



A Woman of No Importance
Oscar Wilde, adapted by LAMDA

In the picture gallery at Hunstanton Chase, Gerald - a young clerk - is speaking to his mother Mrs. Arbuthnot. Whilst Gerald is excited to receive a job offer to work as Lord Illingworth's secretary, his mother does not share the same enthusiasm. In this speech, Gerald tries to reason with her.

GERALD: Of course I am sorry to leave you. Why, you are the best mother in the whole world. But after all, as Lord Illingworth says, it is impossible to live in such a place as Wrockley. You don't mind it. But I'm ambitious; I want something more than that. I want to have a career. I want to do something that will make you proud of me, and Lord Illingworth is going to help me. He is going to do something for me.

(Mrs. Arbuthnot protests.)

Mother, how changeable you are! You don't seem to know your own mind for a single moment. An hour and a half ago in the drawing-room you agreed to the whole thing; now you turn round and make objections, and try to force me to give up my one chance in life. Yes, my one chance. You don't suppose that men like Lord Illingworth are to be found every day, do you, mother? It is very strange that when I have had such a wonderful piece of good luck, the one person to put difficulties in my way should be my own mother.

Besides, you know, mother, I love Hester Worsley. Who could help loving her? I love her more than I have ever told you, far more. And if I had a position, if I had prospects, I could - I could ask her to - Don't you understand now, mother, what it means to me to be Lord Illingworth's secretary? To start like this is to find a career ready for one - before one - waiting for one. If I were Lord Illingworth's secretary I could ask Hester to be my wife.

(Mrs. Arbuthnot protests again.)

You have always tried to crush my ambition, mother - haven't you? You have told me that the world is a wicked place, that success is not worth having, that society is shallow, and all that sort of thing - well, I don't believe it, mother. I think the world must be delightful. I think society must be exquisite. I think success is a thing worth having. You have been wrong in all that you have taught me, mother, quite wrong.