
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

The Importance of Being Earnest

4: A visit from Ernest



NB: This is not a word-for-word transcript

LANGUAGE FOCUS: Past perfect continuous

Narrator

Algernon secretly managed to find out the address of Jack's house in the country – the house where he lives with Cecily. We now join Cecily, a pretty girl of eighteen, and her **governess** Miss Prism – that's the lady who looks after her, in their garden on a summer's day. They're studying German grammar, but Cecily seems more interested in the flowers.

Miss Prism

Cecily! Leave the flowers. Sit down and we'll look at the German verbs.

Cecily

But I really don't like German.

Miss Prism

Cecily, you know Mr Worthing wants you to improve yourself.

Cecily

Dear Uncle Jack is so serious!

Miss Prism

Cecily! I am surprised at you. You know the problems Mr Worthing has. You must remember how worried he is about his **unfortunate** young brother.

Cecily

I wish Uncle Jack would let that unfortunate young man, his brother, come here sometimes. Oh, Miss Prism... Look who's coming... It's **Reverend** Chasuble.

Narrator

And indeed, they hadn't noticed the middle-aged man walking up the garden because **they had been talking** so energetically about Jack.

Miss Prism

Reverend Chasuble! This is a pleasure.

Chasuble

Oh, Miss Prism, I hope you are well?

Cecily

Miss Prism has just been complaining of a headache. I think it would be good for her to have a short walk with you in the park, Reverend.

Miss Prism

I haven't mentioned anything about a headache.

Cecily

No, dear Miss Prism, I know that, but I thought you **had been looking** like you might get one.

Chasuble

Mr Worthing, I suppose, has not returned from London yet?

Miss Prism

He won't be back until Monday afternoon.

Chasuble

Ah yes, he likes spending Sunday in London. He's not one of those people who spend all their time enjoying themselves, not like that young man his brother.

Miss Prism

I think, dear Reverend, I will have a walk with you. I find I have a headache after all, and a walk might do it good.

Chasuble

With pleasure, Miss Prism.

Miss Prism

Cecily, you can read your economics book while I'm gone.

Narrator

So Miss Prism and Dr Chasuble wander off, leaving Cecily alone. She immediately shuts her book on economics and is about to get up when Merriman, the **butler**, arrives.

Merriman

Mr Ernest Worthing has just driven over from the station.

Cecily

Uncle Jack's brother! Did you tell him Mr Worthing was in London?

Merriman

Yes, Miss. He seemed very disappointed. **He had been hoping to** find Mr Worthing at home and **had been planning** to stay the night. I mentioned that you and Miss Prism were in the garden. He said he would like to talk to you for a moment.

Cecily

Ask him to come here.

Merriman

Yes, Miss.

Cecily

I have never met a really wicked person before.

Narrator

Algernon enters looking stylish and confident.

Algernon

You are my little cousin Cecily, I'm sure.

Cecily

You are mistaken. I am not little. In fact, I believe I am unusually tall for my age.

Algernon

Oh, I'm sorry...

Cecily

But I am your cousin Cecily. You are Uncle Jack's brother, my cousin Ernest, my **wicked** cousin Ernest.

Algernon

Oh! I'm not really wicked at all, cousin Cecily.

Cecily

If you aren't, then you have been **deceiving** us all. I hope you haven't been leading a **double life**, pretending to be wicked and being really good all the time.

Algernon

Oh! Of course I have been rather **reckless**.

Cecily

I am glad to hear it.

Algernon

In fact, now you mention it, I've been very bad in my own small way.

Cecily

I don't think you should be so proud of that, though I am sure it has been very pleasant.

Algernon

It is much pleasanter being here with you.

Cecily

I can't understand why you are here at all. Uncle Jack isn't back until Monday afternoon.

Algernon

How disappointing! I have to go back to London early on Monday morning.

Cecily

Well, I think you should wait till Uncle Jack arrives. I know he wants to speak to you about you **emigrating**.

Algernon

About me what?

Cecily

You emigrating. He's gone to London to buy you some clothes.

Algernon

I'm not happy about Jack buying my clothes. I don't like his style of ties at all.

Cecily

I don't think you'll need ties. Uncle Jack is sending you to Australia.

Algernon

Australia! I'd sooner die.

Cecily

Well, he said at dinner on Wednesday night, that you would have to choose between this world, the next world, and Australia.

Algernon

Oh, well! I haven't heard very good things about Australia or the next world. This world is good enough for me, cousin Cecily.

Cecily

Yes, but are you good enough for it?

Algernon

I'm afraid I'm not. That is why you have to **reform** me, cousin Cecily.

Cecily

I'm sorry, I don't have time this morning.

Algernon

Well, will you have time to reform me this afternoon?

Cecily

I think *you* should try.

Algernon

I will, but I will need a little something to eat first. I'm a little hungry.

Cecily

How thoughtless of me! Won't you come in for something to eat?

Algernon

Thank you. Could I have one of your flowers first?

Cecily

Certainly.

Algernon

I'd like a pink rose.

Cecily

Why?

Algernon

Because you are like a pink rose, cousin Cecily.

Cecily

I don't think it can be right for you to talk to me like that. Miss Prism never says such things to me.

Algernon

Then Miss Prism is a short-sighted old lady. You are the prettiest girl I ever saw.

Narrator

Algernon and Cecily go up to the house. Miss Prism and Reverend Chasuble, who **had been walking and discussing** the advantages of marriage for single men, also return home. But someone else is now walking up the garden path. It's Jack! He's back early. He's dressed in black and looking very serious.

Miss Prism

Mr Worthing! This is indeed a surprise. We thought you were coming back on Monday!

Chasuble

Dear Mr Worthing, I hope this black suit does not mean some terrible news?

Jack

My brother.

Miss Prism

Spending lots of money and running up **debts** again?

Chasuble

Still leading his life of pleasure?

Jack

Dead!

Chasuble

Your brother Ernest, dead?

Jack

Quite dead.

Vocabulary

governess

a woman who in the past lived with a family and taught the children

unfortunate

describing someone who is in an embarrassing or unpleasant situation

Reverend

form of address to a Christian priest

butler

the most important male servant in a house

wicked

morally bad

deceiving (to deceive)

tricking people into believing something to be true when it isn't

reckless

acting without thinking of the possible effects of your actions

emigrating (to emigrate)

leaving one country to go and live in another

reform

to change someone's behaviour so they are a better person

debt

money owed to someone

Quiz

1. When Algernon arrives at the house in the country, he introduces himself as ...

- a) Reverend Chasuble
- b) Jack
- c) Jack's brother, Ernest

2. Cecily says that Jack ...

- a) ... is going to emigrate to Australia.
- b) ... is going to send his brother Ernest to Australia.
- c) ... is going to buy some ties in London.

3. Miss Prism is surprised to see Jack because she thought ...

- a) ... he was coming back on Monday.
- b) ... he was dead.
- c) ... he had been walking in the garden.

Feedback:

1. When Algernon arrives at the house in the country, he introduces himself as ...

- a) Reverend Chasuble – Wrong – He introduces himself as someone else.
- b) Jack – Wrong – He introduces himself as a relative of Jack
- c) Jack's brother, Ernest – Correct – Well done!**

2. Cecily says that Jack ...

- a) ... is going to emigrate to Australia – Wrong – He is planning to send someone else to Australia.
- b) ... is going to send his brother Ernest to Australia – Correct – Well done!**
- c) ... is going to buy some ties in London – Wrong – Cecily says that Jack has gone to buy clothes, but she says he is planning to do something else.

3. Miss Prism is surprised to see Jack because she thought ...

- a) ... he was coming back on Monday – Correct – Well done!**
- b) ... he was dead – Wrong – She was surprised for a different reason.
- c) ... he had been walking in the garden – Wrong – She was surprised for a different reason.