

The Importance of Being Earnest

Gwendoline - Cecily Side

GWENDOLINE: You are here on a short visit, I suppose?

CECILY: Oh, no! I live here.

GWENDOLINE: Indeed?

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

GWENDOLINE: Your guardian?

CECILY: Yes. I am Mr. Worthing's ward.

GWENDOLINE: Oh! It is strange he never mentioned to me that he had a ward. How secretive of him. He grows more interesting hourly. I am not sure, however, that the news inspires me with feelings of unmixed delight. I am very fond you, Cecily. I have liked you ever since I met you. But I am bound to state that, now I know that you are Mr. Worthing's ward, I cannot help expressing the wish that you were - well, just a little older than you seem to be - and not quite so very alluring in appearance. In fact, if I may speak candidly -

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

GWENDOLINE: Well, to speak with perfect candor, Cecily, I wish you were fully forty and more than usually plain for your age. Ernest has a strong, upright nature. He is the very soul of truth and honor. But even men of the noblest possible moral character are extremely susceptible to the influence of the physical charms of others.

CECILY: I beg your pardon, Gwendoline. Did you say Ernest?

GWENDOLINE: Yes.

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

GWENDOLINE: Ernest never mentioned to me that he had a bother.

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

GWENDOLINE: Ah, that accounts for it. And now I think of it, I have never heard any man mention his brother. The subject seems distasteful to most men. Of course you are quite, quite sure that it is not Mr. *Ernest Worthing* who's your guardian?

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

GWENDOLINE: I beg your pardon?

CECILY: Dearest Gwendoline, there is no reason why I should make any secret of it to you. Our little county newspaper is sure to chronicle the fact next week. Mr. Ernest Worthing and I are engaged to be married.

GWENDOLINE: My darling Cecily, I think there must be some slight error. Mr. Ernest Worthing is engaged to *me*. The announcement will appear in the *Morning Post* on Saturday at the latest.

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

GWENDOLINE: It is certainly very curious, for he asked *me* to be his wife yesterday afternoon at five-thirty. If you would care to verify the incident, pray do so. I never travel without my diary. I am so sorry, dear Cecily, if it is any disappointment to you, but I am afraid I have the prior claim.

CECILY: It would distress me more than I can tell you, dear Gwendoline, if it caused you any mental or physical anguish, but I feel bound to point out that since Ernest proposed to *you* he has clearly changed his mind.

GWENDOLINE: 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*.

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

GWENDOLINE: Do you allude to *me*, Miss Cardew, as an entanglement? You are presumptuous. On an occasion of this kind, it becomes more than a moral duty to speak one's mind - it becomes a pleasure.

CECILY: Do you suggest, Miss Fairfax, that I entrapped Ernest into an engagement? How dare you? This is not time for wearing the shallow mask of manners. When I see a spade I call it a spade.

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