

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. This shillyshallying 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.

## **JACK & GWENDOLEN**

**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 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 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. You don't know how happy you've made me.

**GWENDOLEN.** My own Ernest!

**JACK.** 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? Do you mean to say you couldn't love me then?

**GWENDOLEN.** (*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.

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

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

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

ERN – audition sides

**JACK.** Gwendolen, I must get christened at once I mean we must get married at once. There is no time to be lost.

**GWENDOLEN.** Married, Mr. Worthing?

**JACK.** (*astounded*) Well ... surely. You know that I love you, and you led me to believe, Miss Fairfax, that you were not absolutely indifferent to me.

**GWENDOLEN.** I adore you. But you haven't proposed to me yet. Nothing has been said at all about marriage. The subject has not even been touched on.

**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 beforehand that I am fully determined to accept you.

**JACK.** Gwendolen!

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

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

**GWENDOLEN.** Yes, but you don't say it.

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

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

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

**GWENDOLEN.** Yes, but men often propose for practice. I know my brother Gerald does. All my girlfriends 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.

## **MISS PRISM AND CECILY**

**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 his constant anxiety about that unfortunate 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.

**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 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 that end happily. They depress me so much.

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

## **Cecily and Algernon**

**Algernon.** [*Raising his hat.*] You are my little cousin Cecily, I'm sure.

**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. 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.** 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.

**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.

**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?

**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 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 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 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.** Well, would you mind my reforming myself this afternoon?

**Cecily.** It is rather Quixotic of you. But I think you should try.

**Algernon.** I will. I feel better already.

**Cecily.** You are looking a little worse.

**Algernon.** That is because I am hungry.

**Cecily.** How thoughtless of me. I should have remembered that when one is going to lead an entirely new life, one requires regular and wholesome meals. Won't you come in?

**Algernon.** Thank you. Might I have a buttonhole first? I never have any appetite unless I have a buttonhole first.

**Cecily.** A Marechal Niel? [*Picks up scissors.*]

**Algernon.** No, I'd sooner have a pink rose.

**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. [*Cecily puts the rose in his buttonhole.*] You are the prettiest girl I ever saw.

**Cecily.** Miss Prism says that all good looks are a 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.

## **Dr. Chasuble and Miss Prism**

**Miss Prism.** You are too much alone, dear Dr. Chasuble. You 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 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 a permanent public temptation. Men should be more careful; this very celibacy leads weaker vessels astray.

**Chasuble.** But is a man not equally attractive when married?

**Miss Prism.** No married man is ever attractive except to his wife.

**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 can be trusted. Young women are green. [*Dr. Chasuble starts.*] I spoke horticulturally. My metaphor was drawn from fruits.

## **CECILY, JACK & ALGERNON**

**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?

**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, 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 with Algernon and glares.*]

## **CECILY AND GWENDOLEN – side 1**

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

**Cecily.** With pleasure!

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

**Cecily.** If you wish.

**Gwendolen.** Then that is all quite settled, is it not?

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

**Gwendolen.** 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.

**Gwendolen.** 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 strict, has brought me up to be extremely short-sighted; it is part of her system; so do you mind my looking at you through my glasses?

**Cecily.** Oh! not at all, Gwendolen. I am very fond of being looked at.

**Gwendolen.** [*After examining Cecily carefully through a lorgnette.*] 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.** 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 he never mentioned to me that he had a ward. How secretive of him! He grows more interesting hourly. I am not sure, however, that the news inspires me with feelings of unmixed delight. [*Rising and going to her.*] I am very fond of you, Cecily; I have liked you ever since I met you! But I am bound to state that now that I know that 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. In fact, if I may speak candidly—

**Cecily.** Pray do! I think that whenever one has anything unpleasant to say, one should always be quite candid.

**Gwendolen.** Well, to speak with perfect candour, Cecily, I wish that you were fully forty-two, and more than usually plain for your age. Ernest has a strong upright nature. He is the very soul of truth and honour. Disloyalty would be as impossible to him as deception. But even men of the noblest possible moral character are extremely susceptible to the influence of the physical charms of others. Modern, no less than Ancient History, supplies us with many most painful examples of what I refer to. If it were not so, indeed, History would be quite unreadable.

**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.** [*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.

**Gwendolen.** 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.

**Gwendolen.** [*Inquiringly.*] I beg your pardon?

**Cecily.** [*Rather shy and confidingly.*] Dearest Gwendolen, there is no reason why I should make a secret of it to you. Our little county newspaper is sure to chronicle the fact next week. 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. 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.*]

**Gwendolen.** [*Examines diary through her lorgnette carefully.*] 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.*] I never travel without my diary. One should always have something sensational to read in the train. I am so sorry, dear Cecily, if it is any disappointment to you, but I am afraid I have the prior claim.

**Cecily.** It would distress me more than I can tell you, dear Gwendolen, if it caused you any mental or physical anguish, but I feel bound to point out that since Ernest proposed to you he clearly has changed his mind.

**Gwendolen.** [*Meditatively.*] 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.** [*Thoughtfully and sadly.*] Whatever unfortunate entanglement my dear boy may have got into, I will never reproach him with it after we are married.

**Gwendolen.** Do you allude to me, Miss Cardew, as an entanglement? You are presumptuous. On an occasion of this kind it becomes more than a moral duty to speak one's mind. It becomes a pleasure.

**Cecily.** Do you suggest, Miss Fairfax, that I entrapped Ernest into an engagement? How dare you? This is no time for wearing the shallow mask of manners. When I see a spade I call it a spade.

**Gwendolen.** [*Satirically.*] I am glad to say that I have never seen a spade. It is obvious that our social spheres have been widely different.

## **CECILY AND GWENDOLEN - SIDE 2.**

**Gwendolen.** Are there many interesting walks in the vicinity, Miss Cardew?

**Cecily.** Oh! yes! a great many. From the top of one of the hills quite close one can see five counties.

**Gwendolen.** 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 her parasol.]

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

**Cecily.** So glad you like it, Miss Fairfax.

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

**Cecily.** Oh, flowers are as common here, Miss Fairfax, as people are in London.

**Gwendolen.** Personally I cannot understand how anybody manages to exist in the country, if anybody who is anybody 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, Miss Fairfax?

**Gwendolen.** [*With elaborate politeness.*] Thank you. [*Aside.*] Detestable girl! But I require tea!

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

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

[**Merriman** does so, and goes out 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 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.

**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.

**Cecily.** It seems to me, Miss Fairfax, that I am trespassing on your valuable time. No doubt you have many other calls of a similar character to make in the neighbourhood.

## **MISS PRISM, DOCTOR CHAUSIBLE, LADY BRACKNELL & JACK**

**Lady Bracknell.** [*Starting.*] Miss Prism! Did I hear 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 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.

**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 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.

[*Enter Miss Prism hurriedly.*]

**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? 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? [*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 basinette, and placed the baby in the hand-bag.

## **JACK & ALGERNON**

**Jack.** 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 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 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 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 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 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.

**Jack.** I wanted to be engaged to Gwendolen, that is all. I love her.

**Algernon.** Well, I simply wanted to be engaged to Cecily. I adore her.

**Jack.** There is certainly no chance of your marrying Miss Cardew.

**Algernon.** I don't think there is much likelihood, Jack, of you and Miss Fairfax being united.

**Jack.** Well, that is no business of yours.

**Algernon.** If it was my business, I wouldn't talk about it. [*Begins to eat muffins.*] It is very vulgar to talk about one's business. Only people like stock-brokers do that, and then merely at dinner parties.

**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.** When I am in trouble, eating is the only thing that consoles me. Indeed, when I am in really great trouble, as any one who knows me intimately will tell you, I refuse everything except food and drink. At the present moment I am eating muffins because I am unhappy. Besides, I am particularly fond of muffins. [*Rising.*]

**Jack.** [*Rising.*] Well, that is no reason why you should eat them all in that greedy way. [*Takes muffins from Algernon.*]

**Algernon.** [*Offering tea-cake.*] I wish you would have tea-cake instead. I don't like tea-cake.

**Jack.** Good heavens! I suppose a man may eat his own muffins in his own garden.

**Algernon.** 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 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. 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. 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 have ever been christened by 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.

**Algernon.** Yes, but I have not been christened for years.

**Jack.** Yes, but you have been christened. That is the 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 can hardly have forgotten that some one very closely connected with you was very nearly carried off this week in Paris by a severe chill.

**Jack.** Yes, but you said yourself that a severe chill was not hereditary.

**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.*]