you mean, Algy, by Cecily? I don't 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 wish to goodness you had let me know. I have been writing frantic letters to Scotland Yard about it. I was very nearly offering a large reward.
- **ALGERNON:** Well, I wish you would offer one. I happen to be more than usually hard up.
- **JACK:** There is no good offering a large reward now that the thing is found.



135	[Enter LANE with the cigarette case on a salver. ALGERNON
	takes it at once. LANE goes out.]
	ALGERNON: I think that is rather mean of you, Ernest, I must
	say. [Opens case and examines it.] However, it makes no
	matter, for, now that I look at the inscription inside, I find
140	that the thing isn't yours after all.
	JACK: Of course it's 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. It is a very ungentlemanly
	thing to read a private cigarette case.
145	ALGERNON: Oh! it is absurd to have a hard-and-fast rule
	about what one should read and what one shouldn't. More
	than half of modern culture depends on what one
	shouldn't read.
	JACK: I am quite aware of the fact, and I don't propose to
150	discuss modern culture. It isn't the sort of thing one should
	talk of in private. I simply want my cigarette case back.
	ALGERNON: Yes; but this isn't your cigarette case. This
	cigarette case is a present from someone of the name of
	Cecily, and you said you didn't know anyone of that name.
155	JACK: Well, if you want to know, Cecily happens to be my
	aunt.
	ALGERNON: Your aunt!
	JACK: Yes. Charming old lady she is, too. Lives at Tunbridge
	Wells. Just give it back to me, Algy.
160	<b>ALGERNON:</b> [Retreating to back of sofa]. But why does she call
	herself little Cecily if she is your aunt and lives at
	Tunbridge Wells? [Reading.] 'From little Cecily with her
	fondest love.'
	JACK: [Moving to sofa and kneeling upon it]. My dear fellow,
165	what on earth is there in that? Some aunts are tall, some
	aunts are not tall. That is a matter that surely an aunt may
	be allowed to decide for herself. You seem to think that
	every aunt should be exactly like your aunt! That is absurd!

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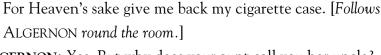
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ALGERNON: Yes. But why does your aunt call you her uncle? 'From little Cecily, with her fondest love to her dear Uncle Jack.' There is no objection, I admit, to an aunt being a small aunt, but why an aunt, no matter what her size may be, should call her own nephew her uncle, I can't quite make out. Besides, your name isn't Jack at all; it is Ernest.

JACK: It isn't Ernest; it's Jack.

ALGERNON: You have always told me it was Ernest. I have introduced you to every one as Ernest. You answer to the name of Ernest. You look as if your name was Ernest. You are the most earnest looking person I ever saw in my life. It is perfectly absurd your saying that your name isn't Ernest. It's on your cards. Here is one of them. [Taking it from case.] 'Mr. Ernest Worthing, B 4, The Albany.' I'll 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. [Puts the card in his pocket.]

**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, old boy, you had much better have the thing out at once.

JACK: My dear Algy, you talk exactly as if you were a dentist. It is very vulgar to talk like a dentist when one isn't a dentist. It produces a false impression,

ALGERNON: Well, that is exactly what dentists always do.

Now, go on! Tell me the whole thing. I may mention that
I have always suspected you of being a confirmed and
secret Bunburyist; and I am quite sure of it now.



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	JACK: Bunburyist? What on earth do you mean by a
	Bunburyist?
	ALGERNON: I'll reveal to you the meaning of that
5	incomparable expression as soon as you are kind 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, and pray make it improbable. [Sits on sofa.]

JACK: My dear fellow, there is nothing improbable about my explanation at all. In fact it's perfectly ordinary. Old Mr. Thomas Cardew, who adopted me when I was a little boy, made me in his will guardian to his grand-daughter, Miss Cecily Cardew. Cecily, who addresses me as her uncle from motives of respect that you could not possibly appreciate, lives at my place in the country under the charge of her admirable governess, Miss Prism.

ALGERNON: Where is that place in the country, by the way?

JACK: That is nothing to you, dear boy. You are not going to be invited....I may tell you candidly that the place is not in Shropshire.

ALGERNON: I suspected that, my dear fellow! I have Bunburyed all over Shropshire on two separate occasions. Now, go on. Why are you Ernest in town and Jack in the country?

JACK: My dear Algy, I don't know whether you will be able to understand my real motives. You are hardly serious enough. When one is placed in the position of guardian, one has to adopt a very high moral tone on all subjects. It's one's duty to do so. And as a high moral tone can hardly be said to conduce very much to either one's health or one's happiness, in order to get up to town I have always pretended to have a younger brother of the name of Ernest,



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who lives in the Albany, and gets into the most dreadful scrapes. That, my dear Algy, is the whole truth pure and simple.

ALGERNON: The truth is rarely pure and never simple.

Modern life would be very tedious if it were either, and modern literature a complete impossibility!

JACK: That wouldn't be at all a bad thing.

ALGERNON: Literary criticism is not your forte, my dear fellow. Don't try it. You should leave that to people who haven't been at a University. They do it so well in the daily papers. 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 often as you like. I have invented an invaluable permanent invalid called Bunbury, in order that I may be able to go down into the country whenever I choose. Bunbury is perfectly invaluable. If it wasn't for Bunbury's extraordinary bad health, for instance, I wouldn't be able to dine with you at Willis's to-night, for I have been really engaged to Aunt Augusta for more than a week.

JACK: I haven't asked you to dine with me anywhere to-night. ALGERNON: I know. You are absurdly careless about sending out invitations. It is very foolish of you. Nothing annoys people so much as not receiving invitations.

JACK: You had much better dine with your Aunt Augusta.

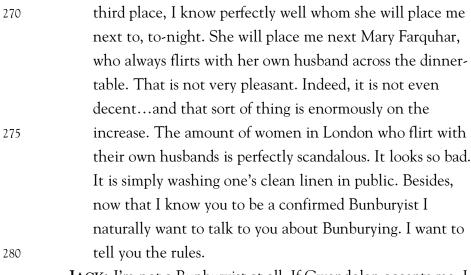
ALGERNON: I haven't the smallest intention of doing anything of the kind. To begin with, I dined there on Monday, and once a week is quite enough to dine with one's own relations. In the second place, whenever I do dine there I am always treated as a member of the family, and sent down with either no woman at all, or two. In the



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JACK: I'm not a Bunburyist at all. If Gwendolen accepts me, I am going to kill my brother, indeed I think I'll kill him in any case. Cecily is a little too much interested in him. It is rather a bore. So I am going to get rid of Ernest. And I strongly advise you to do the same with Mr....with your invalid friend who has the absurd name.

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

JACK: That is nonsense. If I marry a charming girl like Gwendolen, and she is the only girl I ever saw in my life that I would marry, I certainly won't want to know Bunbury.

**ALGERNON:** Then your wife will. You don't seem to realise, that in married life three is company and two is none.

**JACK:** [Sententiously]. That, my dear young friend, is the theory that the corrupt French drama has been propounding for the last fifty years.

**ALGERNON:** Yes; and that the happy English home has proved in half the time.



Drama

## The Importance of Being Earnest, cont.

	JACK: For Heaven's sake, don't try to be cynical. It's perfectly easy to be cynical.
305	ALGERNON: My dear fellow, it isn't easy to be anything now-
	a-days. There's such a lot of beastly competition about.
	[The sound of an electric bell is heard.] Ah! that must be Aunt Augusta. Only relatives, or creditors, ever ring in
	that Wagnerian manner. Now, if I get her out of the way
310	for ten minutes, so that you can have an opportunity for
310	proposing to Gwendolen, may I dine with you to- night at
	Willis's?
	JACK: I suppose so, if you want to.
	ALGERNON: Yes, but you must be serious about it. I hate
315	people who are not serious about meals. It is so shallow of
	them.
	[Enter LANE.]
	LANE: Lady Bracknell and Miss Fairfax.
	[ALGERNON goes forward to meet them. Enter LADY
320	Bracknell and Gwendolen.]
	LADY BRACKNELL: Good afternoon, dear Algernon, I hope
	you are behaving very well.
	ALGERNON: I'm feeling very well, Aunt Augusta.
	LADY BRACKNELL: That's not quite the same thing. In fact
325	the two things rarely go together. [Sees JACK and bows to
	him with icy coldness.]
	<b>Algernon:</b> [To Gwendolen]. Dear me, you are smart!
	GWEDOLEN: I am always smart! Am I not, Mr. Worthing?
	JACK: You're quite perfect, Miss Fairfax.
330	GWEDOLEN: 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'm sorry if we are a little late, Algernon,

but I was obliged to call on dear Lady Harbury. I hadn't

been there since her poor husband's death. I never saw a



	woman so altered; she looks quite twenty years younger.	
	And now I'll have a cup of tea, and one of those nice	
	cucumber sandwiches you promised me.	
340	ALGERNON: Certainly, Aunt Augusta. [Goes over to tea-table	.]
	LADY BRACKNELL: Won't you come and sit here,	
	Gwendolen?	
	GWEDOLEN: Thanks, mamma, I'm quite comfortable where	[
	am.	
345	ALGERNON: [Picking up empty plate in horror]. Good heavens!	
	Lane! Why are there no cucumber sandwiches? I ordered	
	them specially.	
	LANE: [Gravely]. There were no cucumbers in the market thi	.S
	morning, sir. I went down twice.	
350	ALGERNON: No cucumbers!	
	Lane: No, sir. Not even for ready money.	
	ALGERNON: That will do, Lane, thank you.	
	LANE: Thank you, sir. [Goes ou	t.
	ALGERNON: I am greatly distressed, Aunt Augusta, about	
355	there being no cucumbers, not even for ready money.	
	LADY BRACKNELL: It really makes no matter, Algernon. I ha	ad
	some crumpets with Lady Harbury, who seems to me to be	e
	living entirely for pleasure now.	
	<b>ALGERNON:</b> I hear her hair has turned quite gold from grief.	
360	LADY BRACKNELL: It certainly has changed its colour. From	
	what cause I, of course, cannot say. [ALGERNON crosses ar	ıd
	hands tea.] Thank you. I've quite a treat for you to-night,	
	Algernon. I am going to send you down with Mary	

**ALGERNON:** I am afraid, Aunt Augusta, I shall have to give up the pleasure of dining with you to-night after all.

Farquhar. She is such a nice woman, and so attentive to

her husband. It's delightful to watch them.

LADY BRACKNELL: [Frowning]. I hope not, Algernon. It would put my table completely out. Your uncle would have to dine upstairs. Fortunately he is accustomed to that.



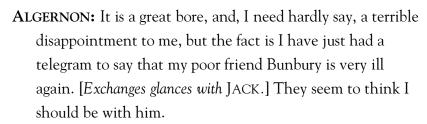
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**LADY BRACKNELL:** It is very strange. This Mr. Bunbury seems to suffer from curiously bad health.

**ALGERNON:** Yes; poor Bunbury is a dreadful invalid.

LADY BRACKNELL: Well, I must say, Algernon, that I think it is high time that Mr. Bunbury made up his mind whether he was going to live or to die. This shilly-shallying with the question is absurd. Nor do I in any way approve of the modern sympathy with invalids. I consider it morbid. Illness of any kind is hardly a thing to be encouraged in others. Health is the primary duty of life. I am always telling that to your poor uncle, but he never seems to take much notice...as far as any improvement in his ailments goes. I should be much obliged if you would ask Mr. Bunbury, from me, to be kind enough not to have a relapse on Saturday, for I rely on you to arrange my music for me. It is my last reception, and one wants something that will encourage conversation, particularly at the end of the season when everyone has practically said whatever they had to say, which, in most cases, was probably not much.

ALGERNON: I'll speak to Bunbury, Aunt Augusta, if he is still conscious, and I think I can promise you he'll be all right by Saturday. Of course the music is a great difficulty. You see, if one plays good music, people don't listen, and if one plays bad music people don't talk. But I'll run over the programme I've drawn out, if you will kindly come into the next room for a moment.

**LADY BRACKNELL:** Thank you, Algernon. It is very thoughtful of you. [*Rising, and following* ALGERNON.] I'm sure the programme will be delightful, after a few





#### The Importance of Being Earnest, cont.

expurgations. French songs I cannot possibly allow. People always seem to think that they are improper, and either look shocked, which is vulgar, or laugh, which is worse.

But German sounds a thoroughly respectable language, and indeed, I believe is so. Gwendolen, you will accompany me.

**GWEDOLEN:** Certainly, mamma.

[LADY BRACKNELL and ALGERNON go into the music-room, GWENDOLEN remains behind.]

JACK: Charming day it has been, Miss Fairfax.

GWEDOLEN: Pray don't 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.

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

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

**GWEDOLEN:** I would certainly advise you to do so. Mamma has a way of coming back suddenly into a room that I have often had to speak to her about.

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

GWEDOLEN: Yes, I am quite well aware of the fact. And I often wish that in public, at any rate, you had been more demonstrative. For me you have always had an irresistible fascination. Even before I met you I was far from indifferent to you. [JACK looks at her in amazement.] We live, as I hope you know, Mr Worthing, in an age of ideals. The fact is constantly mentioned in the more expensive monthly magazines, and has reached the provincial pulpits, I am told: and my ideal has always been to love some one of the name of Ernest. There is something in that name



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#### The Importance of Being Earnest, cont.

that inspires absolute confidence. 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?

**GWEDOLEN:** Passionately!

JACK: Darling! You don't know how happy you've made me.

GWEDOLEN: My own Ernest!

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**JACK:** But you don't really mean to say that you couldn't love me if my name wasn't Ernest?

**GWEDOLEN:** But your name is Ernest.

**JACK:** Yes, I know it is. But supposing it was something else? Do you mean to say you couldn't love me then?

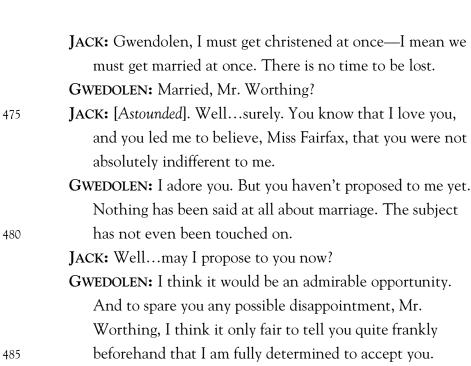
**GWEDOLEN:** [Glibly]. Ah! that is clearly a metaphysical speculation, and like most metaphysical speculations has very little reference at all to the actual facts of real life, as we know them.

JACK: Personally, darling, to speak quite candidly, I don't much care about the name of Ernest...I don't think the name suits me at all.

**GWEDOLEN:** 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 instance, a charming name.

GWEDOLEN: 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 plain. Besides, Jack is a notorious domesticity for John! And I pity any woman who is married to a man called John. She would probably never be allowed to know the entrancing pleasure of a single moment's solitude. The only really safe name is Ernest.



JACK: Gwendolen!

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

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

490 **GWEDOLEN:** Yes, but you don't say it.

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

**GWEDOLEN:** 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.

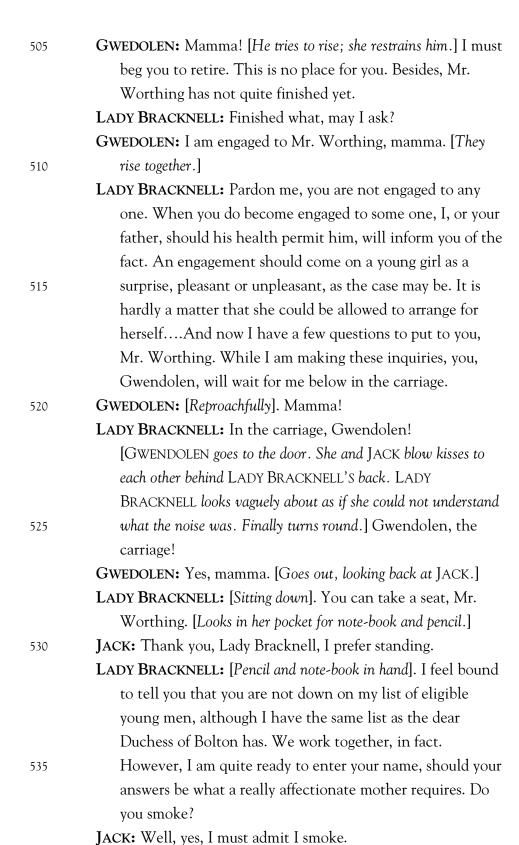
GWEDOLEN: Yes, but men often propose for practice. I know my brother Gerald does. All my girl friends tell me so.

What wonderfully blue eyes you have, Ernest! They are quite, quite blue. I hope you will always look at me just like that, especially when there are other people present.

[Enter LADY BRACKNELL.]

**LADY BRACKNELL:** Mr. Worthing! Rise, sir, from this semi-recumbent posture. It is most indecorous.







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#### The Importance of Being Earnest, cont.

LADY BRACKNELL: I am glad to hear it. A man should always have an occupation of some kind. There are far too many idle men in London as it is. How old are you?

JACK: Twenty-nine.

**LADY BRACKNELL:** A very good age to be married at. I have always been of opinion that a man who desires to get married should know either everything or nothing. Which do you know?

JACK: [After some hesitation]. I know nothing, Lady Bracknell.

LADY BRACKNELL: I am pleased to hear it. I do not approve of anything that tampers with natural ignorance. Ignorance is like a delicate exotic fruit; touch it and the bloom is gone.

The whole theory of modern education is radically unsound. Fortunately in England, at any rate, education produces no effect whatsoever. If it did, it would prove a serious danger to the upper classes, and probably lead to acts of violence in Grosvenor Square. What is your income?

JACK: Between seven and eight thousand a year.

LADY BRACKNELL: [Makes a note in her book]. In land, or in

JACK: In investments, chiefly.

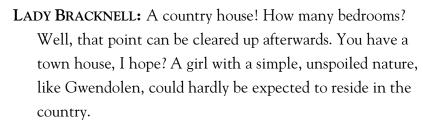
investments?

LADY BRACKNELL: That is satisfactory. What between the duties expected of one during one's lifetime, and the duties exacted from one after one's death, land has ceased to be either a profit or a pleasure. It gives one position, and prevents one from keeping it up. That's all that can be said about land.

JACK: I have a country house with some land, of course, attached to it, about fifteen hundred acres, I believe; but I don't depend on that for my real income. In fact, as far as I can make out, the poachers are the only people who make anything out of it.

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JACK: Well, I own a house in Belgrave Square, but it is let by the year to Lady Bloxham. Of course, I can get it back whenever I like, at six months' notice.

LADY BRACKNELL: Lady Bloxham? I don't know her.

JACK: Oh, she goes about very little. She is a lady considerably

advanced in years.

advanced in years.

**LADY BRACKNELL:** Ah, now-a-days that is no guarantee of respectability of character. What number in Belgrave Square?

**JACK:** 149.

**LADY BRACKNELL:** [Shaking her head]. The unfashionable side. I thought there was something. However, that could easily be altered.

JACK: Do you mean the fashion, or the side?

**LADY BRACKNELL:** [Sternly]. Both, if necessary, I presume. What are your polities?

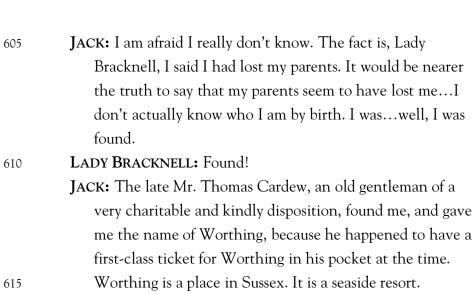
JACK: Well, I am afraid I really have none. I am a Liberal Unionist.

595 **LADY BRACKNELL:** Oh, they count as Tories. They dine with us. Or come in the evening, at any rate. Now to minor matters. Are your parents 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 carelessness. Who was your father? He was evidently a man of some wealth. Was he born in what the Radical papers call the purple of commerce, or did he rise from the ranks of the aristocracy?





**LADY BRACKNELL:** Where did the charitable gentleman who had a first-class ticket for this seaside resort 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. James, or Thomas, Cardew come across this ordinary hand-bag?

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

**LADY BRACKNELL:** The cloak-room at Victoria Station? **JACK:** Yes. The Brighton line.

LADY BRACKNELL: The line is immaterial. Mr. Worthing, I confess I feel somewhat bewildered by what you have just told me. To be born, or at any rate bred, in a hand-bag, whether it had handles or not, seems to me to display a contempt for the ordinary decencies of family life that reminds one of the worst excesses of the French Revolution. And I presume you know what that unfortunate movement led to? As for the particular locality in which the hand-bag was found, a cloak-room at a

railway station might serve to conceal a social



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640	indiscretion—has probably, indeed, been used for that purpose before now—but it could hardly be regarded as an
	assured basis for a recognised position in good society.
	JACK: May I ask you then what you would advise me to do? I
	need hardly say I would do anything in the world to ensure
	Gwendolen's happiness.
645	LADY BRACKNELL: I would strongly advise you, Mr.
	Worthing, to try and acquire some relations as soon as
	possible, and to make a definite effort to produce at any
	rate one parent, of either sex, before the season is quite
	over.
650	JACK: Well, I don't 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
655	can hardly imagine that I and Lord Bracknell would dream
	of allowing our only daughter—a girl brought up with the
	utmost care—to marry into a cloak-room, and form an
	alliance with a parcel? Good morning, Mr. Worthing!
	[LADY BRACKNELL sweeps out in majestic indignation.]
660	JACK: Good morning! [ALGERNON from the other room, strikes
	up the Wedding March. JACK looks perfectly furious, and goes
	to the door.] For goodness' sake don't play that ghastly tune,
	Algy. How idiotic you are!
	[The music stops and ALGERNON enters cheerily.]
665	ALGERNON: Didn't it go off all right, old boy? You don't mean
	to say Gwendolen refused you? I know it is a way she has.
	She is always refusing people. I think it is most ill-natured
	of her.
	JACK: Oh, Gwendolen is as right as a trivet. As far as she is
670	concerned, we are engaged. Her mother is perfectly
	unbearable. Never met such a GorgonI don't really
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know what a Gorgon is like, but I am quite sure that Lady



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#### The Importance of Being Earnest, cont.

Bracknell is one. In any case, she is a monster, without being a myth, which is rather unfair....I beg your pardon, Algy, I suppose I shouldn't talk about your own aunt in that way before you.

ALGERNON: My dear boy, I love hearing my relations abused. It is the only thing that makes me put up with them at all. Relations are simply a tedious pack of people, who haven't got the remotest knowledge of how to live, nor the smallest instinct about when to die.

JACK: Oh, that is nonsense!

**ALGERNON:** It isn't!

**JACK:** Well, I won't argue about the matter. You always want to argue about things.

**ALGERNON:** That is exactly what things were originally made for.

**JACK:** Upon my word, if I thought that, I'd shoot myself...[A pause.] You don't think there is any chance of Gwendolen becoming like her mother in about a hundred and fifty years, do you, Algy?

**ALGERNON:** All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. No man does. That's his.

**JACK:** Is that clever?

**ALGERNON:** It is perfectly phrased! and quite as true as any observation in civilised life should be.

JACK: I am sick to death of cleverness. Everybody is clever now-a-days. You can't go anywhere without meeting clever people. The thing has become an absolute public nuisance. I wish to goodness we had a few fools left.

**ALGERNON:** We have.

**JACK:** I should extremely like to meet them. What do they talk about?

**ALGERNON:** The fools? Oh! about the clever people, of course.

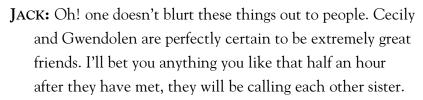
**JACK:** What fools!





	<b>ALGERNON:</b> 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
710	isn't quite the sort of thing one tells to a nice, sweet,
	refined girl. What extraordinary ideas you have about the
	way to behave to a woman!
	ALGERNON: The only way to behave to a woman is to make
	love to her, if she is pretty, and to some one else, if she is
715	plain.
	JACK: Oh, that is nonsense.
	ALGERNON: What about your brother? What about the
	profligate Ernest?
	JACK: Oh, before the end of the week I shall have got rid of
720	him. I'll say he died in Paris of apoplexy. Lots of people die
	of apoplexy, quite suddenly, don't they?
	ALGERNON: Yes, but it's hereditary, my dear fellow. It's a sort
	of thing that runs in families. You had much better say a
	severe chill.
725	JACK: You are sure a severe chill isn't hereditary, or anything
	of that kind?
	ALGERNON: Of course it isn't!
	JACK: Very well, then. My poor brother Ernest to carried off
	suddenly, in Paris, by a severe chill. That gets rid of him.
730	ALGERNON: But I thought you said thatMiss Cardew was a
	little too much interested in your poor brother Ernest?
	Won't she feel his loss a good deal?
	JACK: Oh, that is all right. Cecily is not a silly romantic girl, I
	am glad to say. She has got a capital appetite, goes long
735	walks, and pays no attention at all to her lessons.
	<b>ALGERNON:</b> I would rather like to see Cecily.
	JACK: I will take very good care you never do. She is
	excessively pretty, and she is only just eighteen.
	ALGERNON: Have you told Gwendolen yet that you have an

excessively pretty ward who is only just eighteen?



ALGERNON: Women only do that when they have called each other a lot of other things first. Now, my dear boy, if we want to get a good table at Willis's, we really must go and dress. Do you know it is nearly seven?

JACK: [Irritably]. Oh! It always is nearly seven.

750 **ALGERNON:** Well, I'm hungry.

JACK: I never knew you when you weren't....

**ALGERNON:** What shall we do after dinner? Go to a theatre?

JACK: Oh no! I loathe listening.

ALGERNON: Well, let us go to the Club?

755 **JACK:** Oh, no! I hate talking.

**ALGERNON:** Well, we might trot round to the Empire at ten?

JACK: Oh, no! I can't bear looking at things. It is so silly.

ALGERNON: Well, what shall we do?

JACK: Nothing!

ALGERNON: It is awfully hard work doing nothing. However, I don't mind hard work where there is no definite object of any kind.

[Enter LANE.]

LANE: Miss Fairfax.

765 [Enter GWENDOLEN. LANE goes out.]

ALGERNON: Gwendolen, upon my word!

**GWEDOLEN:** Algy, kindly turn your back. I have something very particular to say to Mr. Worthing.

**ALGERNON:** Really, Gwendolen, I don't think I can allow this at all.

**GWEDOLEN:** Algy, you always adopt a strictly immoral attitude towards life. You are not quite old enough to do that. [ALGERNON retires to the fireplace.]

**JACK:** My own darling!



775 **GWEDOLEN:** Ernest, we may never be married. From the expression on mamma's face I fear we never shall. Few parents now-a-days pay any regard to what their children say to them. The old-fashioned respect for the young is fast dying out. Whatever influence I ever had over mamma, I lost at the age of three. But although she may prevent us 780 from becoming man and wife, and I may marry someone else, and marry often, nothing that she can possibly do can alter my eternal devotion to you.

IACK: Dear Gwendolen!

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**GWEDOLEN:** The story of your romantic origin, as related to me by mamma, with unpleasing comments, has naturally stirred the deeper fibres of my nature. Your Christian name has an irresistible fascination. The simplicity of your character makes you exquisitely incomprehensible to me. 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.]

**GWEDOLEN:** There is a good postal service, I suppose? It may be necessary to do something desperate. That, of course, will require serious consideration. I will communicate with you daily.

**JACK:** My own one! 800

**GWEDOLEN:** How long do you remain in town?

**JACK:** Till Monday.

**GWEDOLEN:** Good! Algy, you may turn round now.

**ALGERNON:** Thanks, I've turned round already.

**GWEDOLEN:** You may also ring the bell. 805

JACK: You will let me see you to your carriage, my own

darling?

**GWEDOLEN:** Certainly.



## The Importance of Being Earnest, cont.

	JACK: [To LANE, who now enters]. I will see Miss Fairfax out.
810	LANE: Yes, sir. [JACK and GWENDOLEN go off.]
	[LANE presents several letters on a salver to ALGERNON: It is to be
	surmised that they are bills, as ALGERNON, after looking at the
	envelopes, tears them up.]
	ALGERNON: A glass of sherry, Lane.
815	LANE: Yes, sir.
	ALGERNON: To-morrow, Lane, I'm going Bunburying.
	LANE: Yes, sir.
	ALGERNON: I shall probably not be back till Monday. You can
	put up my dress clothes, my smoking jacket, and all the
820	Bunbury suits
	LANE: Yes, sir. [Handing sherry.]
	ALGERNON: I hope to-morrow will be a fine day, Lane.
	LANE: It never is, sir.
	ALGERNON: Lane, you're a perfect pessimist.
825	LANE: I do my best to give satisfaction, sir.
	[Enter JACK. LANE goes off.]
	JACK: There's a sensible, intellectual girl! the only girl I ever
	cared for in my life. [ALGERNON is laughing immoderately.]
	What on earth are you so amused at?
830	ALGERNON: Oh, I'm a little anxious about poor Bunbury, that
	is all.
	JACK: If you don't take care, your friend Bunbury will get you
	into a serious scrape some day.
	ALGERNON: I love scrapes. They are the only things that are
835	never serious.
	JACK: Oh, that's nonsense, Algy. You never talk anything but
	nonsense.
	ALGERNON: Nobody ever does.
	[JACK looks indignantly at him, and leaves the room. ALGERNON

ACT-DROP

lights a cigarette, reads his shirt-cuff, and smiles.]

#### The Importance of Being Earnest, cont.

#### Act II

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SCENE—Garden at the Manor House. A flight of gray stone steps leads up to the house. The garden, an old-fashioned one, full of roses. Time of year, July. Basket chairs, and a table covered with books, are set under a large yew tree.

[MISS PRISM discovered seated at the table. CECILY is at the back watering flowers.]

MISS PRISM: [Calling]. Cecily, Cecily! Surely such a utilitarian occupation as the watering of flowers is rather Moulton's duty than yours? Especially at a moment when intellectual pleasures await you. Your German grammar is on the table. Pray open it at page fifteen. We will repeat yesterday's lesson.

**CECILY:** [Coming over very slowly]. But I don't like German. It isn't at all a becoming language. I know perfectly well that I look quite plain after my German lesson.

MISS PRISM: Child, you know how anxious your guardian is that you should improve yourself in every way. He laid particular stress on your German, as he was leaving for town yesterday. Indeed, he always lays stress on your German when he is leaving for town.

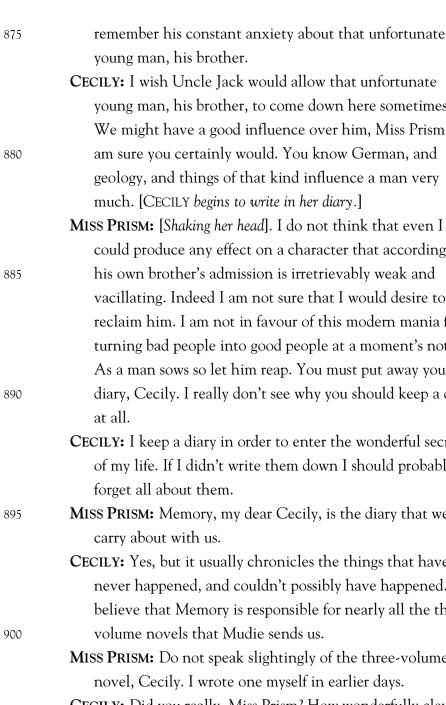
**CECILY:** Dear Uncle Jack is so very serious! Sometimes he is so serious that I think he cannot be quite well

MISS PRISM: [Drawing herself up]. Your guardian enjoys the best of health, and his gravity of demeanour is especially to be commended in one so comparatively young as he is. I know no one who has a higher sense of duty and responsibility.

**CECILY:** I suppose that is why he often looks a little bored when we three are together.

MISS PRISM: Cecily! I am surprised at you. Mr. Worthing has many troubles in his life. Idle merriment and triviality would be out of place in his conversation. You must





remember in constant armiet, about that amortanaec
young man, his brother.
CECILY: I wish Uncle Jack would allow that unfortunate
young man, his brother, to come down here sometimes.
We might have a good influence over him, Miss Prism. I
am sure you certainly would. You know German, and
geology, and things of that kind influence a man very
much. [CECILY begins to write in her diary.]
MISS PRISM: [Shaking her head]. I do not think that even I
could produce any effect on a character that according to
his own brother's admission is irretrievably weak and
vacillating. Indeed I am not sure that I would desire to
reclaim him. I am not in favour of this modern mania for
turning bad people into good people at a moment's notice.
As a man sows so let him reap. You must put away your
diary, Cecily. I really don't see why you should keep a diary
at all.
<b>CECILY:</b> I keep a diary in order to enter the wonderful secrets
of my life. If I didn't 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: Yes, but it usually chronicles the things that have
never happened, and couldn't possibly have happened. I
believe that Memory is responsible for nearly all the three-
volume novels that Mudie sends us.
MISS PRISM: Do not speak slightingly of the three-volume
novel, Cecily. I wrote one myself in earlier days.
CECILY: Did you really, Miss Prism? How wonderfully clever

you are! I hope it did not end happily? I don't like novels

MISS PRISM: The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily.

that end happily. They depress me so much.

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That is what Fiction means.

#### The Importance of Being Earnest, cont.

CECILY: I suppose so.	But it seems	very unfair.	And was	your
novel ever publish	ed?			

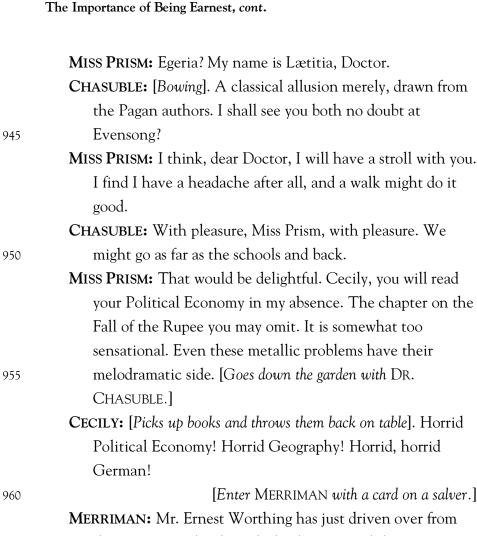
- 910 MISS PRISM: Alas! no. The manuscript unfortunately was abandoned. I use the word in the sense of lost or mislaid. To your work, child, these speculations are profitless.
  - **CECILY:** [Smiling]. But I see dear Dr. Chasuble coming up through the garden.
- 915 **MISS PRISM:** [Rising and advancing]. Dr. Chasuble! This is indeed a pleasure.

[Enter CANON CHASUBLE.]

- **CHASUBLE:** And how are we this morning? Miss Prism, you are, I trust, well?
- OECILY: Miss Prism has just been complaining of a slight headache. I think it would do her so much good to have a short stroll with you in the Park, Dr. Chasuble.
  - **MISS PRISM:** Cecily, I have not mentioned anything about a headache.
- open 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 about my German lesson, when the Rector came in.
  - CHASUBLE: I hope, Cecily, you are not inattentive.
- 930 **CECILY:** Oh, I am afraid I am.
  - CHASUBLE: That is strange. Were I fortunate enough to be Miss Prism's pupil, I would hang upon her lips. [MISS PRISM glares.] I spoke metaphorically.—My metaphor was drawn from bees. Ahem! Mr. Worthing, I suppose, has not returned from town yet?
  - MISS PRISM: We do not expect him till Monday afternoon.
  - CHASUBLE: Ah yes, he usually likes to spend his Sunday in London. He is not one of those whose sole aim is enjoyment, as, by all accounts, that unfortunate young man, his brother, seems to be. But I must not disturb Egeria and her pupil any longer.



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**MERRIMAN:** Mr. Ernest Worthing has just driven over from the station. He has brought his luggage 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?

**MERRIMAN:** Yes, Miss. He seemed very much disappointed. 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 room for him.

**MERRIMAN:** Yes, Miss. [MERRIMAN goes off.]

CECILY: I have never met any really wicked person before. I feel rather frightened. I am so afraid 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'm sure.

OECILY: You are under some strange mistake. 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 cousin Ernest, my wicked cousin Ernest.

985 **ALGERNON:** Oh! I am not really wicked at all, cousin Cecily. You mustn't think that I am wicked.

CECILY: If you are not, then you have certainly been deceiving us all in a very inexcusable manner. I hope you have not been leading a double life, pretending to be wicked and being really good all the time. That would be hypocrisy.

**ALGERNON:** [Looks at her in amazement]. Oh! Of course I have been rather reckless.

CECILY: I am glad to hear it.

995 **ALGERNON:** In fact, now you mention the subject, I have been very bad in my own small way.

**CECILY:** I don't think you should be so proud of that, though I am sure it must have been very pleasant.

**ALGERNON:** It is much pleasanter being here with you.

1000 **CECILY:** I can't understand how you are here at all. Uncle Jack won't be back till Monday afternoon.

**ALGERNON:** That is a great disappointment. I am obliged to go up by the first train on Monday morning. I have a business appointment that I am anxious...to miss.

1005 CECILY: Couldn't you miss it anywhere but in London?

ALGERNON: No: the appointment is in London.

**CECILY:** Well, I know, of course, how important it is not to keep a business engagement, if one wants to retain any sense of the beauty of life, but still I think you had better



1010	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 up to buy your outfit.
	ALGERNON: I certainly wouldn't let Jack buy my outfit. He
1015	has no taste in neckties at all.
	CECILY: I don't think you will require neckties. Uncle Jack is
	sending you to Australia.
	ALGERNON: Australia! I'd sooner die.
	CECILY: Well, he said at dinner on Wednesday night, that you
1020	would have to choose between this world, the next world,
	and Australia.
	ALGERNON: Oh, well! The accounts I have received of
	Australia and the next world, are not particularly
	encouraging. This world is good enough for me, cousin
1025	Cecily.
	CECILY: Yes, but are you good enough for it?
	ALGERNON: I'm afraid I'm not that. That is why I want you to
	reform me. You might make that your mission, if you don't
	mind, cousin Cecily.
1030	CECILY: I'm afraid I've no time, this afternoon.
	ALGERNON: Well, would you mind my reforming myself this
	afternoon?
	CECILY: It is rather Quixotic of you. But I think you should
	try.
1035	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 an entirely new life, one
1040	requires regular and wholesome meals. Won't you come in?
	ALGERNON: Thank you. Might I have a button-hole first? I
	never have any appetite unless I have a buttonhole first.



CECILY: A Maréchal Niel? [Picks up scissors.]

	ALGERNON: No, I'd sooner have a pink rose.
1045	CECILY: Why? [Cuts a flower.]
	ALGERNON: Because you are like a pink rose, cousin Cecily.
	CECILY: I don't think it can be right for you to talk to me like
	that. Miss Prism never says such things to me.
	ALGERNON: Then Miss Prism is a short-sighted old lady.
1050	[CECILY puts the rose in his button-hole.] You are the prettiest
	girl I ever saw.
	CECILY: Miss Prism says that all good looks are a snare.
	ALGERNON: They are a snare that every sensible man would
	like to be caught in.
1055	CECILY: Oh, I don't think I would care to catch a sensible
	man. I shouldn't know what to talk to him about.
	[They pass into the house. MISS PRISM and DR. CHASUBLE
	return.]
	MISS PRISM: You are too much alone, dear Dr. Chasuble. You
1060	should get married. A misanthrope I can understand—a
	womanthrope, never!
	CHASUBLE: [With a scholar's shudder]. Believe me, I do not
	deserve so neologistic a phrase. The precept as well as the
	practice of the Primitive Church was distinctly against
1065	matrimony.
	MISS PRISM: [Sententiously]. That is obviously the reason why
	the Primitive Church has not lasted up to the present day.
	And you do not seem to realise, dear Doctor, that by
	persistently remaining single, a man converts himself into
1070	a permanent public temptation. Men should be more
	careful; this very celibacy leads weaker vessels astray.
	<b>CHASUBLE:</b> But is a man not equally attractive when married?
	MISS PRISM: No married man is ever attractive except to his
	wife.
1075	CHASUBLE: And often, I've been told, not even to her.

MISS PRISM: That depends on the intellectual sympathies of

the woman. Maturity can always be depended on. Ripeness



# The Importance of Being Earnest, cont.

	can be trusted. Young women are green. [DR. CHASUBLE
	starts.] I spoke horticulturally. My metaphor was drawn
1080	from fruits. But where is Cecily?
	CHASUBLE: Perhaps she followed us to the schools.
	[Enter JACK slowly from the back of the garden. He is dressed in
	the deepest mourning, with crape hatband and black gloves.]
	MISS PRISM: Mr. Worthing!
1085	CHASUBLE: Mr. Worthing?
	MISS PRISM: This is indeed a surprise. We did not look for you
	till Monday afternoon.
	JACK: [Shakes MISS PRISM'S hand in a tragic manner]. I have
	returned sooner than I expected. Dr. Chasuble, I hope you
1090	are well?
	CHASUBLE: Dear Mr. Worthing, I trust this garb of woe does
	not betoken some terrible calamity?
	JACK: My brother.
	MISS PRISM: More shameful debts and extravagance?
1095	CHASUBLE: Still leading his life of pleasure?
	JACK: [Shaking his head]. Dead!
	CHASUBLE: Your brother Ernest dead?
	JACK: Quite dead.
	MISS PRISM: What a lesson for him! I trust he will profit by it.
1100	CHASUBLE: Mr. Worthing, I offer you my sincere condolence.
	You have at least the consolation of knowing that you were
	always the most generous and forgiving of brothers.
	JACK: Poor Ernest! He had many faults, but it is a sad, sad
	blow.
1105	CHASUBLE: Very sad indeed. Were you with him at the end?
	JACK: No. He died abroad; in Paris, in fact. I had a telegram
	last night from the manager of the Grand Hotel.
	CHASUBLE: Was the cause of death mentioned?
	JACK: A severe chill, it seems.
1110	MISS PRISM: As a man sows, so shall he reap.



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### The Importance of Being Earnest, cont.

CHASUBLE: [Raising his hand]. Charity, dear Miss Prism,
charity! None of us are perfect. I myself am peculiarly
susceptible to draughts. Will the interment take place
here?

**JACK:** No. He seemed to have expressed a desire to be buried in Paris.

CHASUBLE: In Paris! [Shakes his head.] I fear that hardly points to any very serious state of mind at the last. You would no doubt wish me to make some slight allusion to this tragic domestic affliction next Sunday. [JACK presses his hand convulsively.] My sermon on the meaning of the manna in the wilderness can be adapted to almost any occasion, joyful, or, as in the present case, distressing. [All sigh.] I have preached it at harvest celebrations, christenings, confirmations, on days of humiliation and festal days. The last time I delivered it was in the Cathedral, as a charity sermon on behalf of the Society for the Prevention of Discontent among the Upper Orders. The Bishop, who was present, was much struck by some of the analogies I drew.

JACK: Ah! that reminds me, you mentioned christenings I think, Dr. Chasuble? I suppose you know how to christen all right? [DR. CHASUBLE looks astounded.] I mean, of course, you are continually christening, aren't you?

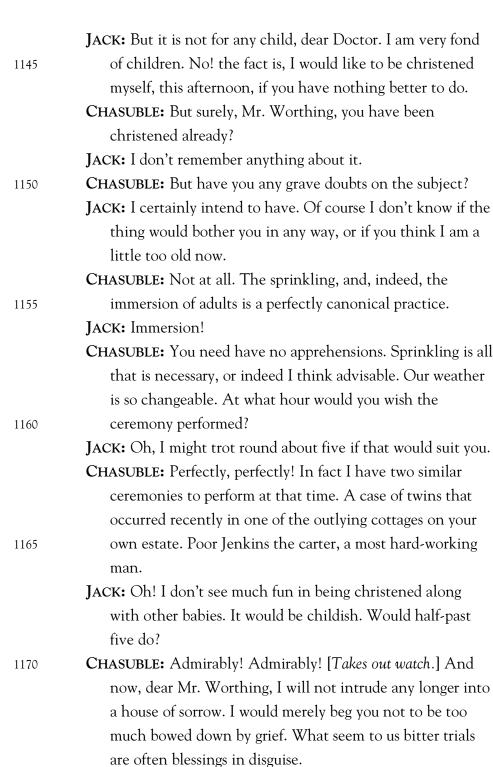
MISS PRISM: It is, I regret to say, one of the Rector's most constant duties in this parish. I have often spoken to the poorer classes on the subject. But they don't seem to know what thrift is.

**CHASUBLE:** But is there any particular infant in whom you are interested, Mr. Worthing? Your brother was, I believe, unmarried, was he not?

JACK: Oh yes.

MISS PRISM: [Bitterly]. People who live entirely for pleasure usually are.





MISS PRISM: This seems to me a blessing of an extremely

[Enter CECILY from the house.]



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obvious kind.

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#### The Importance of Being Earnest, cont.

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

MISS PRISM: Cecily!

**CHASUBLE:** My child! my child! [CECILY goes towards JACK; he kisses her brow in a melancholy manner.]

CECILY: What is the matter, Uncle Jack? Do look happy! 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 nonsense! I haven't got a brother.

CECILY: Oh, don't say that. However badly he may have behaved to you in the past he is still your brother. You couldn't be so heartless as to disown him. I'll tell him to come out. And you will shake hands with him, won't you, Uncle Jack? [Runs back into the house.]

CHASUBLE: These are very joyful tidings.

MISS PRISM: After we had all been resigned to his loss, his sudden return seems to me peculiarly distressing.

JACK: My brother is in the dining-room? I don't 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! [Motions ALGERNON away.]

ALGERNON: Brother John, 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?



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#### The Importance of Being Earnest, cont.

JACK: Nothing will induce me to take his hand. I think his
coming down here disgraceful. He knows perfectly well
why.

- CECILY: Uncle Jack, do be nice. There is some good in
  everyone. Ernest has just been telling me about his poor
  invalid friend Mr. Bunbury, whom he goes to visit so often.
  And surely there must be much good in one who is kind to
  an invalid, and leaves the pleasures of London to sit by a
  bed of pain.
- 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 faults were all on my side. But I must say that I think that brother John's coldness to me is peculiarly painful. I expected a more enthusiastic welcome, especially considering it is the first time I have come here.
  - **CECILY:** Uncle Jack, if you don't 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 hands with ALGERNON and glares.]
  - **CHASUBLE:** It's pleasant, is it not, to see so perfect a reconciliation? I think we might leave the two brothers together.
- 1240 MISS PRISM: Cecily, you will come with us.
  - **CECILY:** Certainly, Miss Prism. My little task of reconciliation is over.
  - **CHASUBLE:** You have done a beautiful action to-day, dear child.



### The Importance of Being Earnest, cont.

1245	MISS PRISM: We must not be premature in our judgments.
	CECILY: I feel very happy. [They all go off.]
	JACK: You young scoundrel, Algy, you must get out of this
	place as soon as possible. I don't allow any Bunburying
	here.
1250	[Enter MERRIMAN.]
	MERRIMAN: I have put Mr. Ernest's things in the room next
	to yours, sir. I suppose that is all right?
	JACK: What?
	MERRIMAN: Mr. Ernest's luggage, sir. I have unpacked it and
1255	put it in the room next to your own.
	JACK: His luggage?
	MERRIMAN: Yes, sir. Three portmanteaus, a dressing-case, two
	hat- boxes, and a large luncheon-basket.
	ALGERNON: I am afraid I can't stay more than a week this
1260	time.
	JACK: Merriman, order the dog-cart at once. Mr. Ernest has
	been suddenly called back to town.
	<b>MERRIMAN:</b> Yes, sir. [Goes back into the house.]
	ALGERNON: What a fearful liar you are, Jack. I have not been
1265	called back to town at all.
	IACK. Yes you have

**JACK:** Yes, you have.

**ALGERNON:** I haven't heard anyone call me.

JACK: Your duty as a gentleman calls you back.

ALGERNON: My duty as a gentleman has never interfered with my pleasures in the smallest degree.

**JACK:** I can quite understand that.

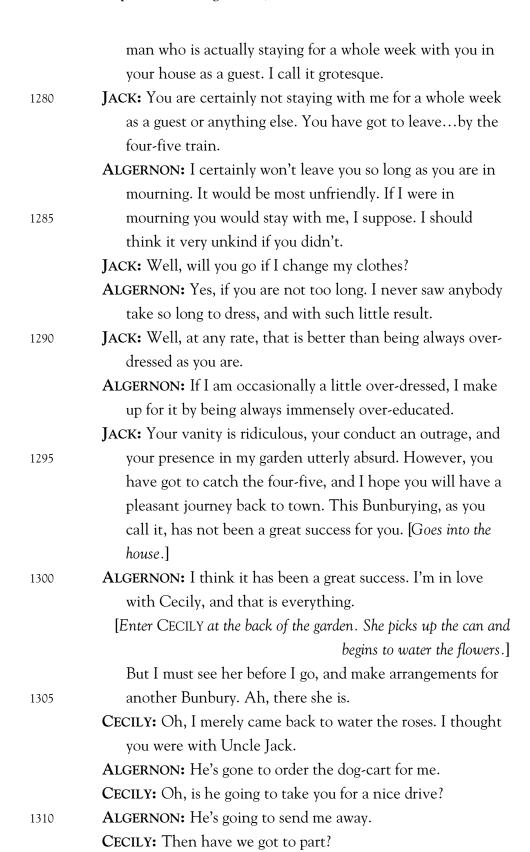
**ALGERNON:** Well, Cecily is a darling.

JACK: You are not to talk of Miss Cardew like that. I don't like it.

**ALGERNON:** Well, I don't like your clothes. You look perfectly 1275 ridiculous in them. Why on earth don't you go up and change? It is perfectly childish to be in deep mourning for a



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	ALGERNON: I am afraid so. It's a very painful parting.	
	CECILY: It is always painful to part from people whom one ha	S
	known for a very brief space of time. The absence of old	
1315	friends one can endure with equanimity. But even a	
	momentary separation from anyone to whom one has just	
	been introduced is almost unbearable.	
	ALGERNON: Thank you.	
	[Enter Merriman	.]
1320	MERRIMAN: The dog-cart is at the door, sir. [ALGERNON look	S
	appealingly at CECILY.]	
	CECILY: It can wait, Merrimanforfive minutes.	
	MERRIMAN: Yes, Miss. [Exit MERRIMAN]	.]
	ALGERNON: I hope, Cecily, I shall not offend you if I state	
1325	quite frankly and openly that you seem to me to be in	
	every way the visible personification of absolute perfection	1.
	CECILY: I think your frankness does you great credit, Ernest. I	f
	you will allow me I will copy your remarks into my diary.	
	[Goes over to table and begins writing in diary.]	
1330	ALGERNON: Do you really keep a diary? I'd give anything to	
	look at it. May I?	
	CECILY: Oh no. [Puts her hand over it.] You see, it is simply a	
	very young girl's record of her own thoughts and	
	impressions, and consequently meant for publication.	
1335	When it appears in volume form I hope you will order a	
	copy. But pray, Ernest, don't stop. I delight in taking dowr	1
	from dictation. I have reached 'absolute perfection.' You	
	can go on. I am quite ready for more.	
	ALGERNON: [Somewhat taken aback]. Ahem! Ahem!	
1340	CECILY: Oh, don't cough, Ernest. When one is dictating one	
	should speak fluently and not cough. Besides, I don't know	V
	how to spell a cough. [Writes as ALGERNON speaks.]	

ALGERNON: [Speaking very rapidly]. Cecily, ever since I first

looked upon your wonderful and incomparable beauty, I



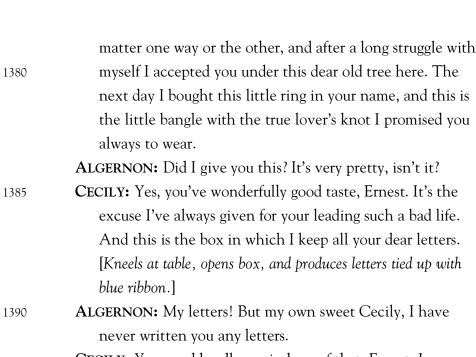
## The Importance of Being Earnest, cont.

1345	have dared to love you wildly, passionately, devotedly, hopelessly.
	CECILY: I don't think that you should tell me that you love
	me wildly, passionately, devotedly, hopelessly. Hopelessly
	doesn't seem to make much sense, does it?
1350	ALGERNON: Cecily!
	[Enter MERRIMAN.
	MERRIMAN: The dog-cart is waiting, sir.
	<b>ALGERNON:</b> Tell it to come round next week, at the same hour.
1355	MERRIMAN: [Looks at CECILY, who makes no sign]. Yes, sir.
	[MERRIMAN retires.]
	CECILY: Uncle Jack would be very much annoyed if he knew
	you were staying on till next week, at the same hour.
	ALGERNON: Oh, I don't care about Jack. I don't care for
1360	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?
1365	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 wicked and
	bad, you of course have formed the chief topic of
1370	conversation between myself and Miss Prism. And of
	course a man who is much talked about is always very
	attractive. One feels there must be something in him after
	all. I daresay it was foolish of me, but I fell in love with
	you, Ernest.
1375	ALGERNON: Darling! And when was the engagement actually
	settled?

CECILY: On the 14th of February last. Worn out by your

entire ignorance of my existence, I determined to end the





CECILY: You need hardly remind me of that, Ernest. I

remember only too well that I was forced to write your letters for you. I wrote always three times a week, and sometimes oftener.

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

CECILY: Oh, I couldn't possibly. They would make you far too conceited. [Replaces box.] The three you wrote me after I had broken off the engagement are so beautiful, and so badly spelled, that even now I can hardly read them without crying a little.

**ALGERNON:** But was our engagement ever broken off?

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

**ALGERNON:** But why on earth did you break it off? What had I done? I had done nothing at all. Cecily, I am very much hurt indeed to hear you broke it off. Particularly when the weather was so charming.

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#### The Importance of Being Earnest, cont.

CECILY: It would hardly have been a really serious							
engagement if it hadn't been broken off at least once. Bu	ıt I						
forgave you before the week was out.							

**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.] I hope your hair curls naturally, does it?

ALGERNON: Yes, darling, with a little help from others.

1420 **CECILY:** I am so glad.

**ALGERNON:** You'll never break off our engagement again, Cecily?

**CECILY:** I don't think I could break it off now that I have actually met you. Besides, of course, there is the question of your name.

ALGERNON: Yes, of course. [Nervously.]

CECILY: You must not laugh at me, darling, but it had always been a girlish dream of mine to love some one whose name was Ernest. [ALGERNON rises, CECILY also.] There is something in that name that seems to inspire absolute confidence. I pity any poor married woman whose husband is not called Ernest.

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

1435 **CECILY:** But what name?

**ALGERNON:** Oh, any name you like—Algernon—for instance...

**CECILY:** But I don't like the name of Algernon.

ALGERNON: Well, my own dear, sweet, loving little darling, I really can't see why you should object to the name of Algernon. It is not at all a bad name. In fact, it is rather an aristocratic name. Half of the chaps who get into the Bankruptcy Court are called Algernon. But seriously,



## The Importance of Being Earnest, cont.

1445	Cecily[Moving to her]if my name was Algy, couldn't you love me?
1440	CECILY: [Rising]. I might respect you, Ernest, I might admire
	your character, but I fear that I should not be able to give
	you my undivided attention.
	ALGERNON: Ahem! Cecily! [Picking up hat.] Your Rector here
1450	is, I suppose, thoroughly experienced in the practice of all
1400	the rites and ceremonials of the Church?
	CECILY: Oh, yes. Dr. Chasuble is a most learned man. He has
	never written a single book, so you can imagine how much
	he knows.
1455	ALGERNON: I must see him at once on a most important
1700	christening—I mean on most important business.
	CECILY: Oh!
	ALGERNON: I shan't be away more than half an hour.
	CECILY: Considering that we have been engaged since
1460	February the 14th, and that I only met you to-day for the
	first time, I think it is rather hard that you should leave me
	for so long a period as half an hour. Couldn't you make it
	twenty minutes?
	<b>ALGERNON:</b> I'll be back in no time. [Kisses her and rushes down the garden.]
1465	CECILY: What an impetuous boy he is! I like his hair so much.
	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 states.
1470	CECILY: Isn't Mr. Worthing in his library?
	MERRIMAN: Mr. Worthing went over in the direction of the
	Rectory some time ago.
	CECILY: Pray ask the lady to come out here; Mr. Worthing is
	sure to be back soon. And you can bring tea.
1475	MERRIMAN: Yes, Miss. [Goes out.]
	CECILY: Miss Fairfax! I suppose one of the many good elderly

women who are associated with Uncle Jack in some of his



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philanthropic work in London. I don't quite like women who are interested in philanthropic work. I think it is so forward of them.

[Enter MERRIMAN.]

**MERRIMAN:** Miss Fairfax.

[Enter GWENDOLEN. Exit MERRIMAN.]

**CECILY:** [Advancing to meet her]. Pray let me introduce myself to you. My name is Cecily Cardew.

**GWEDOLEN:** Cecily Cardew? [Moving to her and shaking hands.] What a very sweet name! Something tells me that we are going to be great friends. I like you already more than I can say. My first impressions of people are never wrong.

1490 **CECILY:** How nice of you to like me so much after we have known each other such a comparatively short time. Pray sit down.

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

1495 **CECILY:** With pleasure!

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

**CECILY:** If you wish.

**GWEDOLEN:** Then that is all quite settled, is it not?

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

GWEDOLEN: Perhaps this might be a favourable opportunity
for my mentioning who I am. My father is Lord Bracknell.

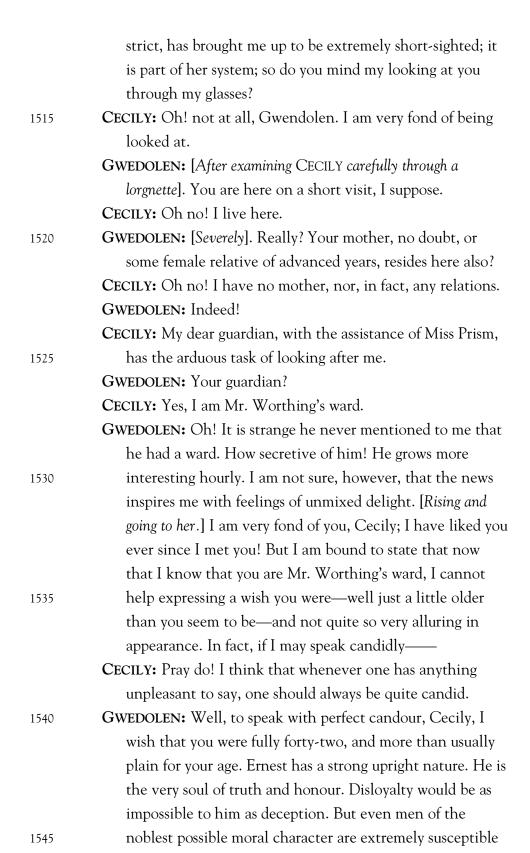
You have never heard of papa, I suppose?

CECILY: I don't think so.

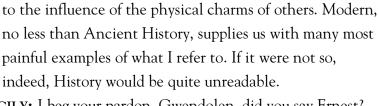
GWEDOLEN: Outside the family circle, papa, I am glad to say, is entirely unknown. I think that is quite as it should be.

The home seems to me to be the proper sphere for the man. And certainly once a man begins to neglect his domestic duties he becomes painfully effeminate, does he not? And I don't like that. It makes men so very attractive. Cecily, mamma, whose views on education are remarkably









1550 CECILY: I beg your pardon, Gwendolen, did you say Ernest?
GWEDOLEN: Yes.

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

**GWEDOLEN:** [Sitting down again]. Ernest never mentioned to me that he had a brother.

**CECILY:** I am sorry to say they have not been on good terms for a long time.

GWEDOLEN: Ah! that accounts for it. And now that I think of it I have never heard any man mention his brother. The subject seems distasteful to most men. Cecily, you have lifted a load from my mind. I was growing almost anxious. It would have been terrible if any cloud had come across 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. **GWEDOLEN:** [Enquiringly]. 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. Our little county newspaper is sure to chronicle the fact next week. Mr. Ernest Worthing and I are engaged to be married.

**GWEDOLEN:** [Quite politely, rising]. My darling Cecily, I think there must be some slight error. Mr. Ernest Worthing is engaged to me. The announcement will appear in the "Morning Post" on Saturday at the latest.

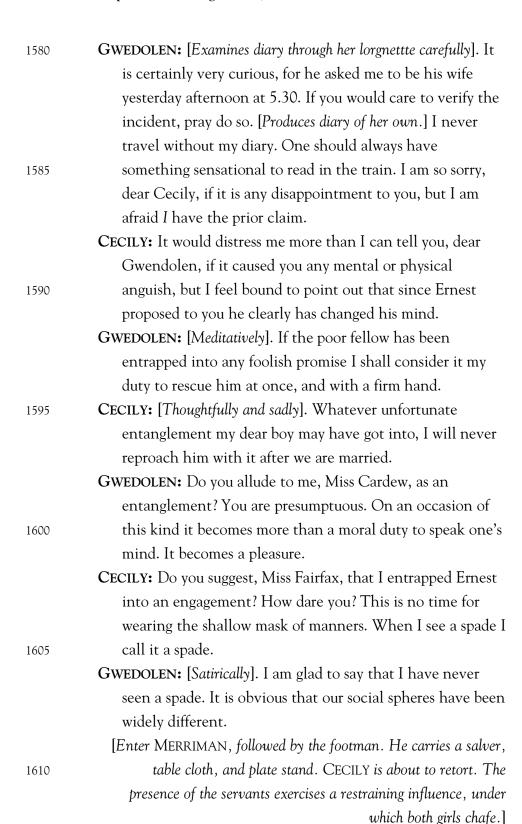
**CECILY:** [Very politely, rising]. I am afraid you must be under some misconception. Ernest proposed to me exactly ten minutes ago. [Shows diary.]

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	CECILY: [Sternly, in a calm voice]. Yes, as usual. [MERRIMAN
1615	begins to clear and lay cloth. A long pause. CECILY and
	GWENDOLEN glare at each other.]
	GWEDOLEN: Are there many interesting walks in the vicinity,
	Miss Cardew?
	CECILY: Oh! yes! a great many. From the top of one of the
1620	hills quite close one can see five counties.
	GWEDOLEN: Five counties! I don't think I should like that. I
	hate crowds.
	CECILY: [Sweetly]. I suppose that is why you live in town?
	[GWENDOLEN bites her lip, and beats her foot nervously with
1625	her parasol.]
	GWEDOLEN: [Looking around]. Quite a well-kept garden this is,
	Miss Cardew.
	CECILY: So glad you like it, Miss Fairfax.
	GWEDOLEN: I had no idea there were any flowers in the
1630	country.
	CECILY: Oh, flowers are as common here, Miss Fairfax, as
	people are in London.
	GWEDOLEN: Personally I cannot understand how anybody
	manages to exist in the country, if anybody who is anybody
1635	does. The country always bores me to death.
	CECILY: Ah! This is what the newspapers call agricultural
	depression, is it not? I believe the aristocracy are suffering
	very much from it just at present. It is almost an epidemic
	amongst them, I have been told. May I offer you some tea,
1640	Miss Fairfax?
	<b>GWEDOLEN:</b> [With elaborate politeness]. Thank you. [Aside.]
	Detestable girl! But I require tea!
	CECILY: [Sweetly]. Sugar?
	GWEDOLEN: [Superciliously]. No, thank you. Sugar is not
1645	fashionable any more. [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?



	GWEDOLEN: [In a bored manner]. Bread and butter, please.
	Cake is rarely seen at the best houses now-a-days.
1650	<b>CECILY:</b> [Cuts a very large slice of cake, and puts it on the tray].
	Hand that to Miss Fairfax.
	[MERRIMAN does so, and goes out with footman. 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
1655	finds it is cake. Rises in indignation.
	GWEDOLEN: 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, and the extraordinary sweetness of my nature,
1660	but I warn you, Miss Cardew, you may go too far.
	CECILY: [Rising]. To save my poor, innocent, trusting boy from
	the machinations of any other girl there are no lengths to
	which I would not go.
	GWEDOLEN: From the moment I saw you I distrusted you. I
1665	felt that you were false and deceitful. I am never deceived
	in such matters. My first impressions of people are
	invariably right.
	CECILY: It seems to me, Miss Fairfax, that I am trespassing on
	your valuable time. No doubt you have many other calls of
1670	a similar character to make in the neighbourhood.
	[Enter JACK.]
	GWEDOLEN: [Catching sight of him]. Ernest! My own Ernest!
	JACK: Gwendolen! Darling! [Offers to kiss her.]
	GWEDOLEN: [Drawing back]. A moment! May I ask if you are
1675	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?
	GWEDOLEN: Thank you. You may. [Offers her cheek.]
1680	CECILY: [Very sweetly]. I knew there must be some

misunderstanding, Miss Fairfax. The gentleman whose arm



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#### The Importance of Being Earnest, cont.

is at present around your waist is my dear guardian, Mr. John Worthing.

**GWEDOLEN:** I beg your pardon?

1685 **CECILY:** This is Uncle Jack.

**GWEDOLEN:** [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 around]. To what young lady? Good heavens! Gwendolen!

1695 **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.*]

**GWEDOLEN:** 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! [The two girls move towards each other and put their arms round each other's waist as if for protection.]

**CECILY:** Are you called Algernon?

ALGERNON: I cannot deny it.

CECILY: Oh!

1710 **GWEDOLEN:** Is your name really John?

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

**CECILY:** [*To* GWENDOLEN]. A gross deception has been practised on both of us.



	GWEDOLEN: My poor wounded Cecily!
	CECILY: My sweet wronged Gwendolen!
	GWEDOLEN: [Slowly and seriously]. You will call me sister, will
	you not? [They embrace. JACK and ALGERNON groan and
1720	walk up and down.]
	CECILY: [Rather brightly]. There is just one question I would
	like to be allowed to ask my guardian.
	GWEDOLEN: An admirable idea! Mr. Worthing, there is just
	one question I would like to be permitted to put to you.
1725	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 at
	present.
	JACK: [Slowly and hesitatingly]. Gwendolen—Cecily—it is very
1730	painful for me to be forced to speak the truth. It is the first
	time in my life that I have ever been reduced to such a
	painful position, and I am really quite inexperienced in
	doing anything of the kind. However, I will tell you quite
	frankly that I have no brother Ernest. I have no brother at
1735	all. I never had a brother in my life, and I certainly have
	not the smallest intention of ever having one in the future.
	CECILY: [Surprised]. No brother at all?
	JACK: [Cheerily]. None!
	<b>GWEDOLEN:</b> [Severely]. Had you never a brother of any kind?
1740	JACK: [Pleasantly]. Never. Not even of any kind.
	GWEDOLEN: I am afraid it is quite clear, Cecily, that neither
	of us is engaged to be married to anyone.
	CECILY: It is not a very pleasant position for a young girl
	suddenly to find herself in. Is it?
1745	GWEDOLEN: Let us go into the house. They will hardly
	venture to come after us there.

CECILY: No, men are so cowardly, aren't they?

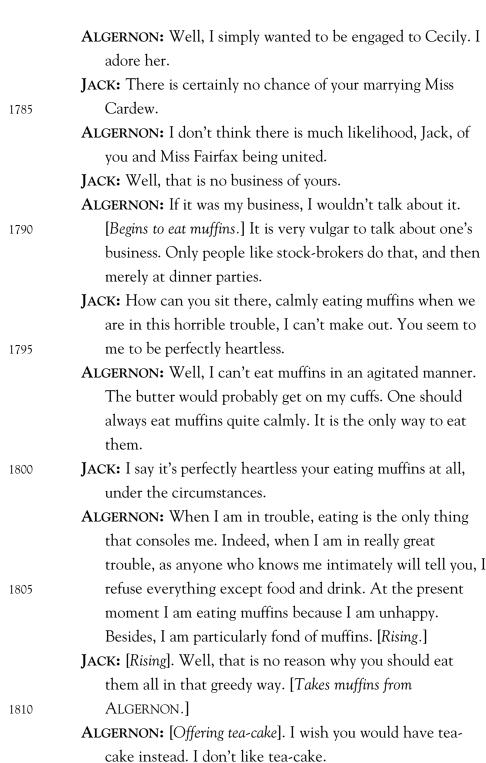
[They retire into the house with scornful looks.]



1750	<b>JACK:</b> This ghastly state of things is what you call Bunburying, I suppose?
	ALGERNON: Yes, and a perfectly wonderful Bunbury it is. The
	most wonderful Bunbury I have ever had in my life.
	JACK: Well, you've no right whatsoever to Bunbury here.
	ALGERNON: That is absurd. One has a right to Bunbury
1755	anywhere one chooses. Every serious Bunburyist knows that.
	JACK: Serious Bunburyist! Good heavens!
	ALGERNON: Well, one must be serious about something, if
	one wants to have any amusement in life. I happen to be
1760	serious about Bunburying. What on earth you are serious
	about I haven't got the remotest idea. About everything, I
	should fancy. You have such an absolutely trivial nature.
	JACK: Well, the only small satisfaction I have in the whole of
	this wretched business is that your friend Bunbury is quite
1765	exploded. You won't be able to run down to the country
	quite so often as you used to do, dear Algy. And a very
	good thing too.
	ALGERNON: Your brother is a little off colour, isn't he, dear
	Jack? You won't be able to disappear to London quite so
1770	frequently as your wicked custom was. And not a bad thing either.
	JACK: As for your conduct towards Miss Cardew, I must say
	that your taking in a sweet, simple, innocent girl like that
	is quite inexcusable. To say nothing of the fact that she is
1775	my ward.
	ALGERNON: I can see no possible defence at all for your
	deceiving a brilliant, clever, thoroughly experienced young
	lady like Miss Fairfax. To say nothing of the fact that she is
	my cousin.
1780	JACK: I wanted to be engaged to Gwendolen, that is all. I love



her.





muffins in his own garden.

JACK: Good heavens! I suppose a man may eat his own

1815	<b>ALGERNON:</b> But you have just said it was perfectly heartless to eat muffins.
	JACK: I said it was perfectly heartless of you, under the
	circumstances. That is a very different thing.
	ALGERNON: That may be. But the muffins are the same. [He
1820	seizes the muffin-dish from JACK.]
	JACK: Algy, I wish to goodness you would go.
	ALGERNON: You can't possibly ask me to go without having
	some dinner. It's absurd. I never go without my dinner. No
	one ever does, except vegetarians and people like that.
1825	Besides I have just made arrangements with Dr. Chasuble
	to be christened at a quarter to six under the name of
	Ernest.
	JACK: My dear fellow, the sooner you give up that nonsense
	the better. I made arrangements this morning with Dr.
1830	Chasuble to be christened myself at 5.30, and I naturally
	will take the name of Ernest. Gwendolen would wish it.
	We can't both be christened Ernest. It's absurd. Besides, I
	have a perfect right to be christened if I like. There is no
	evidence at all that I ever have been christened by
1835	anybody. I should think it extremely probable I never was,
	and so does Dr. Chasuble. It is entirely different in your
	case. You have been christened already.
	<b>ALGERNON:</b> Yes, but I have not been christened for years.
	JACK: Yes, but you have been christened. That is the
1840	important thing.
	ALGERNON: Quite so. So I know my constitution can stand it
	If you are not quite sure about your ever having been
	christened, I must say I think it rather dangerous your
	venturing on it now. It might make you very unwell. You
1845	can hardly have forgotten that someone very closely
	connected with you was very nearly carried off this week in



Paris by a severe chill.

#### The Importance of Being Earnest, cont.

JACK:	Yes,	but you	said y	ourself	that a	severe	chill	was	not
he	redita	ary.							

- 1850 **ALGERNON:** It usen't to be, I know—but I daresay it is now. Science is always making wonderful improvements in things.
  - **JACK:** [*Picking up the muffin-dish*]. Oh, that is nonsense; you are always talking nonsense.
- ALGERNON: Jack, you are at the muffins again! I wish you wouldn't. There are only two left. [*Takes them.*] I told you I was particularly fond of muffins.
  - JACK: But I hate tea-cake.
  - ALGERNON: Why on earth then do you allow tea-cake to be served up for your guests? What ideas you have of hospitality!
    - JACK: Algernon! I have already told you to go. I don't want you here. Why don't you go!
- ALGERNON: I haven't quite finished my tea yet! and there is still one muffin left. [JACK groans and sinks into a chair. ALGERNON still continues eating.]

## ACT-DROP



#### The Importance of Being Earnest, cont.

#### Act III

SCENE—Morning-room at the Manor House.

1870 [GWENDOLEN and CECILY are at the window, looking out into the garden.]

**GWEDOLEN:** The fact that they did not follow us at once into the house, as anyone else would have done, seems to me to show that they have some sense of shame left.

1875 **CECILY:** They have been eating muffins. That looks like repentance.

**GWEDOLEN:** [After a pause]. They don't seem to notice us at all. Couldn't you cough?

CECILY: But I haven't a cough.

1880 **GWEDOLEN:** They're looking at us. What effrontery!

**CECILY:** They're approaching. That's very forward of them.

GWEDOLEN: Let us preserve a dignified silence.

**CECILY:** Certainly. It's the only thing to do now.

[Enter JACK followed by ALGERNON. They whistle some dreadful popular air from a British opera.]

**GWEDOLEN:** This dignified silence seems to produce an unpleasant effect.

CECILY: A most distasteful one.

**GWEDOLEN:** But we will not be the first to speak.

1890 **CECILY:** Certainly not.

1885

1895

**GWEDOLEN:** Mr. Worthing, I have something very particular to ask you. Much depends on your reply.

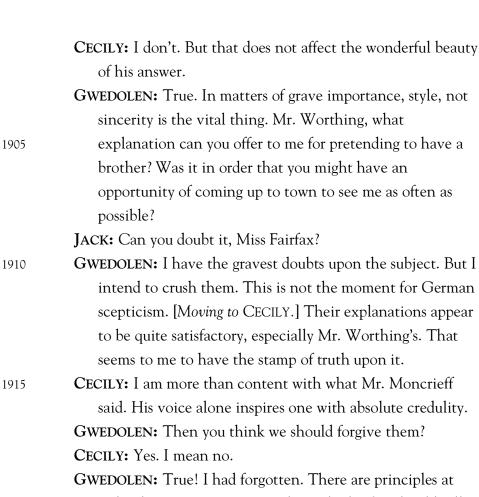
CECILY: Gwendolen, your common sense is invaluable. Mr. Moncrieff, kindly answer me the following question: Why did you pretend to be my guardian's brother?

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

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

1900 **GWEDOLEN:** Yes, dear, if you can believe him.





GWEDOLEN: True! I had forgotten. There are principles at stake that one cannot surrender. Which of us should tell them? The task is not a pleasant one.

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

**GWEDOLEN:** An excellent idea! I nearly always speak at the same time as other people. Will you take the time from me?

1925 me

CECILY: Certainly. [GWENDOLEN beats time with uplifted finger.]

GWEDOLEN AND CECILY: [Speaking together]. Your Christian names are still an insuperable barrier. That is all!

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

**GWEDOLEN:** [*To* JACK]. For my sake you are prepared to do this terrible thing?

JACK: I am.



1955

1960

1965

#### The Importance of Being Earnest, cont.

1935 CECILY: [To ALGERNON]. To please me you are ready to face this fearful ordeal?

ALGERNON: I am!

GWEDOLEN: How about to talk of the equality of the sexes!

**GWEDOLEN:** How absurd to talk of the equality of the sexes! Where questions of self-sacrifice are concerned, men are infinitely beyond us.

JACK: We are. [Clasps hands with ALGERNON.]

**CECILY:** They have moments of physical courage of which we women know absolutely nothing.

**GWEDOLEN:** [To JACK]. Darling!

1945 **ALGERNON:** [To CECILY]. Darling! [They fall into each other's arms.]

[Enter MERRIMAN. When he enters he coughs loudly, seeing the situation.]

MERRIMAN: Ahem! Ahem! Lady Bracknell!

JACK: Good heavens!

[Enter LADY BRACKNELL. The couples separate in alarm. Exit MERRIMAN.]

**LADY BRACKNELL:** Gwendolen! What does this mean? **GWEDOLEN:** Merely that I am engaged to be married to Mr. Worthing, mamma.

LADY BRACKNELL: Come here. Sit down. Sit down immediately. Hesitation of any kind is a sign of mental decay in the young, of physical weakness in the old. [Turns to JACK.] Apprised, sir, of my daughter's sudden flight by her trusty maid, whose confidence I purchased by means of a small coin, I followed her at once by a luggage train. Her unhappy father is, I am glad to say, under the impression that she is attending a more than usually lengthy lecture by the University Extension Scheme on the Influence of a Permanent Income on Thought. I do not propose to undeceive him. Indeed I have never undeceived him on any question. I would consider it wrong. But of course, you

will clearly understand that all communication between



# The Importance of Being Earnest, cont.

	yourself and my daughter must cease immediately from this
1970	moment. On this point, as indeed on all points, I am firm.
	JACK: I am engaged to be married to Gwendolen, Lady
	Bracknell!
	LADY BRACKNELL: You are nothing of the kind, sir. And
	now, as regards Algernon!Algernon!
1975	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 doesn't live here.
	Bunbury is somewhere else at present. In fact, Bunbury is
1980	dead.
	LADY BRACKNELL: Dead! When did Mr. Bunbury die? His
	death must have been extremely sudden.
	ALGERNON: [Airily]. Oh! I killed Bunbury this afternoon. I
	mean poor Bunbury died this afternoon.
1985	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? I was not aware that Mr. Bunbury
	was interested in social legislation. If so, he is well
1990	punished for his morbidity.
	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
1995	the opinion of his physicians. I am glad, however, that he
	made up his mind at the last to some definite course of
	action, and acted under proper medical advice. And now
	that we have finally got rid of this Mr. Bunbury, may I ask,
	Mr. Worthing, who is that young person whose hand my
2000	nephew Algernon is now holding in what seems to me a
	peculiarly unnecessary manner?



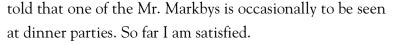


	JACK: That lady is Miss Cecily Cardew, my ward. [LADY
	BRACKNELL bows coldly to CECILY.]
	ALGERNON: I am engaged to be married to Cecily, Aunt
2005	Augusta.
	LADY BRACKNELL: I beg your pardon?
	CECILY: Mr. Moncrieff and I are engaged to be married, Lady
	Bracknell.
	<b>LADY BRACKNELL:</b> [With a shiver, crossing to the sofa and sitting
2010	down]. I do not know whether there is anything peculiarly
	exciting in the air of this particular part of Hertfordshire,
	but the number of engagements that go on seems to me
	considerably above the proper average that statistics have
	laid down for our guidance. I think some preliminary
2015	enquiry on my part would not be out of place. Mr.
	Worthing, is Miss Cardew at all connected with any of the
	larger railway stations in London? I merely desire
	information. Until yesterday I had no idea that there were
	any families or persons whose origin was a Terminus. [JACK
2020	looks perfectly furious, but restrains himself.]
	JACK: [In a clear, cold voice]. Miss Cardew is the granddaughter
	of the late Mr. Thomas Cardew of 149, Belgrave Square,
	S.W.; Gervase Park, Dorking, Surrey; and the Sporran,
	Fifeshire, N.B.
2025	LADY BRACKNELL: That sounds not unsatisfactory. Three
	addresses always inspire confidence, even in tradesmen.
	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.
2030	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. Indeed I am



2035



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 crowded with incident, I see; though perhaps somewhat too exciting for a young girl. I am not myself in favour of premature experiences. [Rises, looks at her watch.] Gwendolen! the time approaches for our departure. We have not a moment to lose. 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. Good-bye, 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. Few girls of the present day have any really solid qualities, any of the qualities that last, and improve with time. We live, I regret to say, in an age of surfaces. [To CECILY.] Come over here, dear. [CECILY goes across.] 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. A thoroughly experienced French maid produces a really marvellous result in a very brief space of time. I remember recommending one to young Lady Lancing, and after three months her own husband did not know her.

JACK: And after six months nobody knew her.

LADY BRACKNELL: [Glares at JACK for a few moments. Then bends, with a practised smile, to CECILY.] Kindly turn round,

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2070	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. The two weak points in our age are its want of
	principle and its want of profile. The chin a little higher,
2075	dear. Style largely depends on the way the chin is worn.
	They are worn very high, just at present. Algernon!
	ALGERNON: Yes, Aunt Augusta!
	LADY BRACKNELL: There are distinct social possibilities in
	Miss Cardew's profile.
2080	ALGERNON: Cecily is the sweetest, dearest, prettiest girl in
	the whole world. And I don't care twopence about social
	possibilities.
	LADY BRACKNELL: Never speak disrespectfully of Society,
	Algernon. Only people who can't get into it do that. [To
2085	CECILY.] Dear child, of course you know that Algernon ha
	nothing but his debts to depend upon. But I do not
	approve of mercenary marriages. When I married Lord
	Bracknell I had no fortune of any kind. But I never
	dreamed for a moment of allowing that to stand in my way
2090	Well, I suppose I must give my consent.
	ALGERNON: Thank you, Aunt Augusta.
	LADY BRACKNELL: Cecily, you may kiss me!
	CECILY: [Kisses her]. Thank you, Lady Bracknell.
	LADY BRACKNELL: You may also address me as Aunt Augusta
2095	for the future.
	CECILY: Thank you, Aunt Augusta.
	LADY BRACKNELL: The marriage, I think, had better take
	place quite soon.
	ALGERNON: Thank you, Aunt Augusta.
2100	CECILY: Thank you, Aunt Augusta.
	LADY BRACKNELL: To speak frankly, I am not in favour of

long engagements. They give people the opportunity of



decline to give.

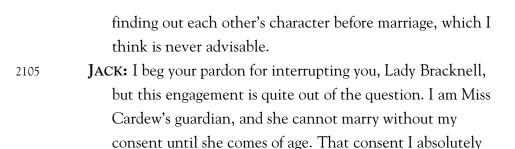
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LADY BRACKNELL: Upon what grounds, may I ask? Algernon is an extremely, I may almost say an ostentatiously, eligible young man. He has nothing, but he looks everything.

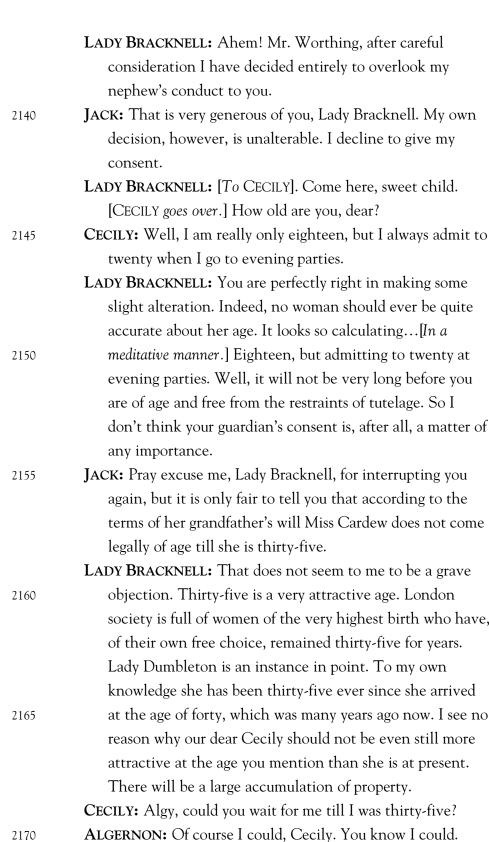
What more can one desire?

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 untruthful. [ALGERNON and CECILY look at him in indignant amazement.]

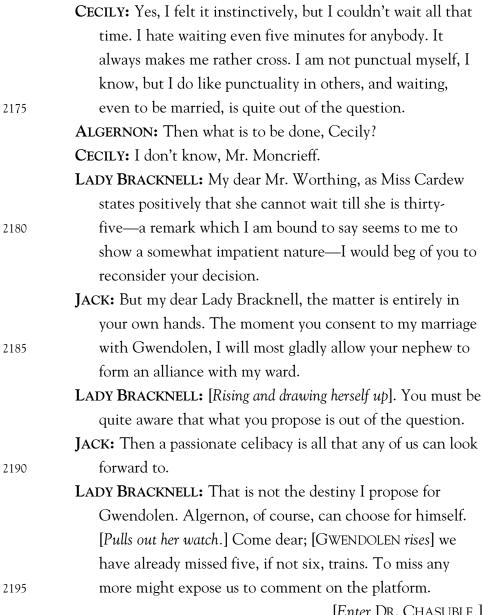
**LADY BRACKNELL:** Untruthful! My nephew Algernon? Impossible! He is an Oxonian.

JACK: I fear there can be no possible doubt about the matter. This afternoon, during my temporary absence in London on an important question of romance, he obtained admission to my house by means of the false pretence of being my brother. Under an assumed name he drank, I've just been informed by my butler, an entire pint bottle of my Perrier-Jouet, Brut, '89; a wine I was specially reserving for myself. Continuing his disgraceful deception, he succeeded in the course of the afternoon in alienating the affections of my only ward. He subsequently stayed to tea, and devoured every single muffin. And what makes his conduct all the more heartless is, that he was perfectly well aware from the first that I have no brother, that I never had a brother, and that I don't intend to have a brother, not even of any kind. I distinctly told him so myself yesterday afternoon.









[Enter Dr. CHASUBLE.]

**CHASUBLE:** Everything is quite ready for the christenings.

LADY BRACKNELL: The christenings, sir! Is not that somewhat premature?

2200

**CHASUBLE:** [Looking rather puzzled, and pointing to JACK and ALGERNON]. Both these gentlemen have expressed a desire for immediate baptism.

LADY BRACKNELL: At their age? The idea is grotesque and irreligious! Algernon, I forbid you to be baptised. I will not



2205	hear of such excesses. Lord Bracknell would be highly
	displeased if he learned that that was the way in which you
	wasted your time and money.
	CHASUBLE: Am I to understand then that there are to be no
	christenings at all this afternoon?
2210	JACK: I don't think that, as things are now, it would be of
2210	much practical value to either of us, Dr. Chasuble.
	CHASUBLE: I am grieved to hear such sentiments from you,
	Mr. Worthing. They savour of the heretical views of the
	Anabaptists, views that I have completely refuted in four of
2215	my unpublished sermons. However, as your present mood
	seems to be one peculiarly secular, I will return to the
	church at once. Indeed, I have just been informed by the
	pew-opener that for the last hour and a half Miss Prism has
	been waiting for me in the vestry.
2220	LADY BRACKNELL: [Starting]. Miss Prism! Did I bear you
	mention a Miss Prism?
	CHASUBLE: Yes, Lady Bracknell. I am on my way to join her.
	LADY BRACKNELL: Pray allow me to detain you for a
	moment. This matter may prove to be one of vital
2225	importance to Lord Bracknell and myself. Is this Miss
	Prism a female of repellent aspect, remotely connected
	with education?
	CHASUBLE: [Somewhat indignantly]. She is the most cultivated
	of ladies, and the very picture of respectability.
2230	LADY BRACKNELL: It is obviously the same person. May I ask
	what position she holds in your household?
	CHASUBLE: [Severely]. I am a celibate, madam.
	JACK: [Interposing]. Miss Prism, Lady Bracknell, has been for
	the last three years Miss Cardew's esteemed governess and
2235	valued companion.
	LADY BRACKNELL: In spite of what I hear of her. I must see



her at once. Let her be sent for.

**CHASUBLE:** [Looking off]. She approaches; she is nigh.

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[Enter	Miss	Prism	hurriedly.
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MISS PRISM: I was told you expected me in the vestry, dear Canon. I have been waiting for you there 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. The Canon starts back in horror. ALGERNON and JACK pretend to be anxious to shield CECILY and GWENDOLEN from hearing the details of a terrible public scandal.] Twenty-eight years ago, Prism, you left Lord Bracknell's house, Number 104, Upper Grosvenor Street, in charge of a perambulator that contained a baby, of the male sex. You never returned. A few weeks later, through the elaborate investigations of the Metropolitan police, the perambulator was discovered at midnight, standing by itself in a remote corner of Bayswater. It contained the manuscript of a three-volume novel of more than usually revolting sentimentality. [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 admit with shame that I do not know. I only wish I did. The plain facts of the case are these. On the morning of the day you mention, a day that is for ever branded on my memory, I prepared as usual to take the baby out in its perambulator. I had also with me a somewhat old, but capacious hand-bag in which I had intended to place the manuscript of a work of fiction that I had written during my few unoccupied hours. In a moment of mental abstraction, for which I never can forgive myself, I deposited the manuscript in the bassinette, and placed the baby in the hand-bag.





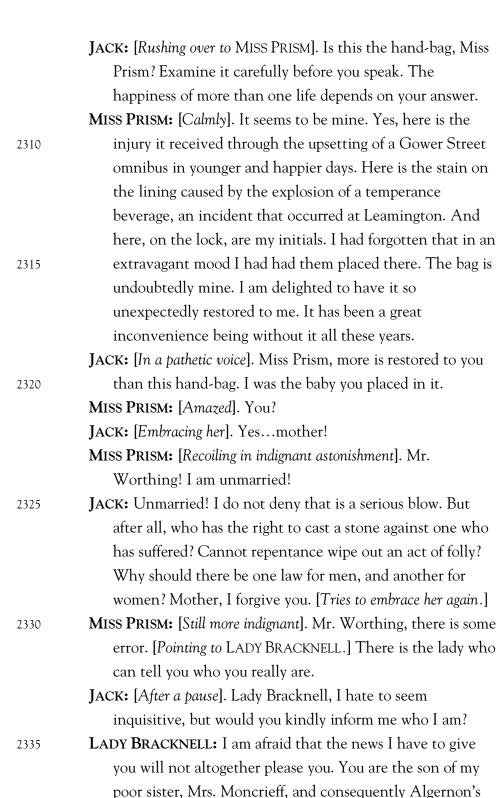


	<b>JACK:</b> [Who has been listening attentively]. But where did you deposit the hand-bag?
2275	MISS PRISM: Do not ask me, Mr. Worthing.
	JACK: Miss Prism, this is a matter of no small importance to
	me. I insist on knowing where you deposited the hand-bag
	that contained that infant.
	MISS PRISM: I left it in the cloak-room of one of the larger
2280	railway stations in London.
	JACK: What railway station?
	MISS PRISM: [Quite crushed]. Victoria. The Brighton line.
	[Sinks into a chair.]
	JACK: I must retire to my room for a moment. Gwendolen,
2285	wait here for me.
	GWEDOLEN: If you are not too long, I will wait here for you all
	my life.
	[Exit JACK in great excitement.]
	CHASUBLE: What do you think this means, Lady Bracknell?
2290	LADY BRACKNELL: I dare not even suspect, Dr. Chasuble. 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.
2295	Everyone looks up.]
	CECILY: Uncle Jack seems strangely agitated.
	CHASUBLE: Your guardian has a very emotional nature.
	LADY BRACKNELL: This noise is extremely unpleasant. It
	sounds as if he was having an argument. I dislike arguments
2300	of any kind. They are always vulgar, and often convincing.
	CHASUBLE: [Looking up]. It has stopped now. [The noise is
	redoubled.]
	LADY BRACKNELL: I wish he would arrive at some conclusion
	GWEDOLEN: This suspense is terrible. I hope it will last.

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



2305





elder brother.

	JACK: Algy's elder brother! Then I have a brother after all. I
2340	knew I had a brother! I always said I had a brother!
	Cecily,—how could you have ever doubted that I had a
	brother. [Seizes hold of ALGERNON.] Dr. Chasuble, my
	unfortunate brother. Miss Prism, my unfortunate brother.
	Gwendolen, my unfortunate brother. Algy, you young
2345	scoundrel, you will have to treat me with more respect in
	the future. You have never behaved to me like a brother in
	all your life.
	ALGERNON: Well, not till to-day, old boy, I admit. I did my
	best, however, though I was out of practice. [Shakes hands.]
2350	GWEDOLEN: [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
2355	suppose?
	GWEDOLEN: I never change, except in my affections.
	CECILY: What a noble nature you have, Gwendolen!
	JACK: Then the question had better be cleared up at once.
	Aunt Augusta, a moment. At the time when Miss Prism
2360	left me in the hand-bag, had I been christened already?
	LADY BRACKNELL: Every luxury that money could buy,
	including christening, had been lavished on you by your
	fond and doting parents.
	JACK: Then I was christened! That is settled. Now, what
2365	name was I given? Let me know the worst.
	LADY BRACKNELL: Being the eldest son you were naturally
	christened after your father.
	JACK: [Irritably]. Yes, but what was my father's Christian
	name?
2370	LADY BRACKNELL: [Meditatively]. I cannot at the present
	moment recall what the General's Christian name was. But
	I have no doubt he had one. He was eccentric, I admit. But



	only in later years. And that was the result of the Indian climate, and marriage, and indigestion, and other things of
2375	that kind.
	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.
2380	JACK: His name would appear in the Army Lists of the period,
	I suppose, Aunt Augusta?
	LADY BRACKNELL: The General was essentially a man of
	peace, except in his domestic life. But I have no doubt his
	name would appear in any military directory.
2385	JACK: The Army Lists of the last forty years are here. These
	delightful records should have been my constant study.
	[Rushes to bookcase and tears the books out.] M.
	GeneralsMallam, Maxbohm, Magley, what ghastly
	names they have—Markby, Migsby, Mobbs, Moncrieff!
2390	Lieutenant 1840, Captain, Lieutenant-Colonel, Colonel,
	General 1869, Christian names, Ernest John. [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. I mean it naturally is Ernest.
2395	LADY BRACKNELL: Yes, I remember now that the General
	was called Ernest. I knew I had some particular reason for
	disliking the name.
	<b>GWEDOLEN:</b> Ernest! My own Ernest! I felt from the first that
	you could have no other name!
2400	JACK: Gwendolen, it is a terrible thing for a man to find out
	suddenly that all his life he has been speaking nothing but
	the truth. Can you forgive me?
	<b>GWEDOLEN:</b> I can. For I feel that you are sure to change.
	JACK: My own one!
2405	CHASUBLE: [To MISS PRISM]. Lætitia! [Embraces her.]
	MISS PRISM: [Enthusiastically]. Frederick! At last!



### The Importance of Being Earnest, cont.

ALGERNON: Cecily! [Embraces her.] At last! JACK: Gwendolen! [Embraces her.] At last!

**LADY BRACKNELL:** My nephew, you seem to be displaying signs of triviality.

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

**TABLEAU** 

2415 Curtain

