

Page 24 The Importance of Being Earnest Act I

~~GWENDOLINE. Yes, Mamma. [*Goes quickly out R.R.*]~~

~~LADY BRACKNELL [*sitting D L*]. You can take a seat, Mr.~~

~~Worthing. [*Looks in her pocket for notebook and pencil.*]~~

~~JACK. Thank you, Lady Bracknell. [*Comes in front of table C.*] I prefer standing.~~

Start LADY BRACKNELL [*pencil and notebook in hand*]. I feel bound to tell you that you are not down on my list of eligible young men, although I have the same list as the dear Duchess of Bolton has. We work together, in fact. However, I am quite ready to enter your name, should your answers be what a really affectionate mother requires. Do you smoke?

JACK. Well, yes, I must admit I smoke.

LADY BRACKNELL [*making check mark in notebook*]. I am glad to hear it. A man should always have an occupation of some kind. There are far too many idle men in London as it is. How old are you?

JACK. Twenty-eight.

LADY BRACKNELL [*another check mark*]. A very good age to be married at. I have always been of the opinion that a man who desires to get married should either know everything or nothing. Which do you know?

JACK. I know nothing, Lady Bracknell. [*Moves D R.*]

LADY BRACKNELL [*another check mark*]. I am pleased to hear it. I do not approve of anything that tampers with natural ignorance. Ignorance is like a delicate, exotic fruit; touch it and the bloom has gone. What is your income?

JACK. Between seven and eight thousand a year.

LADY BRACKNELL [*pencil poised*]. In land or in investment?

JACK. In investments, chiefly. [*Crosses and sits on sofa.*]

LADY BRACKNELL [*another check mark, with a definite flourish this time*]. That is satisfactory. What between the duties expected of one during one's lifetime and the duties exacted from one after one's death, land has ceased to be either a profit or a pleasure. It gives one position and prevents one from keeping it up. That's all that can be said about land.

Act I The Importance of Being Earnest Page 25

JACK. I have a country house with some land, of course, attached to it—about fifteen hundred acres, I believe.

LADY BRACKNELL. A country house? How many bedrooms? Well, that point can be cleared up afterwards. [*Makes note.*] You have a town house, I hope? A girl with a simple, unspoiled nature like Gwendoline could hardly be expected to reside in the country.

JACK. Well, I own a house in Belgrave Square, but it is let by the year to Lady Bloxham. Of course, I can get it back whenever I like, at six months' notice.

LADY BRACKNELL [*severely*]. Lady Bloxham? I don't know her.

JACK. Oh, she goes about very little. She's a lady considerably advanced in years.

LADY BRACKNELL. Ah, nowadays that is no guarantee of respectability of character. What number in Belgrave Square?

JACK. One hundred forty-nine.

LADY BRACKNELL [*closing notebook with a decisive bang*]. The *unfashionable* side. I thought there was something! However, that could easily be altered. Now, to minor matters. Are your parents living?

JACK. I have lost both my parents.

LADY BRACKNELL [*with lifted eyebrows*]. Both? To lose one parent may be regarded as a misfortune—to lose both seems like carelessness. Who was your father? He seems to have been a man of wealth. Was he born in what the Radical papers call the purple of commerce, or did he rise from the ranks of the aristocracy? **Stop**

JACK. I am afraid I really don't know. The fact is, Lady Bracknell, I said I had lost my parents. It would be nearer the truth to say that my parents seem to have lost me. I don't actually know who I am, by birth. I was—well—I was found. [*Rises.*]

LADY BRACKNELL [*aghast*]. Found!

JACK [*moving L C*]. The late Mr Thomas Cardew, an old gentleman of a very charitable and kindly disposition, found me and gave me the name of Worthing because he