

Page 54 The Importance of Being Earnest Act II

my poor, innocent, trusting boy from the machinations of any other girl, there are *no* lengths to which I would not go. GWENDOLINE. From the moment I saw you I distrusted you. I felt that you were false and deceitful. I am never deceived in such matters. My first impressions of people are invariably right.

CECILY [*moving C*]. It seems to me, Miss Fairfax, that I am trespassing on your valuable time. No doubt you have many other calls of a similar character to make in the neighborhood. [*Crosses back, sits again at table and resumes drinking tea.*]

[JACK enters R.]

GWENDOLINE [*seeing him*]. Ernest! My own Ernest!

JACK [*advancing and meeting her at C*]. Gwendoline, darling! [*Offers to kiss her.*]

GWENDOLINE [*drawing back*]. A moment! May I ask if you are engaged to be married to this young lady? [*Points to CECILY.*]

JACK [*laughing*]. To dear little Cecily! Of course not! What could have put such an idea into your pretty little head?

GWENDOLINE. Thank you, You may! [*Offers her cheek, and he kisses her.*]

CECILY [*very sweetly, as she continues to sip tea*]. I knew there must be some misunderstanding, Miss Fairfax. The gentleman whose arm is at present 'round your waist is my dear guardian, Mr. John Worthing.

GWENDOLINE [*drawing back*]. I beg your pardon.

CECILY [*pointing to him with her teacup.*]. This is Uncle Jack.

GWENDOLINE [*backing U L C*]. Jack! Oh!

[ALGY enters L.]

CECILY [*rising, pointing*]. Here is Ernest!

ALGY [*moving directly to CECILY, not seeing GWENDOLINE*]. My own love! [*Offers to kiss her.*]

Act II The Importance of Being Earnest Page 55

CECILY [*drawing back*]. A moment! Ernest, may I ask if you are you engaged to be married to this young lady?

ALGY [*looking around*]. To what young lady? [GWENDOLINE comes down to L C.] Gwendoline! [*Laughs.*] Of course not! What could have put such an idea into your pretty little head?

CECILY. Thank you! [*Presents her cheek to be kissed.*] You may. [ALGY kisses her.]

GWENDOLINE [*crossing C as JACK counter-crosses L C*]. I felt there was some slight error, Miss Cardew. [*Slight note of triumph.*] The gentleman who is now embracing you is my cousin, Mr. Algernon Moncrieff.

CECILY [*breaking away from ALGY*]. Algernon Moncrieff? Oh! [*To ALGY, with faint hint of horror.*] Are you called Algernon?

ALGY [*shrugging*]. I cannot deny it!

CECILY. Oh! [*Crosses to GWENDOLINE. They put their arms around each other's waists as if for protection.*]

GWENDOLINE [*to JACK*]. Is your name really John?

JACK [*standing rather proudly*]. I could deny it if I liked—I could deny anything if I liked. But my name certainly is John. It has been John for years.

CECILY [*to GWENDOLINE*]. A gross deception has been practiced on both of us.

GWENDOLINE [*clinging to her*]. My poor, wounded Cecily!

CECILY. My sweet, wronged Gwendoline!

GWENDOLINE [*slowly and seriously*]. You will call me sister, will you not? [*They embrace. JACK and ALGY groan and JACK paces U L, ALGY U R.*]

CECILY [*rather brightly*]. There is just one question I would like to be allowed to ask my guardian. [JACK comes L C, ALGY R C.]

GWENDOLINE. An admirable idea! [*To JACK.*] Mr. Worthing, there is just one question I would like to be permitted to put to you. Where is your brother Ernest? We are both engaged to be married to your brother Ernest, so it is a

matter of some importance to us to know where your brother Ernest is at present.

JACK [*slowly and hesitatingly*]. Gwendoline—Cecily. It is very painful for me to be forced to speak the truth. [*ALGY sinks in chair left of table R C.*] It is the first time in my life that I have ever been reduced to such a painful position, and I am really quite inexperienced in doing anything of the kind. However, I will tell you quite frankly that I *have* no brother Ernest. I have no brother at all. I never had a brother in my life. And I certainly have not the smallest intention of ever having one in the future.

CECILY [*surprised*]. No brother at all?

JACK [*cheerily*]. None!

GWENDOLINE [*severely, approaching him*]. Have you never had a brother of any kind?

JACK [*pleasantly*]. Never. Not even of any kind. [*Turns and sits comfortably at L C, greatly relieved.*]

GWENDOLINE [*crossing back to CECILY*]. I am afraid it is quite clear, Cecily, that neither of us is engaged to be married to anyone.

CECILY. It is not a very pleasant position for a young girl to suddenly find herself in, is it?

GWENDOLINE. Let us go into the house. [*Takes CECILY's arm and starts R.*] They will hardly venture to come after us there.

CECILY. No, men are so cowardly, aren't they? [*She and GWENDOLINE pause and look sorrowfully at JACK and ALGY. CECILY suddenly breaks into tears, as does GWENDOLINE, and both run out R. JACK rises and crosses to ALGY.*]

JACK. This ghastly state of things is what you call Bunburying, I suppose. [*Gives him a kick, which ALGY returns spitefully.*]

ALGY. Yes, and a perfectly wonderful Bunbury it is. The most wonderful Bunbury I have ever had in my life.

JACK [*coming C*]. Well, the only small satisfaction I have in the whole of this wretched business is that your friend Bunbury is quite exploded. You won't be able to run down to

the country quite so often as you used to do, Algy. And a very good thing, too. [*Sits on settee.*]

ALGY. Your brother is a little off color, isn't he, dear Jack? You won't be able to disappear to London quite so frequently as your wicked custom was. And not a bad thing, either.

JACK. As for your conduct toward Miss Cardew, I must say that your taking in a sweet, simple, innocent girl like that is quite inexcusable. To say nothing of the fact that she is my ward.

ALGY [*picking up a muffin from plate on table, buttering it*]. I can see no possible defense at all for your deceiving a brilliant, clever, thoroughly experienced young lady like Miss Fairfax. [*Crosses and perches on right arm of settee, eating muffin.*] To say nothing of the fact that she is my cousin.

JACK. I wanted to be engaged to Gwendoline, that is all. I love her.

ALGY. Well, I simply wanted to be engaged to Cecily. I adore her.

JACK. There is certainly no chance of your marrying Miss Cardew.

ALGY. I don't think there is much likelihood, Jack, of you and Miss Fairfax being united.

JACK [*irritably*]. How you can sit there calmly eating muffins, when we are in this horrible trouble, I can't make out. You seem to me to be perfectly heartless.

ALGY. Well, I can't eat muffins in an agitated manner. The butter would probably get on my cuffs. One should always eat muffins quite calmly. It is the only way to eat them.

JACK [*rising, moving R C, sitting right of table*]. I say it is perfectly heartless—your eating muffins at all under the circumstances. [*Starts to pour himself cup of tea.*]

ALGY. When I am in trouble, eating is the only thing that consoles me. Indeed, when I am really in great trouble, as anyone who knows me intimately will tell you, I refuse everything except food and drink. At the present moment I