

SIDE 1

Act 1 (pg. 4 - pg. 5) Algernon and Jack

Algernon. Ernest! What brings you up to town?

Jack. Oh, pleasure, pleasure! What else should bring one anywhere? Eating as usual, I see, Algy!

Algernon. [*Stiffly*] I believe it is customary in good society to take some slight refreshment at five o'clock. Where have you been since last Thursday?

Jack. [*Sitting down on the sofa.*] In the country.

Algernon. What on earth do you do there?

Jack. When one is in town, one amuses oneself. When one is in the country, one amuses other people. It is excessively boring.

Algernon. And who are the people you amuse?

Jack. Oh, neighbours, neighbours.

Algernon. Got nice neighbours in your part of Shropshire?

Jack. Perfectly horrid. Never speak to one of them.

Algernon. How immensely you must amuse them. [*Goes over and takes a pile of sandwiches.*]

Jack. Hallo! Why cucumber sandwiches? Who is coming to tea?

Algernon. Oh! Aunt Augusta and Gwendolen.

Jack. I say! Jolly good! [*Boyishly happy; clears throat, straightens tie.*]

Algernon. [*Surprised by the outburst.*] Yes, that is all very well; but I am afraid 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. I thought you had come up for pleasure?...I call that business.

Jack. How utterly unromantic you are!

Algernon. I really don't see anything romantic in proposing. It is very romantic to be in love. But there is nothing romantic about a definite proposal. Why, one may be accepted. One usually is, I believe. Then the excitement is all over.

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

Algernon. Please don't touch the cucumber sandwiches. They are ordered specially for Aunt Augusta. [*Takes one and eats it.*]

Jack. Well, **you** have been eating them all the time.

Algernon. That is a different matter-she is **my** aunt. Anyway, I don't think that you'll ever be married to Gwendolen.

Jack. Why on earth do you say that?

Algernon. Well, in the first place, girls never marry the men they flirt with.

Jack. Oh, that is nonsense!

Algernon. In the second place, I don't give my consent.

Jack. Your **consent**!

Algernon. Gwendolen is my first cousin. And before I allow you to marry her, you will have to clear up the whole question of Cecily. [*Rings bell.*]

Jack. Cecily? I don't know anyone named "Cecily."

SIDE 2

Act One (pg. 7 - pg. 9) Algernon and Jack

Algernon. Here it is. [*Hands cigarette case.*] Now produce your explanation- and pray make it improbable. [*Sits on sofa.*]

Jack. Old Mr. Thomas Worthing, who adopted me when I was a little boy, made me, in his will, guardian to his granddaughter, Miss Cecily Cardew. Cecily, who addresses me as her uncle from motives of respect that you could not possibly appreciate, lives at my place in the country under the charge of her admirable governess, Miss Prism.

Algernon. Go on.

Jack. A guardian always has to be quite serious. It is terribly boring. So, in order to get up to town and have some fun, I have always pretended to have a younger brother named Ernest, who gets into the most horrible scrapes. [*Raises eyebrows up and down*] That, my dear Algy, is the whole truth pure and simple.

Algernon. The truth is rarely pure and never simple. Modern life would be very tedious if it were either, and modern literature a complete impossibility!

Jack. That wouldn't be such a bad thing.

Algernon. Literary criticism is not your forte, my dear fellow. Don't try it. You should leave that to people who haven't been at a University. They do it so well in the daily papers. What you really are is a Bunburyist. I was quite right in saying you were a Bunburyist. You are one of the most advanced Bunburyists I know.

Jack. What on earth do you mean?

Algernon. You have invented a very useful younger brother called Ernest, in order that you may come up to town as often as you like. I have invented a permanent invalid called Bunbury, in order that I may be able to leave town whenever I choose. Bunbury is perfectly invaluable. If it wasn't for Bunbury's extraordinary bad health, for instance, I wouldn't be able to dine with you tonight, for I had promised to attend Aunt Augusta's dinner party.

Jack. I haven't asked you to dine with me tonight.

Algernon. I know. You are absurdly careless about sending out invitations.

Jack. You had much better dine with your Aunt Augusta.

Algernon. I haven't the smallest intention of doing anything of the kind. To begin with, I dined there on Monday, and once a week is quite enough to dine with one's own relations. Besides, now that I know you to be a confirmed Bunburyist, I naturally want to talk to you about Bunburying. I want to tell you the rules.

Jack. I'm not a "Bunburyist." [*Quotation fingers.*] If Gwendolen agrees to marry me, I am going to get rid of my fictitious brother. Cecily is a little too interested in him. I strongly advise you to do the same with Mr. Bunbury.

Algernon. Nothing will induce me to part with Bunbury, and if you ever do get married, you will be very glad to know him.

Jack. If I get married, I certainly won't want to know Bunbury.

Algernon. Then your **wife** will. [*The sound of an electric bell is heard.*] Ah! that must be Aunt Augusta. Now, if I get her out of the way so that you can propose to Gwendolen, may I dine with you tonight?

Jack. No. Oh, alright, fine. [*Annoyed.*]

SIDE 3

Act 1 (pg. 11-pg. 13) Gwendolen and Jack

Jack. Charming day it has been, Miss Fairfax.

Gwendolen. Pray don't talk to me about the weather, Mr. Worthing. Whenever people talk to me about the weather, I always feel quite certain that they mean something else. And that makes me so nervous.

Jack. I *do* mean something else.

Gwendolen. I thought so.

Jack. 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. Mamma has a way of coming back suddenly into a room that I have often had to speak to her about.

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

Gwendolen. Yes, I am quite aware of the fact. And I often wish that in public, at any rate, you had been more demonstrative. My ideal has always been to love someone named 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! [*They go in for a kiss, then Jack stops.*]

Jack. But 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 what if it was something else? Do you mean to say you couldn't love me then?

Gwendolen. Well...*[Wrinkles her nose]*

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. The only really safe name is Ernest.

Jack. Gwendolen, I must get christened at once - I mean we must get married at once.

SIDE 4

Act 1 (pg. 14- pg. 16) Lady Bracknell and Jack

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

Jack. Thank you, Lady Bracknell, I prefer standing.

Lady Bracknell. [*Pencil and note-book in hand.*] 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. Do you smoke?

Jack. Well, yes, I must admit I smoke.

Lady Bracknell. I am glad to hear it. A man should always have an occupation of some kind. How old are you?

Jack. Twenty-nine.

Lady Bracknell. A very good age to be married. 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. What is your income?

Jack. Eight thousand a year. I own a country home and a house in Belgrave Square.

Lady Bracknell. What number in Belgrave Square?

Jack. 149.

Lady Bracknell. [*Shaking her head.*] The unfashionable side. I thought there was something. [*Thoroughly disgusted.*] Now to minor matters. Are your parents living?

Jack. I regret to say that I have lost both of my parents.

Lady Bracknell. To lose **both** parents looks like carelessness. Who was your father?

Jack. I am afraid I don't know. The fact is 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 Worthing found me.

Lady Bracknell. Where did this gentleman **find** you?

Jack. [*Gravely.*] In a hand-bag.

Lady Bracknell. [*Incredulously.*] 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—in the cloak room at Victoria Station.

Lady Bracknell. The cloak room at Victoria Station?

Jack. Yes. The Brighton line.

Lady Bracknell. The line is immaterial. Mr. Worthing, I confess I feel somewhat bewildered by what you have just told me. To be born, or at any rate bred, in a hand-bag, whether it had handles or not, seems to me to display a contempt for the ordinary decencies of family life.

Jack. What would you advise me to do?

Lady Bracknell. I would strongly advise you, Mr. Worthing, to produce two parents as soon as possible.

Jack. Well, I don't see how I could manage to do *that*. I can produce the *hand-bag* at any moment.

Jack Sides

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 cloak room and form an alliance with a *purse*? Good morning, Mr. Worthing!

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

Jack. Good morning!