

Act I The Importance of Being Earnest Page 21

Fairfax, ever since I met you I have admired you more than any girl I have ever met—since I met you.

GWENDOLINE [*rising, moving C*]. Yes, I am quite aware of that fact. And I often wish that in public, at any rate, you had been more demonstrative. For me, you have always had an irresistible fascination. [*Pleased, JACK takes a step toward her.*] Even before I met you I was far from indifferent to you. [*JACK looks at her in amazement and takes another step toward her.*] We live, as I hope you know, Mr. Worthing, in an age of ideals. The fact is constantly mentioned in the more expensive monthly magazines. And my ideal has always been to love someone of the name of Ernest. [*JACK, who is just about to take another step toward her, backs away instead.*] There is something in that name that inspires absolute confidence. [*Moves to sofa.*] The moment Algernon first mentioned to me that he had a friend called Ernest I *knew* I was destined to love you. [*Sits on sofa.*]

Start JACK [*moving to her, getting down on one knee*]. You really love me, Gwendoline?

GWENDOLINE. Passionately!

JACK. Darling! You don't know how happy you've made me.

GWENDOLINE. My own Ernest! [*Embraces JACK.*]

JACK. Of course. But you don't really mean to say that you couldn't love me if my name wasn't Ernest?

GWENDOLINE. But your name *is* Ernest. [*Releases him.*]

JACK [*quickly*]. Yes, I know it is. [*Rises and sits beside her.*]

But supposing it was something else? Do you mean to say you couldn't love me then?

GWENDOLINE. Oh, that is clearly a metaphysical speculation and, like all metaphysical speculations, has very little reference to the actual facts of life as we know them.

JACK [*airily*]. Personally, darling, to speak quite candidly, I don't care much about the name of Ernest—I don't think the name suits me at all.

GWENDOLINE [*firmly*]. It suits you perfectly. It is a divine

name. [*Fervently.*] It has a music of its own. It produces vibrations.

JACK. Well, really, Gwendoline, I must say that I think there are lots of other much nicer names. I think—Jack, for instance, a charming name.

GWENDOLINE [*distastefully*]. Jack! No, there is very little music in the name Jack, if any at all, indeed. It does not thrill. It produces absolutely *no* vibrations. I have known several Jacks, and they all without exception were more than usually plain. [*JACK winces.*] Besides, Jack is a notorious domesticity for John! And I pity any woman who is married to a man called John. [*JACK starts edging away from her on sofa.*] She would probably never be allowed to know the entrancing pleasure of a single moment's solitude. The only really *safe* name is Ernest.

JACK [*flustered*]. Gwendoline, I must get christened at once—I mean we must get married at once. [*Rises.*] **Stop**

GWENDOLINE [*surprised*]. Married, Mr. Worthing? [*Rises.*]

JACK [*astounded*]. Well—surely. You know that I love you, and you led me to believe, Miss Fairfax, that you were not absolutely indifferent to me.

GWENDOLINE. I adore you. But you haven't proposed to me yet. Nothing has been said at all about marriage. The subject has not even been touched upon.

JACK. Well—may I propose to you now?

GWENDOLINE. I think it would be an admirable opportunity. [*Sits quickly on sofa again.*] To spare you any possible disappointment, Mr. Worthing, I think it only fair to tell you quite frankly beforehand that I am fully determined to accept you.

JACK. Then, Gwendoline, you will marry me? [*Goes down on both knees.*]

GWENDOLINE. Of course I will, darling. [*Pats arms around his neck.*] How long you have been about it! I am afraid you have had very little experience in how to propose.

JACK. My own one, I have never loved anyone in the world but you.