

SIDE 3 JACK/LADY B

GWENDOLINE. Yes, Mamma. [*Goes quickly out U R.*]

LADY BRACKNELL [*sitting D L*]. You can take a seat, Mr. Worthing. [*Looks in her pocket for notebook and pencil.*]

JACK. Thank you, Lady Bracknell. [*Comes in front of table C.*] I prefer standing.

LADY BRACKNELL [*pencil and notebook in hand*]. I feel bound to tell you that you are not down on my list of eligible young men, 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 I smoke.

LADY BRACKNELL [*making check mark in notebook*]. 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-eight.

LADY BRACKNELL [*another check mark*]. A very good age to be married at. I have always been of the 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. [*Moves D R.*]

LADY BRACKNELL [*another check mark*]. 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 has gone. What is your income?

JACK. Between seven and eight thousand a year.

LADY BRACKNELL [*pencil poised*]. In land or in investment?

JACK. In investments, chiefly. [*Crosses and sits on sofa.*]

LADY BRACKNELL [*another check mark, with a definite flourish this time*]. 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's all that can be said about land.

JACK. I have a country house with some land, of course, attached to it—about fifteen hundred acres, I believe.

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 Gwendoline 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. Of course, I can get it back whenever I like, at six months' notice.

LADY BRACKNELL [*severely*]. Lady Bloxham? I don't know her.

JACK. Oh, she goes about very little. She's a lady considerably advanced in years.

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

JACK. One hundred forty-nine.

LADY BRACKNELL [*closing notebook with a decisive bang*]. The *unfashionable* side. I thought there was something! However, that could easily be altered. Now, to minor matters. Are your parents living?

JACK. I have lost both my parents.

LADY BRACKNELL [*with lifted eyebrows*]. Both? To lose one parent may be regarded as a misfortune—to lose both seems like carelessness. Who was your father? He seems to have been a man of wealth. 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 really don't know. The fact is, Lady Bracknell, I said I had lost my parents. It would be nearer the truth to say that my parents seem to have lost me. I don't actually know who I am, by birth. I was—well—I was found. [*Rises.*]

LADY BRACKNELL [*aghast*]. Found!

JACK [*moving L C*]. 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 first-class ticket for Worthing in his pocket at the time. Worthing is a seaside resort in Sussex.

LADY BRACKNELL [*eying him sharply, biting off each word*]. Where did the charitable gentleman who had a first-class ticket for this seaside resort find you?

JACK [*gravely*]. In a handbag.

LADY BRACKNELL [*the last straw*]. A handbag!

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

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

JACK. In the cloakroom at Victoria Station. It was given him in mistake for his own.

LADY BRACKNELL [*rising*]. 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 handbag, whether it had handles or not, seems to me to display a contempt for the ordinary decencies of family life that remind one of the worst excesses of the French Revolution—and I presume you know what that unfortunate movement led to? [*Crosses past him to R C.*] As for the particular locality in which the handbag was found, a cloakroom at a railway station might serve to conceal a social indiscretion—has probably, indeed, been used for that purpose before now—but it can hardly be regarded as an assured basis for a recognized position in good society.

JACK [*moving C*]. May I ask you, then, what you would advise me to do? I need hardly say I would do anything in the world to insure Gwendoline's happiness.

LADY BRACKNELL [*sitting on sofa*]. I would strongly advise you, Mr. Worthing, to try and acquire some relations as soon as possible, and to make a definite effort to produce, at any rate, one parent, of either sex, before the season is quite over.

JACK. Well, I don't see how I can possibly manage to do that. I can produce the handbag at any moment. It is in my

dressing-room at home. I really think that should satisfy you, Lady Bracknell.

LADY BRACKNELL [*rising imperiously*]. Me, sir? What has it to do with me? 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 cloakroom, and form an alliance with a handbag. Good morning, Mr. Worthing. [*Sweeps out U R.*]

JACK [*weakly*]. Good morning. [*Off L, ALGY strikes up the "Wedding March" on piano. JACK turns L and glares, then dashes out L.*] For goodness' sake, don't play that ghastly tune, Algy! [*Re-enters L and comes C.*] How idiotic!

[*ALGY enters L and strolls to L C.*]

ALGY [*cheerily*]. Didn't it go off all right, old boy? You don't mean to say Gwendoline refused you?

JACK. Oh, as far as Gwendoline is concerned, we are engaged. [*Moves to entrance U R, glancing off.*] Her mother is perfectly unbearable. Never met such a gorgon. [*Turns.*] You don't think there is any chance of Gwendoline becoming like her mother in about a hundred and fifty years, do you, Algy?

ALGY [*moving to left end of sofa, drawlingly and sententiously*]. All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. No man does. That's his.

JACK [*coming behind sofa*]. Is that clever?

ALGY. It is perfectly phrased and quite as true as any observation in civilized life need be. [*Sits on left arm of sofa, dangling one leg.*]

JACK [*pacing D R*]. I am sick to death of cleverness. Everybody is clever nowadays. You can't go anywhere without meeting clever people. The thing has become an absolute public nuisance. [*Paces D L.*] I wish to goodness we had a few fools left.

ALGY. We have.

JACK. I should extremely like to meet them. What do they talk about?