

JOHN WORTHING*

(*aka Ernest or Jack Worthing)

(With some discomfort)

...I would like to take advantage of your mother's....uh, Lady Bracknell's, temporary absence. Miss Fairfax, ever since I met you I have admired you more than any girl...I have ever met...since...I met you.

(relief) Really? You love me, Gwendolyn? Darling! You don't know how happy you've made me. But you don't really mean to say that you couldn't love me...if my name wasn't Ernest? But supposing it was something else? I don't much care for the name of Ernest...there are lots of other much nicer names. I think...Jack, for instance, is a charming name. (to himself) Oh, my... I must get christened at once.

ALGERNON MONCRIEFF

(Jack's best friend, Algernon, is very aware of his good looks, fashionable clothes and stance. He is comically spoiled by everyone. Very in debt. Too rich to bother paying his bills. A playboy and womanizer. He loves to exasperate everyone—except Cecily. In this scene he is meeting the totally adorable sweet young thing for the first time—and is smitten.)

You are my little cousin, Cecily. Yes, I am your Cousin Ernest, but not your wicked Cousin Ernest. I am not wicked at all. You mustn't think me wicked. (she's a little disappointed) Of course I have been rather reckless. Yes, now that you mention it, I have been very bad in my own small way. But it's much pleasanter being here with you. (the fox flattering the chicken) I want you to reform me. You might make that your mission, if you don't mind. Why, yes, I'd love some dinner, but might I have a button-hole (flower) first? I never have any appetite unless I have a button-hole first. No, not a carnation, a pink rose, because you are like a pink rose, Cecily. You are the prettiest girl I've ever seen.

GWENDOLYN FAIRFAX

(Gwendolyn is the ultimate fashion plate. She is the authority in all things. She must exude a sultry confidence. In this scene, Ernest (Jack) has just clumsily told her he loves her.)

Yes, I am quite aware that you love me. 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. We live, as I hope you know, in an age of ideals. And my ideal has always been to love someone 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.

CECILY CARDEW

(She is Jack's 18-year-old ward. The butler hands her a card of introduction. It is the man she's always wanted to meet: Jack's wicked brother, "Ernest". She's been so protected that she's in love with him already, as he's known as "wicked".)

I have never met any really wicked person before. (Really feel it) I feel rather frightened. I am so afraid he will look just like everyone else.

(He enters. He's dashing)

I see from your card that you are Uncle Jack's brother, my cousin Ernest. My wicked cousin, Ernest. Well, 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.

I don't think you should be so proud of it as that, (she's hooked) though I am sure it must have been very pleasant.

LADY BRACKNELL

(In this scene, she has just been told that her only daughter fancies herself engaged to Ernest Worthing and the authoritative Lady Bracknell sets them both straight.)

Pardon me, Gwendolyn, you are not engaged to anyone. When you do become engaged to someone, I or your father, will inform you of the fact. An engagement should come upon a young girl as a surprise, pleasant or unpleasant as the case may be. It is hardly a matter that a girl could be allowed to arrange for herself. And now I have a few questions to put to you, Mr. Worthing. While I am making these inquiries, you, Gwendolyn, will wait for me in the carriage below. (She argues) In the carriage, Gwendolyn! (She blows a kiss to him) Gwendolyn, the carriage! (She exits)

You may take a seat, Mr. Worthing. I feel obliged to tell you that you are not on my list of eligible young men, and I have the same list as the Duchess of Bolton. However, I am quite ready to enter your name should your answers be what a really affectionate mother requires. Do you smoke? I'm glad to hear it. A man should always have an occupation of some kind. How old are you?

MISS PRISM:

(A persnickety old spinster, Miss Prism is Cecily's governess. But she is enamored of the Reverend Chasuble with whom she is flirting in this scene. Please practice saying his name: It is: "Chas. you .bell" The Reverend Dr. CHAS. you.bell.)

You are too much alone, Dr. Chasuble, you should be married. You do not seem to realize that by persistently remaining single, a man converts himself into a permanent public temptation. Men should be more careful.

Oh, no, a married man is never attractive...except to his wife. And often, I've been told, not even to her. (Picks up an apple) But maturity can always be depended on. Young women are far too green. (Embarrassed) Um, I spoke Horticulturally, of course. My metaphor was drawn from fruits.

DR. CHASUBLE:

And how are we this morning, Miss Prism? You are, I trust, well? Miss Cecily, I hope you are not being inattentive to your lessons and to dear Miss Prism. (She confesses that she is.) That is strange. Were I fortunate enough to be Miss Prism's pupil, I would hang upon her lips. (Embarrassed, he clears throat.) I spoke metaphorically...(All 3 are now embarrassed)...Um, Mr. Worthing has not returned from town yet?

LANE/MERRIMAN:

(Need two different personalities in these two servants. Standard British accent for both. Lane is in Act I and Merriman is in Act II.)

Time to rise, sir. It's a lovely day. Remember your Aunt Augusta will be here shortly, the usual overdue bills are on the tray, and if you expect your finances to be replenished, I would advise you to "Rise and Shine" sir.

I have anticipated your condition and prepared your usual special tomato juice, coffee and seltzer. And, you may need the aspirin powders after you read what they've said about you in the morning paper. In my day we had the rack, sir, but these days we have the press.