

(8) (975) [2w]

Gwendolen meets Cecily – a misunderstanding

Mrn: [unseen] A Miss Fairfax has just called to see Mr. Worthing. [...]

Ccl: Pray ask the lady to come out here; Mr. Worthing is sure to be back soon. And you can bring tea.

Mrn: [unseen] Yes, Miss. [...]

Mrn: Miss Fairfax.

Ccl: Pray let me introduce myself to you. My name is Cecily Cardew.

Gwn: Cecily Cardew? What a very sweet name! Something tells me that we are going to be great friends. [...] My first impressions of people are never wrong.

Ccl: How nice of you to like me so much after we have known each other such a comparatively short time. Pray sit down.

Gwn: I may call you Cecily, may I not?

Ccl: With pleasure!

Gwn: And you will always call me Gwendolen, won't you?

Ccl: If you wish.

Gwn: Then that is all quite settled, is it not?

Ccl: I hope so.

Gwn: Perhaps this might be a favourable opportunity for my mentioning who I am. My father is Lord Bracknell. [...] Mamma, whose views on education are remarkably strict, has brought me up to be extremely short-sighted; it is part of her system; so do you mind my looking at you through my glasses?

Ccl: Oh! not at all, Gwendolen. I am very fond of being looked at.

Gwn: You are here on a short visit I suppose.

Ccl: Oh no! I live here.

Gwn: Really? Your mother, no doubt, or some female relative of advanced years, resides here also?

Ccl: Oh no! I have no mother, nor, in fact, any relations.

Gwn: Indeed?

Ccl: My dear guardian, with the assistance of Miss Prism, has the arduous task of looking after me.

Gwn: Your guardian? Oh! It is strange he never mentioned to me that he had a ward. How secretive of him! He grows more interesting hourly. [...] Cecily; I have liked you ever since I met you! But [...] I cannot help expressing a wish you were – well just a little older than you seem to be. [...] In fact, if I may speak candidly -

Ccl: Pray do! I think that whenever one has anything unpleasant to say, one should always be quite candid.

Gwn: Well, to speak with perfect candour, Cecily, I wish that you were fully forty-two, and more than usually plain for your age. Ernest has a strong upright nature. [...]

Ccl: I beg your pardon, Gwendolen, did you say Ernest?

Gwn: Yes.

Ccl: Oh, but it is not Mr. Ernest Worthing who is my guardian. It is his brother – his elder brother.

Gwn: Ernest never mentioned to me that he had a brother.

Ccl: I am sorry to say they have not been on good terms for a long time.

Gwn: Ah! that accounts for it. [...] I was growing almost anxious. [...] Of course you are quite, quite sure that it is not Mr. Ernest Worthing who is your guardian?

Ccl: Quite sure. In fact, I am going to be his.

Gwn: I beg your pardon?

Ccl: Dearest Gwendolen, [...] Mr. Ernest Worthing and I are engaged to be married.

Gwn: My darling Cecily, I think there must be some slight error. Mr. Ernest Worthing is engaged to me. [...]

Ccl: I am afraid you must be under some misconception. Ernest proposed to me exactly ten minutes ago.

Gwn: It is certainly very curious for he asked me to be his wife yesterday afternoon at 5:30. [...] I am sorry, dear Cecily, if it is any disappointment to you, but I am afraid I have the prior claim.

Gwn: If the poor fellow has been entrapped into any foolish promise I shall consider it my duty to rescue him at once, and with a firm hand.

Ccl: Whatever unfortunate entanglement my dear boy may have got into, I will never reproach him with it after we are married.

Gwn: Do you allude to me, Miss Cardew, as an entanglement? [...]

Ccl: 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.

Gwn: I am glad to say that I have never seen a spade. It is obvious that our social spheres have been widely different.

Mrn: Shall I lay tea here as usual, Miss?

Ccl: Yes, as usual.

Gwn: Are there many interesting walks in the vicinity, Miss Cardew?

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

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

Ccl: I suppose that is why you live in town? [...] – May I offer you some tea, Miss Fairfax?

Gwn: Thank you. Detestable girl! [...]

Ccl: Sugar?

Gwn: No, thank you. Sugar is not fashionable any more.

Ccl: Cake or bread and butter?

Gwn: Bread and butter, please: Cake is rarely seen at the best houses nowadays.

Ccl: [Sugars tea and dumps cake on Gwn's plate]

Gwn: You have filled my tea with lumps of sugar, and though I asked you 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.

Ccl: To save my poor, innocent, trusting boy from the machinations of any girl there are no lengths to which I would not go.

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

Ccl: It seems to me, Miss Fairfax, that I am trespassing on your valuable time. No doubt you have many other calls to make in the neighbourhood.