**GWENDOLEN/CECILY SIDE**

**Gwendolen.**  [After examining **Cecily** carefully.]  You are here on a short visit, I suppose.

**Cecily.**  Oh no!  I live here.

**Gwendolen.**  [Severely.]  Really?  Your mother, no doubt, or some female relative of advanced years, resides here also?

**Cecily.**  Oh no!  I have no mother, nor, in fact, any relations.

**Gwendolen.**  Indeed?

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

**Gwendolen.**  Your guardian?

**Cecily.**  Yes, I am Mr. Worthing’s ward.

**Gwendolen.**  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.  [Rising and going to her.]  I am very fond of you, Cecily; I have liked you ever since I met you!  But I am bound to state that now that I know that you are Mr. Worthing’s ward, I cannot help expressing a wish 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.

**Gwendolen.**  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.  He is the very soul of truth and honour.  Disloyalty would be as impossible to him as deception.  But even men of the noblest possible moral character are extremely susceptible to the influence of the physical charms of others.  Modern, no less than Ancient History, supplies us with many most painful examples of what I refer to.  If it were not so, indeed, History would be quite unreadable.

**Cecily.**  I beg your pardon, Gwendolen, did you say Ernest?

**Gwendolen.**  Yes.

**Cecily.**  Oh, but it is not Mr. Ernest Worthing who is my guardian.  It is his brother—his elder brother.

**Gwendolen.**  [Sitting down again.]  Ernest never mentioned to me that he had a brother.

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

**Gwendolen.**  Ah! that accounts for it.  And now that I think of it I have never heard any man mention his brother.  The subject seems distasteful to most men.  Cecily, you have lifted a load from my mind.  I was growing almost anxious.  It would have been terrible if any cloud had come across a friendship like ours, would it not?  Of course you are quite, quite sure that it is not Mr. Ernest Worthing who is your guardian?

**Cecily.**  Quite sure.  [A pause.]  In fact, I am going to be his.

**Gwendolen.**  [Inquiringly.]  I beg your pardon?

**Cecily.**  [Rather shy and confidingly.]  Dearest Gwendolen, there is no reason why I should make a 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.

**Gwendolen.**  [Quite politely, rising.]  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.**  [Very politely, rising.]  I am afraid you must be under some misconception.  Ernest proposed to me exactly ten minutes ago.  [Shows diary.]

**Gwendolen.**  [Examines diary through her lorgnettte carefully.]  It is certainly very curious, for he asked me to be his wife yesterday afternoon at 5.30.  If you would care to verify the incident, pray do so.  [Produces diary of her own.]  I never travel without my diary.  One should always have something sensational to read in the train.  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 Gwendolen, if it caused you any mental or physical anguish, but I feel bound to point out that since Ernest proposed to you he clearly has changed his mind.