**JACK/ALGERNON SIDE**

**Jack.**  Do you mean to say you have had my cigarette case all this time?  I wish to goodness you had let me know. I was very nearly offering a large reward.

**Algernon.**  Well, I wish you would offer one.  I happen to be more than usually hard up.

**Jack.**  There is no good offering a large reward now that the thing is found.

**Algernon.**  I think that is rather mean of you, Ernest, I must say.  [Opens the cigarette case and examines it.]  However, it makes no matter, for, now that I look at the inscription inside, I find that the thing isn’t yours after all.

**Jack.**  Of course it’s mine.  [Moving to him.]  You have seen me with it a hundred times, and you have no right whatsoever to read what is written inside.  It is a very ungentlemanly thing to read a private cigarette case.

**Algernon.**  Oh! it is absurd to have a hard and fast rule about what one should read and what one shouldn’t.  More than half of modern culture depends on what one shouldn’t read.

**Jack.**  I am quite aware of the fact, and I don’t propose to discuss modern culture.  It isn’t the sort of thing one should talk of in private.  I simply want my cigarette case back.

**Algernon.**  Yes; but this isn’t your cigarette case.  This cigarette case is a present from some one of the name of Cecily, and you said you didn’t know any one of that name.

**Jack.**  Well, if you want to know, Cecily happens to be my aunt.

**Algernon.**  Your aunt!

**Jack.**  Yes.  Charming old lady she is, too.  Just give it back to me, Algy.

**Algernon.**  [Retreating to back of sofa.]  But why does she call herself little Cecily if she is your aunt?  [Reading.]  ‘From little Cecily with her fondest love.’

**Jack.**  [Moving to sofa and kneeling upon it.]  My dear fellow, what on earth is there in that?  Some aunts are tall, some aunts are not tall.  That is a matter that surely an aunt may be allowed to decide for herself.  You seem to think that every aunt should be exactly like your aunt!  That is absurd!  For Heaven’s sake give me back my cigarette case.

**Algernon.**  Yes.  But why does your aunt call you her uncle?  ‘From little Cecily, with her fondest love to her dear Uncle Jack.’  There is no objection, I admit, to an aunt being a small aunt, but why an aunt, no matter what her size may be, should call her own nephew her uncle, I can’t quite make out.  Besides, your name isn’t Jack at all; it is Ernest.

**Jack.**  It isn’t Ernest; it’s Jack.

**Algernon.**  You have always told me it was Ernest.  I have introduced you to every one as Ernest.  You answer to the name of Ernest.  You look as if your name was Ernest.  You are the most earnest-looking person I ever saw in my life.  It is perfectly absurd your saying that your name isn’t Ernest.  It’s on your cards.  Here is one of them.  [Taking it from case.]  ‘Mr. Ernest Worthing, B. 4, The Albany.’  I’ll keep this as a proof that your name is Ernest if ever you attempt to deny it to me, or to Gwendolen, or to any one else.  [Puts the card in his pocket.]

**Jack.**  Well, my name is Ernest in town and Jack in the country, and the cigarette case was given to me in the country.

**Algernon.**  Yes, but that does not account for the fact that your small Aunt Cecily calls you her dear uncle.  Come, old boy, you had much better have the thing out at once.

**Jack.**  My dear Algy, you talk exactly as if you were a dentist.  It is very vulgar to talk like a dentist when one isn’t a dentist.  It produces a false impression.

**Algernon.**  Well, that is exactly what dentists always do.