

AI-Generated Graded Readers

Masaru Uchida, Gifu University

Publication webpage:

https://www1.gifu-u.ac.jp/~masaru/a1/ai-generated_graded_readers.html

Publication date: March 16, 2026

About This Edition

This book is a simplified English adaptation created for extensive reading practice.

The text was generated using ChatGPT and prepared for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

Target reading level: CEFR A2-B1

This edition aims to support fluency development through accessible vocabulary, expanded narration, and improved readability while preserving the original story structure.

Source Text

Original work: The Importance of Being Earnest: A Trivial Comedy for Serious People

Author: Oscar Wilde

Source: Project Gutenberg

<https://www.gutenberg.org/>

Full text available at:

<https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/844/pg844.txt>

The original text is in the public domain.

Copyright and Use

This simplified edition is intended for educational and non-commercial use only.

The source text is provided by Project Gutenberg under its public domain policy.

Users should refer to the Project Gutenberg License for full terms:

<https://www.gutenberg.org/policy/license.html>

This adaptation was generated with the assistance of artificial intelligence and edited for readability and educational purposes.

Disclaimer

This edition is an educational adaptation and is not affiliated with or endorsed by Project Gutenberg.

Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest: A Trivial Comedy for Serious People* (Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified by ChatGPT)

Dramatis Personae

John Worthing, J.P.

Algernon Moncrieff

Rev. Canon Chasuble, D.D.

Merriman, Butler

Lane, Manservant

Lady Bracknell

Hon. Gwendolen Fairfax

Cecily Cardew

Miss Prism, Governess

Part 1

Act I

Algernon Moncrieff's Flat in Half-Moon Street, London.

Lane and Algernon are in the room. The room is comfortable and rich. There are flowers on the table. Tea things stand ready.

Algernon sits at the piano and plays softly.

Lane stands near the table and prepares the tea.

ALGERNON

Lane, did you hear what I was playing just now?

LANE

I did not think it polite to listen, sir.

ALGERNON

That is very thoughtful of you, Lane. I do not play well enough for people to listen to me. Anyone can play well. But to play badly with feeling—that is rare.

LANE

Yes, sir.

ALGERNON

And now, Lane, about the sandwiches. Why are there so few cucumber sandwiches? I ordered many for Lady Bracknell.

LANE

There were many sandwiches when I left the kitchen, sir.

ALGERNON

Very strange. I see only two or three now.

LANE

Yes, sir.

ALGERNON

Lane, did you eat the cucumber sandwiches?

LANE

I believe I did eat some of them, sir.

ALGERNON

All of them, I think.

LANE

Yes, sir.

ALGERNON

Well, Lane, it does not matter. Lady Bracknell will soon arrive, and she will certainly be angry.

LANE

Yes, sir.

A bell rings.

LANE

Mr. Ernest Worthing.

Lane leaves. Jack Worthing enters.

Jack is dressed well, but he looks a little nervous.

ALGERNON

How are you, my dear Ernest? What brings you to town?

JACK

My dear Algy, please do not call me Ernest. My name is Jack.

ALGERNON

But you always tell everyone that your name is Ernest.

JACK

That is true—in town.

ALGERNON

Then what is your name in the country?

JACK

Jack.

ALGERNON

That is very confusing. You seem to have two lives.

JACK

Yes. When one lives in the country, one must behave well. When one lives in town, one may enjoy life.

ALGERNON

So in the country you are serious Jack, and in town you are the pleasant Ernest.

JACK

Exactly.

ALGERNON

I like that very much. It is what I call Bunburying.

JACK

Bunburying?

ALGERNON

Yes. It means having a useful excuse for going somewhere else.

JACK

You always have strange ideas, Algy.

ALGERNON

Not strange—necessary. Modern life is impossible without them.

Jack sits down.

ALGERNON

Tell me, why have you come to town today?

JACK

I have come to propose to Gwendolen.

ALGERNON

My cousin Gwendolen?

JACK

Yes.

ALGERNON

That is serious news.

JACK

I hope she will accept me.

ALGERNON

I think she will. But you must ask her mother first.

JACK

Lady Bracknell?

ALGERNON

Yes.

JACK

That may be difficult.

ALGERNON

Very difficult.

Algernon suddenly sees Jack's cigarette case on the table.

ALGERNON

What is this?

JACK

My cigarette case.

ALGERNON

May I look at it?

JACK

Of course.

Algernon opens the case and reads the writing inside.

ALGERNON

Interesting.

JACK

What is interesting?

ALGERNON

This message.

He reads.

ALGERNON

“To my dear Uncle Jack, from little Cecily, with her fondest love.”

He looks at Jack carefully.

ALGERNON

Now explain this.

JACK

It is nothing important.

ALGERNON

Who is Cecily?

JACK

She is my ward.

ALGERNON

Then why does she call you Uncle Jack if your name is Ernest?

Jack hesitates.

ALGERNON

Now I understand. You have invented a younger brother called Ernest.

JACK

Yes.

ALGERNON

You are very clever.

JACK

It was necessary.

ALGERNON

Why?

JACK

Because when I am in the country I must behave very well. I am responsible for Cecily. But sometimes I want to come to London and enjoy myself.

ALGERNON

So you say that your brother Ernest is always in trouble in London.

JACK

Yes.

ALGERNON

And when Ernest is in trouble, you must come to London to help him.

JACK

Exactly.

ALGERNON

That is Bunburying.

JACK

No, it is not.

ALGERNON

Of course it is.

Jack laughs a little but looks uneasy.

ALGERNON

My dear Jack, you have created a very useful brother.

JACK

But I will soon end this story.

ALGERNON

Why?

JACK

Because I am going to marry Gwendolen.

ALGERNON

Marriage ends many pleasant things.

JACK

Not this one.

ALGERNON

You will tell Gwendolen the truth?

JACK

No. She loves the name Ernest.

ALGERNON

She loves the name?

JACK

Yes. She says it inspires confidence.

ALGERNON

Women are very strange about names.

JACK

So I must keep the name Ernest.

ALGERNON

Then your double life will continue.

JACK

No. I will kill my brother Ernest.

ALGERNON

Kill him?

JACK

Yes. When I return to the country, I will announce that my brother Ernest has died.

ALGERNON

That is very dramatic.

JACK

It is the only solution.

Algernon laughs.

ALGERNON

My dear Jack, you are one of the greatest Bunburyists I have ever known.

A bell rings again.

LANE enters.

LANE

Lady Bracknell and Miss Fairfax.

ALGERNON

Show them in.

Lane leaves.

Jack quickly moves toward the door.

JACK

I must speak to Gwendolen alone.

ALGERNON

You will have your chance soon.

Jack straightens his coat and waits nervously.

Lady Bracknell and Gwendolen enter.

Lady Bracknell is large and dignified. Gwendolen is elegant and confident.

GWENDOLEN

Good afternoon, Algernon.

ALGERNON

My dear Gwendolen.

Lady Bracknell looks around the room.

LADY BRACKNELL

Algernon, I hope you have prepared the tea.

ALGERNON

Yes, Aunt Augusta.

Gwendolen suddenly notices Jack.

GWENDOLEN

Mr. Worthing!

JACK

Miss Fairfax.

They smile warmly at each other.

Lady Bracknell sits at the table.

LADY BRACKNELL

Algernon, you may take me to the dining room. I wish to speak to you about something important.

ALGERNON

Of course, Aunt Augusta.

Algernon stands.

Lady Bracknell rises.

She turns to Gwendolen.

LADY BRACKNELL

You may remain here, Gwendolen.

She turns again to Algernon.

LADY BRACKNELL

But do not eat the sandwiches before I return.

ALGERNON

Certainly not.

Lady Bracknell and Algernon leave the room.

Jack and Gwendolen are now alone.

Jack moves closer to her.

JACK

Miss Fairfax, ever since I met you, I have admired you more than any woman in the world.

GWENDOLEN

I have always felt that you were destined to say something like this.

JACK

Gwendolen—

GWENDOLEN

Yes, Mr. Worthing?

JACK

Will you marry me?

GWENDOLEN

Of course I will.

Jack looks very happy.

JACK

My darling!

GWENDOLEN

But I must tell you something.

JACK

Anything.

GWENDOLEN

I have always wished to love someone named Ernest.

Jack freezes slightly.

GWENDOLEN

The name Ernest inspires absolute trust.

JACK

Does it?

GWENDOLEN

Yes. I cannot imagine loving anyone whose name is not Ernest.

Jack smiles nervously.

JACK

My name is Ernest.

GWENDOLEN

I know.

She smiles warmly.

GWENDOLEN

That is why I love you.

Part 2

Act I (continued)

The room is quiet. Jack and Gwendolen stand near the window.

GWENDOLEN

From the first moment I saw you, I felt that your name must be Ernest.

JACK

Did you really?

GWENDOLEN

Yes. It was a divine instinct.

JACK

That is very interesting.

GWENDOLEN

If your name had been something else—something ordinary—I do not think I could have loved you.

JACK

Really?

GWENDOLEN

For example, the name Jack.

Jack becomes slightly uncomfortable.

GWENDOLEN

There is something weak about the name Jack. It has no music in it. Ernest is

much stronger.

JACK

Yes... much stronger.

GWENDOLEN

It expresses truth and honor.

JACK

Indeed.

GWENDOLEN

So when you asked me to marry you, I felt certain that it must be right.

JACK

You make me very happy.

GWENDOLEN

And you must promise me one thing.

JACK

Anything.

GWENDOLEN

You must always be Ernest.

JACK

I promise.

They move closer together.

JACK

May I kiss you?

GWENDOLEN

Certainly.

Just as Jack moves toward her, the door opens.

Lady Bracknell enters suddenly.

Jack steps back at once.

LADY BRACKNELL

Gwendolen!

GWENDOLEN

Mama!

LADY BRACKNELL

What is the meaning of this?

GWENDOLEN

Mama, I am engaged to Mr. Worthing.

Lady Bracknell looks shocked.

LADY BRACKNELL

Pardon me?

GWENDOLEN

Mr. Worthing has proposed to me.

LADY BRACKNELL

Gwendolen, leave the room.

GWENDOLEN

Mama—

LADY BRACKNELL

At once.

Gwendolen looks at Jack.

GWENDOLEN

You may speak to Mama. I am sure she will understand.

She leaves the room.

Lady Bracknell sits in a large chair and looks at Jack very carefully.

LADY BRACKNELL

Mr. Worthing, I feel bound to tell you that you are not on my list of eligible young men.

JACK

I am sorry to hear that.

LADY BRACKNELL

What is your income?

JACK

Between seven and eight thousand a year.

Lady Bracknell looks pleased.

LADY BRACKNELL

That is satisfactory.

She opens a small notebook.

LADY BRACKNELL

Now I will ask you a few questions.

JACK

Certainly.

LADY BRACKNELL

Are your parents living?

JACK

I have lost both my parents.

LADY BRACKNELL

To lose one parent may be regarded as a misfortune. To lose both looks like carelessness.

JACK

I assure you it was not my fault.

LADY BRACKNELL

Who were your parents?

Jack hesitates.

JACK

I do not actually know.

Lady Bracknell stops writing.

LADY BRACKNELL

You do not know?

JACK

No.

LADY BRACKNELL

That is extremely unusual.

JACK

I was found.

LADY BRACKNELL

Found?

JACK

Yes.

LADY BRACKNELL

Where?

JACK

In a handbag.

Lady Bracknell looks completely shocked.

LADY BRACKNELL

A handbag?

JACK

Yes.

LADY BRACKNELL

Where was this handbag found?

JACK

At Victoria Station.

LADY BRACKNELL

The Brighton line?

JACK

Yes.

LADY BRACKNELL

In what part of the station?

JACK

In the cloakroom.

Lady Bracknell rises slowly.

LADY BRACKNELL

Mr. Worthing, I must say that I consider this matter extremely serious.

JACK

I understand.

LADY BRACKNELL

To be born—or at least found—in a handbag is a serious social error.

JACK

I regret the situation deeply.

LADY BRACKNELL

The handbag, I presume, had some mark of identity?

JACK

No.

LADY BRACKNELL

Then the whole matter is quite impossible.

JACK

But surely—

LADY BRACKNELL

Mr. Worthing, I cannot allow my daughter to marry into a cloakroom.

JACK

I will try to find my parents.

LADY BRACKNELL

Do so.

JACK

I will search everywhere.

LADY BRACKNELL

Until then, the engagement is entirely out of the question.

Jack looks very upset.

LADY BRACKNELL

Good afternoon, Mr. Worthing.

She moves toward the door.

Just then Gwendolen returns quickly.

GWENDOLEN

Mama, I must speak to you.

LADY BRACKNELL

You already know my decision.

GWENDOLEN

But I am engaged.

LADY BRACKNELL

You are not engaged.

GWENDOLEN

I am.

LADY BRACKNELL

You are not.

GWENDOLEN

Mama, I love him.

LADY BRACKNELL

You will forget him.

GWENDOLEN

Never.

LADY BRACKNELL

You must come with me.

She takes Gwendolen firmly by the arm.

GWENDOLEN

Mr. Worthing!

JACK

Miss Fairfax!

GWENDOLEN

Remember this. My ideal has always been to love someone named Ernest.

JACK

Yes.

GWENDOLEN

And I will love you always.

LADY BRACKNELL

Come, Gwendolen.

Lady Bracknell leads her out of the room.

Jack stands alone for a moment.

Then Algernon enters from the dining room.

ALGERNON

Well, my dear Ernest, how did the proposal go?

JACK

Lady Bracknell has refused the marriage.

ALGERNON

That is not surprising.

JACK

She asked many questions.

ALGERNON

She always does.

JACK

And she discovered that I was found in a handbag.

Algernon laughs loudly.

ALGERNON

A handbag!

JACK

Yes.

ALGERNON

That explains everything.

JACK

Everything?

ALGERNON

Why you live a double life.

JACK

This is serious.

ALGERNON

Very serious—and very amusing.

Jack walks around the room.

JACK

I must end my double life at once.

ALGERNON

How?

JACK

I will return to the country tomorrow.

ALGERNON

And then?

JACK

I will announce that my brother Ernest has died.

ALGERNON

Killed by what?

JACK

A severe chill.

ALGERNON

Very tragic.

JACK

Then I will live honestly as Jack Worthing.

Algernon looks thoughtful.

ALGERNON

Where exactly is your country house?

JACK

In Hertfordshire.

ALGERNON

And you live there with your ward Cecily?

JACK

Yes.

ALGERNON

She must be charming.

JACK

She is a very sweet girl.

ALGERNON

I would like to meet her.

JACK

You never will.

ALGERNON

Why not?

JACK

Because you are not invited.

Algernon smiles quietly.

ALGERNON

My dear Ernest, nothing is easier than visiting a country house.

JACK

I will not allow it.

ALGERNON

We shall see.

Jack picks up his hat.

JACK

Goodbye, Algy. I must return home and prepare for my brother's death.

ALGERNON

Safe journey.

Jack leaves.

Algernon stands alone in the room.

He picks up the cigarette case again.

ALGERNON

Cecily Cardew.

He smiles slowly.

ALGERNON

I think I should visit the country.

He rings the bell.

Lane enters.

ALGERNON

Lane, bring me the railway guide.

LANE

Yes, sir.

Algernon sits down with great satisfaction.

Part 3

Act I (continued)

Algernon sits at the table and looks through the railway guide. Lane stands quietly nearby.

ALGERNON

Lane, there are many trains to Hertfordshire.

LANE

Yes, sir.

ALGERNON

It is a very convenient county.

LANE

Indeed, sir.

ALGERNON

One may easily go there in the afternoon and return to London in the evening.

LANE

Quite so, sir.

Algernon closes the railway guide and smiles.

ALGERNON

Lane, I believe I shall go to the country tomorrow.

LANE

Very good, sir.

ALGERNON

It is always pleasant to visit friends in the country.

LANE

Yes, sir.

ALGERNON

Even when they have not invited you.

LANE

That also happens, sir.

Algernon stands and walks slowly around the room.

ALGERNON

Lane, have you ever invented an imaginary friend?

LANE

No, sir.

ALGERNON

It is extremely useful.

LANE

I can imagine it would be, sir.

ALGERNON

My friend Bunbury, for example, is often ill.

LANE

That is unfortunate, sir.

ALGERNON

Yes. His health is very uncertain. Whenever I wish to escape from London, Bunbury suddenly becomes worse.

LANE

A most convenient illness, sir.

ALGERNON

Exactly.

Lane begins to clear the table.

ALGERNON

Lane, you may go.

LANE

Yes, sir.

Lane leaves the room.

Algernon walks to the mirror and adjusts his coat.

ALGERNON

Cecily Cardew.

He smiles.

ALGERNON

A charming name.

He sits again and writes something on a small card.

ALGERNON

“Mr. Ernest Worthing.”

He looks pleased with the name.

ALGERNON

Tomorrow I shall become Ernest.

He laughs quietly.

The curtain falls.

Act II

Garden at the Manor House, Woolton.

A wide garden stretches behind the house. There are trees and flowers. A small table stands under a large tree. Books and papers lie on the table.

Cecily Cardew sits at the table and writes in a diary.

Miss Prism stands nearby with a book in her hand.

CECILY

Miss Prism, I wish Uncle Jack would allow his brother Ernest to visit us.

MISS PRISM

I do not think that would be wise, Cecily.

CECILY

But I am very curious about him.

MISS PRISM

Your uncle has often told you that his brother is a very wicked man.

CECILY

Yes. That is why I wish to meet him.

MISS PRISM

You must not encourage such thoughts.

CECILY

But wicked people are sometimes very interesting.

MISS PRISM

They are never interesting for long.

Cecily closes her diary.

CECILY

Miss Prism, may I ask you a question?

MISS PRISM

Certainly, my dear.

CECILY

Why do people keep diaries?

MISS PRISM

To record their daily thoughts and actions.

CECILY

I write my diary before the events happen.

MISS PRISM

Before?

CECILY

Yes. It is much more interesting that way.

Miss Prism looks slightly confused.

MISS PRISM

I am not sure that is the proper use of a diary.

CECILY

But it makes life more exciting.

Miss Prism sighs gently.

MISS PRISM

Cecily, you must try to be serious.

CECILY

I am serious.

She opens her diary again.

CECILY

For example, yesterday I recorded that I had a long conversation with Uncle Jack's brother Ernest.

MISS PRISM

But you did not see him yesterday.

CECILY

No, but I may see him one day.

MISS PRISM

I hope not.

CECILY

Why not?

MISS PRISM

Because your uncle has warned you about him.

CECILY

Yes, but Uncle Jack always speaks very kindly about Ernest at the end of the story.

MISS PRISM

Your uncle is a very good man.

CECILY

He is very serious.

MISS PRISM

Seriousness is a virtue.

CECILY

It must be very dull.

Miss Prism tries to hide a smile.

MISS PRISM

Cecily, we must now return to our studies.

CECILY

What shall we study today?

MISS PRISM

German grammar.

CECILY

German grammar is very difficult.

MISS PRISM

That is why we must study it.

Cecily stands reluctantly.

CECILY

Miss Prism, do you think Uncle Jack will come home today?

MISS PRISM

He wrote that he would return this afternoon.

CECILY

And perhaps his brother Ernest will come with him.

MISS PRISM

I sincerely hope not.

Just then the Reverend Canon Chasuble enters the garden.

He carries a hat and a book.

CHASUBLE

Good afternoon, Miss Prism.

MISS PRISM

Good afternoon, Dr. Chasuble.

CHASUBLE

Good afternoon, Miss Cecily.

CECILY

Good afternoon, Dr. Chasuble.

CHASUBLE

I hope I am not interrupting your studies.

MISS PRISM

Not at all.

CECILY

We were about to begin German grammar.

CHASUBLE

Ah, German grammar is a very serious subject.

CECILY

Yes. That is why I do not like it.

Chasuble smiles.

CHASUBLE

Miss Prism, I came to ask if you would join me for a short walk later this afternoon.

Miss Prism looks pleased but tries to appear calm.

MISS PRISM

That would be most agreeable.

CECILY

Dr. Chasuble, may I ask you a question?

CHASUBLE

Of course, Miss Cecily.

CECILY

If someone wishes to be christened again, is that possible?

Chasuble looks surprised.

CHASUBLE

Well... yes. Under certain circumstances.

CECILY

That is interesting.

MISS PRISM

Cecily, why do you ask such a question?

CECILY

I was simply curious.

At that moment Merriman enters from the house.

MERRIMAN

Miss Cardew, a gentleman has arrived.

CECILY

A gentleman?

MERRIMAN

Yes, Miss.

CECILY

What is his name?

MERRIMAN

Mr. Ernest Worthing.

Cecily jumps to her feet with excitement.

CECILY

Ernest!

Miss Prism looks very alarmed.

MISS PRISM

Mr. Ernest Worthing?

CECILY

At last he has come.

She turns quickly to Merriman.

CECILY

Please show him here at once.

MERRIMAN

Yes, Miss.

Merriman leaves.

Cecily looks delighted.

CECILY

Miss Prism, this is wonderful.

MISS PRISM

This is extremely unfortunate.

CECILY

I have waited so long to meet him.

MISS PRISM

Cecily, you must behave properly.

CECILY

Of course.

But she cannot hide her excitement.

A moment later Algernon enters.

He is dressed elegantly and smiles charmingly.

CECILY

Mr. Ernest Worthing!

ALGERNON

Miss Cardew, I suppose?

CECILY

Yes.

They look at each other with great curiosity.

Part 4

Act II (continued)

The garden is quiet. The afternoon sun shines through the trees.

Cecily stands before Algernon with bright excitement.

Miss Prism looks uneasy.

ALGERNON

Miss Cardew, I am very pleased to meet you.

CECILY

And I am very pleased to meet you.

She studies him carefully.

CECILY

You are my Uncle Jack's brother.

ALGERNON

Yes.

CECILY

You have been very naughty.

ALGERNON

I am afraid that is true.

CECILY

But you look much better than I expected.

ALGERNON

Thank you.

CECILY

Uncle Jack often speaks about your terrible behavior.

ALGERNON

I regret that deeply.

CECILY

But I have always been very interested in you.

ALGERNON

That is kind of you.

Miss Prism steps forward.

MISS PRISM

Mr. Ernest Worthing, I must tell you that your presence here is quite unexpected.

ALGERNON

I apologize for arriving without notice.

MISS PRISM

Your brother has always warned us about you.

ALGERNON

My brother has a great imagination.

CECILY

Yes, Uncle Jack is very serious.

ALGERNON

Seriousness can be a great weakness.

MISS PRISM

Mr. Worthing, you must excuse us. Cecily and I were about to begin our studies.

CECILY

But Miss Prism—

MISS PRISM

Cecily.

CECILY

Very well.

She turns politely to Algernon.

CECILY

Mr. Ernest Worthing, perhaps you will walk in the garden while we finish our lesson.

ALGERNON

With pleasure.

MISS PRISM

Come, Cecily.

Miss Prism and Cecily move toward the house.

But before they leave, Cecily turns again to Algernon.

CECILY

Mr. Ernest Worthing, I hope you will not disappear suddenly.

ALGERNON

I promise I will remain here.

CECILY

That makes me very happy.

Miss Prism gently leads Cecily away.

Algernon sits in a chair under the tree.

ALGERNON

What a charming girl.

He looks around the garden.

ALGERNON

The country is very peaceful.

He takes a small flower from the table.

ALGERNON

Much more peaceful than London.

A short time later Cecily returns alone.

She carries a small watering can.

CECILY

Mr. Ernest Worthing.

ALGERNON

Miss Cardew.

CECILY

Miss Prism has gone to walk with Dr. Chasuble.

ALGERNON

How fortunate.

CECILY

I thought you might like to see the garden.

ALGERNON

Very much.

They walk slowly among the flowers.

CECILY

You have been very wicked, I hear.

ALGERNON

Yes.

CECILY

But I always hoped that you would become better.

ALGERNON

I am trying.

CECILY

That is good.

They stop near the table.

CECILY

I must confess something to you.

ALGERNON

Please do.

CECILY

For a long time I have been very interested in you.

ALGERNON

Really?

CECILY

Yes.

ALGERNON

But we have never met before today.

CECILY

That is true.

ALGERNON

Then how could you be interested in me?

CECILY

Because of your reputation.

ALGERNON

My reputation is very bad.

CECILY

Yes, but it is very romantic.

ALGERNON

You think so?

CECILY

Of course.

She sits at the table.

CECILY

I have even written about you in my diary.

ALGERNON

Written about me?

CECILY

Yes.

She opens the diary and reads.

CECILY

“Today I met Uncle Jack’s brother Ernest for the first time. He is very charming.”

Algernon laughs softly.

ALGERNON

But we met only a few minutes ago.

CECILY

Yes, but I wrote that yesterday.

ALGERNON

Yesterday?

CECILY

I like to write about events before they happen.

ALGERNON

That is a wonderful system.

CECILY

It makes life much more interesting.

She closes the diary.

CECILY

Mr. Ernest Worthing, do you truly wish to improve your life?

ALGERNON

Very much.

CECILY

Then you must behave better.

ALGERNON

I will try.

CECILY

Perhaps I can help you.

ALGERNON

I would be grateful.

CECILY

First, you must not be so wicked.

ALGERNON

I promise.

CECILY

Second, you must stay here for a while.

ALGERNON

I would like that very much.

They smile at each other.

CECILY

You see, I have always imagined that we would become friends.

ALGERNON

Friends?

CECILY

Yes.

She hesitates slightly.

CECILY

Or perhaps something more.

Algernon looks at her warmly.

ALGERNON

Miss Cardew, may I tell you something?

CECILY

Yes.

ALGERNON

From the moment I saw you, I admired you greatly.

CECILY

Did you?

ALGERNON

Yes.

CECILY

That is very nice.

ALGERNON

I think you are the most charming girl I have ever met.

Cecily blushes slightly.

CECILY

That is exactly what I hoped you would say.

They sit together under the tree.

ALGERNON

Miss Cardew—

CECILY

Please call me Cecily.

ALGERNON

Cecily.

CECILY

Yes?

ALGERNON

I think I love you.

CECILY

Of course you do.

ALGERNON

Of course?

CECILY

Yes.

She opens her diary again.

CECILY

You proposed to me yesterday.

ALGERNON

Yesterday?

CECILY

Yes.

She reads.

CECILY

“Ernest asked me to marry him. I accepted at once.”

Algernon looks amused.

ALGERNON

Then we are already engaged?

CECILY

Yes.

ALGERNON

That was very quick.

CECILY

Love is always quick.

Algernon smiles.

ALGERNON

Cecily, you are wonderful.

Just then Merriman appears again.

MERRIMAN

Miss Cardew.

CECILY

Yes, Merriman?

MERRIMAN

Mr. Worthing has returned.

CECILY

Uncle Jack?

MERRIMAN

Yes, Miss.

Cecily looks surprised.

CECILY

But Uncle Jack was not expected until evening.

MERRIMAN

He arrived suddenly.

CECILY

Where is he?

MERRIMAN

He is coming through the garden now.

Cecily stands.

CECILY

This will be interesting.

Algernon looks slightly worried.

ALGERNON

Very interesting.

Part 5

Act II (continued)

The garden path leads from the house.

Jack enters slowly. He wears black clothes and a black hat. His face looks serious.

Cecily sees him first.

CECILY

Uncle Jack!

JACK

My dear Cecily.

He embraces her kindly.

JACK

I have returned earlier than expected.

CECILY

Yes, Merriman told me.

She looks at his clothes.

CECILY

Why are you dressed in black?

JACK

I bring very sad news.

CECILY

Sad news?

JACK

Yes.

He pauses.

JACK

My poor brother Ernest is dead.

Cecily looks surprised but not deeply upset.

CECILY

Dead?

JACK

Yes. He died suddenly in Paris.

CECILY

What happened?

JACK

A severe chill.

CECILY

How unfortunate.

JACK

Yes. His life was very troubled.

CECILY

I am sorry to hear it.

Jack sighs heavily.

JACK

We must now forget him and continue our lives.

CECILY

That may be difficult.

JACK

Why?

CECILY

Because he is here.

Jack turns quickly.

JACK

Here?

Cecily points calmly across the garden.

Algernon stands near the table.

Jack stares at him in complete shock.

JACK

Algernon!

ALGERNON

My dear Ernest—no, I mean Jack.

JACK

What are you doing here?

ALGERNON

Visiting your charming ward.

JACK

You are pretending to be my brother.

ALGERNON

Yes.

JACK

But I have just announced that you are dead.

ALGERNON

That is very inconvenient.

JACK

You must leave at once.

ALGERNON

I cannot.

JACK

Why not?

ALGERNON

Because I am engaged to Cecily.

Jack looks even more shocked.

JACK

Engaged?

CECILY

Yes, Uncle Jack.

JACK

Impossible.

CECILY

We became engaged yesterday.

JACK

Yesterday?

CECILY

Yes.

Jack looks from Cecily to Algernon.

JACK

Algernon, this is outrageous.

ALGERNON

On the contrary, it is very romantic.

JACK

You must end this nonsense immediately.

ALGERNON

I cannot.

JACK

Why not?

ALGERNON

Because I love Cecily.

Cecily smiles.

CECILY

And I love Ernest.

JACK

His name is not Ernest.

CECILY

Of course it is.

JACK

No, it is not.

ALGERNON

Jack, please.

JACK

Algernon Moncrieff!

Cecily looks confused.

CECILY

Algernon?

ALGERNON

Yes.

CECILY

Then your name is not Ernest?

ALGERNON

Not exactly.

CECILY

Oh.

She pauses.

CECILY

That is disappointing.

ALGERNON

But I can easily change my name.

CECILY

Really?

ALGERNON

Yes. I plan to be christened.

CECILY

That is wonderful.

JACK

This is absurd.

He turns to Algernon angrily.

JACK

You have deceived my ward.

ALGERNON

You deceived everyone first.

JACK

That is different.

ALGERNON

Not at all.

Jack sighs with frustration.

JACK

This situation must end.

CECILY

But Uncle Jack—

JACK

Cecily, I forbid this engagement.

CECILY

You forbid it?

JACK

Yes.

CECILY

Why?

JACK

Because Algernon is extremely unreliable.

ALGERNON

I object strongly.

CECILY

Uncle Jack, you must allow me to make my own decision.

JACK

You are too young.

CECILY

I am quite capable of understanding my feelings.

Jack shakes his head.

JACK

No. I cannot permit it.

Cecily looks hurt.

CECILY

This is very unfair.

At that moment Merriman enters again.

MERRIMAN

Mr. Worthing.

JACK

Yes?

MERRIMAN

A young lady has arrived.

JACK

A young lady?

MERRIMAN

Yes, sir.

JACK

What is her name?

MERRIMAN

Miss Fairfax.

Jack freezes.

JACK

Gwendolen?

MERRIMAN

Yes, sir.

Cecily looks interested.

CECILY

Miss Fairfax?

JACK

Oh dear.

ALGERNON

This becomes more interesting every minute.

Cecily turns to Merriman.

CECILY

Please show Miss Fairfax into the garden.

MERRIMAN

Yes, Miss.

Merriman leaves.

JACK

This is a disaster.

ALGERNON

Not necessarily.

JACK

Gwendolen believes my name is Ernest.

ALGERNON

So does Cecily.

JACK

Exactly.

ALGERNON

Then we must be careful.

JACK

Very careful.

A moment later Gwendolen enters the garden.

She walks with calm confidence.

GWENDOLEN

Mr. Worthing!

JACK

Gwendolen!

They move toward each other.

GWENDOLEN

I could not remain in London. I felt that I must see you again.

JACK

That was very brave.

GWENDOLEN

My love gives me courage.

She notices Cecily.

GWENDOLEN

And who is this charming young lady?

CECILY

My name is Cecily Cardew.

GWENDOLEN

Miss Cardew, I am pleased to meet you.

CECILY

And I am pleased to meet you.

They smile politely.

GWENDOLEN

Mr. Worthing has spoken of you.

CECILY

Uncle Jack is very kind.

GWENDOLEN

Uncle Jack?

Cecily nods.

CECILY

Yes. Mr. Worthing is my guardian.

Gwendolen looks surprised.

GWENDOLEN

Your guardian?

CECILY

Yes.

GWENDOLEN

How interesting.

Cecily studies Gwendolen carefully.

CECILY

Miss Fairfax, may I ask you a question?

GWENDOLEN

Certainly.

CECILY

Are you engaged?

GWENDOLEN

Yes.

CECILY

To whom?

GWENDOLEN

To Ernest Worthing.

Cecily smiles calmly.

CECILY

How curious.

GWENDOLEN

Why curious?

CECILY

Because I am also engaged to Ernest Worthing.

Silence fills the garden.

Part 6

Act II (continued)

Silence fills the garden.

Gwendolen and Cecily look at each other carefully.

Jack and Algernon stand behind them with great anxiety.

GWENDOLEN

I beg your pardon?

CECILY

I said that I am engaged to Ernest Worthing.

GWENDOLEN

That is impossible.

CECILY

I assure you it is quite true.

GWENDOLEN

Mr. Worthing proposed to me yesterday afternoon in London.

CECILY

Mr. Ernest Worthing proposed to me yesterday afternoon in the garden.

GWENDOLEN

Then there must be some misunderstanding.

CECILY

Perhaps.

They smile politely, but the smiles are cold.

CECILY

Will you sit down, Miss Fairfax?

GWENDOLEN

Thank you.

They sit at the small table.

Cecily rings a small bell.

Merriman enters.

CECILY

Merriman, please bring tea.

MERRIMAN

Yes, Miss.

He leaves.

GWENDOLEN

Miss Cardew, may I ask how long you have been engaged to Mr. Ernest Worthing?

CECILY

For some time.

GWENDOLEN

Indeed?

CECILY

Yes.

She opens her diary calmly.

CECILY

According to my diary, we became engaged three months ago.

GWENDOLEN

Three months ago?

CECILY

Yes.

GWENDOLEN

That seems quite impossible.

CECILY

Why?

GWENDOLEN

Because Mr. Worthing has been engaged to me since yesterday.

CECILY

That is rather late.

GWENDOLEN

I think you must be mistaken.

CECILY

I rarely make mistakes.

They look at each other again.

GWENDOLEN

Miss Cardew, I feel it my duty to tell you that there is no possibility of your engagement to Mr. Worthing.

CECILY

I am afraid the same is true of yours.

GWENDOLEN

Excuse me?

CECILY

Mr. Ernest Worthing is my fiancé.

GWENDOLEN

He is mine.

Their voices become sharper.

GWENDOLEN

Miss Cardew, I do not wish to be unpleasant.

CECILY

Nor do I.

GWENDOLEN

But the facts are quite clear.

CECILY

Yes, they are.

GWENDOLEN

Mr. Worthing loves me.

CECILY

He loves me.

GWENDOLEN

You are mistaken.

CECILY

I am not.

At that moment Merriman returns with tea.

MERRIMAN

Tea, Miss.

CECILY

Thank you.

He places the tray on the table and leaves.

Cecily pours tea slowly.

CECILY

Sugar?

GWENDOLEN

No, thank you.

Cecily calmly puts four lumps of sugar into Gwendolen's cup.

GWENDOLEN

Miss Cardew, I said no sugar.

CECILY

Yes, but sugar is sweet.

GWENDOLEN

I prefer no sugar.

CECILY

Very well.

She then pours tea for herself.

GWENDOLEN

Bread and butter, please.

CECILY

Certainly.

She gives Gwendolen a large slice of cake instead.

GWENDOLEN

I asked for bread and butter.

CECILY

Cake is more suitable for the afternoon.

GWENDOLEN

Thank you.

They eat in silence.

Finally Gwendolen speaks again.

GWENDOLEN

Miss Cardew, I wish to ask you one more question.

CECILY

Please do.

GWENDOLEN

What is the name of your fiancé?

CECILY

Ernest.

GWENDOLEN

Of course.

CECILY

I could never love anyone whose name was not Ernest.

GWENDOLEN

Nor could I.

They both look satisfied for a moment.

Then Gwendolen turns suddenly toward Jack.

GWENDOLEN

Mr. Worthing!

JACK

Yes, Gwendolen?

GWENDOLEN

What is your Christian name?

Jack hesitates.

JACK

Jack.

GWENDOLEN

Jack?

CECILY

Jack?

Both women stare at him.

GWENDOLEN

Your name is not Ernest?

JACK

Well—

CECILY

Uncle Jack!

GWENDOLEN

Explain yourself immediately.

Jack looks extremely uncomfortable.

JACK

The truth is... my name is Jack.

Cecily turns to Algernon.

CECILY

Then what is your name?

ALGERNON

Algernon.

CECILY

Algernon!

GWENDOLEN

Then neither of you is named Ernest?

ALGERNON

No.

GWENDOLEN

This is perfectly absurd.

CECILY

It is extremely disappointing.

Both women stand up angrily.

GWENDOLEN

You have deceived us.

CECILY

Both of you.

GWENDOLEN

I am very angry.

CECILY

So am I.

GWENDOLEN

I could not possibly forgive you.

CECILY

Nor could I.

They walk away together.

Jack and Algernon remain alone.

JACK

You have ruined everything.

ALGERNON

You did the same.

JACK

My engagement is broken.

ALGERNON

Mine as well.

They sit heavily in the chairs.

ALGERNON

What shall we do?

JACK

We must be christened at once.

ALGERNON

An excellent idea.

JACK

If we become Ernest, everything will be solved.

ALGERNON

Yes.

JACK

Dr. Chasuble can perform the ceremony this afternoon.

ALGERNON

Perfect.

They stand.

ALGERNON

Let us go and find him.

JACK

At once.

They leave the garden together.

The garden becomes quiet again.

Part 7

Act III

Drawing-room at the Manor House, Woolton.

The room is elegant and quiet. A writing table stands near the window. Flowers decorate the room.

Gwendolen and Cecily sit together. Their anger has begun to soften.

CECILY

Miss Fairfax, I feel that I must apologize for the way I behaved.

GWENDOLEN

Miss Cardew, I must apologize also.

CECILY

It was not very polite of me to put sugar in your tea.

GWENDOLEN

And it was not polite of me to criticize your cake.

CECILY

We were both very upset.

GWENDOLEN

Yes.

They smile a little.

CECILY

The men behaved very badly.

GWENDOLEN

Very badly indeed.

CECILY

Still, I think they were not entirely wicked.

GWENDOLEN

No.

CECILY

They simply wished to be named Ernest.

GWENDOLEN

Which shows that they understand the importance of the name.

CECILY

Exactly.

They laugh softly.

Just then Jack enters the room.

JACK

Gwendolen.

GWENDOLEN

Mr. Worthing.

CECILY

Uncle Jack.

JACK

I have something important to say.

GWENDOLEN

Yes?

JACK

I have decided to be christened this afternoon.

CECILY

Christened?

JACK

Yes.

GWENDOLEN

Why?

JACK

Because I wish to be worthy of your affection.

GWENDOLEN

That is very admirable.

CECILY

It is a very good idea.

At that moment Algernon enters.

ALGERNON

Good afternoon.

CECILY

Mr. Moncrieff.

GWENDOLEN

Algernon.

ALGERNON

I also intend to be christened this afternoon.

CECILY

How wonderful.

ALGERNON

I feel that it is my duty.

JACK

Your duty?

ALGERNON

Yes.

JACK

This is absurd.

ALGERNON

Not at all.

JACK

I told you about the christening first.

ALGERNON

That does not matter.

JACK

It matters very much.

They begin to argue.

GWENDOLEN

Please do not quarrel.

CECILY

Yes, it is not pleasant.

At that moment Merriman enters.

MERRIMAN

Lady Bracknell has arrived.

Everyone is surprised.

JACK

Lady Bracknell?

GWENDOLEN

Mama!

Lady Bracknell enters the room with great dignity.

LADY BRACKNELL

Good afternoon.

GWENDOLEN

Mama, what brings you here?

LADY BRACKNELL

I have come to check on my daughter.

She looks around the room.

Then she sees Cecily.

LADY BRACKNELL

And who is this young lady?

CECILY

My name is Cecily Cardew.

LADY BRACKNELL

Cardew?

JACK

Cecily is my ward.

LADY BRACKNELL

Indeed.

She studies Cecily carefully.

LADY BRACKNELL

Miss Cardew, are you wealthy?

CECILY

I have a small fortune.

LADY BRACKNELL

How small?

CECILY

About one hundred and thirty thousand pounds.

Lady Bracknell suddenly becomes very pleased.

LADY BRACKNELL

A very suitable amount.

She turns to Algernon.

LADY BRACKNELL

Algernon, I believe you know Miss Cardew.

ALGERNON

Yes, Aunt Augusta.

LADY BRACKNELL

You are fond of her?

ALGERNON

Very fond.

LADY BRACKNELL

Then you may marry her.

CECILY

Thank you, Lady Bracknell.

ALGERNON

Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

Jack looks shocked.

JACK

Excuse me.

LADY BRACKNELL

Yes, Mr. Worthing?

JACK

Cecily is my ward.

LADY BRACKNELL

Indeed.

JACK

And I refuse to allow her to marry Algernon.

ALGERNON

What?

CECILY

Uncle Jack!

LADY BRACKNELL

You refuse?

JACK

Yes.

LADY BRACKNELL

May I ask why?

JACK

Because Lady Bracknell refuses to allow me to marry Gwendolen.

Lady Bracknell pauses.

LADY BRACKNELL

This is extremely inconvenient.

JACK

I agree.

LADY BRACKNELL

Mr. Worthing, you must understand that my daughter cannot marry someone who was found in a handbag.

JACK

Until that matter is solved, I cannot approve Algernon's marriage.

LADY BRACKNELL

This is very unreasonable.

JACK

Perhaps.

LADY BRACKNELL

The situation must be clarified.

She turns to Merriman.

LADY BRACKNELL

Send for Miss Prism.

MERRIMAN

Yes, madam.

He leaves.

CECILY

Miss Prism?

GWENDOLEN

Why Miss Prism?

LADY BRACKNELL

Miss Prism may be able to explain something important.

A few moments later Miss Prism enters nervously.

MISS PRISM

Lady Bracknell!

LADY BRACKNELL

Miss Prism.

Miss Prism looks frightened.

LADY BRACKNELL

I believe you once worked for my sister.

MISS PRISM

Yes, Lady Bracknell.

LADY BRACKNELL

And I believe you once lost a baby.

Miss Prism gasps.

MISS PRISM

Lady Bracknell!

LADY BRACKNELL

Please explain.

Miss Prism trembles.

MISS PRISM

It was many years ago.

LADY BRACKNELL

Go on.

MISS PRISM

I was responsible for a baby boy.

Everyone listens closely.

MISS PRISM

One day I placed the manuscript of a novel in a perambulator.

LADY BRACKNELL

Yes?

MISS PRISM

And I accidentally placed the baby in a handbag.

Shock fills the room.

MISS PRISM

I left the handbag at Victoria Station.

Jack suddenly becomes very excited.

JACK

Victoria Station?

MISS PRISM

Yes.

JACK

Was the handbag large and black?

MISS PRISM

Yes.

JACK

Then I must find it at once.

He rushes toward the door.

JACK

It is upstairs in my room.

He runs out of the room.

Everyone waits in silence.

Part 8

Act III (continued)

The room is silent. Everyone waits.

Lady Bracknell sits calmly in a chair. Gwendolen stands beside her. Cecily and Algernon whisper quietly.

Miss Prism looks extremely nervous.

After a moment Jack returns quickly. He carries a large black handbag.

JACK

Is this the handbag?

Miss Prism looks at it with fear.

MISS PRISM

Yes.

LADY BRACKNELL

Are you quite certain?

MISS PRISM

Yes, Lady Bracknell.

JACK

Then this explains everything.

LADY BRACKNELL

Indeed.

Jack places the handbag on the table.

JACK

I was the baby in this handbag.

Everyone looks at him.

GWENDOLEN

You?

CECILY

Uncle Jack?

JACK

Yes.

He turns to Miss Prism.

JACK

You left me in the cloakroom at Victoria Station.

MISS PRISM

I deeply regret the mistake.

JACK

Fortunately I was discovered by a kind gentleman.

LADY BRACKNELL

Who was that gentleman?

JACK

Mr. Thomas Cardew.

CECILY

My grandfather!

JACK

Yes.

CECILY

Then you are not really my uncle.

JACK

No.

CECILY

You are my older brother!

JACK

Exactly.

Cecily smiles with delight.

CECILY

How wonderful!

Jack turns to Lady Bracknell.

JACK

Now that my origin is known, I hope you will allow me to marry Gwendolen.

Lady Bracknell thinks carefully.

LADY BRACKNELL

There is still one question.

JACK

What question?

LADY BRACKNELL

Who were your parents?

JACK

I was a baby in a handbag.

LADY BRACKNELL

Yes, but whose baby?

She turns slowly toward Miss Prism.

LADY BRACKNELL

Miss Prism, whose child was the baby you lost?

MISS PRISM

It was the child of your sister.

Lady Bracknell rises suddenly.

LADY BRACKNELL

My sister!

MISS PRISM

Yes.

LADY BRACKNELL

Then the child was the younger son of General Moncrieff.

Miss Prism nods nervously.

MISS PRISM

Yes.

Algernon suddenly jumps up.

ALGERNON

General Moncrieff was my father!

LADY BRACKNELL

Exactly.

She looks proudly at Jack.

LADY BRACKNELL

Mr. Worthing, you are the elder son of General Moncrieff.

Jack looks astonished.

JACK

Then Algernon is my younger brother.

ALGERNON

My dear brother!

They shake hands warmly.

CECILY

This is delightful.

GWENDOLEN

Yes, it is.

Jack turns again to Lady Bracknell.

JACK

Now that my family is known, may I marry Gwendolen?

LADY BRACKNELL

Certainly.

GWENDOLEN

At last!

She moves happily toward Jack.

GWENDOLEN

My dear Ernest.

Jack hesitates.

JACK

Gwendolen, I must tell you something.

GWENDOLEN

Yes?

JACK

My name is not Ernest.

GWENDOLEN

Not Ernest?

JACK

No.

He looks at Lady Bracknell.

JACK

Aunt Augusta, what was the name of General Moncrieff's eldest son?

LADY BRACKNELL

The eldest son was named Ernest.

Jack becomes very still.

JACK

Ernest?

LADY BRACKNELL

Yes.

Jack smiles slowly.

JACK

Then I have always been Ernest.

GWENDOLEN

Of course you have.

CECILY

How perfect!

ALGERNON

My dear Ernest, I congratulate you.

Jack turns to Gwendolen.

JACK

Gwendolen, it seems that I have been telling the truth all my life.

GWENDOLEN

I always believed you.

Jack smiles with quiet happiness.

JACK

Now I understand, for the first time in my life, the importance of being Earnest.