

The Importance of Being Earnest

By Oscar Wilde

Adapted by Hoffi Munt

Act One

Algernon. Aunt Augusta won't quite approve of your being here.

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. Yes, but before I allow you to marry her, you will have to clear up the whole question of Cecily. [Holds up a phone]

Jack. Well, if you want to know, Cecily happens to be my aunt. Charming old lady she is, too. Lives at Tunbridge Wells. Just give it back to me, Algy.

Algernon. [Retreating.] 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. Some aunts are tall, some aunts are not tall.

Algernon. Yes. But why does your aunt call you her uncle? 'From little Cecily, with her fondest love to her dear Uncle Jack.' 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 everyone 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.

Jack. Well, my name is Ernest in town and Jack 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.

Jack. Old Mr. Thomas Cardew made me in his will guardian to his grand-daughter, Miss Cecily Cardew. Cecily, lives at my place in the country. In order to get up to town I have always pretended to have a younger brother of the name of Ernest who gets into the most dreadful scrapes.

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.

Jack. 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.

[The sound of an electric bell is heard.]

Algernon Ah! that must be Aunt Augusta.

[Enter Lady Bracknell and Gwendolyn]

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 the two things rarely go together. Won't you come and sit here, Gwendolen?

Gwendolen. Thanks, mamma, I'm quite comfortable where I am.

Algernon. I am afraid, Aunt Augusta, I shall have to give up the pleasure of dining with you tonight after all.

Lady Bracknell. I hope not, Algernon.

Algernon. I have just had a telegram to say that my poor friend Bunbury is very ill again. They seem to think I should be with him.

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.

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.... I'll run over the programme I've drawn out for then, if you will kindly come into the next room for a moment.

Lady Bracknell. Thank you, Algernon. It is very thoughtful of you.

[Algernon and Lady Bracknell exit]

Jack. Miss Fairfax, ever since I met you I have admired you more than any girl . . . I have ever met since . . . I met you.

Gwendolen. Yes, I am quite well aware of the fact. And my ideal has always been to love some one of the name of Ernest. There is something in that name that inspires absolute confidence.

Jack. You don't mean to say that you couldn't love me if my name wasn't Ernest?

Gwendolen. But your name is Ernest.

Jack. Yes, I know it is. But supposing it was something else? There are lots of other much nicer names. I think Jack, for instance, a charming name.

Gwendolen. Jack? . . . No, there is very little music in the name Jack.

Jack. Gwendolen, I must get christened at once—I mean we must get married at once. Will you marry me? [Goes on his knees.]

Gwendolen. Of course I will, darling.

[Enter **Lady Bracknell.**]

Lady Bracknell. Mr. Worthing! Rise, sir, from this semi-recumbent posture. It is most indecorous.

Gwendolen. I am engaged to Mr. Worthing, mamma.

Lady Bracknell. Pardon me, you are not engaged to anyone. When you do become engaged to someone, I, or your father, will inform you of the fact. . . . I have a few questions to put to you, Mr. Worthing. While I am making these inquiries, you, Gwendolen, will wait for me below.

[Gwendolyn exits]

Lady Bracknell I feel bound to tell you that you are not down on my list of eligible young men. However, I am quite ready to enter your name, should your answers be what a really affectionate mother requires... 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?

Jack. I am afraid I really don't know. . . I don't actually know who I am by birth. I was . . . well, I was found.

Lady Bracknell. Found!

Jack. The late Mr. Thomas Cardew, an old gentleman of a very charitable and kindly disposition, found me, and gave me the name of Worthing, because he happened to have a first-class ticket for Worthing in his pocket at the time.

Lady Bracknell. Where did the charitable gentleman who had a first-class ticket for this seaside resort find you?

Jack. In a handbag.

Lady Bracknell. A handbag?

Jack. Yes, Lady Bracknell. I was in a handbag—a somewhat large, black leather handbag, with handles to it—an ordinary handbag in fact.

Lady Bracknell. In what locality did this Thomas, Cardew come across this ordinary handbag?

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

Lady Bracknell. 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 handbag, whether it had handles or not, seems to me to display a contempt for the ordinary decencies of family life

Jack. May I ask you then what you would advise me to do?

Lady Bracknell. I would strongly advise you, Mr. Worthing, to try and acquire some relations as soon as possible.

Jack. Well, I don't see how I could possibly manage to do that.

Lady Bracknell. You 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 cloakroom, and form an alliance with a parcel? Good morning, Mr. Worthing!

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

[Enter Algenon]

Algenon. Did you tell Gwendolen the truth about your being Ernest in town, and Jack in the country?

Jack. My dear fellow, the truth isn't quite the sort of thing one tells to a nice, sweet, refined girl.

Algenon. What about your brother? What about the profligate Ernest?

Jack. Oh, before the end of the week I shall have got rid of him. I'll say he died in Paris of apoplexy.

Algenon. But I thought you said that . . . Miss Cardew was a little too much interested in your poor brother Ernest? Won't she feel his loss a good deal?

Jack. Cecily is not a silly romantic girl, I am glad to say. She has got a capital appetite, goes long walks, and pays no attention at all to her lessons.

Algernon. 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.

[Enter **Gwendolen.**]

Algernon. Gwendolen, upon my word!

Gwendolen. Algy, kindly turn your back. I have something very particular to say to Mr. Worthing. Ernest, we may never be married but, nothing can alter my eternal devotion to you.

Jack. Dear Gwendolen!

Gwendolen. Your Christian name has an irresistible fascination. Your town address at the Albany I have. What is your address in the country?

Jack. The Manor House, Woolton, Hertfordshire.

[**Algernon** writes the address on his shirt-cuff.]

Gwendolen. How long do you remain in town?

Jack. Till Monday.

Gwendolen. Good! Algy, you may turn round now.

Algernon. Thanks, I've turned round already.

[**Gwendolen** 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?

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 never serious.

Jack. Oh, that's nonsense, Algy. You never talk anything but nonsense.

Algernon. Nobody ever does.

Act Two

Miss Prism. You must put away your diary, Cecily. I really don't see why you should keep a diary at all.

Cecily. 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 Maudie 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 that end happily. They depress me so much.

Miss Prism. The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means.

Cecily. I suppose so. But it seems very unfair. And was your novel ever published?

Miss Prism. Alas, no. The manuscript unfortunately was lost.... I will have a stroll. I find I have a headache, and a walk might do it good.

[Enter **Algernon**.]

Algernon You are my little cousin Cecily, I'm sure. [He holds out his card to her]

Cecily. You are under some strange mistake. I am not little. In fact, I believe I am more than usually tall for my age. But I am your cousin Cecily. You, I see from your card, are Uncle Jack's brother, my cousin Ernest, my wicked cousin Ernest.

Algernon. Oh! I am not really wicked at all, cousin Cecily. You mustn't think that I am wicked.

Cecily. 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. Uncle Jack won't be back till Monday afternoon. I know he wants to speak to you about your emigrating.

Algernon. About my what?

Cecily. Your emigrating. Uncle Jack is sending you to Australia. He said at dinner on Wednesday night, that you 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 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.

Cecily. I'm afraid I've no time, this afternoon.

Algernon. 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.

Cecily. Oh, I don't think I would care to catch a sensible man. I shouldn't know what to talk to him about.

[Algernon and Cecily exit.]

[Miss Prism returns just as Jack arrives]

Miss Prism. Mr. Worthing! This is indeed a surprise. We did not look for you till Monday afternoon.

Jack I have returned sooner than I expected.

Miss Prism. 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?

Jack. [Shaking his head.] Dead!

Miss Prism. 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. A severe chill, it seems.

Miss Prism. As a man sows, so shall he reap.

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

Cecily. Uncle Jack! 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. I'll tell him to come out [Runs back into the house.]

Miss Prism. After we had all been resigned to his loss, his sudden return seems to me peculiarly distressing.

[Enter **Algernon** and **Cecily** hand in hand.]

Jack. Good heavens!

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.

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

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 every one. 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.

Jack. Oh, he has been talking about Bunbury, has he?

Algernon. 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 with **Algernon** and glares.]

Miss Prism. I think we might leave the two brothers together. Cecily, you will come with me.

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

Jack. You young scoundrel, Algy, you must get out of this place as soon as possible.

Algernon. I certainly won't leave you so long as you are in mourning. It would be most unfriendly.

Jack. You have got to catch the four-five train, and I hope you will have a pleasant journey back to town. [Goes into the house.]

[Enter **Cecily** at the back of the garden]

Cecily. Oh, I merely came back to water the roses. I thought you were with Uncle Jack.

Algernon. He's going to send me away.

Cecily. Then have we got to part?

Algernon. I am afraid so. It's a very painful parting... I hope, Cecily, I shall not offend you if I state quite frankly and openly that you seem to me to be in every way the visible personification of absolute perfection.

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

Algernon. Do you really keep a diary? I'd give anything to look at it. May I?

Cecily. Oh no. You see, it is simply a very young girl's record of her own thoughts and impressions, and consequently meant for publication. When it appears in volume form I hope you will order a copy.

Algernon. I love you, Cecily. You will marry me, won't you?

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

Algernon. For the last three months?

Cecily. Yes, it will be exactly three months on Thursday.

Algernon. But how did we become engaged?

Cecily. Well, ever since dear Uncle Jack first confessed to us that he had a younger brother who was very wicked and bad, I daresay it was foolish of me, but I fell in love with you, Ernest.

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 matter one way or the other, and after a long struggle with myself I accepted you under this dear old tree here. The next day I bought this little ring in your name.

Algernon. Did I give you this? It's very pretty, isn't it?

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

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

Cecily. You need hardly remind me of that, Ernest. I remember only too well that I was forced to write your letters for you.

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.

Cecily. It would hardly have been a really serious engagement if it hadn’t been broken off at least once. But I forgave you before the week was out.

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

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

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

Cecily. But what name?

Algernon. Oh, any name you like—Algernon—for 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

Cecily. I might respect you, if you were Algernon, I might admire your character, but I fear that I should not be able to give you my undivided attention.

Algernon. I must see the rector at once on a most important christening—I mean on most important business.

Cecily. Oh!

Algernon. I'll be back in no time.

[Kisses her and rushes down the garden.]

[Enter **Gwendolen.**]

Gwendolyn: I was told that Mr Worthing would be back soon and that I should wait here.

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

Gwendolen. 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.

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

Gwendolen. You are here on a short visit, I suppose.

Cecily. Oh no! I live here.

Gwendolen. Really? Your mother, no doubt, or some female relative of advanced years, resides here also?

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

Gwendolen. Indeed?

Cecily. My dear guardian, with the assistance of Miss Prism, has the arduous task of looking after me.

Gwendolen. Your guardian?

Cecily. Yes, I am Mr. Worthing's ward.

Gwendolen. Oh! It is strange, Ernest never mentioned to me that he had a ward.

Cecily. I beg your pardon, Gwendolen, did you say Ernest?

Gwendolen. Yes.

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

Gwendolen. Ernest never mentioned to me that he had a brother.

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

Gwendolen. Ah, that accounts for it. And now that I think of it I have never heard any man mention his brother. Of course you are quite, quite sure that it is not Mr. Ernest Worthing who is your guardian?

Cecily. Quite sure. In fact, I am going to be his.

Gwendolen. I beg your pardon?

Cecily. Dearest Gwendolen, there is no reason why I should make a secret of it to you. Mr. Ernest Worthing and I are engaged to be married.

Gwendolen My darling Cecily, I think there must be some slight error. Mr. Ernest Worthing is engaged to me.

Cecily. I am afraid you must be under some misconception. Ernest proposed to me exactly ten minutes ago.

Gwendolen. If the poor fellow has been entrapped into any foolish promise I shall consider it my duty to rescue him at once, and with a firm hand.

Cecily. Do you suggest, Miss Fairfax, that I entrapped Ernest into an engagement?

[Enter **Miss Prism** reading. The presence of Miss Prism exercises a restraining influence, under which both girls chafe.]

Gwendolen. Quite a well-kept garden this is, Miss Cardew.

Cecily. So glad you like it, Miss Fairfax.

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

Cecily. Oh, flowers are as common here, Miss Fairfax, as people are in London. [Sweetly.] Sugar?

Gwendolen No, thank you. Sugar is not fashionable any more.

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

[Miss Prism exits]

Gwendolen. From the moment I saw you I distrusted you. I felt that you were false and deceitful. I am never deceived in such matters. My first impressions of people are invariably right.

[Enter **Jack.**]

Gwendolen. Ernest! My own Ernest!

Jack. Gwendolen! Darling!

Gwendolen. A moment! May I ask if you are engaged to be married to this young lady?

[Points to **Cecily.**]

Jack. To dear little Cecily! Of course not! What could have put such an idea into your pretty little head?

Cecily. I knew there must be some misunderstanding, Miss Fairfax. The gentleman whose arm is at present round your waist is my guardian, Mr. John Worthing.

Gwendolen. I beg your pardon?

Cecily. This is Uncle Jack.

Gwendolen Jack! Oh!

[Enter **Algernon.**]

Cecily. Here is Ernest.

Algernon. My own love! [Offers to kiss her.]

Cecily. A moment, Ernest! May I ask you—are you engaged to be married to this young lady?

Algernon. To what young lady? Good heavens! Gwendolen!

Cecily. Yes! to good heavens, Gwendolen, I mean to Gwendolen.

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

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

Cecily. Algernon Moncrieff! Oh! A gross deception has been practised on both of us.

Gwendolen. My poor wounded Cecily!

Cecily. My sweet wronged Gwendolen!

Gwendolen. Mr. Worthing, there is just one question I would like to be permitted to put to you. Where is your brother Ernest?

Jack. Gwendolen—Cecily—it is very painful for me to be forced to speak the truth. However, I will tell you quite frankly that I have no brother Ernest. I have no brother at all.

Cecily. No brother at all?

Jack. None!

Gwendolen. 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?

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

[They retire into the house with scornful looks.]

Jack. I must say that your taking in a sweet, simple, innocent girl like Miss Cardew that is quite inexcusable.

Algernon. [Eating] I can see no possible defence at all for your deceiving a brilliant, clever, thoroughly experienced young lady like Miss Fairfax.

Jack. How can you sit there, calmly eating muffins when we are in this horrible trouble, I can't make out. You seem to me to be perfectly heartless.

Algernon. Well, I can't eat muffins in an agitated manner. The butter would probably get on my cuffs. One should always eat muffins quite calmly. It is the only way to eat them.

Jack. I say it's perfectly heartless your eating muffins at all, under the circumstances.

Algernon. That may be. But the muffins are the same.

Jack. Algy, I wish to goodness you would go.

Algernon. You can't possibly ask me to go without having some dinner. Besides I have just made arrangements 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 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.

Algernon. Jack, you are at the muffins again! I wish you wouldn't. There are only two left.
I told you I was particularly fond of muffins.

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!

Act Three

Gwendolen. The fact that they did not follow, as anyone else would have done, seems to me to show that they have some sense of shame left.

Cecily. They have been eating muffins. That looks like repentance.

[Enter **Jack** followed by **Algernon**.]

Cecily. 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?

Gwendolen. Yes, dear, if you can believe him.

Cecily. I don't. But that does not affect the wonderful beauty of his answer.

Gwendolen. Mr. Worthing, what explanation can you offer to me for pretending to have a brother? Was it in order that you might have an opportunity of coming up to town to see me as often as possible?

Jack. Can you doubt it, Miss Fairfax?

Gwendolen. Their explanations appear to be quite satisfactory, especially Mr. Worthing's. But there are principles at stake that one cannot surrender.

Gwendolen and **Cecily** [Speaking together.] Your Christian names are still an insuperable barrier.

Jack and Algernon [Speaking together.] Our Christian names! Is that all? But we are going to be christened this afternoon.

Gwendolen. For my sake you are prepared to do this terrible thing?

Jack. I am.

Cecily. To please me you are ready to face this fearful ordeal?

Algernon. I am!

Gwendolen. Darling!

Algernon. Darling!

[Enter **Lady Bracknell**. The couples separate in alarm.]

Lady Bracknell. Gwendolen! What does this mean?

Gwendolen. Merely that I am engaged to be married to Mr. Worthing, mamma.

Lady Bracknell. You are nothing of the kind. And now, as regards Algernon! . . . Algernon!

Algernon. Yes, Aunt Augusta.

Lady Bracknell. May I ask if it is in this house that your invalid friend Mr. Bunbury resides?

Algernon. Oh! No! Bunbury doesn't live here. Bunbury is somewhere else at present. In fact, Bunbury is dead.

Lady Bracknell. Dead! When did Mr. Bunbury die? His death must have been extremely sudden.

Algernon. Oh! I killed Bunbury this afternoon. I mean poor Bunbury died this afternoon.

Lady Bracknell. 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 nephew Algernon is now holding in what seems to me a peculiarly unnecessary manner?

Jack. That lady is Miss Cecily Cardew, my ward.

Algernon. I am engaged to be married to Cecily, Aunt Augusta.

Lady Bracknell. I beg your pardon?

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

Lady Bracknell Mr. Worthing, is Miss Cardew at all connected with any of the larger railway stations in London?

Jack. Miss Cardew is the grand-daughter of the late Mr. Thomas Cardew of 149 Belgrave Square, S.W.; Gervase Park, Dorking, Surrey; and the Sporrin, Fifeshire, N.B.

Lady Bracknell. That sounds not unsatisfactory. Three 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.

Lady Bracknell. So far I am satisfied. 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.

Lady Bracknell. 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. There are distinct social possibilities in Miss Cardew's profile. Well, I suppose I must give my consent.

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

Lady Bracknell. Upon what grounds may I ask?

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

Lady Bracknell. Untruthful! My nephew Algernon? Impossible!

Jack. I fear there can be no possible doubt about the matter. 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.

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

Jack. That is very generous of you, Lady Bracknell. My own decision, however, is unalterable. I decline to give my consent. Miss Cardew does not come legally of age till she is thirty-five.

Lady Bracknell. That does not seem to me to be a grave objection. Thirty-five is a very attractive age.

Cecily. But I couldn't wait all that time.

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

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

Lady Bracknell. You must be quite aware that what you propose is out of the question. That is not the destiny I want for Gwendolen. Algernon, of course, can choose for himself.

[**Miss Prism** enters. She is shocked at the sight of **Lady Bracknell** and tries to leave]

Lady Bracknell. Prism! Come here, Prism! Prism! Where is that baby? 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. But the baby was not there! Prism! Where is that baby?

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 forever 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 handbag 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 basinette, and placed the baby in the handbag.

Jack. But where did you deposit the handbag?

Miss Prism. I left it in the cloak-room of one of the larger railway stations in London.

Jack. What railway station?

Miss Prism. Victoria. The Brighton line.

Jack. I must retire to my room for a moment. [Exit **Jack** in great excitement.]

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

Cecily. Uncle Jack seems strangely agitated.

Lady Bracknell. This noise is extremely unpleasant. It sounds as if he was having an argument. I dislike arguments of any kind. They are always vulgar, and often convincing.

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

Jack. Is this the handbag, Miss Prism? Examine it carefully before you speak. The happiness of more than one life depends on your answer.

Miss Prism. It seems to be mine. Here is the stain on the lining caused by the explosion of a temperance beverage, an incident that occurred at Leamington. And here, on the lock, are my initials. I am delighted to have it so unexpectedly restored to me. It has been a great inconvenience being without it all these years.

Jack. Miss Prism, more is restored to you than this handbag. I was the baby you placed in it.

Miss Prism. You?

Jack. Yes . . . mother!

Miss Prism. Mr. Worthing, there is some error. [Pointing to **Lady Bracknell.**] There is the lady who can tell you who you really are.

Jack. Lady Bracknell, I hate to seem inquisitive, but would you kindly inform me who I am?

Lady Bracknell. I am afraid that the news I have to give you will not altogether please you. You are the son of my poor sister, Mrs. Moncrieff, and consequently Algernon's elder brother.

Jack. Algy's elder brother! Then I have a brother after all. [Seizes hold of **Algernon.**] Algy, you young 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.

Gwendolen. My own! But what own are you? What is your Christian name, now that you have become someone else?

Jack. At the time when Miss Prism left me in the handbag, what name was I given?

Lady Bracknell. Being the eldest son you were naturally christened after your father.

Jack. Yes, but what was my father's Christian name?

Lady Bracknell I cannot at the present moment recall what the General's Christian name was. But I have no doubt he had one.

Jack. Algy! Can't you recollect what our father's Christian name was?

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

Lady Bracknell. I have no doubt his name would appear in any military directory.

Jack. The Army Lists of the last forty years are here. [Rushes to bookcase and tears the books out.] M. Generals . . . Markby, Migsby, Mobbs, Moncrieff! Lieutenant 1840, Captain, Lieutenant-Colonel, Colonel, General 1869, Christian names, Ernest John.... I always told you, Gwendolen, my name was Ernest, didn't I?

Lady Bracknell. Yes, I remember now that the General was called Ernest, I knew I had some particular reason for disliking the name.

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

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.

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.