

SIDE 2 JACK/GWEN

Page 20 The Importance of Being Earnest Act I

courage conversation—particularly at the end of the season when everyone has practically said whatever they have to say.

ALGY. I'll speak to Bunbury, Aunt Augusta—if he is still conscious—*[Rises, takes her cup, and crosses to table C with it.]*—and I think I can promise you he'll be all right on Saturday. Of course, the music is a great difficulty. *[JACK takes GWENDOLINE'S cup to table and then returns dutifully to her side.]* But I'll run over the program I've drawn out, if you will come into the next room for a moment. *[Starts L.]*

LADY BRACKNELL. Thank you, Algernon. It is very thoughtful of you. *[Rises and follows him.]* I'm sure the program will be delightful, after a few expurgations. *[Pauses in front of GWENDOLINE.]* Gwendoline, you will follow.

GWENDOLINE. Certainly, Mamma. *[LADY BRACKNELL gives JACK a searching look, then goes out L. ALGY gives JACK a searching look, also, and goes out L, leaving door open. There is an awkward pause. GWENDOLINE sits folding and unfolding her handkerchief. Then she looks up at JACK, as if to say something. Just at that moment, he looks down at her, as if to speak, and neither speaks. Finally JACK clears his throat and moves L.C.]*

JACK. Charming day it has been, Miss Fairfax.

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

JACK *[quickly]*. I do mean something else.

GWENDOLINE *[breaking into a smile]*. I thought so.

JACK *[moving to her side]*. And I would like to be allowed to take advantage of Lady Bracknell's temporary absence—

GWENDOLINE. I would certainly advise you to do so. Mamma has a way of coming back suddenly into a room, that I have had to speak to her about.

JACK *[crossing, closing door L, returning to her side]*. Miss

Act I The Importance of Being Earnest Page 21

Fairfax, ever since I met you I have admired you more than any girl I have ever met—since I met you.

GWENDOLINE *[rising, moving C]*. Yes, I am quite aware of that 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. *[Pleased, JACK takes a step toward her.]* Even before I met you I was far from indifferent to you. *[JACK looks at her in amazement and takes another step toward her.]* 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 my ideal has always been to love someone of the name of Ernest. *[JACK, who is just about to take another step toward her, backs away instead.]* There is something in that name that inspires absolute confidence. *[Moves to sofa.]* The moment Algernon first mentioned to me that he had a friend called Ernest I knew I was destined to love you. *[Sits on sofa.]*

JACK *[moving to her, getting down on one knee]*. You really love me, Gwendoline?

GWENDOLINE. Passionately!

JACK. Darling! You don't know how happy you've made me.

GWENDOLINE. My own Ernest! *[Embraces JACK.]*

JACK. Of course. But you don't really mean to say that you couldn't love me if my name wasn't Ernest?

GWENDOLINE. But your name *is* Ernest. *[Releases him.]*

JACK *[quickly]*. Yes, I know it is. *[Rises and sits beside her.]* But supposing it was something else? Do you mean to say you couldn't love me then?

GWENDOLINE. Oh, that is clearly a metaphysical speculation and, like all metaphysical speculations, has very little reference to the actual facts of life as we know them.

JACK *[airily]*. 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.

GWENDOLINE *[firmly]*. It suits you perfectly. It is a divine

name. [*Fervently.*] It has a music of its own. It produces vibrations.

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

GWENDOLINE [*distastefully*]. 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. [*JACK winces.*] Besides, Jack is a notorious domesticity for John! And I pity any woman who is married to a man called John. [*JACK starts edging away from her on sofa.*] She would probably never be allowed to know the entrancing pleasure of a single moment's solitude. The only really *safe* name is Ernest.

JACK [*flustered*]. Gwendoline, I must get christened at once—I mean we must get married at once. [*Rises.*]

GWENDOLINE [*surprised*]. Married, Mr. Worthing? [*Rises.*]

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.

GWENDOLINE. 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 upon.

JACK. Well—may I propose to you now?

GWENDOLINE. I think it would be an admirable opportunity. [*Sits quickly on sofa again.*] 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. Then, Gwendoline, you will marry me? [*Goes down on both knees.*]

GWENDOLINE. Of course I will, darling. [*Puts arms around his neck.*] 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.

GWENDOLINE. Yes, but men often propose for practice. [*Holds his head in her hands.*] Oh, Ernest, what wonderfully blue eyes you have. They are quite, quite blue. I hope you will always look at me just like that, especially when there are other people present.

[*LADY BRACKNELL enters, and takes in the situation at a glance.*]

LADY BRACKNELL [*coming L C.*]. Mr. Worthing! [*JACK tries to get up. GWENDOLINE restrains him.*] Rise, sir, from this semi-recumbent posture. It is most indecorous. [*Averts head.*]

GWENDOLINE. Mamma! [*JACK again tries to rise; she restrains him.*] I must beg you to retire. This is no place for you. [*Another movement from JACK, but GWENDOLINE holds him down on his knees firmly.*] Besides, Mr. Worthing has not quite finished yet.

LADY BRACKNELL. Finished what, may I ask?

GWENDOLINE. I am engaged to Mr. Worthing, Mamma. [*Rises and helps a flustered JACK to his feet.*]

LADY BRACKNELL. Pardon me, you are not engaged to anyone. [*Crosses C.*] When you do become engaged to anyone, I or your father, should his health permit him, will *inform* you of the fact. An engagement should always come on a young girl as a surprise—pleasant or unpleasant, as the case may be. It is hardly a matter that she should be allowed to arrange for herself. And now I have a few questions to put to you, Mr. Worthing. And while I am making these inquiries, *you*, Gwendoline, will wait for me below in the carriage. [*Waves imperiously toward U R as she moves D L.*]

GWENDOLINE [*reproachfully*]. Mamma!

LADY BRACKNELL [*severely*]. In the carriage, Gwendoline! [*Turns D L again. GWENDOLINE and JACK move U R and blow kisses to each other behind LADY BRACKNELL'S back. LADY BRACKNELL looks vaguely about, as if she cannot understand what the noise is; finally, she turns.*] Gwendoline, the carriage!