LADY BRACKNELL Oh! nowadays that is no guarantee of respectability of character. What number in Belgrave Square?

JACK 149.

LADY BRACKNELL The unfashionable side. However, that could easily be altered.

JACK Do you mean the fashion or the side, Lady Bracknell?

LADY BRACKNELL Both if necessary, I presume. What are your politics?

JACK Well, I am afraid I really have none, Lady Bracknell. I am a Liberal Unionist.

LADY BRACKNELL Oh! they count as Tories! They dine with us. Or come in the evening, at any rate. You have, of course, no sympathy of any kind with the Radical Party?

JACK Oh! I don't want to put the asses against the classes, if that is what you mean, Lady Bracknell.

LADY BRACKNELL That is exactly what I do mean . . . ahem! . . . Are your parents living?

JACK I have lost both my parents!

LADY BRACKNELL Both? . . . To lose one parent may be regarded as a misfortune . . . to lose both seems like carelessness. Who was your father? Was he born in what the Radical papers call the purple of commerce or did he rise from the ranks of the aristocracy?

JACK I am afraid I don't really know. The fact is, Lady Bracknell, I said I had lost my parents. The truth is that my parents seem to have lost me. . . . I don't actually know who I am. I was . . . well, I was found. The late Mr

Thomas Cardew, an old gentleman of a very charitable and kindly disposition, found me and gave me the name of Worthing because he happened to have a ticket for Worthing in his pocket at the time. Worthing is a place in Sussex. It is a seaside resort.

LADY BRACKNELL Where did the charitable gentleman who had a ticket for the seaside resort find you?

JACK [*gravely*] In a handbag.

LADY BRACKNELL A handbag!

JACK [*very seriously*] Yes, Lady Bracknell. I was in a handbag —a somewhat large black leather handbag, with handles to it—an ordinary handbag, in fact.

LADY BRACKNELL In what locality did this Mr Cardew come across this ordinary handbag?

JACK In the cloak-room at Victoria Station. It was given to him in mistake for his own. He did not discover the error till he arrived at his own house. All subsequent efforts to ascertain who I was were unavailing.

LADY BRACKNELL The cloak-room at Victoria Station?

JACK Yes, the Brighton line.

LADY BRACKNELL The line is immaterial . . . Mr Worthing, I confess I feel somewhat bewildered by what you have just told me. To be born, or at any rate bred in a handbag, whether it had handles or not, seems to me to display a contempt for the ordinary decencies of family life that reminds one of the worst excesses of the French Revolution. And I presume you know what that unfortunate movement led to? As for the particular locality in which the handbag was found, a cloak-room at a railway station

might serve to conceal a social indiscretion—has probably indeed been used for that purpose before now—but it could hardly be regarded as an assured basis for a recognised position in good society.

JACK May I ask then what you would advise me to do? I need hardly say I would do anything in the world to ensure Gwendolen's happiness.

LADY BRACKNELL I would strongly advise you, Mr Worthing, to try and acquire some relations as soon as possible, and to make a definite effort to produce, at any rate, one parent, of either sex, before the season is quite over.

JACK Well, I don't see how I could possibly manage to do that. I can produce the handbag at any moment. It is in my bedroom at home. I really think that should satisfy you, Lady Bracknell.

LADY BRACKNELL [*indignantly*] Me, sir? What has it to do with me? You can hardly imagine, sir, that I and Lord Bracknell would dream of allowing our only daughter—a girl brought up with the utmost care—to marry into a cloak-room and form an alliance with a parcel?

[JACK *starts indignantly*]

Kindly open the door for me, sir. You will, of course, understand that for the future there is to be no communication of any kind between you and Miss Fairfax.

[*Exit*]

[ALGERNON, *from the other room, strikes up the Wedding March.* JACK *looks perfectly furious*]

JACK [*going to the door*] For goodness' sake don't play that ghastly tune, Algy. How idiotic you are!