

JACK: Gwendolen! Darling! (JACK leans forward to kiss GWENDOLEN.)

GWENDOLEN: A moment! May I ask if you are engaged to be married to this young lady? (GWENDOLEN points to CECILY.)

JACK: (Laughing.) To dear little Cecily! Of course not! What could have put such an idea into your pretty little head?

GWENDOLEN: Thank you. (GWENDOLEN smiles and offers her cheek to be kissed. JACK kisses her on the cheek quickly.)

CECILY: (Smiling broadly.) I knew there must be some misunderstanding, Miss Fairfax. The gentleman whom you are presently touching is my guardian, Mr. John Worthing.

GWENDOLEN: I beg your pardon?

CECILY: This is Uncle Jack.

GWENDOLEN: (Eyes growing wide and stepping away from JACK.) Jack! Oh!

(Enter ALGERNON from DSL.)

CECILY: Here is Ernest.

ALGERNON: (Goes straight over to CECILY without noticing anyone else.) My own love! (ALGERNON leans forward to kiss CECILY.)

CECILY: A moment, Ernest! May I ask you—are you engaged to be married to this young lady? (CECILY points to GWENDOLEN.)

ALGERNON: (Looking around.) To what young lady? Good heavens! Gwendolen!

CECILY: Yes, to good heavens Gwendolen.

ALGERNON: (Laughing.) Of course not! What could have put such an idea into your pretty little head?

CECILY: Thank you. (CECILY smiles and offers her cheek to be kissed. ALGERNON kisses her on the cheek quickly.)

GWENDOLEN: I felt there was some slight error, Miss Cardew. The gentleman who is now embracing you is my cousin, Mr. Algernon Moncrieff.

CECILY: (Breaking away from ALGERNON.) Algernon Moncrieff! Oh! (CECILY and GWENDOLEN move towards each other CS and put their arms round each other's waists as if for protection.)

CECILY: Are you called Algernon?

ALGERNON: (Glumly.) I cannot deny it.

CECILY: Oh!

GWENDOLEN: Is your name really John?

JACK: (*Indignantly.*) I could deny it if I liked. I could deny anything if I liked. (*JACK looks at the ground and scuffles his feet.*) But my name is John. It has been for years.

GWENDOLEN: Oh!

CECILY: (*To GWENDOLEN.*) A gross deception has been practiced on both of us.

GWENDOLEN: My poor wounded Cecily!

CECILY: My sweet wronged Gwendolen!

GWENDOLEN: (*Holding CECILY by the shoulders and gazing solemnly into her eyes.*) You will call me sister, will you not? (*CECILY nods and hugs GWENDOLEN.*)

CECILY: There is just one question I would like to be allowed to ask my guardian.

GWENDOLEN: An admirable idea!

CECILY: (*To JACK.*) 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.*) Gwendolen—Cecily—it is very painful for me to be forced to speak the truth. 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. (*JACK nods emphatically and smiles.*)

CECILY: (*Surprised.*) No brother at all?

JACK: None!

GWENDOLEN: A brother of any kind?

JACK: Never. Not of any kind.

GWENDOLEN: 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 suddenly to find herself in, is it?

GWENDOLEN: Let us go into the house. They will hardly venture to come after us there.

(*GWENDOLEN and CECILY exit DSR, glaring at JACK and ALGERNON.*)

JACK: (*Turning angrily to ALGERNON.*) This ghastly state of things is what you call Bunburying, I suppose?

ALGERNON: Yes, and a perfectly wonderful Bunbury it is. (ALGERNON sits in CECILY'S empty chair SL and props his feet up on the table.)

The most wonderful Bunbury I have ever had in my life.

JACK: Well, you've no right whatsoever to Bunbury here.

ALGERNON: That is absurd. One has a right to Bunbury anywhere one chooses. Every serious Bunburyist knows that.

JACK: Serious Bunburyist! Oh, for goodness sake!

ALGERNON: Well, one must be serious about something, if one wants to take any satisfaction from life. I happen to be serious about Bunburying. What on earth you are serious about I haven't got the remotest idea.

JACK: (*Leaning over GWENDOLEN'S empty chair towards ALGERNON.*) 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, dear Algy. And a very good thing too.

ALGERNON: 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 custom was. And not a bad thing either.

JACK: (*Ignoring ALGERNON.*) As for your conduct towards 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.

ALGERNON: Well, I can see no possible defense at all for your deceiving a brilliant, clever, experienced young lady like Miss Fairfax. To say nothing of the fact that she is practically my cousin.

JACK: I simply wanted to be engaged to Gwendolen. I love her.

ALGERNON: Well, I simply wanted to be engaged to Cecily. I adore her. (ALGERNON stamps his feet.)

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

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

JACK: Well, that is no business of yours.

ALGERNON: If it *was* my business, I wouldn't talk about it. (ALGERNON leans forward and takes two muffins from the muffin dish.) It is very vulgar to talk about one's own business. (ALGERNON takes a large bite.) People only do that at dinner parties when they are otherwise bored to death.

JACK: How can you sit there, calmly eating muffins when we are in this horrible trouble? You seem to me to be perfectly heartless.

ALGERNON: 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. (ALGERNON *takes another bite.*)

JACK: I say it's perfectly heartless your eating muffins at all, under the circumstances.

ALGERNON: When I am in trouble, eating is the only thing that consoles me.

Jack: What's your excuse the rest of the time?

ALGERNON: (*Ignoring JACK.*) Indeed, when I am in really great trouble I refuse everything except food and drink. At the present moment I am eating muffins because I am unhappy. Besides, I am particularly fond of muffins. (ALGERNON *takes another muffin and bites into it ferociously.*)

JACK: Well, that is no reason why you should eat them all in that greedy way. (JACK *picks up the muffin dish, takes one and eats it, turning away from ALGERNON.*)

ALGERNON: (*Picking up a covered dish and holding it out to JACK.*) I wish you would have tea-cake instead. I don't like tea-cake.

JACK: Good heavens! I suppose a man may eat his own muffins in his own garden.

ALGERNON: But you just said it was perfectly heartless to eat muffins.

JACK: I said it was perfectly heartless of *you* to eat muffins. That is a very different thing. These are *my* muffins.

ALGERNON: That may be. But I'm still hungry. (ALGERNON *seizes the muffin dish from JACK.*)

JACK: Algy, I wish to goodness you would go!

ALGERNON: (*Waving a muffin at JACK.*) You can't possibly ask me to go without having some dinner first. It's absurd. Besides I have just made arrangements with Father Chasuble to be christened at a quarter to six under the name of Ernest.

JACK: My dear fellow, the sooner you give up that nonsense the better. I made arrangements this morning with Father Chasuble to be christened myself at 5:30, and I naturally will take the name of Ernest. Gwendolen would wish it. We can't both be christened Ernest.

ALGERNON: It seems to me we shall. (ALGERNON *pours himself a cup of tea and drinks it.*)

JACK: That's absurd. Besides, I have a perfect right to be christened if I like. There is no evidence at all that I have ever been christened by anybody. I

should think it extremely probable I never was, and so does Father Chasuble. (*JACK leans across the table toward ALGERNON.*) You have been christened already.

ALGERNON: Yes, but not for years.

JACK: Yes, but you *have* been christened. That is the important thing.

ALGERNON: Quite so. So I know my constitution can stand it. If you are not quite sure about your ever having been christened, I must say I think it rather dangerous your venturing on it now. It might make you very unwell. You can hardly have forgotten that your dear younger brother was very nearly carried off this week in Paris by a severe chill.

JACK: Yes, but you said yourself that a severe chill was not hereditary.

ALGERNON: It usen't to be, I know—but it might be now. Science is always making wonderful improvements in things.

JACK: (*Snatching the muffin dish away from ALGERNON.*) Oh, that is nonsense; you are always talking nonsense.

ALGERNON: Jack, you are at the muffins again! (*ALGERNON leaps to his feet.*) I wish you wouldn't. There are only two left. (*ALGERNON reaches out and takes the muffins from the dish as JACK tries to pull the dish away from ALGERNON'S reach.*)

JACK: Blast it, Algy!

ALGERNON: I told you I was particularly fond of muffins. You have the tea-cake.

JACK: But I hate tea-cake.

ALGERNON: Why on earth then do you allow tea-cake to be served up for your guests? What ideas you have of hospitality!

JACK: Algernon! I have already told you to go. I don't want you here. (*JACK slams the muffin dish down on the table.*) Why haven't you gone?

ALGERNON: I haven't quite finished my tea yet! And I've still one muffin left. (*JACK groans, and sinks into the chair SR. ALGERNON continues eating.*)

(Lights down, curtain close.)