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SF PERUSALS

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

A Trivial Comedy for Serious People

by Oscar Wilde

SAMUEL FRENCH

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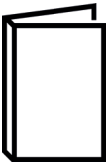
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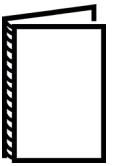
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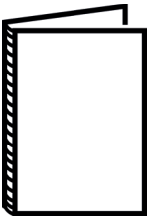
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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

JOHN WORTHING, J.P.	Of the Manor House, Woolton, Hertfordshire
ALGERNON MONCRIEFF	His friend
REV. CANON CHASUBLE, D.D.	Rector of Woolton
MR GRIBSBY	Of the firm of Parker and Gribsby, Solicitors, London
MOULTON	Gardener
MERRIMAN	Butler to Mr Worthing
LANE	Mr Moncrieff's manservant
FOOTMAN	At the Manor House
LADY BRACKNELL	
HON. GWENDOLEN FAIRFAX	Her daughter
CECILY CARDEW	John Worthing's ward
MISS PRISM	Her governess

SCENES

ACT I Algernon Moncrieff's rooms in Half Moon St. W.
ACT II The garden at the Manor House, Woolton.
ACT III Drawing-room at the Manor House, Woolton.
ACT IV Same as ACT III.

Time:Summer, 1894

ACT I

SCENE: **ALGERNON***'s rooms in Half Moon Street. Door upstage right and door left centre. Fireplace right centre. The room is luxuriously and artistically furnished.*

The sound of a piano is heard in the adjoining room. **LANE** *is arranging afternoon tea on the table, and after the music has ceased,* **ALGERNON** *enters.*

ALGERNON Did you hear what I was playing just now, Lane?

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

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

LANE Yes, sir.

ALGERNON And, speaking of the science of Life, have you got the cucumber sandwiches cut for Lady Bracknell?

LANE Yes, sir.

ALGERNON Ahem! Where are they?

LANE Here, sir. *(Shows plate)*

ALGERNON *(takes one and eats it)* Oh! ...Lane, I see from your book that on Thursday night, when Lord Shoreham and Mr Worthing were dining with me, eight bottles of champagne are entered as having been consumed.

LANE Yes, sir. Eight bottles and a pint.

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

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

ALGERNON Good heavens! Is marriage so demoralizing as that?

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

ALGERNON I don't know that I am much interested in your family life, Lane.

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

ALGERNON And very natural, I am sure... That will do, Lane, thank you!

LANE Thank you, sir.

False exit.

ALGERNON Ah! ...just give me another cucumber sandwich.

LANE Yes, sir. *(Returns and hands plate)*

Exit **LANE.**

ALGERNON Lane's views on marriage seem somewhat lax. Really, if the lower orders don't set us a good example—what on earth is the use of them? They seem as a class to have absolutely no sense of their moral responsibilities.

Enter **LANE.**

LANE Mr Ernest Worthing!

Exit.

Enter **JACK**.

ALGERNON How are you, my dear Ernest? What brings you to town?

JACK Oh, pleasure, pleasure! What else should bring one anywhere. *(Putting hand on* **ALGERNON***'s shoulder)* Eating as usual, I see, Algy.

ALGERNON *(stiffly)* I believe it *is* customary to take some *slight* refreshment at five o'clock. Where have you been since last Thursday?

JACK *(sitting down)* Oh! in the country.

ALGERNON What on earth do you *do* there?

JACK *(pulling off his gloves)* When one is in town one amuses oneself. When one is in the country one amuses other people. It is excessively boring.

ALGERNON And who are the people you amuse?

JACK *(airily)* Oh! neighbours, neighbours!

ALGERNON Got nice neighbours in your part of Shropshire?

JACK Perfectly horrid. Never speak to one of them.

ALGERNON How immensely you must amuse them! *(Goes over and takes sandwich)* Shropshire is your county, Ernest, isn't it?

JACK *(going over to table)* Eh? ...Shropshire? ...Yes, of course. Hallo! Why all these cups? Why cucumber sandwiches? Who is coming to tea?

ALGERNON Oh! merely Aunt Augusta and Gwendolen.

JACK How perfectly delightful!

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

JACK May I ask why?

ALGERNON My dear fellow, the way you flirt with Gwendolen is perfectly disgraceful. It is almost as bad as the way Gwendolen flirts with you.

JACK I am in love with Gwendolen. I have come up to town expressly to propose to her.

ALGERNON I thought you had come up for pleasure... I call that business.

JACK How utterly unromantic you are!

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

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

ALGERNON Oh! there is no use speculating on that subject. Divorces are made in Heaven...please don't touch the cucumber sandwiches. They are ordered specially for Aunt Augusta. *(Takes one and eats it)*

JACK Well, you have been eating them all the time.

ALGERNON That is quite a different matter. She is my Aunt. Have some bread and butter. The bread and butter is for Gwendolen. Gwendolen is devoted to bread and butter.

JACK *(eating bread and butter)* And very good bread and butter it is, too.

ALGERNON Well, my dear fellow, you need not eat it all. You behave just as if you were married to her already. You are not married to her already, and I don't think you ever will be.

JACK Why on earth do you say that?

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

JACK *(pulling himself together)* Oh! that is nonsense!

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

JACK Your consent! What utter nonsense you talk!

ALGERNON My dear fellow, Gwendolen is my first cousin, and before I allow you to marry her, you will have to clear up the whole question of Cecily.

JACK Cecily! What on earth do you mean?

ALGERNON *goes to bell and rings it. Then returns to tea-table and eats another sandwich.*

What do you mean, Algy, by Cecily? I don't know anyone of the name of Cecily...as far as I remember.

Enter **LANE.**

ALGERNON Bring me that cigarette case Mr Worthing left in the hall the last time he dined here.

LANE Yes, sir.

Exit.

JACK Do you mean to say you have had my cigarette case all this time? I wish to goodness you had let me know. I have been writing frantic letters to Scotland Yard about it, I was very nearly offering a reward.

ALGERNON Well, I wish you would offer one. I happen to be more than usually hard up.

JACK There is no good offering a reward now that the thing is found.

Enter **LANE**, *with cigarette case on salver.* **ALGERNON** *takes it.* **LANE** *goes out.*

ALGERNON I must say, I think that is rather horrid of you, Ernest. *(Opens case and examines it)* However, it makes

no matter; for now that I look at the inscription inside, I find that the thing isn't yours after all.

JACK *(irritably)* Of course it is mine. You have seen me with it a hundred times, and you have no right whatsoever to read what is written inside. It is a very ungentlemanly thing to read a private cigarette case.

ALGERNON Oh! it is absurd to have a hard and fast rule about what one should read and what one shouldn't. One should read everything. That is the true basis of modern culture. More than half of modern culture depends on what one shouldn't read.

JACK I am quite aware of that fact; and I don't propose to discuss modern culture. I simply want my cigarette case back.

ALGERNON Yes, but this isn't your cigarette case. This cigarette case is a present from someone of the name of Cecily, and you said you didn't know anyone of that name.

JACK I said I didn't remember knowing anyone of that name. I do remember now. She is my aunt.

ALGERNON Your aunt?

JACK Yes, charming old lady she is, too. Lives at Tunbridge Wells. Just give it back to me, Algy. *(Goes across stage to take it)*

ALGERNON *(retreating)* But why does she call herself little Cecily, if she is your aunt and lives at Tunbridge Wells? *(Reads)* "From little Cecily, with her fondest love."

JACK My dear fellow, what on earth is there in that? Some aunts are tall, some aunts are not tall. That is a matter that surely an aunt may be allowed to decide for herself. *You* seem to think that every aunt should be exactly like your aunt. That is absurd. For Heaven's sake give me back my cigarette case. *(Advances)*

ALGERNON *(sheltering himself behind table)* Yes, but why does your aunt call you her uncle? "From little Cecily with her fondest love to dear Uncle Jack." There is no objection I

admit, to an aunt being a small aunt, but why an aunt, no matter what her size may be, should call her own nephew her uncle, I can't make out. Besides, your name isn't Jack at all. It is Ernest.

JACK It isn't Ernest—it's Jack.

ALGERNON You have always told me it was Ernest. I have introduced you to everyone as Ernest. You answer to the name of Ernest. You look as if your name was Ernest. It is perfectly absurd your saying that your name isn't Ernest. Why! it's on your cards. Here is one of them. "Mr Ernest Worthing, B.4, The Albany, W." Now I'll keep this as a proof that your name is Ernest, if you ever attempt to deny it, to me or to Gwendolen or to anybody else.

JACK Well, my name is Ernest in town and Jack in the country. And the cigarette case was given to me in the country.

ALGERNON Yes, but that does not account for the fact that your small aunt Cecily, who lives at Tunbridge Wells, calls you her dear uncle. Come, old boy, you had much better have the thing out at once.

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

ALGERNON Well, that is exactly what dentists always do. Now go on: tell me the whole thing. I may mention that I have always suspected you of being a confirmed and secret Bunburyist; and I am quite sure of it now.

JACK What on earth do you mean by a Bunburyist?

ALGERNON 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 Well, produce my cigarette case first.

ALGERNON Here it is. *(Hands cigarette case)* Now produce your explanation; and pray make it remarkable.

JACK My dear fellow, there is nothing remarkable about this explanation at all. In fact it is perfectly ordinary. Old Mr Thomas Cardew, who adopted me when I was a little boy, under rather peculiar circumstances, and left me all the money I possess, made me in his will guardian to his grand-daughter Miss Cecily Cardew. Cecily, who addresses me as her uncle from motives of respect, resides at my place in the country under the charge of her admirable governess Miss Prism.

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

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

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

JACK My dear Algy, I don't know whether you will be able to understand my real motives. You are hardly serious enough. When one is placed in the position of a guardian, one has to adopt a very high moral tone, on all subjects. It is one's duty to do so, and as a high moral tone can hardly be said to conduce very much to either one's health or happiness if carried to excess, in order to get up to town I have always pretended I have a younger brother of the name of Ernest, who lives in the Albany and gets into the most dreadful scrapes. That, my dear Algy, is the whole truth, pure and simple.

ALGERNON The truth is rarely pure and never simple. Modern life would be very tedious if it was either. And modern literature a complete impossibility.

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

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

saying you were a Bunburyist. You are one of the most advanced Bunburyists I know.

JACK What on earth do you mean?

ALGERNON You have invented a very useful younger brother called Ernest, in order that you may be able to come up to town as often as you like. I have invented an invaluable permanent invalid called Bunbury in order that I may go down into the country whenever I choose.

JACK What nonsense.

ALGERNON It isn't nonsense. Bunbury is perfectly invaluable. If it wasn't for Bunbury's extraordinary bad health for instance, I wouldn't be able to dine with you at the Savoy to-night, for I have been really engaged to Aunt Augusta for more than a week.

JACK I haven't asked you to dine with me anywhere to-night.

ALGERNON I know. You are absurdly careless about sending out invitations. It is very foolish of you. Nothing annoys people as much as not receiving invitations.

JACK Well, I can't dine at the Savoy. I owe them about £700. They are always getting judgments and things against me. They bother my life out.

ALGERNON Why on earth don't you pay them? You have got heaps of money.

JACK Yes, but Ernest hasn't, and I must keep up Ernest's reputation. Ernest is one of those chaps who never pay a bill. He gets writted about once a week.

ALGERNON Well, let us dine at Willis's.

JACK You had much better dine with your Aunt Augusta.

ALGERNON I haven't the smallest intention of doing anything of the kind. To begin with, I dined there on Monday, and once a week is quite enough to dine with one's own relations. In the second place, whenever I do dine there, I am always

treated as a member of the family, and sent down with either no woman at all, or two. In the third place, I know perfectly well whom she will place me next to, to-night. She will place me next Mary Farquhar, who always flirts with her own husband across the dinner table. That is not very pleasant. Indeed, it is not even decent...and that sort of thing is enormously on the increase. The amount of women in London who flirt with their own husbands is perfectly scandalous. It looks so bad. It is simply washing one's clean linen in public. 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 am not a Bunburyist at all. If Gwendolen accepts me I shall naturally kill my brother. Indeed, I think I'll kill him in any case. Cecily is a good deal too much interested in him. She is always asking me to forgive him, and that sort of thing. It is rather a bore, so I am going to get rid of Ernest. And I strongly advise you to do the same with your friend Bunbury.

ALGERNON I haven't the smallest intention of doing anything of the kind, and if you ever get married, which seems to me extremely problematic, you will be very glad to know Bunbury. A man who marries without knowing Bunbury has a very tedious time of it.

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

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

JACK *(sententiously)* That, my dear Algy, is the theory that the corrupt French drama has been propounding for the last fifty years.

ALGERNON Yes, and that the happy English home has proved in half the time. That is the worst of the English. They

are always degrading truths into facts, and when a truth becomes a fact, it loses all its intellectual value.

JACK Do you always really understand what you say, Algy?

ALGERNON *(after consideration)* Yes...if I listen attentively.

A ring.

Ah! that must be Aunt Augusta! Now, if I get Aunt Augusta out of the way for ten minutes, so that you can have an opportunity for proposing to Gwendolen, may I dine with you to-night at Willis's?

JACK I suppose so, if you want to.

ALGERNON Yes, but you must be serious about it. I hate people who are not serious about meals. It is so shallow of them.

Enter **LANE.**

LANE Lady Bracknell and Miss Fairfax.

Enter **LADY BRACKNELL** *and* **GWENDOLEN.**

LADY BRACKNELL Well, dear Algernon, I hope you are well. *(Bows coldly to* **JACK***)* Good afternoon, Mr Worthing.

ALGERNON *(going to meet them)* Good afternoon, Aunt Augusta. *(To* **GWEN***)* Dear me, you are smart!

GWENDOLEN I am always smart.

ALGERNON I know: that is why I said it. If a woman isn't always smart, she is never smart.

GWENDOLEN Now don't try to be clever, Algy. It doesn't become you at all.

ALGERNON It is not becoming to anybody.

GWENDOLEN On the contrary. It is excessively becoming to me. *(To* **JACK***)* Isn't it, Mr Worthing?

JACK Everything is becoming to you, Miss Fairfax.

LADY BRACKNELL Won't you come over and sit here, Gwendolen?

GWENDOLEN Thanks, mamma, I am quite comfortable where I am.

LADY BRACKNELL I am sorry if we are a little late, Algernon, but I was obliged to call on dear Lady Harbury. I hadn't been there since her poor husband's death. I never saw a woman so altered, she looks quite twenty years younger. I'll have a cup of tea now, and one of those nice cucumber sandwiches you promised me.

ALGERNON Certainly, Aunt Augusta. *(Goes over to table)* Good heavens! Why are there no cucumber sandwiches, Lane? I ordered them specially.

LANE *(gravely)* There were no cucumbers in the market this morning, sir. I went down twice.

ALGERNON No cucumbers!

LANE No, sir. Not even for ready money.

ALGERNON That will do, Lane, thank you.

LANE Thank you, sir.

Exit.

ALGERNON I am greatly distressed, Aunt Augusta, about there being no cucumbers, not even for ready money.

LADY BRACKNELL It makes no matter, Algernon, I had some crumpets with Lady Harbury, who seems to me to be living entirely for pleasure now.

ALGERNON Yes. I hear her hair has turned quite gold from grief.

LADY BRACKNELL It certainly has changed its colour. From what cause, of course, I can't say.

ALGERNON *hands tea.*

Thank you. I am going to send you down to dinner with Mary Farquhar, to-night. She is such a nice young woman and so attentive to her husband.

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

LADY BRACKNELL I hope not, Algernon.

ALGERNON Yes, it is a great bore, but the fact is I have just had a telegram to say that my poor friend Bunbury is very ill again. They seem to think I should be with him. I have promised to go down by the 6.40 from King's Gross.

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

ALGERNON Yes, dear old Bunbury is a terrible 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 not. This shilly-shallying with the question is absurd. Nor do I in any way approve of this 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 any notice... as far as any improvement in his many ailments goes. Well, Algernon, of course if you are obliged to be by the bedside of Mr Bunbury, I have nothing more to say. But I would 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.

ALGERNON Ah! That is the difficulty, Aunt Augusta. You see, if one plays good music people don't listen, and if one plays bad music they don't talk. But I'll tell you my ideas on the subject, if you will come into the next room for a moment. I have drawn out a programme.

LADY BRACKNELL Thank you, Algernon. It is very thoughtful of you. I'm sure the programme will be delightful, after a few expurgations. French songs I cannot possibly allow. People

always seem to think that they are improper, and either look shocked, which is vulgar, or laugh, which is worse. But German sounds a thoroughly respectable language, and indeed, I believe is so. I will see you again, no doubt, Mr Worthing.

Exit **LADY BRACKNELL** *with* **ALGERNON. GWENDOLEN** *remains behind.*

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 that they mean something else. And that makes me so nervous.

JACK I do mean something else.

GWENDOLEN I thought so. In fact, I am never wrong.

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

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 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 that. 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. The name, fortunately for my peace of mind, is, as far as my own experience goes, extremely rare.

JACK You really love me, Gwendolen?

GWENDOLEN Passionately.

JACK Darling Gwendolen!

GWENDOLEN My own Ernest!

They embrace.

JACK Of course, 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 Ah, that is clearly a metaphysical speculation, and like all 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 care much 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 have a very tedious life with him. She would probably

never be allowed to know the pleasure of a single moment's solitude. The only really safe name is Ernest.

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

GWENDOLEN *(surprised)* 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. 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 I know that. But men often propose for practice. I know my brother does. He tells me so… What wonderfully blue eyes you have, Ernest. They are quite, quite blue. I hope you will always look at me just like that, especially when there are other people present!

Enter **LADY BRACKNELL.**

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

JACK *rises.*

GWENDOLEN Mamma! I must beg you to retire. This is no place for you... Besides, Mr Worthing has not quite finished yet.

LADY BRACKNELL Finished what, may I ask?

GWENDOLEN I am engaged to Mr Worthing, mamma!

LADY BRACKNELL Pardon me, you are not engaged to anyone. When you do become engaged to someone, I or your father, should his health permit him, will inform you of the fact. An engagement should come on a young girl as a surprise, pleasant or unpleasant as the case may be. It is hardly a matter that she could be allowed to arrange for herself... And now, I have a few questions to put to you, Mr Worthing!

JACK I shall be charmed to reply to any questions, Lady Bracknell.

GWENDOLEN You mean if you know the answers to them. Mamma's questions are sometimes peculiarly inquisitorial.

LADY BRACKNELL I intend to make them very inquisitorial. And while I am making these enquiries, you, Gwendolen, will wait for me below in the carriage.

GWENDOLEN *(reproachfully)* Mamma!

LADY BRACKNELL *(severely)* In the carriage, Gwendolen.

GWENDOLEN *and* **JACK** *blow kisses to each other behind* **LADY BRACKNELL**'s *back.* **LADY BRACKNELL** *looks vaguely about as if she could not understand what the noise was. Finally turns round.*

Gwendolen! The carriage!

GWENDOLEN Yes, mamma!

Exit.

LADY BRACKNELL *(sitting down)* You can take a chair, 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, Mr Worthing, although I have the same list as the dear Duchess of Bolton has. We work together, in fact. 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 that I smoke.

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

JACK Twenty-nine!

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

JACK 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. What is your income?

JACK Between seven and eight thousand a year.

LADY BRACKNELL *(makes a note in her book)* In land, or in investments?

JACK In investments, Lady Bracknell.

LADY BRACKNELL That is satisfactory. What, between the duties expected of one during one's lifetime and the duties exacted from one after one's death—land has ceased to be either a

profit or a pleasure. It gives one position and prevents one from keeping it up. That is all that can be said about it.

JACK I have a country house, with some land of course attached to it, but I don't depend on that for my real income. The poachers are the only people who make anything out of it.

LADY BRACKNELL A country house! How many bedrooms? Well, that point can be cleared up afterwards. *(Makes note)* You have a town house I hope. A girl with a simple unspoiled nature like Gwendolen could hardly be expected to reside in the country.

JACK Well, I own a house in Belgrave Square, but it is let by the year to Lady Bloxham. I have never lived in it. Of course, I can get it back whenever I like.

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

JACK Oh! she goes about very little. She is a lady considerably advanced in years.

LADY BRACKNELL Oh! nowadays that is no guarantee of respectability of character. What number in Belgrave Square?

JACK 149.

LADY BRACKNELL The unfashionable side. However, that could easily be altered.

JACK Do you mean the fashion or the side, Lady Bracknell?

LADY BRACKNELL Both if necessary, I presume. What are your politics?

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

LADY BRACKNELL Oh! they count as Tories! They dine with us. Or come in the evening, at any rate. You have, of course, no sympathy of any kind with the Radical Party?

JACK Oh! I don't want to put the asses against the classes, if that is what you mean, Lady Bracknell.

LADY BRACKNELL That is exactly what I do mean...ahem! ...Are your parents living?

JACK I have lost both my parents!

LADY BRACKNELL Both? ...To lose one parent may be regarded as a misfortune...to lose both seems like carelessness. Who was your father? Was he born in what the Radical papers call the purple of commerce or did he rise from the ranks of the aristocracy?

JACK I am afraid I don't really know. The fact is, Lady Bracknell, I said I had lost my parents. The truth is that my parents seem to have lost me... I don't actually know who I am. I was...well, I was found. 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 Worthing in his pocket at the time. Worthing is a place in Sussex. It is a seaside resort.

LADY BRACKNELL Where did the charitable gentleman who had a ticket for the seaside resort find you?

JACK *(gravely)* In a handbag.

LADY BRACKNELL A handbag!

JACK *(very seriously)* Yes, Lady Bracknell. I was in a handbag—a somewhat large black leather handbag, with handles to it—an ordinary handbag, in fact.

LADY BRACKNELL In what locality did this Mr Cardew come across this ordinary handbag?

JACK In the cloak-room at Victoria Station. It was given to him in mistake for his own. He did not discover the error till he arrived at his own house. All subsequent efforts to ascertain who I was were unavailing.

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

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