

SIDE 8
PRISM/JACK/GWEN/LADY B
CHASUBLE/CECILY/ALGY

START

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MISS PRISM [*falteringly*]. Lady Bracknell, I admit with shame that I do not know. I only wish I did. The plain facts of the case are these. On the morning of the day you mention, a day that is forever branded on my memory, I prepared as usual to take the baby out in the perambulator. I had also with me a somewhat old but capacious handbag in which I intended to place the manuscript of a work of fiction that I had written during my few unoccupied hours. In a moment of mental abstraction, I deposited the manuscript in the bassinet and placed the baby in the handbag.

JACK [*who has been listening attentively, coming in front of sofa*]. But where did you deposit the handbag?

MISS PRISM. Do not ask me, Mr. Worthing.

JACK. Miss Prism, this is a matter of no small importance to me. I insist on knowing where you deposited the handbag.

MISS PRISM. In the cloakroom at Victoria Station—the Brighton line. [*Quite crushed, MISS PRISM crosses L C and sinks in chair right of table.*]

JACK [*starting U R*]. I must retire to my room for a moment. Gwendoline, wait here for me.

GWENDOLINE. If you are not too long, I will wait here for you all my life. [*JACK goes out U R.*]

CHASUBLE. What do you think this means, Lady Bracknell?

LADY BRACKNELL [*sitting at C.*]. I dare not even suspect, Dr. Chasuble. [*Noises are heard overhead, as if someone is throwing trunks about. Everyone looks up.*]

CECILY. Uncle Jack seems strangely agitated.

CHASUBLE. Your guardian has a very emotional nature.

LADY BRACKNELL. This noise is extremely unpleasant. [*Noises are heard overhead again. Everyone looks up. Noises stop.*]

CHASUBLE [*looking up*]. It has stopped now.

LADY BRACKNELL. I wish he would arrive at some conclusion.

GWENDOLINE. This suspense is terrible. I hope it will last.

[*JACK hurries in U R with a black leather handbag. He rushes over to MISS PRISM.*]

JACK. Is this the handbag, Miss Prism? [*Hands it to her.*]

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Examine it carefully before you speak. The happiness of more than one life depends on your answer. [*GWENDOLINE moves in front of sofa, anxiously.*]

MISS PRISM. It seems to be mine. [*Rises.*] Yes, here is the injury it received through the upsetting of a Gower Street omnibus in younger and happier days. [*Opens bag. In a more confidential and more joyful voice.*] And here, on the lock, are my initials. The bag is undoubtedly mine. I am delighted to have it unexpectedly restored to me. It has been a great inconvenience being without it all these years. JACK [*in a pathetic voice*]. Miss Prism, more is restored to you than the handbag. I was the baby you placed in it.

MISS PRISM [*amazed*]. You?

JACK [*embracing her*]. Yes—Mother!

MISS PRISM [*recoiling in indignant astonishment*]. Mr. Worthing, I am unmarried!

JACK [*drawing back*]. Unmarried! I do not deny that this is a serious blow. But, after all, who has the right to cast a stone against one who has suffered? Cannot repentance wipe out an act of folly? Why should there be one law for men and another for women? [*Moves toward her.*] Mother, I forgive you! [*Throws bag to DR. CHASUBLE, who catches it, and tries to embrace her again.*]

MISS PRISM [*struggling out of his embrace*]. Mr. Worthing, there is some error. [*Points to LADY BRACKNELL.*] There is the lady who can tell you who you really are. [*Moves to CHASUBLE, who speaks soothingly to her.*]

JACK [*after a pause*]. Lady Bracknell, I hate to seem inquisitive, but would you kindly inform me who I am?

LADY BRACKNELL. I am afraid that the news I have to give you will not altogether please you. [*Rises.*] You are the son of my poor sister, Mrs. Moncrieff, and consequently Algernon's elder brother.

JACK. Algy's elder brother! [*Turns to ALGY.*] Then I have a brother after all! I knew I had a brother! I always said I had a brother. [*Crosses D L, exuberantly.*] Cecily, how could you have ever doubted that I had a brother? [*Pulls ALGY*

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by arm to CHASUBLE.] Dr. Chasuble, my unfortunate brother! [*Pulls him over to GWENDOLINE.*] Gwendoline, my unfortunate brother! [*Lets go of ALGY, who moves D L, to CECILY.*]

GWENDOLINE [*to JACK*]. My own! [*Pauses.*] But what own are you? What is your Christian name now that you have become someone else?

JACK. Good heavens! I had quite forgotten that point. [*Crosses C, to LADY BRACKNELL.*] Aunt Augusta, a moment. At the time when Miss Prism left me in the hand-bag, had I been christened already?

LADY BRACKNELL [*quite calmly*]. Every luxury that money could buy, including christening, had been lavished on you by your fond and doting parents.

JACK [*turning to others*]. Then I *was* christened! That is settled. [*To LADY BRACKNELL.*] Now, what name was I given? Let me know the worst.

LADY BRACKNELL [*after a pause*]. Being the eldest son, you were naturally christened after your father.

JACK [*irritably*]. Yes, but what was our father's Christian name?

LADY BRACKNELL. I remember now that the General was called Ernest. I knew I had some particular reason for disliking the name.

GWENDOLINE [*holding out her arms*]. Ernest! I felt from the first that you could have no other name. [*General consternation: JACK hurries to GWENDOLINE and embraces her. CHASUBLE takes MISS PRISM in his arms clumsily, and ALGY embraces CECILY. LADY BRACKNELL beams approvingly on the couples in turn. The next four speeches are given simultaneously.*]

JACK. Gwendoline! At last!

CHASUBLE. Letitia! At last!

MISS PRISM. Frederick! At last!

ALGY. Cecily! At last!

GWENDOLINE [*topping the consternation*]. My own Ernest!

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