

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

(*Enter MERRIMAN, followed by the footman. He carries a salver, table cloth, and plate stand. CECILY is about to retort. The presence of the servants exercises a restraining influence, under which both girls chafe.*)

MERRIMAN. Shall I lay tea here as usual, Miss?

CECILY. (*sternly, in a calm voice*) Yes, as usual. (*MERRIMAN begins to clear and lay cloth. A long pause. CECILY and GWENDOLEN glare at each other.*)

GWENDOLEN. Are there many interesting walks in the vicinity, Miss Cardew?

CECILY. Oh yes! a great many. From the top of one of the hills quite close one can see five counties.

GWENDOLEN. Five counties! I don't think I should like that. I hate crowds.

CECILY. (*sweetly*) I suppose that is why you live in town?

GWENDOLEN. (*Bites her lip and beats her foot nervously with her parasol. Looking round.*) Quite a well-kept garden this is, Miss Cardew.

CECILY. So glad you like it, Miss Fairfax.

GWENDOLEN. I had no idea there were any flowers in the country.

CECILY. Oh, flowers are as common here, Miss Fairfax, as people are in London.

GWENDOLEN. Personally I cannot understand how anybody manages to exist in the country, if anybody who is anybody does. The country always bores me to death.

CECILY. Ah! This is what the newspapers call agricultural depression, is it not? I believe the aristocracy are suffering very much from it just at present. It is almost an epidemic amongst them, I have been told. May I offer you some tea, Miss Fairfax?

GWENDOLEN. (*with elaborate politeness*) Thank you. (*aside*) Detestible girl! But I require tea!

CECILY. (*sweetly*) Sugar?

GWENDOLEN. (*superciliously*) No, thank you. Sugar is not fashionable any more.

CECILY. (*Looks angrily at GWENDOLEN, takes up the tongs and puts four lumps of sugar into the cup. Severely.*) Cake or bread and butter?

GWENDOLEN. (*in a bored manner*) Bread and butter, please. Cake is rarely seen at the best houses nowadays.

CECILY. (*Cuts a very large slice of cake and puts it on the tray.*) Hand that to Miss Fairfax. (*MERRIMAN does so, and goes out with footman.*)

GWENDOLEN. (*Drinks the tea and makes a grimace. Puts*

*down cup at once, reaches out her hand to the bread and butter, looks at it, and finds it is cake. Rises in indignation.*) You have filled my tea with lumps of sugar, and though I asked most distinctly for bread and butter, you have given me cake. I am known for the gentleness of my disposition, and the extraordinary sweetness of my nature, but I warn you, Miss Cardew, you may go too far.

CECILY. *(rising)* To save my poor, innocent, trusting boy from the machinations of any other girl there are no lengths to which I would not go.

GWENDOLEN. From the moment I saw you I distrusted you. I felt you were false and deceitful. I am never deceived in such matters. My first impressions of people are invariably right.

CECILY. 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.

*(Enter JACK.)*

GWENDOLEN. *(catching sight of him)* Ernest! My own Ernest!

JACK. Gwendolen! Darling! *(Offers to kiss her.)*

GWENDOLEN. *(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?

GWENDOLEN. Thank you. You may. *(Offers her cheek.)*

CECILY. *(very sweetly)* I knew there must be some misunderstanding, Miss Fairfax. The gentleman whose arm is at present around your waist is my dear guardian, Mr. John Worthing.

GWENDOLEN. I beg your pardon?

CECILY. This is Uncle Jack.

GWENDOLEN. *(receding)* Jack! Oh!

*(Enter ALGERNON.)*

CECILY. Here is Ernest.

ALGERNON. *(Goes straight over to CECILY without noticing anyone else.)* My own love! *(Offers to kiss her.)*

CECILY. *(drawing back)* A moment, Ernest! May I ask you — are you engaged to be married to this young lady?

ALGERNON. *(looking round)* To what young lady? Good heavens! Gwendolen!

CECILY. Yes! To good heavens, Gwendolen, I mean to Gwendolen.

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

CECILY. Thank you. *(presenting her cheek to be kissed)* You may. *(ALGERNON kisses her.)*

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! *(The two girls move toward each other and put their arms round each other's waist as if for protection.)*

CECILY. Are you called Algernon?

ALGERNON. I cannot deny it.

CECILY. Oh!

GWENDOLEN. 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 GWENDOLEN*) A gross deception has been practiced on both of us.

GWENDOLEN. My poor wounded Cecily!

CECILY. My sweet wronged Gwendolen!

GWENDOLEN. (*slowly and seriously*) You will call me sister, will you not? (*They embrace. JACK and ALGERNON groan and walk up and down.*)

CECILY. (*rather brightly*) There is just one question I would like to be allowed to ask my guardian.

GWENDOLEN. An admirable idea! 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*) Gwendolen — Cecily — it is very painful for me to be forced to speak the truth. 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!

GWENDOLEN. (*severely*) Had you never a brother of any kind?

JACK. (*pleasantly*) Never. Not even of any kind.

GWENDOLEN. I am afraid it is quite clear, Cecily, that neither of us is engaged to be married to any one.

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.

CECILY. No, men are so cowardly, aren't they? (*They retire into the house with scornful looks.*)

JACK. This ghastly state of things is what you call Bunburying, I suppose?

ALGERNON. Yes, and a perfectly wonderful Bunbury it is. 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! Good heavens!

ALGERNON. Well, one must be serious about something, if one wants to have any amusement in life. I happen to be serious about Bunburying. What on earth you are serious about I haven't got the remotest idea. About everything, I should fancy. You have such an absolutely trivial nature.

JACK. Well, the only small satisfaction I have in the whole of this wretched business is that your friend Bun-