

The Importance of Being Earnest (in 30 minutes)

a trivial comedy for serious people

adapted by Jason Pizzarello
from the play by Oscar Wilde

CHARACTERS

(3 females, 2 males, 2 flexible)

John “JACK” Worthing
ALGERNON Moncrieff

LADY BRACKNELL, Algernon’s Aunt (can also be played by a male)
GWENDOLEN Fairfax, her daughter

CECILY Cardew, Jack’s ward
MISS PRISM, her Governess

MERRY or Merriman, a servant (male or female)

TIME AND PLACE

Place: A fancy country home. The garden.

Time: 1885.

A NOTE FROM THE ADAPTOR

As you no doubt noticed from the parenthetical in the title, this adaptation is a dramatic, and most serious!, cutting of the full-length three-act version of *The Importance of Being Earnest* by Oscar Wilde. (He also wrote a four-act version, but never mind that.) In pursuit of the highest form of an abbreviated work my aim was to stay true to the wit and intricate structure of the original, while creating an abridged version that held its own. In short, I had to take some dramatic license. Ninety five and a half percent of the dialog is straight from the original, it’s edges snipped, and the leaky passages patched and glued together. Instead of three locations, there is one. And instead of a butler and a “manservant” there is just one servant. And Rev. Canon Chasuable, D.D. is no more. Okay, so I made some changes. But it was in the spirit of Wilde, and I hope you’ll find it’s a speedy little farce and that the romance remains hilariously trivial.

It is also worth noting that, in addition to his play being a masterwork of wordplay, the physicalization throughout, but especially in the exits and entrances, requires a precision similar to a dance-routine. For this romp to succeed, the words alone are not enough. The physical comedy must match the verbal swordplay, and both together must build to a crescendo of laughter.

Last but not least... Have fun!

(A Garden. A table set for tea.

JACK is pacing. MERRY, his servant, enters with a platter of sandwiches.)

JACK: Is that the cucumber sandwiches cut for Lady Bracknell?

MERRY: Yes, sir. *(Sets down the platter.)*

JACK: *(Straightening the table:)* Are you of the opinion this is a suitable display of tea and sandwiches for a marriage engagement?

MERRY: I believe it *is* a very suitable, sir. Although, I have only been married once. That was in consequence of a misunderstanding between myself and a young person.

JACK: I don't know that I am much interested in your family life, Merry.

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

JACK: Naturally, I'm sure. That will do, Merry, thank you.

MERRY: Thank you, sir.

(MERRY goes out. JACK continues to straighten the table. MERRY reenters.)

MERRY: Mr. Algeron Moncrieff.

(MERRY goes out. Enter ALGERON.)

ALGERON: Mr. Ernest Worthing. How are you, old boy?

JACK: Algy, my dear! What brings you up to the country?

ALGERON: I've come to return the cigarette case you left in the smoking-room last time you dined with me. *(ALGERON tosses him the case.)* It's yours, isn't it?

JACK: It most certainly is. Thank you, old pal. But to need to come all the way to the country to return a cigarette case.

ALGERON: I've also decided to accompany my aunt Augusta and cousin Gwendolen that you invited. Surely, you meant to invite me as well.

JACK: I surely never invited you all.

ALGERON: I know. You are absurdly careless about sending out invitations. *(Starts eating the cucumber sandwiches, JACK slaps his hand.)* The way you flirt with my cousin Gwendolen is perfectly disgraceful. It is almost as bad as the way Gwendolen flirts with you. I am afraid Aunt Augusta won't quite approve of you.

JACK: I am in love with Gwendolen. I have invited her to the country expressly to propose to her.

ALGERON: You behave as if you were married to her already and I don't think you ever will be.

JACK: Why on earth do you say that?

ALGERON: I don't give my consent.

JACK: Your consent!

ALGERON: 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.

JACK: Cecily! So that's why you're here!

ALGERON: I couldn't help but notice the inscription in your cigarette case: 'From little Cecily, with her fondest love to her dear Uncle Jack.' Why does your dear niece Cecily call you Uncle Jack when your name is Ernest?

JACK: It is a very ungentlemanly thing to read a private cigarette case. But if you must know, my name isn't Ernest; it's Jack.

ALGERON: You have always told me it was 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.

ALGERON: Ah ha! I have always suspected you of being a confirmed and secret Bunburyist; and I am quite sure of it now.

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

ALGERON: I'll reveal to you the meaning of that incomparable expression as soon as you are kind enough to inform me why you are Ernest in town and Jack in the country.

JACK: 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 here in the country under the charge of her admirable governess, Miss Prism.

ALGERON: Yes, but why are you Ernest in town and Jack in the country?

JACK: As a guardian, one has to adopt a very high moral tone on all subjects. It's one's duty. And as a high moral tone can hardly conduce very much to either one's health or one's happiness, in order to get to town I have always pretended to have a younger brother of the name of Ernest, who lives in town, and gets into the most dreadful scrapes. That, my dear Algy, is the whole truth pure and simple.

ALGERON: The truth is rarely pure and never simple. What you really are is a Bunburyist. You are one of the most advanced Bunburyists I know.

JACK: What on earth do you mean?

ALGERON: You have invented a very useful younger brother called Ernest, in order that you may be able to come to town as often as you like. I have invented an invaluable permanent invalid called Bunbury, in order that I may be able to get out of town whenever I choose. Bunbury is perfectly invaluable.

JACK: I'm not a Bunburyist at all. If Gwendolen accepts me, I am going to kill my brother. Actually 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.

ALGERON: Nothing will ever induce me to part with Bunbury.

(Enter MERRY.)

MERRY: Lady Bracknell and Miss Gwendolen Fairfax.

(ALGERNON goes forward to meet them.)

JACK: *(Aside to MERRY, giving him the platter of cucumber sandwiches:)* Quickly, set this platter inside, Merry.

MERRY: Yes, sir.

(MERRY exits with the platter. Enter LADY BRACKNELL and GWENDOLEN.)

LADY BRACKNELL: Good afternoon, dear Algernon, what a nice surprise, I hope you are behaving very well.

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

LADY BRACKNELL: That's not quite the same thing. In fact the two things rarely go together. *(Sees JACK and bows to him with icy coldness.)*

ALGERON: *(To GWENDOLEN:)* Dear me, you are looking smart!

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

JACK: You're quite perfect, Miss Fairfax.

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

(MERRY has returned without the platter.)

LADY BRACKNELL: Mr. Worthing, I'll have a cup of tea, and one of those nice cucumber sandwiches you promised me.

JACK: Certainly. *(Pretends to look for the plate on the table.)* Merriman! Why are there no cucumber sandwiches? I ordered them specially.

MERRY: Sir?

JACK: The cucumber sandwiches!

MERRY: The platter is inside, sir. As you--

JACK: Good heavens! Please escort Miss Bracknell inside at once and prepare all the refreshments she so rightfully deserves.

MERRY: Yes, sir.

(MERRY exits, confused. LADY BRACKNELL in a huff, rises.)

LADY BRACKNELL: Come with me, Algernon. We can discuss our dinner plans for Saturday.

ALGERON: I am afraid, Aunt Augusta, I shall have to give up the pleasure of dining with you. It is a terrible disappointment to me, but the fact is I have just had a telegram to say that my poor friend Bunbury is very ill again. *(Exchanges glances with JACK.)* They seem to think I should be with him.

LADY BRACKNELL: This Mr. Bunbury seems to suffer from curiously bad health.

ALGERON: 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 die.

ALGERON: I'll speak to Bunbury at once, Aunt Augusta, if he is still conscious.

LADY BRACKNELL: Thank you, Algeron. It is very thoughtful of you. ...Gwendolen, join me for sandwiches.

GWENDOLEN: Right behind you, mother.

(LADY BRACKNELL and ALGERON go inside. As ALGERON is leaving he makes a gesture to JACK that he is leaving him alone with GWENDOLEN, who remains behind.)

JACK: Charming day it has been, Miss Fairfax.

GWENDOLEN: 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 nervous.

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

GWENDOLEN: I would certainly advise you to do so.

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.

GWENDOLEN: Yes, I am quite well aware of the fact. I have always longed to love someone of the name of Ernest. There is something in that name 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?

GWENDOLEN: Passionately!

JACK: Darling! But you don't really 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? . . . I don't think the name suits me at all.

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

JACK: Well, really, Gwendolen, I must say there are lots of other much nicer names. I think Jack, for instance, is a charming name.

GWENDOLEN: Jack? . . . No, there is very little music in the name Jack, if any at all. It does not thrill. It produces absolutely no vibrations. The only name is Ernest.

JACK: Gwendolen, we must get married at once.

GWENDOLEN: Married?

JACK: You know that I love you, and you led me to believe, Miss Fairfax, that you were not absolutely indifferent to me.

GWENDOLEN: I adore you. But you haven't proposed to me yet.

JACK: Well . . . may I propose to you now?

GWENDOLEN: I think it would be an admirable opportunity. And to spare you any possible disappointment, Mr. Worthing, I think it only fair to tell you quite frankly before-hand that I am fully determined to accept you.

JACK: *(Goes on his knees.)* Gwendolen, will you marry me?

GWENDOLEN: Of course I will, darling. 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 from that posture. It is most indecent.

GWENDOLEN: Mamma! *(He rises.)* I am engaged to Mr. Worthing!

LADY BRACKNELL: Pardon me, you are not engaged to any one. When you do become engaged to some one, I, or your father, should his health permit him, will inform you of the fact. And now I have a few questions to put to you, Mr. Worthing. Wait for me in the carriage, Gwendolen.

GWENDOLEN: But Mamma--!

LADY BRACKNELL: In the carriage!

(GWENDOLEN goes to leave. She and JACK blow kisses to each other behind Lady Bracknell's back, as she turns around, GWENDOLEN disappears from sight.)

LADY BRACKNELL: *(Sitting down, pencil and note-book in hand.)* I feel bound to tell you that you are not down on my list of eligible young men, Mr. Worthing. However, I am quite ready to enter your name, should your answers be what a really affectionate mother requires. 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. 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'm afraid I really don't know. I said I had lost my parents. It would be nearer the truth to say that my parents seem to have lost me . . . 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 ticket for the town Worthing in his pocket at the time.

LADY BRACKNELL: Where did the charitable gentleman with the ticket 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. It was left in a cloak-room and given to him in mistake for his own.

LADY BRACKNELL: Mr. Worthing, 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.

JACK: 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, and to make a definite effort to produce at any rate one parent, of either sex, before the season is quite over.

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. I really think that should satisfy you, Lady Bracknell.

LADY BRACKNELL: Me, sir! What has it to do with me? 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 cloak-room, and form an alliance with a parcel?!

(LADY BRACKNELL sweeps out in majestic indignation. ALGERNON enters cheerily.)

ALGERON: Didn't it go off all right, old boy? You don't mean to say Gwendolen refused you?

JACK: As far as she is concerned, we are engaged. Her mother is perfectly unbearable. But I suppose I shouldn't talk about your own aunt in that way before you.

ALGERON: 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: You don't think there is any chance of Gwendolen becoming like her mother in about a hundred and fifty years, do you, Algy?

ALGERON: All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. No man does. That's his. So did you tell Gwendolen the truth about your being Ernest in the city, and Jack in the country?

JACK: Before the end of the week I shall have got rid of him. I'll say my poor brother Ernest died.... in Paris of... a severe chill.

ALGERON: But I thought you said that Cecily was a too interested in your poor brother Ernest? Won't she feel his loss a good deal?

JACK: Oh, that's alright. Cecily is not a silly romantic girl, I am glad to say. She has got a capital appetite, goes for long walks, and pays no attention at all to her lessons.

ALGERON: 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.

ALGERON: Have you told Gwendolen yet that you have an excessively pretty ward who is only just eighteen?

JACK: One doesn't just blurt these things out to people. Cecily and Gwendolen will without a doubt be calling each other sister.

ALGERON: Women only do that when they have called each other a lot of other things first.

JACK: If you'll excuse me, dear boy, I must catch my darling Gwendolen before her beast of mother drags her back to the city.

(JACK runs off. ALGERON hears MISS PRISM and CECILY approaching and hides. MISS PRISM enters walking with CECILY. CECILY helps her to a chair.)

MISS PRISM: Thank you, sweet Cecily.

CECILY: I wish Uncle Jack would allow his poor unfortunate brother Earnest to come to the country sometime. We might have a good influence over him, Miss Prism. I am sure you certainly would.

MISS PRISM: I don't think even I could produce any effect on a character that according to his own brother's admission is irretrievably weak and vacillating. Besides, I am not in favor of this modern trend of turning bad people into good people at a moment's notice. As a man sows so let him reap. *(CECILY opens her diary and begins to write.)* I really don't see why you keep a diary at all, Cecily.

CECILY: 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.

MISS PRISM: These speculations are pointless. I think I will continue to have a stroll. I find I have a headache after all, and a walk might do it good.

(MISS PRISM exits the garden. CECILY continues in her diary. MERRY enters.)

MERRY: Mr. Ernest Worthing has arrived.

CECILY: Mr. Ernest Worthing? Uncle Jack's brother!

MERRY: Yes, Miss. He said he was anxious to speak to you privately for a moment.

CECILY: I've never met a really wicked person before. Ask Mr. Ernest Worthing to come here at once.

MERRY: Yes, Miss.

(MERRY goes off. Enter ALGERNON, very gay and debonaire.)

ALGERON: *(Raising his hat.)* You must be my little cousin Cecily.

CECILY: 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. And you are my wicked cousin Ernest.

ALGERON: Oh, I am not really wicked at all. You mustn't think that.

CECILY: If 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.

ALGERON: Now that you mention the subject, I have been very bad in my own small way.

CECILY: You shouldn't be so proud of that, though I am sure it must have been very pleasant.

ALGERON: It is much pleasanter being here with you.

CECILY: I know Uncle Jack wants to speak to you about your emigrating.

ALGERON: About my what?

CECILY: Your emigrating. Uncle Jack is sending you to Australia.

ALGERON: Australia! I'd sooner die.

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

ALGERON: 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?

ALGERON: I'm afraid not. That is why I want you to reform me.

CECILY: I'm afraid I've no time, this afternoon.

ALGERON: Well, would you mind my reforming myself this afternoon?

CECILY: I think you should try.

ALGERON: I feel better already.

CECILY: You are looking a little worse.

ALGERON: 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 requires regular and wholesome meals. Won't you come in?

ALGERON: *(Looks at her in amazement.)* Thank you. You are the prettiest girl I ever saw.

CECILY: Miss Prism says that all good looks are a snare.

ALGERON: 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.

(They exit to the house. MISS PRISM returns, looking for CECILY. 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! Why are you dressed in that manner? 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: Your brother Ernest dead?

JACK: Quite dead.

MISS PRISM: 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: He had many faults, but it is a sad, sad blow.

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

JACK: No. He died abroad; in Paris, in fact. I just received a telegram from the manager of the Grand Hotel.

MISS PRISM: Was the cause of death mentioned?

JACK: A severe chill, it seems.

MISS PRISM: As a man sows, so shall he reap. Your brother was, I believe, unmarried, was he not?

JACK: Oh yes, quite.

MISS PRISM: (*Bitterly.*) People who live entirely for pleasure usually are. I beg you not to be too much bowed down by grief. What seem to us bitter trials are often blessings in disguise. And this seems to me a blessing of an extremely obvious kind.

(*Enter CECILY from the house.*)

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

JACK: My brother is in the dining-room?

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

JACK: 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!

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

(JACK glares at him and does not take his hand.)

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

JACK: Nothing will induce me to take his hand. I think his coming 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, and leaves the pleasures of London to sit by a bed of pain.

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

ALGERON: I must say that I find Jack's coldness to me is peculiarly painful.

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

CECILY: Certainly, Miss Prism. My little task of reconciliation is over. I feel very happy.

(MISS PRISM and CECILY go off.)

JACK: *(As soon as they're gone:)* You young scoundrel, Algy, you must get out of this place as soon as possible. I don't allow any Bunburying here. *(Shouting off:)* Merry!

(Enter MERRY.)

JACK: Merry, order the carriage at once. Mr. Ernest has been suddenly called back to town.

MERRY: Yes, sir. *(Heads back into the house.)*

ALGERON: I have not been called back to town at all.

JACK: Your duty as a gentleman calls you back.

ALGERON: My duty as a gentleman has never interfered with my pleasures in the smallest degree. Cecily is a darling.

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

ALGERON: Well, I don't like your clothes. It is perfectly childish to be in deep mourning for a man who is standing right in front of you.

JACK: I demand that you leave this instant.

ALGERON: I certainly won't leave you so long as you are in mourning.

JACK: Will you go if I change my clothes?

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

JACK: Well, at any rate, that is better than being always over-dressed as you are.

ALGERON: If I am occasionally a little over-dressed, I make up for it by being always immensely over-educated.

JACK: Your vanity is ridiculous, your conduct an outrage, and your presence in my garden utterly absurd. However, you have got to catch the four-five, and I hope you will have a pleasant journey back to town. This Bunburying, as you call it, has not been a great success for you. *(Calling off, as he goes:)* Merry, the carriage!

(JACK storms off into the house. CECILY enters, just missing him.)

CECILY: Oh, I thought you were with Uncle Jack.

ALGERON: No, he's going to send me away.

CECILY: Then have we got to part?

ALGERON: I am afraid so. It's a very painful parting.

(Enter MERRY.)

MERRY: The carriage is at the door, sir.

(ALGERNON looks appealingly at CECILY.)

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

MERRY: Yes, Miss. *(Exits.)*

ALGERON: 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.)*

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

CECILY: Oh no. *(Puts her hand over it.)* It's private and only meant for publication. When it appears in volume form I hope you will order a copy. But pray, Ernest, don't stop. I delight in taking down from dictation. I have reached 'absolute perfection'. You can go on. I am quite ready for more. *(Writes as ALGERNON speaks.)*

ALGERON: *(Speaking very rapidly:)* Cecily, ever since I first looked upon your wonderful and incomparable beauty, I 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?

(Enter MERRY.)

MERRY: The carriage is waiting, sir.

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

MERRY: *(Looks at CECILY, who makes no sign.)* Yes, sir.

(MERRY exits.)

ALGERON: You will marry me, won't you?

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

ALGERON: For the last three months?

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

ALGERON: 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 have formed the chief topic of conversation between myself and Miss Prism. And of course a man who is much talked about is always very attractive. I daresay it was foolish of me, but I fell in love with you, Ernest.

ALGERON: 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. It has always been a girlish dream of mine to love some one whose name was Ernest. There is something in that name that seems to inspire absolute confidence. I pity any poor married woman whose husband is not called Ernest.

ALGERON: But, my dear Cecily, do you mean to say you could not love me if I had some other name? ...like—Algernon—for instance . . .

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

ALGERON: Well, my own dear, sweet, loving little darling, I really can't see why you should object to the name of Algernon... if my name was Algy, couldn't you love me?

CECILY: 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.

ALGERON: I must see my Brother John at once to speak about this most important... business.

CECILY: Considering that we have been engaged since February the 14th, and that I only met you today for the first time, I find it rather difficult that you should leave me.

ALGERON: I'll be back in no time.

(Kisses her and rushes down out of the garden. Enter MERRY.)

MERRY: A Miss Fairfax is looking for Mr. Worthing. On very important business, Miss Fairfax states.

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

MERRY: Yes, Miss.

(MERRY goes out. CECILY scribbles a note in her diary before GWENDOLEN enters.)

CECILY: (*Advancing to meet her.*) Please let me introduce myself. 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. (*After examining CECILY carefully.*) You are here on a short visit, I suppose.

CECILY: Oh no! I live here.

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

CECILY: I have no mother, nor, in fact, any relations. 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 he never mentioned to me that he had a ward. How secretive of him. He grows more interesting hourly. However, this news fills me with feelings of unmixed delight. I am very fond of you, Cecily; I have liked you ever since I met you, but now that I know you are Mr. Worthing's ward, I cannot help expressing a wish you were—well, just a little older than you seem to be—and not quite so very alluring in appearance. Ernest has a strong upright nature. He is the very soul of truth and honor. Disloyalty would be as impossible to him as deception. That being stated—

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. It would have been terrible if any cloud had come across a friendship like ours, would it not?

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

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

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

GWENDOLEN: *(Thoroughly examining diary)* It is certainly very curious, for he asked me to be his wife yesterday afternoon at 5.30. If you would care to verify the incident, pray do so. *(Produces diary of her own. Cecily takes it.)* I am so sorry, dear Cecily, if it is any disappointment to you, but I am afraid I have the prior claim.

CECILY: Well, since Ernest proposed to you he clearly has changed his mind.

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? How dare you!

(Enter MERRY. He carries a tray with tea and such. GWENDOLEN is about to retort, but the presence of the MERRY creates a restraining influence for both.)

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

CECILY: *(Sternly, in a calm voice.)* Yes, as usual.

(MERRY begins to set down tea and such. CECILY and GWENDOLEN glare at each other.)

CECILY: May I offer you some tea, Miss Fairfax?

GWENDOLEN: *(With elaborate politeness.)* Thank you.

CECILY: *(Sweetly.)* Sugar?

GWENDOLEN: *(Superciliously.)* No, thank you. Sugar is not fashionable 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?

GWENDOLEN: Bread and butter, please. Cake is rarely seen at the best houses nowadays.

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

(MERRY does so, and goes out. GWENDOLEN drinks the tea and makes a grimace. Puts down cup at once, reaches out her hand to the bread and butter, looks at it, and finds it is cake. Rises in indignation.)

GWENDOLEN: You have filled my tea with lumps of sugar, and though I asked most distinctly for bread and butter, you have given me cake. I am known for the gentleness of my disposition, and the extraordinary sweetness of my nature, 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.

(JACK approaches.)

GWENDOLEN: *(Catching sight of him.)* Ernest! My own Ernest!

JACK: Gwendolen! Darling! You came back! *(Offers to kiss her.)*

GWENDOLEN: *(Draws back.)* Wait a moment! Are you engaged to be married to this young lady? *(Points to CECILY.)*

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

GWENDOLEN: Thank you. You may kiss me now. *(Offers her cheek.)*

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

GWENDOLEN: I beg your pardon?

CECILY: This is Uncle Jack.

GWENDOLEN: *(Receding.)* Jack! Oh!

(ALGERNON approaches.)

CECILY: Here is Ernest.

ALGERNON: *(Goes straight over to CECILY without noticing any one else.)* My own love! *(Offers to kiss her.)*

CECILY: *(Drawing back.)* A moment, Ernest! Are you engaged to be married to this young lady?

ALGERON: *(Looking round:)* To what young lady? Good heavens - Gwendolen?!
(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.

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

CECILY: *(Breaking away from ALGERNON:)* Algernon Moncrieff! Oh!

(CECILY and GWENDOLEN move towards each other and put their arms round each other's waists as if for protection.)

CECILY: Are you called Algernon?

ALGERON: I cannot deny it.

CECILY: Oh!

GWENDOLEN: Is your name really Jack?

JACK: *(Standing rather proudly.)* I could deny it if I liked, but I won't. My name certainly is Jack. It has been Jack for years.

CECILY: *(To GWENDOLEN:)* A gross deception has been practiced on both of us.

GWENDOLEN: My poor wounded Cecily!

CECILY: My sweet wronged Gwendolen!

GWENDOLEN: *(Slowly and seriously.)* You will call me sister, will you not?

(They embrace. JACK and ALGERNON groan and walk up and down.)

CECILY: There is just one question I would like to be allowed to ask my guardian.

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

JACK: *(Slowly and hesitatingly:)* Gwendolen—Cecily—it is very 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 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: No brother at all?

JACK: None!

GWENDOLEN: Had you never a brother of any kind?

JACK: Never. Not even of an kind.

GWENDOLEN: I am afraid it is quite clear, Cecily, that neither of us is engaged to be married to any one.

CECILY: It's 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.

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

(They retire into the house with scornful looks for JACK and ALGERON.)

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

ALGERON: 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.

ALGERON: That is absurd. One has a right to Bunbury anywhere one chooses. Every serious Bunburyist knows that.

JACK: Serious Bunburyist! Good heavens! 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 my ward.

ALGERON: I can see no possible defense 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.

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

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

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

ALGERON: I don't think there is much likelihood, Jack, of you and Miss Fairfax being united. *(Begins to eat muffins off the table.)*

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.

ALGERON: 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.

ALGERON: When I am in trouble, eating is the only thing that consoles me. Besides, I am particularly fond of muffins.

JACK: Well, that is no reason why you should eat them all in that greedy way. *(Takes muffins from ALGERNON.)*

ALGERON: *(Offering cake.)* I wish you would have cake instead. I don't like cake.

JACK: Good heavens! I suppose a man may eat his own muffins in his own garden.

ALGERON: 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.

ALGERON: That may be. But the muffins are the same. *(He seizes the muffin-dish from JACK.)* There are only two left. *(Takes them.)* I told you I was particularly fond of muffins.

JACK: But I hate cake.

ALGERON: Why on earth then do you allow 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!

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

(JACK holds the muffin away from him, and ALGERON wrestles him for it. They're rolling around on the ground when GWENDOLEN and CECILY reenter.)

GWENDOLEN: The fact that neither of you followed us into the house, as any one else would have done, seems to me to show that you have some sense of shame left.

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

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

(JACK stands and dusts himself off. ALGERON the same, but eating the muffin.)

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?

ALGERON: 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 into town to see me as often as possible?

JACK: Can you doubt it, Miss Fairfax?

GWENDOLEN: I have the gravest doubts upon the subject. But I intend to crush them.

(GWENDOLEN and CECILY move to speak aside. JACK and ALGERON continue to tussle.)

GWENDOLEN: Their explanations appear to be quite satisfactory, especially Mr. Worthing's. That seems to me to have the stamp of truth upon it.

CECILY: I am more than content with what Mr. Moncrieff said. His voice alone inspires one with absolute credulity.

GWENDOLEN: Then you think we should forgive them?

CECILY: Yes. I mean no.

GWENDOLEN: 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?

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

CECILY: Certainly. *(GWENDOLEN beats time with uplifted finger.)*

GWENDOLEN and CECILY: *(Speaking together:)* Your given names are still an insuperable barrier. That is all!

JACK and ALGERON: *(Speaking together:)* Our names! Is that all? But we can change them!

GWENDOLEN and CECILY: You would do that?

JACK and ALGERON: Of course! We hate our names! Anything for you!

GWENDOLEN: *(To JACK:)* Darling!

ALGERON: *(To CECILY:)* Darling!

(They fall into each other's arms. Enter MERRY. When he enters, he coughs loudly, seeing the situation.)

MERRY: Ahem! Ahem! Lady Bracknell!

JACK: Good heavens!

(MERRY sneaks away as LADY BRACKNELL enters. 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. ...Algernon!

ALGERON: Yes, Aunt Augusta.

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

ALGERON: (*Stammering.*) 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.

ALGERON: (*Airily.*) Oh, I killed Bunbury this afternoon. I mean poor Bunbury died this afternoon.

LADY BRACKNELL: What did he die of?

ALGERON: Bunbury? Oh he was found out. I mean the doctors found out that Bunbury could not live, that is what I mean—so Bunbury died.

LADY BRACKNELL: He seems to have had great confidence in the opinion of his 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 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.*)

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

LADY BRACKNELL: I beg your pardon?

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

LADY BRACKNELL: (*With a shiver, sitting down.*) The number of engagements going on seems to be considerably above the proper average. Mr. Worthing, is Miss Cardew at all connected with any of the larger railway stations in London? I merely desire information. Until this morning I had no idea that there were any families or persons whose origin was a terminal.

JACK: (*Furious, but restraining himself.*) I have 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. I am not in favor of premature experiences. (*Rises, looks at her watch.*) Gwendolen! the time approaches for our departure. As a matter of form, Mr. Worthing, I had better ask you if Miss Cardew has any little fortune?

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

LADY BRACKNELL: (*Immediately sitting down again.*) A moment, Mr. Worthing. 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 that last, and improve with time. We live, I regret to say, in an age of surfaces. (*To CECILY:*) Come over here, dear. (*CECILY does.*) Kindly turn to the side, sweet child. (*She does.*) Yes, quite as I expected. Algernon, there are distinct social possibilities in Miss Cardew's profile.

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

LADY BRACKNELL: Never speak disrespectfully of Society, Algernon. Only people who can't get into it do that. Well, I suppose I must give my consent.

ALGERON: Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

LADY BRACKNELL: Cecily, you may kiss me!

CECILY: (*Kisses her.*) Thank you, Lady Bracknell.

LADY BRACKNELL: The marriage, I think, had better take place quite soon. To speak frankly, I am not in favor of long engagements. They give people the opportunity of finding out each other's character before marriage, which I think is never advisable.

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? 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: 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!

JACK: I fear there can be no possible doubt about the matter. This afternoon, in 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.

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

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

LADY BRACKNELL: That is not the destiny I propose for Gwendolen. Algernon, of course, can choose for himself. *(Pulls out her watch, to GWENDOLEN:)* Come, dear, we have already missed five, if not six, trains. To miss any more might expose us to comment on the platform.

(MERRY enters, but before he can announce a guest, MISS PRISM enters hurriedly. MERRY throws up his arms and exits.)

MISS PRISM: Cecily, there you are. I have been looking-- *(She 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.)

LADY BRACKNELL: Twenty-eight years ago, Prism, you left Lord Bracknell's house 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 police department, the perambulator was discovered in a remote alley. But the baby was not there!

(Every one looks at MISS PRISM.)

LADY BRACKNELL: Prism! Where is that baby?

MISS PRISM: *(Collecting herself:)* 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 a moment of mental abstraction, for which I never can forgive myself, I placed the

baby in the hand-bag and I... I... I left it in the coat-room of one of the larger railway stations in London.

JACK: What... What railway station, Miss Prism? This is a matter of no small importance to me.

MISS PRISM: *(Quite ashamed:)* Victoria. The Brighton line. *(Sinks into a chair.)*

JACK: I must retire to my room for a moment. Gwendolen, wait here for me.

GWENDOLEN: If you are not too long, I will wait here for you all my life.

(JACK exits in great excitement.)

CECILY: What do you think this means, Lady Bracknell?

LADY BRACKNELL: I dare not even suspect, Miss Cardew. I need hardly tell you that in families of high position strange coincidences are not supposed to occur.

(JACK runs back on with a hand-bag of black leather in his hand.)

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

MISS PRISM: It seems to be mine. Yes, here, on the lock, are my initials. I had forgotten that in an extravagant mood I had had them placed there. 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 hand-bag. I was the baby you placed in it.

MISS PRISM: *(Amazed:)* You?

JACK: *(Embracing her:)* Yes . . . mother!

MISS PRISM: *(Recoiling:)* Mr. Worthing! I am unmarried!

JACK: Mother, I forgive you. *(Tries to embrace her again.)*

MISS PRISM: *(Still holding him back:)* Mr. Worthing, there is some error. *(Pointing to LADY BRACKNELL:)* There is the lady who can tell you who you really are.

JACK: *(After a pause.)* 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. I 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.*) Algy, you young scoundrel, you will have to treat me with more respect. You have never behaved to me like a brother in all your life.

ALGERON: Well, not till today, old boy, I admit. I did my best, however, though I was out of practice. (*Shakes hands.*)

GWENDOLEN: (*To JACK:*) My love! What is your given name, now that you have become some one else?

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

GWENDOLEN: I never change, except in my affections.

CECILY: What a noble nature you have, Gwendolen!

JACK: Then the question had better be cleared up at once. Algy! Can't you recollect what our father's name was?

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

JACK: Aunt Augusta! At the time when Miss Prism left me in the hand-bag, what name was I given? Let me know the worst.

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

JACK: (*Irritably:*) Yes, but what was my father's name?

LADY BRACKNELL: (*Meditatively:*) Yes, I remember now... that your father's name was... Ernest John. I knew I had some particular reason for disliking the name.

JACK: Ernest John! I always told you, Gwendolen, my name was Ernest, didn't I? Well, it is Ernest after all. I mean it naturally is Ernest.

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. Can you forgive me?

GWENDOLEN: I can. For I feel that you are sure to change.

JACK: My love!

ALGERON: 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 realized for the first time in my life the vital Importance of Being Earnest.

End of Play.