MERRIMAN Ahem! Ahem! Lady Bracknell!

JACK Good heavens!

[*Enter* LADY BRACKNELL—*general consternation and scuffle*]

[*Exit* MERRIMAN]

LADY BRACKNELL Gwendolen! What does this mean?

GWENDOLEN Merely that I am engaged to be married to Mr Worthing, mamma.

LADY BRACKNELL Come over here, at once.

GWENDOLEN Certainly, mamma. But I am engaged to be married to Mr Worthing.

LADY BRACKNELL Silence, child. Come here. At once. Hesitation of any kind is a sign of mental decay in the young, of physical weakness in the old. [*Turns to* JACK] Mr Worthing, apprised of my daughter's sudden flight by her trusty maid, whose confidence I purchased by means of a small coin, I followed her at once by a luggage train. Her unhappy father is, I am glad to say, under the impression that she is attending a more than usually lengthy lecture at the University Extension Scheme. I do not propose to undeceive him. Indeed I have never undeceived him on any question. I would consider it wrong. But of course you will clearly understand that all communication between yourself and my daughter must cease immediately from this moment. On this point, as indeed on all points, I am firm.

JACK I am engaged to be married to Gwendolen, Lady Bracknell.

LADY BRACKNELL You are nothing of the kind, sir. [*Turns*

to ALGERNON] And now as regards Algernon!... Algernon!

ALGERNON Yes, Aunt Augusta.

LADY BRACKNELL May I ask if it is in this house that your invalid friend Mr Bunbury resides?

ALGERNON Oh! no. Bunbury doesn't live here. Bunbury is somewhere else at present. In fact Bunbury is dead.

LADY BRACKNELL Dead? But when did Mr Bunbury die? His death must have been extremely sudden.

ALGERNON I killed Bunbury this afternoon. I mean poor Bunbury died this afternoon.

LADY BRACKNELL What did he die of?

ALGERNON Bunbury? Oh! he was quite exploded.

LADY BRACKNELL Exploded! Was he the victim of a revolutionary outrage? I was not aware that Mr Bunbury was interested in social legislation. If so, he is well punished for his morbidity.

ALGERNON My dear Aunt Augusta, I mean he was found out! The doctors found out that Bunbury could not live, that is what I mean—so Bunbury died.

LADY BRACKNELL He seems to have had great confidence in the opinion of his physicians. I am glad, however, that he made up his mind at the last to some definite course of action, and acted under proper medical advice. And now that we have buried this Mr Bunbury at last, may I ask, Mr Worthing, who is that young lady whose hand my nephew Algernon is now holding in what seems to me a peculiarly unnecessary manner?

JACK This lady, Lady Bracknell, is Miss Cecily Cardew, my ward.

[LADY BRACKNELL *bows coldly to* CECILY]

ALGERNON I am engaged to be married to Cecily, Aunt Augusta.

LADY BRACKNELL I beg your pardon?

CECILY Mr Moncrieff and I are engaged to be married, Lady Bracknell.

LADY BRACKNELL [*with a shiver, crossing to the sofa and sitting down*] I do not know whether there is anything peculiarly exciting in the air of this part of Hertfordshire, but the amount of engagements that go on seems to me considerably above the proper average that statistics have laid down for our guidance. I think some preliminary enquiry on my part would not be out of place. Mr Worthing, is Miss Cardew at all connected with any of the larger railway stations in London? I ask merely for information. Until yesterday I had no idea that there were any families or persons, whose origin was a terminus.

[JACK *looks perfectly furious, but restrains himself*]

JACK [*in a clear cold voice*] Miss Cardew is the grand-daughter of the late Mr Thomas Cardew of 149 Belgrave Square, S.W., Gervase Park, Dorking, Surrey, and the Sporran, Fifeshire, N.B.

LADY BRACKNELL That sounds not unsatisfactory. Three addresses always inspire confidence. But what proof have I of their authenticity?

[JACK *gets very angry*—GWENDOLEN *makes signs to him to keep quiet*—ALGERNON *plucks at his coat tails*—CECILY *puts her hand on his arm*]