1 – Algernon and Lane

Excerpt from Act One

> [*Morning-room in Algernon's flat in Half-Moon Street. The room is luxuriously and artistically furnished. The sound of a piano is heard in the adjoining room.*
>
> ***Lane** is arranging afternoon tea on the table, and after the music has ceased, **Algernon** enters*.]

ALGERNON.
Did you hear what I was playing, Lane?

LANE.
I didn't think it polite to listen, sir.

ALGERNON.
I'm sorry for that, for your sake. I don't play accurately—any one can play accurately—but I play with wonderful expression.

LANE.
Yes, sir.

ALGERNON.
And, speaking of the science of Life, have you got the cucumber sandwiches cut for Lady Bracknell?

LANE.
Yes, sir.

> [*Hands them on a salver*. ***Algernon** inspects them, takes two, and sits down on the sofa*.]

ALGERNON.
Oh! … by the way, Lane, I see from your book that on Thursday night, when Lord Shoreman and Mr. Worthing were dining with me, eight bottles of champagne are entered as having been consumed.

LANE.
Yes, sir; eight bottles and a pint.

ALGERNON.
Why is it that at a bachelor's establishment the servants invariably drink the champagne? I ask merely for information.

LANE.
I attribute it to the superior quality of the wine, sir. I have often observed that in married households the champagne is rarely of a first-rate brand.

ALGERNON.
Good heavens! Is marriage so demoralising as that?

LANE.
I believe it *is* a very pleasant state, sir. I have had very little experience of it myself up to the present. I have only been married once. That was in consequence of a misunderstanding between myself and a young person.

ALGERNON.
I don't know that I am much interested in your family life, Lane.

LANE.
No, sir; it is not a very interesting subject. I never think of it myself.

ALGERNON.
Very natural, I am sure. That will do, Lane, thank you.

LANE.
Thank you, sir.

2 – Algernon and Jack

Excerpt from Act One

JACK.
For goodness' sake don't play that ghastly tune, Algy. How idiotic you are!

ALGERNON.
Didn't it go off all right, old boy? You don't mean to say Gwendolen refused you? I know it is a way she has. She is always refusing people. I think it is most ill-natured of her.

JACK.
Oh, Gwendolen is as right as a trivet. As far as she is concerned, we are engaged. Her mother is perfectly unbearable. Never met such a Gorgon . . . I don't really know what a Gorgon is like, but I am quite sure that Lady Bracknell is one. In any case, she is a monster, without being a myth, which is rather unfair . . . I beg your pardon, Algy, I suppose I shouldn't talk about your own aunt in that way before you.

ALGERNON.
My dear boy, I love hearing my relations abused. It is the only thing that makes me put up with them at all. Relations are simply a tedious pack of people, who haven't got the remotest knowledge of how to live, nor the smallest instinct about when to die.

JACK.
Oh, that is nonsense!

ALGERNON.
It isn't!

JACK.
Well, I won't argue about the matter. You always want to argue about things.

ALGERNON.
That is exactly what things were originally made for.

JACK.
Upon my word, if I thought that, I'd shoot myself… You don't think there is any chance of Gwendolen becoming like her mother in about a hundred and fifty years, do you, Algy?

ALGERNON.
All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. No man does. That's his.

JACK.
Is that clever?

ALGERNON.
It is perfectly phrased! and quite as true as any observation in civilised life should be.

JACK.
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. I wish to goodness we had a few fools left.

ALGERNON.
We have.

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

ALGERNON.
The fools? Oh! about the clever people, of course.

JACK.
What fools!

ALGERNON.
By the way, did you tell Gwendolen the truth about your being Ernest in town, and Jack in the country?

JACK.
My dear fellow, the truth isn't quite the sort of thing one tells to a nice, sweet, refined girl. What extraordinary ideas you have about the way to behave to a woman!

ALGERNON.
The only way to behave to a woman is to woo her, if she is pretty, and to woo some one else, if she is plain.

JACK.
Oh, that is nonsense.

ALGERNON.
What about your brother? What about the profligate Ernest?

JACK.
Oh, before the end of the week I shall have got rid of him. I'll say he died in Paris of apoplexy. Lots of people die of apoplexy, quite suddenly, don't they?

ALGERNON.
Yes, but it's hereditary, my dear fellow. It's a sort of thing that runs in families. You had much better say a severe chill.

JACK.
You are sure a severe chill isn't hereditary, or anything of that kind?

ALGERNON.
Of course it isn't!

JACK.
Very well, then. My poor brother Ernest is carried off suddenly, in Paris, by a severe chill. That gets rid of him.

ALGERNON.
But I thought you said that… Miss Cardew was a little too much interested in your poor brother Ernest? Won't she feel his loss a good deal?

JACK.
Oh, that is all right. Cecily is not a silly romantic girl, I am glad to say. She has got a capital appetite, goes long walks, and pays no attention at all to her lessons.

ALGERNON.
I would rather like to see Cecily.

JACK.
I will take very good care you never do. She is excessively pretty, and she is only just eighteen.

ALGERNON.
Have you told Gwendolen yet that you have an excessively pretty ward who is only just eighteen?

JACK.
Oh! one doesn't blurt these things out to people. Cecily and Gwendolen are perfectly certain to be extremely great friends. I'll bet you anything you like that half an hour after they have met, they will be calling each other sister.

ALGERNON.
Women only do that when they have called each other a lot of other things first. Now, my dear boy, if we want to get a good table at Willis's, we really must go and dress. Do you know it is nearly seven?

JACK.
Oh! It always is nearly seven.

ALGERNON.
Well, I'm hungry.

JACK.
I never knew you when you weren't…

3 – Jack and Gwendolen

Excerpt from Act One

JACK.
Charming day it has been, Miss Fairfax.

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

JACK.
I *do* mean something else.

GWENDOLEN.
I thought so. In fact, I am never wrong.

JACK.
And I would like to be allowed to take advantage of Lady Bracknell's temporary absence . . .

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

JACK.
Miss Fairfax, ever since I met you I have admired you more than any girl… I have ever met since… I met you.

GWENDOLEN.
Yes, I am quite well aware of the 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. Even before I met you I was far from indifferent to you. 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 has reached the provincial pulpits, I am told; and my ideal has always been to love some one of the name of Ernest. There is something in that name that inspires absolute confidence. The moment Algernon first mentioned to me that he had a friend called Ernest, I knew I was destined to love you.

JACK.
You really love me, Gwendolen?

GWENDOLEN.
Passionately!

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

GWENDOLEN.
My own Ernest!

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

GWENDOLEN.
But your name is Ernest.

JACK.
Yes, I know it is. But supposing it was something else? Do you mean to say you couldn't love me then?

GWENDOLEN.
Ah! that is clearly a metaphysical speculation, and like most metaphysical speculations has very little reference at all to the actual facts of real life, as we know them.

JACK.
Personally, darling, to speak quite candidly, I don't much care about the name of Ernest … I don't think the name suits me at all.

GWENDOLEN.
It suits you perfectly. It is a divine name. It has a music of its own. It produces vibrations.

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

GWENDOLEN.
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. The only really safe name is Ernest.

JACK.
Gwendolen, I must get christened at once—I mean we must get married at once. There is no time to be lost.

GWENDOLEN.
Married, Mr. Worthing?

JACK.
Well… surely. You know that I love you, and you led me to believe, Miss Fairfax, that you were not absolutely indifferent to me.

GWENDOLEN.
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 on.

JACK.
Well … may I propose to you now?

GWENDOLEN.
I think it would be an admirable opportunity. And to spare you any possible disappointment, Mr. Worthing, I think it only fair to tell you quite frankly before-hand that I am fully determined to accept you.

JACK.
Gwendolen!

GWENDOLEN.
Yes, Mr. Worthing, what have you got to say to me?

JACK.
You know what I have got to say to you.

GWENDOLEN.
Yes, but you don't say it.

JACK.
Gwendolen, will you marry me?

[***Jack*** *goes on his knees*.]

GWENDOLEN.
Of course I will, darling. 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 any one in the world but you.

GWENDOLEN.
Yes, but men often propose for practice. I know my brother Gerald does. All my girl-friends tell me so. What wonderful eyes you have, Ernest! I hope you will always look at me just like that, especially when there are other people present.

4 – Chasuble and Prism

Excerpt from Act Two

[***Cecily*** *is an invisible part of this cut.* ***Miss Prism*** *rises and advances to* ***Chasuble***, *as* ***Chasuble*** *enters*.]

MISS PRISM.
Dr. Chasuble! This is indeed a pleasure.

CHASUBLE.
And how are we this morning? Miss Prism, you are, I trust, well? And I hope, Cecily, you are not inattentive. Were I fortunate enough to be Miss Prism's pupil, I would hang upon her lips.

[***Miss Prism*** *reacts strongly*.]

I spoke metaphorically.—My metaphor was drawn from bees. Ahem! Mr. Worthing, I suppose, has not returned from town yet?

MISS PRISM.
We do not expect him till Monday afternoon.

CHASUBLE.
Ah yes, he usually likes to spend his Sunday in London. He is not one of those whose sole aim is enjoyment, as, by all accounts, that unfortunate young man his brother seems to be. But I must not disturb Egeria and her pupil any longer.

MISS PRISM.
Egeria? My name is Lætitia, Doctor.

[***Chasuble*** *bows*.]

CHASUBLE.
A classical allusion merely, drawn from the Pagan authors. I shall see you both no doubt at Evensong?

MISS PRISM.
I think, dear Doctor, I will have a stroll with you. I find I have a headache after all, and a walk might do it good.

CHASUBLE.
With pleasure, Miss Prism, with pleasure. We might go as far as the schools and back.

MISS PRISM.
That would be delightful. Cecily, you will read your Political Economy in my absence. The chapter on the Fall of the Rupee you may omit. It is somewhat too sensational. Even these metallic problems have their melodramatic side.

[***Miss Prism*** *walks with* ***Dr. Chasuble***.]

MISS PRISM.
You are too much alone, dear Dr. Chasuble. You should get married. A misanthrope I can understand—a womanthrope, never!

CHASUBLE.
Believe me, I do not deserve so neologistic a phrase. The precept as well as the practice of the Primitive Church was distinctly against matrimony.

MISS PRISM.
That is obviously the reason why the Primitive Church has not lasted up to the present day. And you do not seem to realise, dear Doctor, that by persistently remaining single, a man converts himself into a permanent public temptation. Men should be more careful; this very celibacy leads weaker vessels astray.

CHASUBLE.
But is a man not equally attractive when married?

MISS PRISM.
No married man is ever attractive except to his wife.

CHASUBLE.
And often, I've been told, not even to her.

MISS PRISM.
That depends on the intellectual sympathies of the woman. Maturity can always be depended on. Ripeness can be trusted. Young women are green.

[***Dr. Chasuble*** *starts*.]

I spoke horticulturally. My metaphor was drawn from fruits. But where is Cecily?

CHASUBLE.
Perhaps she has wandered indoors.

5 – Algernon and Cecily

Excerpt from Act Two

[***Cecily*** *takes a card from* ***Merriman*** *and reads it*.]

CECILY.
'Mr. Ernest Worthing, B. 4, The Albany, W.' Uncle Jack's brother! I have never met any really wicked person before. I feel rather frightened. I am so afraid he will look just like every one else.

[*Enter* ***Algernon****, very gay and debonnair*.]

He does!

[***Algernon*** *greets* ***Cecily***.]

ALGERNON.
You are my little cousin Cecily, I'm sure.

CECILY.
You are under some strange mistake. I am not little. In fact, I believe I am more than usually tall for my age. But I am your cousin Cecily. You, I see from your card, are Uncle Jack's brother, my cousin Ernest, my wicked cousin Ernest.

ALGERNON.
Oh! I am not really wicked at all, cousin Cecily. You mustn't think that I am wicked.

CECILY.
If you are not, then you have certainly been deceiving us all in a very inexcusable manner. I hope you have not been leading a double life, pretending to be wicked and being really good all the time. That would be hypocrisy.

ALGERNON.
Oh! Of course I have been rather reckless.

CECILY.
I am glad to hear it.

ALGERNON.
In fact, now you mention the subject, I have been very bad in my own small way.

CECILY.
I don't think you should be so proud of that, though I am sure it must have been very pleasant.

ALGERNON.
It is much pleasanter being here with you.

CECILY.
I can't understand how you are here at all. Uncle Jack won't be back till Monday afternoon.

ALGERNON.
That is a great disappointment. I am obliged to go up by the first train on Monday morning. I have a business appointment that I am anxious… to miss.

CECILY.
Couldn't you miss it anywhere but in London?

ALGERNON.
No: the appointment is in London.

CECILY.
Well, I know, of course, how important it is not to keep a business engagement, if one wants to retain any sense of the beauty of life, but still I think you had better wait till Uncle Jack arrives. I know he wants to speak to you about your emigrating.

ALGERNON.
About my what?

CECILY.
Your emigrating. He has gone up to buy your outfit.

ALGERNON.
I certainly wouldn't let Jack buy my outfit. He has no taste in neckties at all.

CECILY.
I don't think you will require neckties. Uncle Jack is sending you to Australia.

ALGERNON.
Australia! I'd sooner die.

CECILY.
Well, he said at dinner on Wednesday night, that you would have to choose between this world, the next world, and Australia.

ALGERNON.
Oh, well! The accounts I have received of Australia and the next world, are not particularly encouraging. This world is good enough for me, cousin Cecily.

CECILY.
Yes, but are you good enough for it?

ALGERNON.
I'm afraid I'm not that. That is why I want you to reform me. You might make that your mission, if you don't mind, cousin Cecily.

CECILY.
I'm afraid I've no time, this afternoon.

ALGERNON.
Well, would you mind my reforming myself this afternoon?

CECILY.
It is rather Quixotic of you. But I think you should try.

ALGERNON.
I will. I feel better already.

CECILY.
You are looking a little worse.

ALGERNON.
That is because I am hungry.

CECILY.
How thoughtless of me. I should have remembered that when one is going to lead an entirely new life, one requires regular and wholesome meals. Won't you come in?

ALGERNON.
Thank you. Might I have a buttonhole first? I never have any appetite unless I have a buttonhole first. A pink rose.

CECILY.
Why?

ALGERNON.
Because you are like a pink rose, Cousin Cecily.

CECILY.
I don't think it can be right for you to talk to me like that. Miss Prism never says such things to me.

ALGERNON.
Then Miss Prism is a short-sighted old lady. You are the prettiest girl I ever saw.

CECILY.
Miss Prism says that all good looks are a snare.

ALGERNON.
They are a snare that every sensible man would like to be caught in.

CECILY.
Oh, I don't think I would care to catch a sensible man. I shouldn't know what to talk to him about.

6 – Gwendolen and Cecily

Excerpt from Act Two

[*Enter* ***Gwendolen*** *as* ***Merriman*** *exits*. ***Cecily*** *moves to greet her*.]

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

GWENDOLEN.
Cecily Cardew?

[*Moving to her and shaking 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. Pray sit down.

[***Gwendolen*** *remains standing*.]

GWENDOLEN.
I may call you Cecily, may I not?

CECILY.
With pleasure!

GWENDOLEN.
And you will always call me Gwendolen, won't you?

CECILY.
If you wish.

GWENDOLEN.
Then that is all quite settled, is it not?

CECILY.
I hope so.

[*A pause. They both sit down together*.]

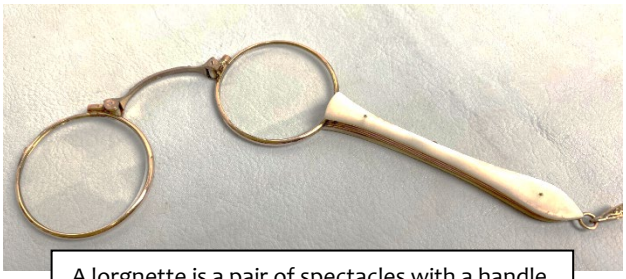
GWENDOLEN.
Perhaps this might be a favourable opportunity for my mentioning who I am. My father is Lord Bracknell. You have never heard of papa, I suppose?

CECILY.
I don't think so.

GWENDOLEN.
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. And certainly once a man begins to neglect his domestic duties he becomes painfully effeminate, does he not? And I don't like that. It makes men so very attractive. Cecily, mamma, whose views on education are remarkably strict, has brought me up to be extremely short-sighted; it is part of her system; so do you mind my looking at you through my glasses?

CECILY.
Oh! not at all, Gwendolen. I am very fond of being looked at.



A lorgnette is a pair of spectacles with a handle

[***Gwendolen*** *carefully examines* ***Cecily*** *through a lorgnette*.]

GWENDOLEN.
You are here on a short visit, I suppose.

CECILY.
Oh no! I live here.

GWENDOLEN.
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.

GWENDOLEN.
Indeed?

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

GWENDOLEN.
Your guardian?

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

GWENDOLEN.
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.

[***Gwendolen*** *rises and goes to* ***Cecily***.]

I am very fond of you, Cecily; I have liked you ever since I met you! But I am bound to state that now that I know that you are Mr. Worthing's ward, I cannot help expressing a wish you were—well, just a little older than you seem to be—and not quite so very alluring in appearance. 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.

GWENDOLEN.
Well, to speak with perfect candour, Cecily, I wish that you were fully forty-two, and more than usually plain for your age. Ernest has a strong upright nature. He is the very soul of truth and honour. Disloyalty would be as impossible to him as deception. But even men of the noblest possible moral character are extremely susceptible to the influence of the physical charms of others. Modern, no less than Ancient History, supplies us with many most painful examples of what I refer to. If it were not so, indeed, History would be quite unreadable.

CECILY.
I beg your pardon, Gwendolen, did you say Ernest?

GWENDOLEN.
Yes.

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

[***Gwendolen*** *sits*.]

GWENDOLEN.
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.

GWENDOLEN.
Ah! that accounts for it. And now that I think of it I have never heard any man mention his brother. The subject seems distasteful to most men. Cecily, you have lifted a load from my mind. I was growing almost anxious. It would have been terrible if any cloud had come across a friendship like ours, would it not? Of course you are quite, quite sure that it is not Mr. Ernest Worthing who is your guardian?

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

GWENDOLEN.
I beg your pardon?

CECILY.
[*Confidingly*.] Dearest Gwendolen, there is no reason why I should make a secret of it to you. Our little county newspaper is sure to chronicle the fact next week. Mr. Ernest Worthing and I are engaged to be married.

[***Gwendolen*** *stands*.]

GWENDOLEN.
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*** *stands*.]

CECILY.
I am afraid you must be under some misconception. Ernest proposed to me exactly ten minutes ago.

[***Cecily*** *shows diary to* ***Gwendolen****, who carefully examines the diary through her lorgnette*.]

GWENDOLEN.
It is certainly very curious, for he asked me to be his wife yesterday afternoon at 5.30. If you would care to verify the incident, pray do so.

[***Gwendolen*** *produces a diary of her own*.]

I never travel without my diary. One should always have something sensational to read in the train. I am so sorry, dear Cecily, if it is any disappointment to you, but I am afraid I have the prior claim.

CECILY.
It would distress me more than I can tell you, dear Gwendolen, if it caused you any mental or physical anguish, but I feel bound to point out that since Ernest proposed to you he clearly has changed his mind.

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

GWENDOLEN.
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.

GWENDOLEN.
I am glad to say that I have never seen a spade. It is obvious that our social spheres have been widely different.