

SIDE 1 JACK/ALGY

Wells. *[Moves to him.]* Just give it back to me, Algy!
[Tries to take case.]

ALGY *[slipping past him, retreating behind sofa]*. But why does she call herself little Cecily, if she is your aunt and lives at Tunbridge Wells? *[Reading from case.]* "From little Cecily, with her fondest love."

JACK *[moving to front of sofa, kneeling upon it]*. 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! *[Makes second grab for case.]* That is absurd! For heaven's sake, give me back my cigarette case. *[Bends across sofa.]*

ALGY *[keeping out of reach]*. Yes. But why does your aunt call you her uncle? "From little Cecily, with her fondest love to her dear Uncle Jack." *[JACK gradually moves around right end of sofa. ALGY gradually moves toward L C stage.]* 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 quite make out. *[JACK moves behind sofa toward L C now.]* Besides, your name isn't Jack at all. It is Ernest.

JACK. It isn't Ernest, it's Jack!

ALGY *[moving D L]*. You always told me it was Ernest. I have introduced you to everyone as Ernest. You answer to the name of Ernest. You look as if your name was Ernest. You are the most earnest-looking person I ever saw in my life. It is perfectly absurd, your saying that your name isn't Ernest. It's on your cards. Here is one of them. *[Takes it from case.]* "Mr. Ernest Worthing, B4, The Albany." I'll keep this as a proof that your name is Ernest if ever you attempt to deny it to me, or to Gwendoline, or to anyone else. *[Puts card in pocket.]*

JACK *[backing down]*. Well, my name is Ernest in town and Jack in the country. And the cigarette case was given me in the country. *[Sits left of table C.]*

ALGY. Yes, but that does not account for the fact that your

small Aunt Cecily who lives at Tunbridge Wells calls you her dear uncle. *[Puts case behind back as he moves toward JACK.]* Now, 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 *[irritably]*. Bunburyist! What on earth do you mean by a Bunburyist?

ALGY *[moving above table to right of it]*. 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.

ALGY. Here it is. *[Hands him case.]* Now, produce your explanation. *[Crosses and sits on left arm of sofa.]*

JACK. Well, old Mr. Thomas Cardew, 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—*[Pauses, then looks directly at ALGY.]*—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.

ALGY *[interested, rising, moving toward table C]*. 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.

ALGY. I suspected that, my dear fellow. I have Bunbured all over Shropshire on two separate occasions. Now go on. Why are you Ernest in town and Jack in the country? *[Returns and sits on arm of sofa again.]*

JACK. My dear Algy, when one is placed in the position of guardian, one has to adopt a very high moral tone on all subjects. It's 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, in order to get up to town I have always pretended to have a younger brother of the name of Ernest, who lives at the Albany, and gets into the most

dreadful scrapes. There, my dear Algy, is the whole truth, pure and simple.

ALGY. The truth is rarely pure and never simple. [*Rises and crosses to right of table C.*] What you are is a Bunburyist. You are one of the most advanced Bunburyists I know.

JACK. What on earth do you mean?

ALGY [*moving above table to L C.*]. 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. [*Moves U C to fireplace.*] Bunbury is perfectly invaluable. If it wasn't for Bunbury's extraordinary bad health, for instance—[*Comes down above table C.*]—I wouldn't be able to dine with you at the Carlton tonight, 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 tonight.

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

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

ALGY [*moving to sofa, sitting*]. 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 tonight. She will place me next to 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 are a confirmed Bunburyist, I naturally

want to talk to you about Bunburying. I want to tell you the rules.

JACK [*rising*]. I'm not a Bunburyist at all. If Gwendoline accepts me, I am going to kill my brother. [*Moves D L.*] Indeed, 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. [*Sits D L.*]

ALGY. Nothing will induce me to part with Bunbury, and if you ever get married, which seems to be 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 Gwendoline, and she is the only girl I ever saw in my life that I would marry, I certainly don't want to know Bunbury.

ALGY [*rising*]. Then your wife will. [*Crosses L C.*] You don't seem to realize, my dear fellow, that in married life three is company, and two is none. [*Bell rings off U R.*] Ah, that must be Aunt Augusta. [*Steps toward JACK.*] Now, if I get her out of the way for ten minutes, so that you can have an opportunity of proposing to Gwendoline, may I dine with you tonight at the Carlton?

JACK. I suppose so, if you want to.

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

~~[*LANE enters U R and pauses upstage of entrance.*]~~

~~LANE. Lady Bracknell and Miss Fairfax.~~

~~[*ALGY moves upstage of the table C as LADY BRACKNELL and GWENDOLINE enter U R. JACK rises. LANE goes out U R again.*]~~

~~LADY BRACKNELL [*moving to ALGY, shaking hands*]. Well, dear Algernon, I hope you are behaving well.~~

~~ALGY. I'm feeling well, Aunt Augusta.~~