Lady Bracknell (Algernon’s “Aunt Augusta”) and her daughter Gwendolyn visit Algernon. Jack, Algeron’s friend, is already there. Jack and Gwendolyn are in love. The text in blue signals where I think new beats are introduced (or can be, by the actor’s interpretation).

[**Algernon** goes forward to meet them.  Enter **Lady Bracknell** and **Gwendolen**.]

[Lady B in her social mode, a good Society Matron, who is supposed to keep wayward Young People like Algernon, her nephew, in line]

**Lady Bracknell.**  Good afternoon, dear Algernon, I hope you are behaving very well.

**Algernon.**  I’m feeling very well, Aunt Augusta.

**Lady Bracknell.** [Beat- she recognizes he’s avoided answering her implicit question, and chides him, but not too harshly] That’s not quite the same thing.  In fact the two things rarely go together.  Beat - Sees Jack, has a negative reaction because she dislikes him [Sees **Jack** and bows to him with icy coldness.]

**Algernon.**  [To **Gwendolen**.]  Dear me, you are smart!

**Gwendolen.**  I am always smart!  Am I not, Mr. Worthing?

**Jack.**  You’re quite perfect, Miss Fairfax.

**Gwendolen.**  Oh! I hope I am not that.  It would leave no room for developments, and I intend to develop in many directions.  [**Gwendolen** and **Jack** sit down together in the corner.]

Beat - Lady B is back in her “society lady” mode, gossiping and being a guest. She has decided to ignore Jack (whom she dislikes) in favor of expressing her social power in the room.

**Lady Bracknell.**  I’m sorry if we are a little late, Algernon, but I was obliged to call on dear Lady Harbury.  I hadn’t been there since her poor husband’s death.  I never saw a woman so altered; she looks quite twenty years younger.  And now I’ll have a cup of tea, and one of those nice cucumber sandwiches you promised me.

**Algernon.**  Certainly, Aunt Augusta.  [Goes over to tea-table.]

Lady B notices Gwendolyn and Jack, disapproves, wants to interrupt:

**Lady Bracknell.**  Won’t you come and sit here, Gwendolen?

**Gwendolen.**  Thanks, mamma, I’m quite comfortable where I am.

**Algernon.**  [Picking up empty plate in horror.]  Good heavens!  Lane!  Why are there no cucumber sandwiches?  I ordered them specially.

**Lane.**  [Gravely.]  There were no cucumbers in the market this morning, sir.  I went down twice.

**Algernon.**  No cucumbers!

**Lane.**  No, sir.  Not even for ready money.

**Algernon.**  That will do, Lane, thank you.

**Lane.**  Thank you, sir.  [Goes out.]

**Algernon.**  I am greatly distressed, Aunt Augusta, about there being no cucumbers, not even for ready money.

Momentarily distracted by the lack of cucumber sandwiches, which also earns her disapproval, but she is fond of her nephew and reassures him:

**Lady Bracknell.**  It really makes no matter, Algernon.  I had some crumpets with Lady Harbury, [shifts to judgmental gossip] who seems to me to be living entirely for pleasure now.

**Algernon.**  I hear her hair has turned quite gold from grief.

**Lady Bracknell.**  It certainly has changed its colour.  [She disavows the gossip she just shared because she also has to maintain her moral rectitude.] From what cause I, of course, cannot say.  [beat - I always feel like there’s a sort of shared understanding between her and Algernon here as he hands her the tea — they are cut from the same cloth] [**Algernon** crosses and hands tea.]  Thank you. [shifts here — she has news she is excited to share, a favor for her nephew, expects him to be happy] I’ve quite a treat for you to-night, Algernon.  I am going to send you down with Mary Farquhar.  She is such a nice woman, and so attentive to her husband. [Beat - this is an instruction to Algernon, he’s supposed to watch them and learn — this is a statement of Algernon’s character arc, which is about him learning to become a good husband and partner] It’s delightful to watch them.

**Algernon.**  I am afraid, Aunt Augusta, I shall have to give up the pleasure of dining with you to-night after all.

**Lady Bracknell.**  [Beat, she’s disappointed and annoyed that her plans are disrupted.] [Frowning.]  I hope not, Algernon.  It would put my table completely out.  [Beat - thinking out loud, she’s found a solution to her problem, she’s satisfied.] Your uncle would have to dine upstairs.  Fortunately he is accustomed to that.

**Algernon.**  It is a great bore, and, I need hardly say, a terrible disappointment to me, but the fact is I have just had a telegram to say that my poor friend Bunbury is very ill again.  [Exchanges glances with **Jack**.]  They seem to think I should be with him.

**Lady Bracknell.**  [She disapproves, again] It is very strange.  This Mr. Bunbury seems to suffer from curiously bad health.

**Algernon.**  Yes; poor Bunbury is a dreadful invalid.

**Lady Bracknell.**  [She’s going to offer a piece of her mind, as a respected society matron. She knows what is Proper and Correct.] Well, I must say, Algernon, that I think it is high time that Mr. Bunbury made up his mind whether he was going to live or to die.  This shilly-shallying with the question is absurd.  Nor do I in any way approve of the modern sympathy with invalids.  I consider it morbid.   [She personally disapproves, but now she makes this into a moral duty, working herself up into a moral pronouncement:] Illness of any kind is hardly a thing to be encouraged in others. Health is the primary duty of life. [Shifts back to the personal, a more sympathetic mode. She has a personal stake in this] I am always telling that to your poor uncle, but he never seems to take much notice . . . as far as any improvement in his ailment goes. [Back to the matter at hand, this nonsense of Mr. Bunbury’s, which is inconveniencing HER plans and so she will fix it] I should be much obliged if you would ask Mr. Bunbury, from me, to be kind enough not to have a relapse on Saturday, for I rely on you to arrange my music for me. [Here She shifts to being proud of what she’s put together for the end of the season — this is her work, this is how she maintains power in her world:] It is my last reception, and one wants something that will encourage conversation, particularly at the end of the season when every one has practically said whatever they had to say, [and here comes the judgement against other people! Good ol’ Lady B, she can’t resist a dig at inferiors:] which, in most cases, was probably not much. [Full circle back to reasserting her dominant position as not only the best hostess, but the most Right]

**Algernon.**  I’ll speak to Bunbury, Aunt Augusta, if he is still conscious, and I think I can promise you he’ll be all right by Saturday.  Of course the music is a great difficulty.  You see, if one plays good music, people don’t listen, and if one plays bad music people don’t talk.  But I’ll run over the programme I’ve drawn out, if you will kindly come into the next room for a moment.

**Lady Bracknell.**  [Mollified, feels she’s done her duty and satisfied that Algernon will do his. Her party will not be ruined.] Thank you, Algernon.  It is very thoughtful of you.  [Rising, and following **Algernon**.]  [back to thinking about her party and what a great hostess she is] I’m sure the programme will be delightful, [she reasserts her stern moral views and disapproval] after a few expurgations.  French songs I cannot possibly allow.  People always seem to think that they are improper, and either look shocked, which is vulgar, or laugh, which is worse.  [having said what she dislikes, she shifts to what she approves of] But German sounds a thoroughly respectable language, and indeed, I believe is so.  [remembering she has a daughter, and deciding peremptorily it’s time for both of them to go. she’s used to giving orders] Gwendolen, you will accompany me.

**Gwendolen.**  Certainly, mamma.

[**Lady Bracknell** and **Algernon** go into the music-room, **Gwendolen** remains behind.]