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is rather an aristocratic name. But seriously, Cecily, if my name *was* Algy, couldn't you love me?

CECILY. I might *respect* you, Ernest. I might *admire* your *character*, but I fear I would not be able to give you my undivided attention.

ALGY. [*glancing L.*] Cecily! Your rector here is, I suppose, thoroughly experienced in the practice of all the rites and ceremonials of the church?

CECILY. Oh, yes. Dr. Chasuble is a most learned man. He has never written a single book, so you can imagine how much he knows.

ALGY. I must see him at once on a matter of important christening—I mean business. [*Crosses L.*] I'll be back in half an hour. [*Comes back, kisses her and dashes out L.*]

CECILY [*rapturously, looking after him*]. What an impetuous boy he is! [*Moves C.*] I like his hair so much. I must enter his proposal in my diary. [*Goes quickly R C, sits left of table and starts to write in diary.*]

[MERRIMAN *enters R.*]

MERRIMAN. A Miss Fairfax has just called to see Mr. Worthing. On very important business, Miss Fairfax states.

CECILY. Isn't Mr. Worthing in his library?

MERRIMAN. Mr. Worthing went over in the direction of the Rectory some time ago.

CECILY. Miss Fairfax! I suppose one of the many elderly good women who are associated with Uncle Jack in some of his philanthropic work in London. I don't quite like women who are interested in philanthropic work. I think it is so forward of them.

MERRIMAN. Yes, Miss.

CECILY. Pray ask the lady to come out here. Mr. Worthing is sure to be back soon. And you can bring tea.

MERRIMAN. Yes, Miss. [*Goes out R. CECILY closes her diary and rises.*]

[MERRIMAN *enters R with GWENDOLINE.*]

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MERRIMAN. Miss Fairfax. [*Goes out R.*]

CECILY. Pray let me introduce myself to you. My name is Cecily Cardew.

GWENDOLINE [*coming to right of table*]. Cecily Cardew! [*Moves to her and shakes hands.*] What a very sweet name. Something tells me that we are going to be great friends. I like you already more than I can say. My first impressions of people are never wrong.

CECILY. How nice of you to like me so much after we have known each other such a comparatively short time. [*Pauses.*] Pray sit down. [*Indicates settee as she moves toward it.*]

GWENDOLINE [*still standing*]. I may call you Cecily, may I not?

CECILY. With pleasure.

GWENDOLINE. And you will always call *me* Gwendoline, won't you?

CECILY [*slightly bewildered*]. If you wish.

GWENDOLINE [*crossing to her*]. Then that is all settled, is it not?

CECILY. I hope so. [*Pause. They both sit together, CECILY at L C, GWENDOLINE on settee.*]

GWENDOLINE. Perhaps this might be favorable for my mentioning who I am. My father is Lord Bracknell. You have never heard of Papa, I suppose?

CECILY. I don't think so.

GWENDOLINE. Outside the family circle, Papa, I am glad to say, is entirely unknown. I think that is quite as it should be. The home seems to me to be the proper sphere for the man. Cecily, Mamma, whose views on education are remarkably strict, has brought me up to be extremely short-sighted. It's part of her system, so do you mind my looking at you through my glasses?

CECILY. Oh, not at all, Gwendoline. I am very fond of being looked at. [*There is a long pause as GWENDOLINE examines CECILY through her lorgnette. CECILY bears it patiently.*]

GWENDOLINE [*finally*]. You are here on a short visit, I suppose?

CECILY. Oh, no! I live here.

GWENDOLINE [*coldly*]. Really? Your mother, no doubt, or some female relative of advanced years, resides here also.

CECILY. Oh, no! I have no mother, nor, in fact, any relations.

GWENDOLINE. Indeed? [*Looks at her again through lorgnette.*]

CECILY. My dear guardian, with the assistance of Miss Prism, has the arduous task of looking after me.

GWENDOLINE. Your guardian?

CECILY. Yes. I am Mr. Worthing's ward.

GWENDOLINE [*jolted*]. Oh! It is strange he never mentioned to me that he had a ward. How secretive of him. He grows more interesting hourly. I am not sure, however, that the news inspires me with feelings of unmixed delight. [*Rises and moves R C.*] I am very fond of you, Cecily. I have liked you ever since I met you. But I am bound to state that, now I know that you are Mr. Worthing's ward, I cannot help expressing the wish that you were—well, just a little older than you seem to be—and not quite so very alluring in appearance. [*Moves C again.*] In fact, if I may speak candidly—

CECILY. Pray do! I think that whenever one has anything unpleasant to say, one should always be quite candid.

GWENDOLINE. Well, to speak with perfect candor, Cecily, I wish you were fully forty and more than usually plain for your age. Ernest has a strong, upright nature. He is the very soul of truth and honor. But even men of the noblest possible moral character are extremely susceptible to the influence of the physical charms of others.

CECILY. I beg your pardon, Gwendoline. Did you say Ernest?

GWENDOLINE. Yes.

CECILY. Oh, but it is not Mr. Ernest Worthing who is my guardian. It is his brother—his elder brother.

GWENDOLINE. Ernest never mentioned to me that he had a brother.

CECILY. I am sorry to say they have not been on good terms for a long time.

GWENDOLINE [*sitting again on settee*]. Ah, that accounts for

it. And now I think of it, I have never heard any man mention his brother. The subject seems distasteful to most men. Of course you are quite, quite sure that it is not Mr. Ernest Worthing who's your guardian?

CECILY. Quite sure. [*Pauses.*] In fact, I am going to be his.

GWENDOLINE [*inquiringly*]. I beg your pardon?

CECILY [*rather shy and confidently, rising, crossing C, sitting beside her*]. Dearest Gwendoline, there is no reason why I should make any secret of it to you. Our little county newspaper is sure to chronicle the fact next week. [*Takes deep breath, then speaks ecstatically.*] Mr. Ernest Worthing and I are engaged to be married.

GWENDOLINE [*quite politely, rising, crossing R C*]. My darling Cecily, I think there must be some slight error. Mr. Ernest Worthing is engaged to *me*. The announcement will appear in the *Morning Post* on Saturday at the latest.

CECILY [*very politely, rising, moving R C*]. I am afraid you must be under some misconception. Ernest proposed to me exactly ten minutes ago. [*Takes diary from table and shows what she has written in it.*]

GWENDOLINE [*examining diary through her lorgnette carefully*]. It is certainly very curious, for he asked *me* to be his wife yesterday afternoon at five-thirty. If you would care to verify the incident, pray do so. I never travel without my diary. [*Produces her diary from handbag and shows her the place.*] I am so sorry, dear Cecily, if it is any disappointment to you, but I am afraid I have the prior claim. [*Shuts diary and puts it back in handbag triumphantly.*]

CECILY. It would distress me more than I can tell you, dear Gwendoline, if it caused you any mental or physical anguish, but I feel bound to point out that since Ernest proposed to *you* he has clearly changed his mind. [*Places diary back on table with a triumphant nod.*]

GWENDOLINE [*meditatively, moving L C*]. If the poor fellow has been entrapped into any foolish promise, I shall consider it my duty to rescue him *at once*, and with a *firm hand*.

CECILY [*thoughtfully and sadly, moving slowly C*]. Whatever

unfortunate entanglement my dear boy may have got into, I will never reproach him with it, *after* we are married.

GWENDOLINE [*crossing to her*]. Do you allude to *me*, Miss Cardew, as an entanglement? You are presumptuous. On an occasion of this kind, it becomes more than a moral duty to speak one's mind—it becomes a pleasure.

CECILY. Do you suggest, Miss Fairfax, that I entrapped Ernest into an engagement? How dare you? This is no time for wearing the shallow mask of manners. When I see a spade I call it a spade.

[MERRIMAN enters R. He carries a tea cloth and a salver. GWENDOLINE is about to make a retort. The presence of a servant exercises a restraining influence under which both girls chafe.]

GWENDOLINE [*satirically*]. I am glad to say that I have never seen a spade. It is obvious that our social spheres have been widely different. [*With a toss of her head she moves U L C and pretends to inspect garden.*]

MERRIMAN. Shall I lay tea here as usual, Miss?

CECILY [*sternly, in a clear voice*]. Yes, as usual. [MERRIMAN crosses to table R C, clears table, placing things on table behind settee, then places tea cloth on table. Meanwhile, CECILY and GWENDOLINE glare at each other, and CECILY flounces D R.]

GWENDOLINE [*still U L C*]. Quite a well-kept garden this is, Miss Cardew.

CECILY. So glad you like it, Miss Fairfax.

GWENDOLINE [*coming down to L C*]. I had no idea there were any flowers in the country.

CECILY [*moving C*]. Oh, flowers are as common here, Miss Fairfax, as people are in London.

[A SERVANT enters R, carrying a tray set with tea things. He hands it to MERRIMAN, who places it on the table R C, then remains standing behind the table. The SERVANT then goes out R and re-enters with a plate of tea-cakes and one of

*bread-and-butter sandwiches and muffins. He gives them to MERRIMAN, who places them on the table, and the SERVANT goes out R again.*]

GWENDOLINE [*on spoken cue, "—are in London"*]. Personally I cannot understand how anybody manages to exist in the country, if anybody who is anybody does. The country always bores me to death. [*Sits L C.*]

CECILY. Ah! That is what the newspapers call agricultural depression, is it not? I believe the aristocracy are suffering very much from it just at present. It is almost an epidemic amongst them, I have been told. [*Crosses, sits upstage of table R C and pours tea.*] May I offer you some tea, Miss Fairfax?

GWENDOLINE [*with elaborate politeness*]. Thank you.

CECILY [*sweetly*]. Sugar?

GWENDOLINE [*superciliously*]. No, thank you. Sugar is not fashionable any more. [CECILY looks angrily at her, takes up tongs, and puts four lumps of sugar into cup which she then places on salver that MERRIMAN is holding.]

CECILY [*severely*]. Cake, or bread and butter?

GWENDOLINE [*in a bored manner*]. Bread and butter, please.

[CECILY is about to put bread and butter on tray.] Cake is rarely seen at the best houses nowadays. [CECILY cuts a large slice of cake, and puts it on MERRIMAN's salver. MERRIMAN moves L C and places salver on table next to GWENDOLINE. Then he goes out R. GWENDOLINE drinks tea and makes a grimace, puts down cup at once, reaches out her hand for bread and butter, looks at it and finds it is cake, rises in indignation and moves C. CECILY, meanwhile, is enjoying her tea.] You have filled my tea with lumps of sugar, and though I asked most distinctly for bread and butter, you have given me cake. I am known for the gentleness of my disposition and the extraordinary sweetness of my nature, but I warn you, Miss Cardew, you may go too far. [*Flounces L C.*]

CECILY [*putting down her cup with a clatter, rising*]. To save