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*Dramatic Publishing*

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# **THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST**

**OSCAR WILDE**

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**THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY**

# The Importance of Being Earnest

*Comedy. By Oscar Wilde.*

*Cast: 5m., 4w., 1 extra.* Oscar Wilde's classic is a delight from the first cucumber sandwich on, as Jack's double life catches up with him. The problems are resolved in an extremely charming and quite unexpected way as Jack and Algernon discover the importance of being earnest while answering to the name of Ernest. *Two simple int. sets., one ext. set.*

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A Comedy in Three Acts

OSCAR WILDE'S

The Importance of  
Being Earnest



**THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY**

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# The Importance of Being Earnest

*A Comedy in Three Acts*

FOR FIVE MEN AND FOUR WOMEN

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## CHARACTERS

JOHN WORTHING, J. P. (JACK) . . . . . *of the Manor House*  
ALGERNON MONCRIEFF . . . . . *his friend*  
REVEREND CANON CHASUBLE, D.D. . . . . *rector of Woolton*  
MERRIMAN . . . . . *butler to Jack*  
LANE . . . . . *Algy's manservant*  
LADY BRACKNELL . . . . . *a woman of importance*  
GWENDOLINE FAIRFAX . . . . . *her daughter*  
CECILY CARDEW . . . . . *Jack's ward*  
MISS PRISM . . . . . *Cecily's tutor*  
SERVANT . . . . . *bit part (no lines)*

PLACE: *England.*

TIME: *Around 1895.*

## SYNOPSIS

ACT ONE: *The sitting-room in Algernon's flat in Half Moon Street, London. Teatime.*

ACT TWO: *The garden at the Manor House, Woolton, Hertfordshire, the next afternoon.*

ACT THREE: *The morning-room at the Manor House, immediately following Act Two.*

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## NOTES ON CHARACTERS AND COSTUMES

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**ALGY:** He is a dashing man-about-town, good-looking, charming and thoroughly sophisticated. His taste in clothes is impeccable.

**JACK:** He, too, is a good-looking man-about-town, but a little more serious-minded, and he lacks some of Algy's brittle sophistication. His clothes are in the height of fashion. In Act Two he is dressed entirely in black.

**LANE:** Lane is the perfect manservant, unquestioning and never smiling. He wears simple clothes, befitting his position.

**LADY BRACKNELL:** She is a woman of ample proportions, the ultimate in a dowager of high society. Lady Bracknell never lacks for words, and she makes every word count, savoring each one down to the last syllable. She dresses richly though somewhat elaborately.

**GWENDOLINE:** Gwendoline is an attractive, charming, straightforward girl who is in love with Jack and determined to marry him in spite of all obstacles. She dresses smartly in the fashion of the period.

**MISS PRISM:** She is a plain, spinsterly-looking woman in her fifties, whose only passion, apparently, is a devotion to her work. Her clothes are severe and unadorned.

**CECILY:** She is just eighteen, pretty, impressionable and romantically inclined. She dresses simply, as befitting a young girl not yet formally introduced to society.

**MERRIMAN:** He is the perfect butler, efficient and unassuming. He wears a butler's uniform.

**CHASUBLE:** He is a slightly pompous, stuffy man with a romantic eye for Miss Prism. He is dressed as a man of the clergy.

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## PROPERTIES

**GENERAL:** ACT ONE: bell cord, accessories for fireplace, round table and two chairs, small sofa or love-seat, serving table, overstuffed lounging chair, small stand, writing desk and chair, wastebasket, rugs, paintings, miscellaneous bric-a-brac, etc.; tea things, including cups, saucers, plates, spoons, sugar, cream, napkins on table C; two plates of sandwiches on serving table U L; bowl of flowers on mantel; pencil, railway guide and other accessories on desk. ACT TWO: small settee, table, round table with three chairs, two basket chairs, small table or stand between basket chairs, flowering shrubs and plants in pots; several books, scissors, embroidery for Miss Prism, box containing letters tied with blue ribbon on table R C; diary and pencil on settee. ACT THREE: drapes on window, round table and two chairs, fireplace accessories, small sofa, writing desk and chair, accessories for desk, large comfortable chair.

**LANE:** Cigarette case (card inside) on salver, teapot, two letters on salver.

**GWENDOLINE:** Handkerchief, notebook and pencil in handbag, lorgnette, diary in handbag.

**LADY BRACKNELL:** Notebook and pencil, watch.

**MISS PRISM:** Book.

**CECILY:** Watering can, ring.

**JACK:** Long white handkerchief, black leather handbag.

**MERRIMAN:** Card on salver, tea cloth and salver.

**ALGY:** Watch.

**CHASUBLE:** Watch.

**SERVANT:** Tray with tea things, including cups, saucers, spoons, sugar tongs, plates, napkins, sugar, cream, dish of butter and butter knife, plate of tea-cake and another of bread-and-butter sandwiches and muffins.

## PRODUCTION NOTES

**STAGING:** Staging of "The Importance of Being Earnest" can be simple or elaborate (in the spirit and décor of the times), as desired. The sparkling, enduring lines and the



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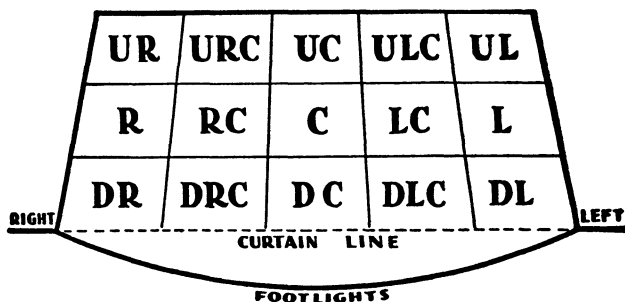
almost classic comic situations will carry the play regardless. While the action calls for three sets, this need not present any difficult problems. All three sets can be staged in curtains. If other scenery is used, entrances in all three scenes have been planned so as to bring them in the same relative positions in each scene. Hence, one basic set can be used for Act One and Act Three. The door *L* becomes a window in Act Three, and the same archway *U R* can be used for both acts. To simplify the staging further, all entrances in Act Two are made from *R* and *L* stage. Many of the same pieces of furniture can be used in all acts by using slip covers for one scene and removing them for the next. The fireplace *U C* in Act One is the same fireplace in Act Three, with the addition of a bit of drapery tacked along the edge of the mantel and different objects substituted on top of the mantel.

**TEMPO:** Nothing adds more to the polish of a production than the quick picking up of cues. Unless there is a definite reason for a pause, train your actors to come in with their speeches "on the heels," so to speak, of the preceding speeches. When a production lags, audience interest likewise will lag.

It is always advisable during the last week of rehearsals to hold one or more sessions during which the actors merely sit around in a circle and go through lines only with the express purpose of snapping up cues.

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## CHART OF STAGE POSITIONS



### STAGE POSITIONS

*Upstage* means away from the footlights, *downstage* means toward the footlights, and *right* and *left* are used with reference to the actor as he faces the audience. R means *right*, L means *left*, U means *up*, D means *down*, C means *center*, and these abbreviations are used in combination, as: U R for *up right*, R C for *right center*, D L C for *down left center*, etc. One will note that a position designated on the stage refers to a general territory, rather than to a given point.

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NOTE: Before starting rehearsals, chalk off your stage or rehearsal space as indicated above in the *Chart of Stage Positions*. Then teach your actors the meanings and positions of these fundamental terms of stage movement by having them walk from one position to another until they are familiar with them. The use of these abbreviated terms in directing the play saves time, speeds up rehearsals, and reduces the amount of explanation the director has to give to his actors.



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# ACT ONE

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**SCENE:** *The scene is the sitting-room of Algy's flat in Half Moon Street. The room is tastefully and somewhat artistically furnished. An archway U R leads to the outer hall. Upstage of this arch is a bell cord. In the L wall, a door leads to the other rooms in the flat. There is a fireplace U C with the usual accessories. At C stage is a round table with comfortable chairs on either side of it. A small sofa or love-seat is R C, at a slight angle toward C stage. Upstage of the door L is a serving table. At D L stage is an overstuffed lounging chair with a small stand left of it. There is a writing desk D R with a chair in front of it and a wastebasket at the downstage end. Rugs, several good paintings and the usual bric-a-brac, including a few trophies, complete the setting.]*

**AT RISE OF CURTAIN:** *Just before the curtain rises, piano music is heard off L. When the curtain rises, LANE is arranging afternoon tea on the table C. After a few moments the piano-playing stops and ALGY saunters in L.]*

ALGY [*crossing L C*]. Did you hear what I was playing, Lane?

LANE [*not pausing in his work*]. I didn't think it polite to listen, sir.

ALGY [*sbrugging*]. I'm sorry for that. [*Comes left of table.*]

Have you got the cucumber sandwiches cut for Lady Bracknell?

LANE [*crossing to table U L, returning to table C with plate of sandwiches*]. Yes, sir.

ALGY [*taking one or two off plate, crossing to sofa, sitting*].

Oh, by the way, Lane, I see from your book that on Thursday night, when Lord Shoreham and Mr. Worthing were

Page 10 The Importance of Being Earnest Act I

dining with me, eight bottles of champagne are entered as having been consumed. [*Nibbles on sandwich.*]

LANE [*arranging plate of sandwiches on table*]. Yes, sir—eight bottles and a pint.

ALGY. Why is it that at a bachelor's establishment the servants invariably drink the champagne? [*Glances over at LANE.*] 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.

ALGY. Good heavens! Is marriage so demoralizing as that?

LANE [*gravely*]. I believe it *is* a very pleasant state, sir. [*Crosses to table U L for another plate of sandwiches, which he places on table C.*] 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 the young person.

ALGY [*rising, moving D L, still nibbling*]. I don't know that I am much interested in your family life, Lane.

LANE. No, sir. [*Crosses U C, brings small bowl of flowers from mantel and places it on table C.*] It is not a very interesting subject. I never think of it myself.

ALGY. Very natural, I am sure. [*Bell rings off U R.*] The bell, Lane.

LANE. Yes, sir. [*Goes out U R.*]

ALGY [*sitting D L, continuing to nibble sandwiches*]. Lane's views on marriage seem somewhat lax. Really, if the lower orders don't set us a good example, what on earth is the use of them? They seem, as a class, to have absolutely no sense of their moral responsibility.

[*LANE enters U R and pauses upstage of entrance.*]

LANE [*announcing*]. Mr. Ernest Worthing.

[*JACK enters U R and comes down in front of the sofa. LANE goes out U R.*]

Act I     The Importance of Being Earnest     Page 11

ALGY [*rising, moving to left of table c.*]. How do you do, my dear Ernest? What brings you up to town?

JACK. Oh, pleasure, pleasure! What else should bring one anywhere? [*Crosses to desk D R, tossing hat down.*] Eating, as usual, I see, Algy!

ALGY [*stiffly*]. I believe it *is* customary in good society to take some slight refreshment at five o'clock. Where have you been since last Thursday? [*Sits left of table c.*]

JACK. Oh, in the country.

ALGY. What on earth do you do there?

JACK [*pulling off his gloves*]. When one is in town one amuses oneself. When one is in the country one amuses other people. It is excessively boring. [*Tosses gloves on desk.*]

ALGY. And who are the people you amuse?

JACK [*airily*]. Oh, neighbors, neighbors!

ALGY. Got nice neighbors in your part of Shropshire?

JACK [*coming right of table c.*]. Perfectly horrid! Never speak to any of them.

ALGY [*helping himself to more cucumber sandwiches from plate*]. How immensely you must amuse them. By the way, Shropshire *is* your county?

JACK. Eh? Shropshire? Yes, of course. [*Scrutinizes table c.*] Hallo! Why all these cups? Why cucumber sandwiches? Who is coming to tea?

ALGY. Oh, merely Aunt Augusta and Gwendoline.

JACK. How perfectly delightful!

ALGY. Yes, that is all very well, but I am afraid Aunt Augusta won't quite approve of your being here.

JACK [*sitting right of table*]. May I ask why?

ALGY. My dear fellow, the way you flirt with Gwendoline is perfectly disgraceful. It is almost as bad as the way Gwendoline flirts with you.

JACK [*staunchly*]. I am in love with Gwendoline. I have come up to town expressly to propose to her.

ALGY. I thought you had come up for pleasure? I call that business.

Page 12 The Importance of Being Earnest Act I

JACK [*half turning his back on ALGY*]. How utterly unromantic you are!

ALGY [*between bites of cucumber sandwiches*]. I really don't see anything romantic in proposing. It is very romantic to be in love. But there is nothing romantic about a definite proposal. Why, one may be accepted. [*An afterthought.*] One usually is, I believe. Then the excitement is all over. The very essence of romance is uncertainty. [*JACK makes as if to take a cucumber sandwich. ALGY takes up plate and puts it on his knee.*] Please don't touch the cucumber sandwiches. They are ordered specially for Aunt Augusta. [*Takes one and eats it.*]

JACK. Well, you have been eating them all the time.

ALGY. That is quite a different matter. She is my aunt. [*Pushes plate of bread-and-butter sandwiches toward JACK.*] Have some bread and butter. The bread and butter is for Gwendoline. Gwendoline is devoted to bread and butter.

JACK [*taking plate and placing it on his knee, and then starting to eat a sandwich*]. And very good bread and butter it is, too.

ALGY. Well, my dear fellow, you need not eat it as if you were going to eat it all. You behave as if you were married to her already. You are not married to her already, and I don't think you ever will be.

JACK. Why on earth do you say that?

ALGY. Well, in the first place, girls never marry the men they flirt with. Girls don't think it right.

JACK. Oh, that's nonsense! [*Both men eat sandwiches as scene continues.*]

ALGY. It isn't. It is a great truth. It accounts for the extraordinary number of bachelors that one sees all over town. In the second place, I don't give my consent.

JACK. *Your* consent!

ALGY. My dear fellow, Gwendoline is my first cousin; and before I allow you to marry her, you will have to clear up the whole question of Cecily. [*Rises, crosses UR and pulls bell cord.*]

Act I    The Importance of Being Earnest    Page 13

JACK. Cecily! What on earth do you mean? What do you mean, Algy, by Cecily? I don't know anyone of the name of Cecily.

[LANE enters U R.]

ALGY. Lane, bring me that cigarette case Mr. Worthing left in the smoking-room the last time he dined here.

LANE. Yes, sir. [*Goes out U R. ALGY comes down in front of sofa.*]

JACK. Do you mean to say you have had my cigarette case all this time? I wish to goodness you had let me know. I have been writing frantic letters to Scotland Yard about it. I was nearly offering a large reward.

ALGY. Well, I wish you *would* offer one. I happen to be more than usually hard up.

[LANE enters U R with cigarette case on a salver.]

JACK. There is no good offering a large reward now that the thing is found. [*LANE comes down to ALGY. JACK rises and moves toward them, but ALGY quickly takes case and moves L C. LANE goes out U R again.*]

ALGY. I think it rather mean of you, Ernest, I must say. [*Opens case and examines it.*] However, it makes no matter, for now that I look at the inscription inside, I find the thing isn't yours after all. [*Turns away.*]

JACK [*moving toward him*]. Of course it's mine. You have seen me with it a hundred times, and you have no right whatsoever to read what is written inside. It is a very ungentlemanly thing to read a private cigarette case.

ALGY [*turning to JACK*]. Yes, but this is not your cigarette case. This case is a present from someone of the name of Cecily, and you said you didn't know anyone of that name.

JACK [*finally admitting*]. Well, if you want to know, Cecily happens to be my aunt.

ALGY [*unbelievably, moving D L*]. Your aunt!

JACK. Yes. Charming old lady she is, too. Lives at Tunbridge



Wells. [*Moves to him.*] Just give it back to me, Algy!  
[*Tries to take case.*]

ALGY [*slipping past him, retreating behind sofa*]. But why does she call herself little Cecily, if she is your aunt and lives at Tunbridge Wells? [*Reading from case.*] "From little Cecily, with her fondest love."

JACK [*moving to front of sofa, kneeling upon it*]. My dear fellow, what on earth is there in *that*? Some aunts are tall, some aunts are not tall. That is a matter that surely an aunt may be allowed to decide for herself. *You* seem to think that every aunt should be exactly like your aunt! [*Makes second grab for case.*] That is absurd! For heaven's sake, give me back my cigarette case. [*Bends across sofa.*]

ALGY [*keeping out of reach*]. Yes. But why does your aunt call you her uncle? "From little Cecily, with her fondest love to her dear Uncle Jack." [JACK *gradually moves around right end of sofa*. ALGY *gradually moves toward L C stage.*] There is no objection, I admit, to an aunt being a small aunt; but why an aunt, no matter what her size may be, should call her own nephew her uncle, I can't quite make out. [JACK *moves behind sofa toward L C now.*] Besides, your name isn't Jack at all. It is Ernest.

JACK. It isn't Ernest, it's Jack!

ALGY [*moving D L*]. You always told me it was Ernest. I have introduced you to everyone as Ernest. You answer to the name of Ernest. You look as if your name was Ernest. You are the most earnest-looking person I ever saw in my life. It is perfectly absurd, your saying that your name isn't Ernest. It's on your cards. Here is one of them. [*Takes it from case.*] "Mr. Ernest Worthing, B4, The Albany." I'll keep this as a proof that your name is Ernest if ever you attempt to deny it to me, or to Gwendoline, or to anyone else. [*Puts card in pocket.*]

JACK [*backing down*]. Well, my name is Ernest in town and Jack in the country. And the cigarette case was given me in the country. [*Sits left of table C.*]

ALGY. Yes, but that does not account for the fact that your

Act I      The Importance of Being Earnest      Page 15

small Aunt Cecily who lives at Tunbridge Wells calls you her dear uncle. [*Puts case behind back as he moves toward JACK.*] Now, tell me the whole thing. I may mention that I have always suspected *you* of being a confirmed and secret Bunburyist, and I am quite sure of it now.

JACK [*irritably*]. Bunburyist! What on earth do you mean by a Bunburyist?

ALGY [*moving above table to right of it*]. I'll reveal to you the meaning of that incomparable expression as soon as you are kind enough to inform me why you are Ernest in town and Jack in the country.

JACK. Well, produce my cigarette case first.

ALGY. Here it is. [*Hands him case.*] Now, produce your explanation. [*Crosses and sits on left arm of sofa.*]

JACK. Well, old Mr. Thomas Cardew, who adopted me when I was a little boy, made me, in his will, guardian to his granddaughter, Miss Cecily Cardew. Cecily, who addresses me as her uncle—[*Pauses, then looks directly at ALGY.*]—from motives of respect that you could not possibly appreciate, lives at my place in the country, under the charge of her admirable governess, Miss Prism.

ALGY [*interested, rising, moving toward table c*]. Where is that place in the country, by the way?

JACK. That is nothing to you, dear boy. You are not going to be invited. I may tell you candidly that the place is not in Shropshire.

ALGY. I suspected that, my dear fellow. I have Bunburied all over Shropshire on two separate occasions. Now go on. Why are you Ernest in town and Jack in the country? [*Returns and sits on arm of sofa again.*]

JACK. My dear Algy, when one is placed in the position of guardian, one has to adopt a very high moral tone on all subjects. It's one's duty to do so. And as a high moral tone can hardly be said to conduce very much to either one's health or happiness, in order to get up to town I have always pretended to have a younger brother of the name of Ernest, who lives at the Albany, and gets into the most

dreadful scrapes. There, my dear Algy, is the whole truth, pure and simple.

ALGY. The truth is rarely pure and never simple. [*Rises and crosses to right of table c.*] What you are is a Bunburyist. You are one of the most advanced Bunburyists I know.

JACK. What on earth do you mean?

ALGY [*moving above table to L C*]. You have invented a very useful younger brother called Ernest, in order that you may be able to come up to town as often as you like. I have invented an invaluable permanent invalid called Bunbury, in order that I may go down into the country whenever I choose. [*Moves U C to fireplace.*] Bunbury is perfectly invaluable. If it wasn't for Bunbury's extraordinary bad health, for instance—[*Comes down above table c.*]—I wouldn't be able to dine with you at the Carlton tonight, for I have been really engaged to Aunt Augusta for more than a week.

JACK. I haven't asked you to dine with me anywhere tonight.

ALGY. I know. You are absurdly careless about sending out invitations. It is very foolish of you. Nothing annoys people so much as not receiving invitations.

JACK. You had much better dine with your Aunt Augusta.

ALGY [*moving to sofa, sitting*]. I haven't the smallest intention of doing anything of the kind. To begin with, I dined there on Monday, and once a week is quite enough to dine with one's own relations. In the second place, whenever I do dine there, I am always treated as a member of the family, and sent down with either no woman at all or two. In the third place, I know perfectly well whom she will place me next to tonight. She will place me next to Mary Farquhar, who always flirts with her own husband across the dinner table. That is not very pleasant. Indeed, it is not even decent—and that sort of thing is enormously on the increase. The amount of women in London who flirt with their own husbands is perfectly scandalous. It looks so bad. It is simply washing one's clean linen in public. Besides, now that I know you are a confirmed Bunburyist, I naturally

Act I    The Importance of Being Earnest    Page 17

want to talk to you about Bunburying. I want to tell you the rules.

JACK [*rising*]. I'm not a Bunburyist at all. If Gwendoline accepts me, I am going to kill my brother. [*Moves D L.*] Indeed, I think I'll kill him in any case. Cecily is a little too much interested in him. It is rather a bore. So I am going to get rid of Ernest. And I strongly advise you to do the same with Mr.—with your invalid friend who has the absurd name. [*Sits D L.*]

ALGY. Nothing will induce me to part with Bunbury, and if you ever get married, which seems to be extremely problematic, you will be very glad to know Bunbury. A man who marries without knowing Bunbury has a very tedious time of it.

JACK. That is nonsense. If I marry a charming girl like Gwendoline, and she is the only girl I ever saw in my life that I would marry, I certainly don't want to know Bunbury.

ALGY [*rising*]. Then your wife will. [*Crosses L C.*] You don't seem to realize, my dear fellow, that in married life three is company, and two is none. [*Bell rings off U R.*] Ah, that must be Aunt Augusta. [*Steps toward JACK.*] Now, if I get her out of the way for ten minutes, so that you can have an opportunity of proposing to Gwendoline, may I dine with you tonight at the Carlton?

JACK. I suppose so, if you want to.

ALGY. Yes, but you must be serious about it. I hate people who are not serious about meals; it is so shallow of them.

[*LANE enters U R and pauses upstage of entrance.*]

LANE. Lady Bracknell and Miss Fairfax.

[*ALGY moves upstage of the table C as LADY BRACKNELL and GWENDOLINE enter U R. JACK rises. LANE goes out U R again.*]

LADY BRACKNELL [*moving to ALGY, shaking hands*]. Well, dear Algernon, I hope you are behaving well.

ALGY. I'm feeling well, Aunt Augusta.

LADY BRACKNELL. That's not quite the same thing; in fact, the two rarely go together. [*Moves L C and nods to JACK.*] Good afternoon, Mr. Worthing. How d'ye do?

ALGY [*crossing R C, to GWENDOLINE, who has paused in front of sofa*]. Dear me, you *are* smart!

GWENDOLINE. I am always smart. [*Crosses directly to JACK.*] Aren't I, Mr. Worthing?

JACK [*fervently*]. You are quite perfect, Miss Fairfax. [*Seats her D L, then stands right of her, attentively.*]

GWENDOLINE. Oh! I hope I am not that. It would leave no room for developments, and I intend to develop in *many directions*.

LADY BRACKNELL [*coming in front of table C*]. I'm sorry if we are a little late, Algernon, but I was obliged to call on dear Lady Harbury.

[*LANE enters U R with a teapot, which he places on table C.*]

LADY BRACKNELL. I hadn't been there since her poor husband's death. [*Shakes her head sorrowfully.*] I never saw a woman so altered. [*Then brightly.*] She looks quite twenty years younger. [*Crosses R C and sits on sofa. ALGY moves around right end to behind sofa.*] I'll have a cup of tea and one of those nice cucumber sandwiches you promised me.

ALGY [*crossing right of table, picking up empty sandwich plate with pretended concern*]. Good heavens, Lane! Why are there no cucumber sandwiches? I ordered them specially.

LANE [*blandly*]. There were no cucumbers in the market this morning, sir. I went down twice. [*Takes plate from ALGY.*]

ALGY. No cucumbers?

LANE [*steadfastly, looking directly at him*]. No, sir—not even for ready money.

ALGY. That will do, Lane. Thank you.

LANE. Thank you, sir. [*Goes out U R.*]

ALGY. I'm greatly distressed, Aunt Augusta, about there being no cucumbers—not even for ready money.

LADY BRACKNELL. It really makes no matter, Algernon. I

Act I      The Importance of Being Earnest      Page 19

had some crumpets with Lady Harbury, who seems to me to be living entirely for pleasure now.

ALGY [*pouring tea*]. I hear that her hair has turned quite gold from grief.

LADY BRACKNELL. It certainly has changed color. From what cause, I, of course, can't say. [ALGY *crosses and hands tea to LADY BRACKNELL. Then he moves behind sofa and sits right of her.*] Thank you. I've quite a treat for you tonight, Algernon. [JACK, *meanwhile, rises and pours a cup of tea for GWENDOLINE.*] I am going to send you down with Mary Farquhar. She is such a nice young woman, and so attentive to her husband. It's delightful to watch them.

ALGY. I am afraid, Aunt Augusta, I shall have to give up the pleasure of dining with you tonight after all.

LADY BRACKNELL. I hope not, Algernon. It would put my table completely out. Your uncle would have to dine upstairs. Fortunately, he's accustomed to that.

ALGY. It is a great bore, but the fact is I have just had a telegram to say that my poor friend Bunbury is very ill again. [*Exchanges glances with JACK.*] They seem to think I should be with him.

LADY BRACKNELL. It is very strange. This Mr. Bunbury seems to suffer from curiously bad health.

ALGY [*sorrowfully*]. Yes. Poor Bunbury is a dreadful invalid.

LADY BRACKNELL. Well, I must say, Algernon, that I think it is high time that Mr. Bunbury made up his mind whether he was going to live or die. This shilly-shallying with the question is absurd. Nor do I in any way approve of this *modern* sympathy with invalids. I consider it morbid. Illness of any kind is hardly a thing to be encouraged in others. Health is the primary duty of life. I am always telling that to your poor uncle, but he never seems to take any notice—as far as improvement in his many ailments goes. I would be much obliged if you would ask Mr. Bunbury, from me, to be kind enough not to have a relapse on Saturday, for I rely on you to arrange my music for me. It is my last reception—and one wants *something* that will en-