

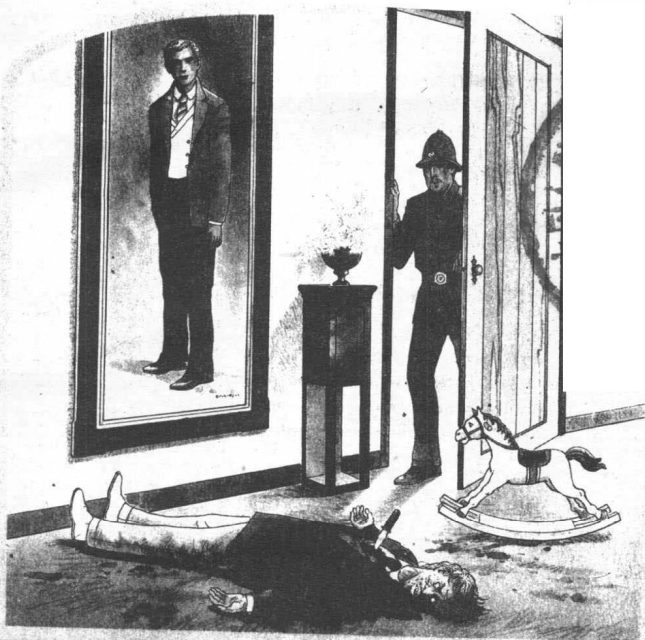


Five Stories From OSCAR WILDE

Simplified By ELIZABETH TOMBS BA(OXON); MA

World Publishing Corp

shinglet publishers pte ltd



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First Published 1988

ISBN 9971 61 355 7

ISBN 7-5062-0581-5

Reprint authorized by Shing Lee Publishers Pte Ltd.

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Reprint by World Publishing Corporation, Beijing, 1990

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PREFACE

The Classics to Remember series of English Literature books is a collection of readers for pupils at secondary levels.

The series is a selection of abridged and simplified classics in the English language, designed to appeal to the average reader. Whilst retaining the original feel of the book, these shorter versions offer fewer obstacles to pleasure and immediate understanding.

Each book includes an introduction giving details about the individual author, plus a suggestion of the plot and themes of the story. Character notes are included, and at the end of the story there is a glossary and a series of questions on each chapter, designed to ensure that the pupil has grasped the essentials of the plot.

Above all, we hope that the reader will enjoy these classics made available in such an accessible form. The series includes adventure and mystery novels, detective, science fiction and love stories: a whole range of well-written and enduring classics in English.

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FIVE STORIES FROM OSCAR WILDE

INTRODUCTION

In the 1890s Oscar Wilde was a famous and sometimes outrageous figure in fashionable social circles in London. He was also well-known in America and Europe to theatre audiences, readers and critics. He had wide groups of admiring friends.

Yet he was also the subject of gossip because of his glamour and outlandishness, and especially his manner of dressing — velvet knickerbockers were his favourites. A scandal later ensured a public trial and his spending some years in prison before going to France where he died. But surviving all this is the brilliance and terror of 'Dorian Gray', the wit of his comic tales, and the sparkling conversation of his plays. This book offers a selection of all types of his writing: novel, short stories, fairy tales and play rendered into prose.

CHARACTER NOTES

ERNEST WORTHING

Ernest Worthing is a friend of Algernon. There is some competition between the two young men. Ernest calls himself Jack in the country to his charge Miss Cecily Cardew and tells her he has a brother in town called Ernest who often needs to be rescued. This white lie he calls 'Bunburying', so that he can come to London often without anyone knowing what he is doing. He falls in love with Gwendolen but the marriage is opposed by her mother Lady Bracknell, until Lady Bracknell discovers his true identity. He opposes Cecily's marriage to Algernon out of annoyance.

ALGERNON

Algernon, nephew of Lady Bracknell, is more cautious than Ernest and is often disapproving of his friend. He falls in love with Cecily and opposes Ernest's marriage to Gwendolen, until both couples are united happily.

LADY BRACKNELL

Mother of Gwendolen, she is stern and authoritarian but also a comic figure. She refuses to let Ernest marry her daughter and even when his true identity is revealed, she criticizes him for triviality.

CECILY

Young and innocent, she resides in the country under the care of the governess, Miss Prism. She is rather restless and critical of her guardian 'Uncle Jack' and very interested in his brother 'Ernest'. She will only marry Algernon if his name is Ernest, being of a demanding and imaginative nature.

GWENDOLEN

Gwendolen is older and sharper than Cecily and at first, very suspicious of her. She and Cecily came to form an alliance against the two men but later melt and agree to become brides.

CHAPTER ONE

One afternoon in Algernon's flat in Half-Moon Street in London, the servant Lane was arranging afternoon tea on the table.

Algernon himself, a young man in his twenties, came in looking spruce in a suit and tie. 'Have you got the cucumber sandwiches cut for Lady Bracknell?' he asked Lane.

'Yes Sir,' Lane replied. Then he announced a visitor, 'Mr Ernest Worthing.'

'Where have you been since last Thursday, Ernest?' demanded Algernon.

Ernest pulled off his gloves. 'Oh, in the country. It's quite boring, Shropshire.' Ernest began to eat the cucumber sandwiches. 'Who is coming to tea, by the way?'

'Merely Aunt Augusta and Gwendolen,' said Algernon. 'And Aunt Augusta will not approve of your being here. She doesn't like your behaviour towards Gwendolen.'

'I am in love with Gwendolen and I have come up to town in order to propose to her.'

'Please don't touch the cucumber sandwiches,' Algernon snapped at him. 'And another thing. You won't marry Gwendolen, because I am her cousin and I won't allow you to marry her until you've cleared up the whole question of Cecily.' He rang the bell, and Lane came in. 'Bring me the cigarette case left by Mr Worthing the last time he dined here.'

'What on earth are you talking about, Algy! I don't know anyone called Cecily,' exclaimed Ernest.

Lane came in with the case and Algernon examined it. 'I find it isn't yours after all, now I see the inscription.'

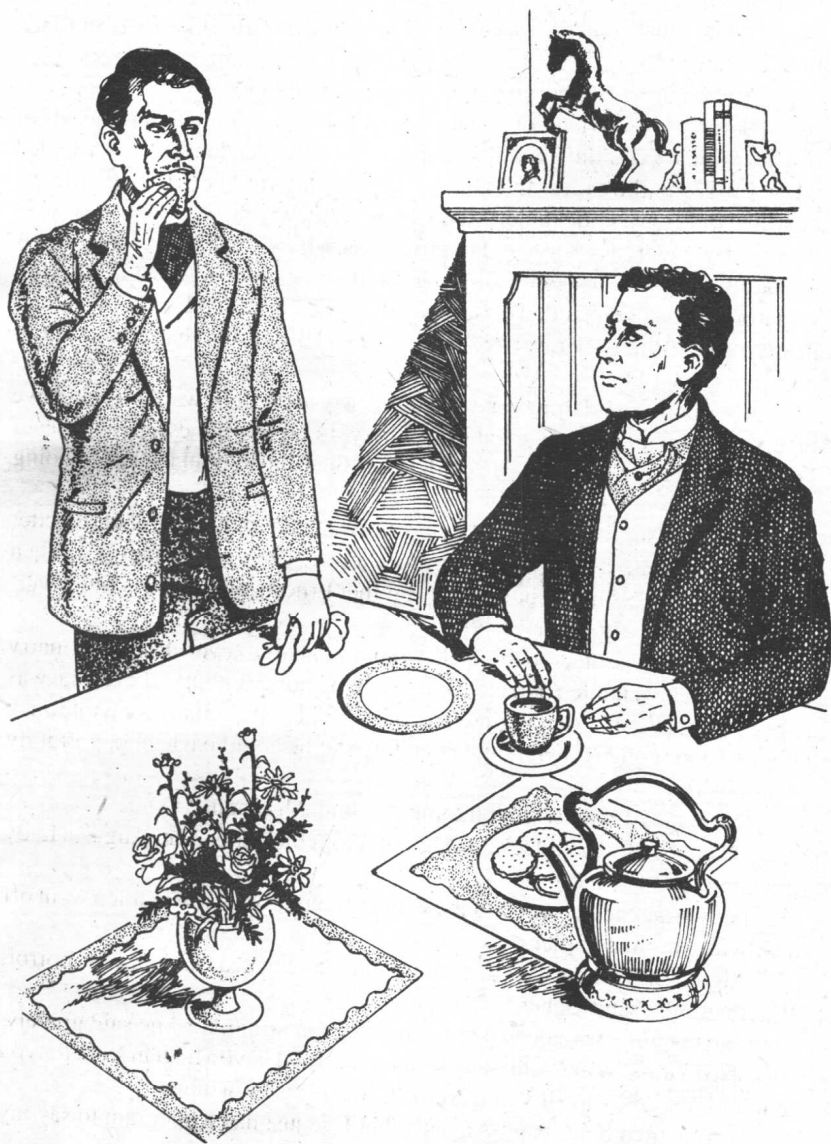
'Of course it's mine,' Ernest snatched at it. 'You shouldn't read inside it anyway!'

'You said you didn't know anyone by the name of Cecily and this says "From little Cecily to Uncle Jack with fondest love."'

Ernest retreated back to the sofa: 'Well if you must know, Cecily is my niece.'

'She says "With fondest love to her dear Uncle Jack." And besides, your name isn't Jack, it's Ernest.'

'My name is Jack,' said Ernest stiffly.



'Please don't touch the cucumber sandwiches,' Algernon snapped at him.

'You are the most earnest-looking person I ever saw in my life. You're being absurd.'

Ernest looked embarrassed. 'Well my name is Ernest in town and Jack in the country.'

'So you are a Bunburyist after all!' declared Algernon.

'I don't know what you mean. Cecily calls me her uncle for reasons of respect which I couldn't possibly expect you to understand. I was adopted when I was small by old Mr Thomas Cardew, who in his will made me the guardian of his grand-daughter Miss Cecily Cardew. She lives at my house in the country under the charge of her governess, Miss Prism. Now, when one is a guardian one has to behave oneself. And so in order to have a little fun sometimes, I have pretended to have a young brother called Ernest, who lives in town and gets into the most awful escapades. That means I can come to London whenever I like.'

Algernon patted him on the back. 'My dear fellow, I myself have invented an invalid by the name of Bunbury, to provide an escape whenever I need one. That's why I can dine with you at the Club tonight instead of going to Aunt Augusta's.'

Jack was surprised. He had not even issued an invitation. 'You'd better go to your Aunt's house. And you mistake me, I'm no Bunburyist. When Gwendolen accepts me, I shall kill my brother Ernest, as Cecily is a little over-interested in him. It's rather a bore.'

Algernon smiled to himself, thinking that if ever Jack did marry Gwendolen, Gwendolen herself might want to know Bunbury, if ever she was bored. Wouldn't she want her own escapes? When the bell rang, he told Jack he'd leave him on his own with Gwendolen so he could have an opportunity of proposing.

'Now may I dine with you tonight?' said Algernon.

'I suppose so,' said Jack, as Algernon welcomed his Aunt Augusta Lady Bracknell, and Gwendolen.

Lady Bracknell bowed to Jack with icy coldness, as Gwendolen went off to sit with him in a corner.

Algernon picked up the empty plate and asked of Lane in horror, 'Where are the sandwiches?'

'No cucumbers to be had in the market I'm afraid, Sir,' he said gravely.

'No matter, Dear,' said Lady Bracknell. 'But I have a treat in store for you tonight. I am going to sit you next to a most pleasant woman.'

'It is a great bore, Aunt Augusta, but I've just had a telegram to say my

poor friend Bunbury is ill again, and I feel I should be with him.' He avoided looking at Jack.

Lady Bracknell thought it very strange, as Mr Bunbury seemed to suffer from very bad health. 'Well, I do hope you can arrange for him not to be ill on Saturday, as I rely on you to arrange the music.'

'I'll run over the programme I've drawn up, Aunt Augusta, if you'll step in the next room with me.'

And so Jack and Gwendolen were left behind together. Jack was nervous but Gwendolen gazed at him frankly, and when he began to speak, interrupted him. 'We are constantly reminded by the magazines, Mr Worthing, that we live in an age of ideals. And my ideal is to love someone by the name of Ernest. The name inspires me with confidence. And when Algernon mentioned to me he had a friend called Ernest ...'

'You mean you really love me, Gwendolen?' cried Jack. Then he was struck by doubt.

'But what if my name wasn't Ernest?'

'But it is,' said Gwendolen glibly. 'And it is a divine name.'

'Well,' said Jack. 'I must say there are nicer names. Jack for instance.'

But Gwendolen pouted and said that the name Jack was not exciting at all.

'Gwendolen,' commanded Jack suddenly. 'I must get christened at once — I mean we must get married at once. There is no time to be lost.'

But as he went down on his knees and Gwendolen gazed into his blue eyes, Lady Bracknell sailed back into the room and told him he looked ridiculous and had better rise.

'Mama!' cried Gwendolen, preventing him from getting up. 'Mr Worthing and I are engaged to be married!'

'Pardon me,' said her mother magisterially. 'You are not engaged to anyone. When you do become engaged, I or your father will inform you of the fact. It is hardly something you can expect to arrange for yourself. I wish to ask Mr Worthing some questions, and you, Gwendolen, will wait for me in the carriage below. The carriage, Gwendolen!'

Lady Bracknell took out her notebook and pencil, and Jack remained standing.

'Do you smoke?' she demanded. 'I may tell you, I am quite willing to enter your name on my list of eligible young men, should your answers prove satisfactory.'

'I must admit, I do smoke!'

'Glad to hear you have an occupation of some kind. How old are you?'

'Twenty-nine.'

'A good age. And your income is?'

'Between seven and eight thousand a year. And I have a country house with some land.'

'But you have a town house I hope as well? A girl with a simple unspoiled nature like Gwendolen can hardly be expected to reside in the country.'

'Well, I do have a house in Belgrave Square, Number 149.'

'Hmm, the unfashionable side. But that can be altered. And now to minor matters,' Lady Bracknell adjusted her spectacles. 'Your parents. Did your father make money through commerce or is he a true aristocrat?'

Jack blushed. 'The fact is, Lady Bracknell, I have lost both my parents, or rather, they lost me. I don't really know who I am. I was ... well, I was found!'

'Found!' gasped Lady Bracknell.

But it was true. Jack had been found in a handbag by the late Mr Thomas Cardew, an old gentleman of charitable and kindly disposition, who gave him the name of Worthing because he happened to have in his pocket a ticket for Worthing, a seaside resort in Sussex. The handbag, a large black leather one with handles, was in the cloak-room at Victoria Station and was given to Mr Cardew in mistake for his own.

Lady Bracknell was bewildered. 'A cloak-room in a railway station is hardly a basis for a position in good society. I would strongly advise you, Mr Worthing, to acquire some parents as soon as possible. How can you think that I and Lord Bracknell would dream of allowing our only daughter, brought up with the utmost care, to marry into a cloak-room, and form an alliance with a parcel? Good afternoon!'

She swept out in indignation, and from another room the wedding march was struck up on the piano.

'Congratulations!' called out Algernon cheerily.

Jack was furious. 'For goodness' sake stop that ghastly tune, Algy!'

'Something wrong?' Algernon strolled in.

'Gwendolen's mother is unbearable. But I beg your pardon, I shouldn't talk about your own aunt like that before you.'

'Not at all, my dear boy. By the way,' he tapped his fingers on the arm of the chair, 'did you tell Gwendolen about your being Ernest in town, and Jack in the country?'

Jack coloured. How could he tell the truth to a nice, sweet, refined girl like Gwendolen? 'I'll have to get rid of the profligate Ernest. I'll say he was carried

off suddenly in Paris, by a severe chill. That'll deal with him.'

'I'm sure Miss Cardew will miss your brother. I'd rather like to meet Cecily you know, Jack,' smiled Algernon. 'And have you told Gwendolen yet that you have an excessively pretty ward who is only just eighteen?'

Jack sighed. Perhaps Gwendolen and Cecily would become like sisters. And he must do his best to keep Cecily and Algernon apart. Fortunately, she was not a silly romantic girl, but had an excellent appetite and took long walks in the fields.

It was near seven, time to dress for dinner at the Club. But Jack was horribly irritable and out of sorts after the trials of the afternoon.

Then the servant Lane announced Gwendolen, who commanded Algernon to retire to the other end of the room as she had something serious to say to Ernest.

'Ernest,' she began. 'I fear we may never be married. I can tell by the expression on mama's face. I have no influence whatever over her. But nothing can alter my eternal devotion to you. The story of your romantic origin, as related to me by mama, with various comments, has an irresistible fascination for me. Together with your exquisite Christian name of course, and the wonderful simplicity of your character. Now I have your town address at the Albany. What is your address in the country?'

'The Manor House, Woolton, Hertfordshire.'

Algernon, who had been carefully listening, smiled to himself and wrote the address on his shirt-cuff. Then he picked up the Railway Guide.

Gwendolen was gathering her gloves and bag to go. 'I will write to you daily, Ernest, since our situation may require desperate action. We will have to think about it carefully.'

'I shall be in town till Monday, my darling,' Jack sighed, as he saw her to her carriage.

Algernon, accepting a glass of sherry from Lane, ordered him to pack his bags. 'All the Bunbury suits, Lane. I'm going Bunburying and shan't be back till Monday.'

When Jack came back upstairs, he frowned. 'What are you laughing at Algy?'

'Oh, I'm anxious about poor Bunbury.'

Jack coughed. 'Your friend Bunbury will get you into a serious scrape one of these days.' Indignation was rising.

'I love scrapes,' declared Algernon, with immense self-satisfaction, lighting a cigarette and reading his shirt-cuff.

CHAPTER TWO

The garden at the Manor House in Woolton was an old-fashioned one, full of roses. Cecily and her governess Miss Prism had spent much time here this summer, for July had been glorious. Indeed, they had set up school under a large yew tree, under which Miss Prism was now sitting at a table covered with books.

Cecily however was watering flowers. She did not like German at all.

'Cecily!' called Miss Prism. 'Your guardian particularly stresses your German. Do come here.'

Cecily sighed. 'Uncle Jack is so awfully serious. He looks bored when he comes down here.'

Miss Prism drew herself up. She knew Mr Worthing had a great sense of duty and responsibility, and was often worried about that unfortunate young man his brother.

As if reading her mind, Cecily began to write in her diary, musing aloud: 'I wish Uncle Jack would allow his brother to come down here sometimes. We might have a good influence over him, Miss Prism; you know German and geology so well.'

Miss Prism shook her head. According to his brother, Ernest suffered from a temperament so weak and indecisive that no-one could reclaim him. She said out loud, 'I don't know why you keep a diary, Cecily. I'm sure a lot of it must be imaginings.'

'But didn't you yourself write one of those three-volume novels, Miss Prism? You never told me what became of it.'

'Unfortunately, the manuscript was lost. And now to your work, child.'

Cecily smiled, for here was Dr Chasuble coming up through the garden.

Miss Prism went to meet him and Cecily said, 'Miss Prism has been complaining of a headache. It would do her much good to have a stroll through the Park with you, Dr Chasuble.'

'Cecily, I have not mentioned anything about a headache. You should be thinking of your German.'

Dr Chasuble scolded her for not being attentive, indeed envying her for being Miss Prism's pupil. If he had been in her place But Miss Prism glared at him, suspecting him of dreaming. So he turned the conversation to Mr Worthing.

'We do not expect him till Monday afternoon,' said Miss Prism. 'He likes to spend his Sunday in town. As he is a serious young man, enjoyment is not his sole aim in life. But, dear Dr Chasuble, I will have a stroll with you after



'Cecily!' called Miss Prism.

all. I do indeed have a headache and a walk will do it good!"

Dr Chasuble was delighted to be able to take Miss Prism off. But Cecily, who had received instructions to read her Political Economy, threw the books back on the table in disgust.

It was fortunate that the servant Merriman interrupted her with a card on a salver, to announce Mr Ernest Worthing from the Albany.

"Uncle Jack's brother!" cried Cecily.

"He seemed most disappointed that Mr Worthing was in town, Miss, but is anxious to speak with you privately for a moment."

Algernon strode up to her and raised his hat, looking very gay and debonair. "My little cousin Cecily, I believe."

Cecily stood up straight. "I am not little. In fact I am tall for my age. And you, I see, are my wicked cousin Ernest."

Algernon was amazed. "I suppose I have been very reckless in my own sort of way."

"Are you proud of that? I'm sure it must have been very enjoyable. But anyway, you know Uncle Jack won't be back till Monday afternoon?"

"What a disappointment. I have to get back to London by the first train Monday morning."

"You had better wait till Uncle Jack arrives. He wants to speak to you about emigrating. He had gone to London to buy your outfit."

"I wouldn't let Jack do that! He has no taste in neckties at all."

Cecily smiled; Algernon blanched: here he was being told that he was going to Australia! He said desperately, "I'm not bad enough for that! Perhaps you could undertake to reform me, cousin Cecily."

So she invited him in for a meal, as the beginning of his regular and wholesome life. She cut him a pink rose, which reminded him of her, for she was an exceedingly pretty girl. But he knew better than to bombard her with compliments, as he followed her into the house.

In the meantime, Miss Prism and Dr Chasuble had returned to the garden. Miss Prism was in her stride, advising Dr Chasuble that he was too much alone and should get married. For a single man was a permanent temptation to weaker vessels. "And in marriage," she advised, "one can rely on a mature woman of intellectual sympathies. Young women are green. Drawing my metaphor, of course, from fruit. But where is dear Cecily?"

Then however they were surprised by the advent of Jack, dressed in mourning with a crepe hatband and black gloves. He shook Miss Prism's hand in a tragic manner. "My brother," he explained solemnly to Dr Chasuble.