
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

The Importance of Being Earnest

7: The misunderstanding



This is not a word-for-word transcript

LANGUAGE FOCUS: Talking about the future

Narrator

Algernon and Cecily are engaged. But Cecily thinks his name is Ernest, and so Algernon has rushed off to change his name. Meanwhile, Gwendolen has arrived, and **is about to** meet Cecily for the first time. Gwendolen also thinks she's engaged to someone called Ernest.

Cecily

Hello, my name is Cecily Cardew.

Gwendolen

What a sweet name! I like you already. I think **we are going to be** great friends. My **first impressions** of people are never wrong.

Cecily

How nice of you to like me so much when we have only just met. Please sit down.

Gwendolen

May I call you Cecily?

Cecily

With pleasure!

Gwendolen

And you can call me Gwendolen... You are here on a short visit, I suppose.

Cecily

Oh no! I live here.

Gwendolen

Really? Your mother, no doubt, lives here, too?

Cecily

Oh no! I don't have a mother or father - in fact, I don't have any relations.

Gwendolen

Really?

Cecily

My dear **guardian** looks after me.

Gwendolen

Your guardian?

Cecily

Yes, Mr Worthing.

Narrator

She means Jack, of course.

Gwendolen

Oh! That's strange - he's never mentioned to me that he was a guardian. And I'm not sure, that this news fills me with great delight... I have liked you ever since I met you, Cecily. But now that I know that Mr Worthing is your guardian, I can't help wishing that you were... well... just a little older, and not quite so... well... attractive. In fact, if I may speak honestly...

Cecily

Please do...

Gwendolen

Well, to be honest, Cecily, I wish that you were 42 and unattractive. Ernest would never lie to me. Though I don't always trust him, [to herself] especially with beautiful women.

Cecily

I'm sorry, Gwendolen, did you say Ernest?

Gwendolen

Yes.

Cecily

Oh, but it isn't Mr Ernest Worthing who is my guardian. It's his brother - his elder brother.

Narrator

By Ernest Worthing, she means Algernon.

Gwendolen

Ernest never mentioned to me that he had a brother.

Cecily

Well, they haven't been getting along well for a long time.

Gwendolen

Ah! that explains it. Cecily, you have greatly **reassured** me. I was beginning to get anxious. You are quite sure that it is not Mr Ernest Worthing who is your guardian?

Cecily

Quite sure. In fact, I am going to be his.

Gwendolen

I beg your pardon?

Cecily

Dearest Gwendolen **Mr Ernest Worthing and I are going to get married.**

Narrator

Now when Cecily says Ernest here, she, of course, means Algernon, who she thinks is called Ernest.

Gwendolen

My darling Cecily, there must be some mistake. Mr Ernest Worthing is engaged to me.

Narrator

And when Gwendolen says Ernest here, she, of course, means Jack.

Gwendolen

The announcement will appear in the paper on Saturday.

Cecily

You must be mistaken. Ernest proposed to me ten minutes ago. I've written it in my diary.

Gwendolen

That's very strange, because he asked me marry him yesterday afternoon. Here, it's in my diary. I never travel without my diary. You should always have something exciting to read in the train. I'm sorry, dear Cecily, but I'm afraid he was mine first.

Cecily

It upsets me, dear Gwendolen, but I have to point out that since Ernest proposed to you, he has clearly changed his mind.

Gwendolen

If the poor fellow has been **trapped I intend to rescue** him at once.

Cecily

Whatever **entanglement** my dear boy has got into, **I will never blame** him.

Gwendolen

Are you referring to me, Miss Cardew, as an entanglement?

Cecily

Do you suggest, Miss Fairfax, that I trapped Ernest into an engagement? How dare you?

Gwendolen

Miss Cardew...

Merriman

Ahem!

Narrator

But they are interrupted by Merriman who arrives with the tea. The two women look angrily at each other. They can't continue their argument in front of him.

Gwendolen

Are there many interesting walks around here, Miss Cardew?

Cecily

Oh! Yes! Several. From the top of the hills you can see five **counties**.

Gwendolen

Five counties! I wouldn't like that; I hate crowds.

Cecily

I suppose that is why you live in London?

Gwendolen

Quite a well-kept garden this is, Miss Cardew.

Cecily

So glad you like it, Miss Fairfax.

Gwendolen

I had no idea there were any flowers in the country.

Cecily

Oh, flowers are as common here, Miss Fairfax, as people are in London. Would you like some tea, Miss Fairfax?

Gwendolen

Thank you. Awful girl!

Cecily

Sugar?

Gwendolen

No, thank you. Sugar is not fashionable any more.

Narrator

Cecily puts four lumps of sugar into the cup, which she gives to Gwendolen, who does not notice as she is **short-sighted**.

Cecily

Cake or bread and butter?

Gwendolen

Bread and butter, please. Cake is rarely seen at the best houses nowadays.

Narrator

Cecily cuts a large slice of cake and hands it to Gwendolen. Gwendolen drinks the tea and **shudders**. She puts down the cup, reaches out for the bread and butter and finds it's cake.

Gwendolen

You have put sugar in my tea, and though I asked quite clearly for bread and butter, you have given me cake. I usually have a gentle and sweet nature, but I warn you, Miss Cardew, you may go too far.

Cecily

I would do anything to save my poor, innocent boy from the secret plans of another girl.

Gwendolen

From the moment I saw you I distrusted you. My first impressions of people are always right.

Cecily

It seems to me, Miss Fairfax, that I am wasting your valuable time.

Narrator

And here comes Jack.

Gwendolen

Ernest! My own Ernest!

Jack

Gwendolen! Darling!

Gwendolen

Wait! May I ask if you are engaged to this young lady?

Jack

To dear little Cecily! Of course not!

Gwendolen

Thank you.

Cecily

I knew there must be some misunderstanding, Miss Fairfax. This gentleman is my guardian, Mr Jack Worthing.

Gwendolen

I beg your pardon?

Cecily

This is Uncle Jack.

Gwendolen

Jack! Oh!

Narrator

And now Algernon arrives, too.

Cecily

Here is Ernest.

Algernon

Cecily, my love!

Cecily

Wait, Ernest! May I ask you - are you engaged to this young lady?

Vocabulary

impressions

opinion of someone or something you make quite quickly

guardian

someone who is legally responsible for someone else, such as a child whose parents cannot look after them (perhaps because they have died)

reassured

made to feel less worried about something

trapped

(here) caught by a trick

entanglement

(here) a complicated situation

blame

say or think that someone did something wrong

counties

the UK is divided into counties, which are political regions

short-sighted

unable to see things that are not close

shudders

shakes very suddenly

Quiz

1. When Gwendolen first meets Cecily she...
 - a) ... thinks Cecily is unattractive.
 - b) ... thinks they won't get along.
 - c) ... thinks they will be friends.

2. Gwendolen and Cecily both say they are going to marry...
 - a) ... someone called Ernest.
 - b) ... Cecily's guardian.
 - c) ... someone called Jack.

3. The misunderstanding is that...
 - a) Cecily thinks Algernon is called Ernest and Gwendolen thinks Jack is called Ernest.
 - b) Cecily thinks Jack is called Ernest and Gwendolen thinks Algernon is called Ernest.
 - c) Gwendolen thinks that Jack and Cecily are already married.

Feedback

1. When Gwendolen first meets Cecily she ...
 - a) ... thinks Cecily is unattractive. – Wrong. She says 'I can't help wishing that you were... well... just a little older, and not quite so... well... attractive.'
 - b) ... thinks they won't get along. Wrong. She says 'I like you already. I think we are going to be great friends.'
 - c) ... thinks they will be friends. – Correct. Well done!**

2. Gwendolen and Cecily both say they are going to marry...
 - a) ... someone called Ernest. – Correct. Well done!**
 - b) ... Cecily's guardian. –Wrong. They both say they're going to marry someone else.
 - c) ... someone called Jack. – Wrong. They both say they're going to marry someone with a different name.

3. The misunderstanding is that...
 - a) Cecily thinks Jack is called Ernest and Gwendolen thinks Algernon is called Ernest. – Wrong. It is the other way round!
 - b) Cecily thinks Algernon is called Ernest and Gwendolen thinks Jack is called Ernest. – Correct. Well done!**
 - c) Gwendolen thinks that Jack and Cecily are already married. – Wrong. Cecily tells her that they 'are going to get married.'