**CECILY/ALGERNON SIDE**

**Cecily.**  Uncle Jack would be very much annoyed if he knew you were staying on till next week, at the same hour.

**Algernon.**  Oh, I don’t care about Jack.  I don’t care for anybody in the whole world but you.  I love you, Cecily.  You will marry me, won’t you?

**Cecily.**  You silly boy!  Of course.  Why, we have been engaged for the last three months.

**Algernon.**  For the last three months?

**Cecily.**  Yes, it will be exactly three months on Thursday.

**Algernon.**  But how did we become engaged?

**Cecily.**  Well, ever since dear Uncle Jack first confessed to us that he had a younger brother who was very wicked and bad, you of course have formed the chief topic of conversation between myself and Miss Prism.  And of course a man who is much talked about is always very attractive.  One feels there must be something in him, after all.  I daresay it was foolish of me, but I fell in love with you, Ernest.

**Algernon.**  Darling!  And when was the engagement actually settled?

**Cecily.**  On the 14th of February last.  Worn out by your entire ignorance of my existence, I determined to end the matter one way or the other, and after a long struggle with myself I accepted you under this dear old tree here.  The next day I bought this little ring in your name, and this is the little bangle with the true lover’s knot I promised you always to wear.

**Algernon.**  Did I give you this?  It’s very pretty, isn’t it?

**Cecily.**  Yes, you’ve wonderfully good taste, Ernest.  It’s the excuse I’ve always given for your leading such a bad life.  And this is the box in which I keep all your dear letters.  [Kneels at table, opens box, and produces letters tied up with blue ribbon.]

**Algernon.**  My letters!  But, my own sweet Cecily, I have never written you any letters.

**Cecily.**  You need hardly remind me of that, Ernest.  I remember only too well that I was forced to write your letters for you.  I wrote always three times a week, and sometimes oftener.

**Algernon.**  Oh, do let me read them, Cecily?

**Cecily.**  Oh, I couldn’t possibly.  They would make you far too conceited.  [Replaces box.]  The three you wrote me after I had broken off the engagement are so beautiful, and so badly spelled, that even now I can hardly read them without crying a little.

**Algernon.**  But was our engagement ever broken off?

**Cecily.**  Of course it was.  On the 22nd of last March.  You can see the entry if you like. [Shows diary.]  ‘To-day I broke off my engagement with Ernest.  I feel it is better to do so.  The weather still continues charming.’

**Algernon.**  But why on earth did you break it off?  What had I done?  I had done nothing at all.  Cecily, I am very much hurt indeed to hear you broke it off.  Particularly when the weather was so charming.

**Cecily.**  It would hardly have been a really serious engagement if it hadn’t been broken off at least once.  But I forgave you before the week was out.

**Algernon.**  [Crossing to her, and kneeling.]  What a perfect angel you are, Cecily.

**Cecily.**  You dear romantic boy.  [He kisses her, she puts her fingers through his hair.]  I hope your hair curls naturally, does it?

**Algernon.**  Yes, darling, with a little help from others.

**Cecily.**  I am so glad.

**Algernon.**  You’ll never break off our engagement again, Cecily?

**Cecily.**  I don’t think I could break it off now that I have actually met you.  Besides, of course, there is the question of your name.

**Algernon.**  Yes, of course.  [Nervously.]

**Cecily.**  You must not laugh at me, darling, but it had always been a girlish dream of mine to love some one whose name was Ernest.  [**Algernon** rises, **Cecily** also.]  There is something in that name that seems to inspire absolute confidence.  I pity any poor married woman whose husband is not called Ernest.