**SIDE 1 Algernon and Jack**

**Algernon.**  How are you, my dear Ernest?  What brings you up to town?

**Jack.**  Oh, pleasure, pleasure!  What else should bring one anywhere?  Eating as usual, I see, Algy!

**Algernon.**  [Stiffly*.*]  I believe it is customary in good society to take some slight refreshment at five o’clock.  Where have you been since last Thursday?

**Jack.**  [Sitting down on the sofa.]  In the country.

**Algernon.**  What on earth do you do there?

**Jack.**  [Pulling off his gloves*.*]  When one is in town one amuses oneself.  When one is in the country one amuses other people.  It is excessively boring.

**Algernon.**  And who are the people you amuse?

**Jack.**  [Airily*.*]  Oh, neighbours, neighbours.

**Algernon.**  Got nice neighbours in your part of Shropshire?

**Jack.**  Perfectly horrid!  Never speak to one of them.

**Algernon.**  How immensely you must amuse them!  [Goes over and takes sandwich.]  By the way, Shropshire is your county, is it not?

**Jack.**  Eh?  Shropshire?  Yes, of course.  Hallo!  Why all these cups?  Why cucumber sandwiches?  Who is coming to tea?

**Algernon.**  Oh! merely Aunt Augusta and Gwendolen.

**Jack.**  How perfectly delightful!

**Algernon.**  Yes, that is all very well; but I am afraid Aunt Augusta won’t quite approve of your being here.

**Jack.**  May I ask why?

**Algernon.**  My dear fellow, the way you flirt with Gwendolen is perfectly disgraceful.  It is almost as bad as the way Gwendolen flirts with you.

**Jack.**  I am in love with Gwendolen.  I have come up to town expressly to propose to her.

**Algernon.**  I thought you had come up for pleasure? . . . I call that business.

**Jack.**  How utterly unromantic you are!

**Algernon.** I don’t give my consent.

**Jack.**  Your consent!

**Algernon.**  My dear fellow, Gwendolen is my first cousin.  And before I allow you to marry her, you will have to clear up the whole question of Cecily.  [Rings bell.]

**Jack.**  Cecily!  What on earth do you mean?  What do you mean, Algy, by Cecily!  I don’t know any one of the name of Cecily.

*Algernon produces a cigarette case and opens it.*

**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 have been writing frantic letters to the police about it.  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.**  [Opens case and examines it.]  That 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.** Algy, I simply want my cigarette case back.

**Algernon.**  Yes; but this isn’t your cigarette case.  This cigarette case is a present from someone of the name of Cecily, and you said you didn’t know anyone 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.** But why does she call herself little Cecily if she is your aunt. [Reading.]  ‘From little Cecily with her fondest love.’

**Jack.**   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.