

**Lady Windermere's Fan**

**By**

**Oscar Wilde**

LADY WINDERMERE'S FAN

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

Lord Windermere

Lord Darlington

Lord Augustus Lorton

Mr. Dumby

Mr. Cecil Graham

Mr. Hopper

Parker, Butler

Lady Windermere

The Duchess of Berwick

Lady Agatha Carlisle

Lady Plymdale

Lady Stutfield

Lady Jedburgh

Mrs. Cowper-Cowper

Mrs. Erlynne

Rosalie, Maid

## THE SCENES OF THE PLAY

ACT I. Morning-room in Lord Windermere's house.

ACT II. Drawing-room in Lord Windermere's house.

ACT III. Lord Darlington's rooms.

ACT IV. Same as Act I.

TIME: The Present

PLACE: London.

The action of the play takes place within twenty-four hours, beginning on a Tuesday afternoon at five o'clock, and ending the next day at 1.30 p.m.

LONDON: ST. JAMES'S THEATRE

FIRST ACT

SCENCE

Morning-room of Lord Windermere's house in Carlton House Terrace.  
Doors C. and R. Bureau with books and papers R. Sofa with small  
tea-table L. Window opening on to terrace L. Table R.

[LADY WINDERMERE is at table R., arranging roses in a blue bowl.]

[Enter PARKER.]

PARKER. Is your ladyship at home this afternoon?

LADY WINDERMERE. Yes--who has called?

PARKER. Lord Darlington, my lady.

LADY WINDERMERE. [Hesitates for a moment.] Show him up--and I'm  
at home to any one who calls.

PARKER. Yes, my lady.

[Exit C.]

LADY WINDERMERE. It's best for me to see him before to-night. I'm glad he's come.

[Enter PARKER C.]

PARKER. Lord Darlington,

[Enter LORD DARLINGTON C.]

[Exit PARKER.]

LORD DARLINGTON. How do you do, Lady Windermere?

LADY WINDERMERE. How do you do, Lord Darlington? No, I can't shake hands with you. My hands are all wet with these roses. Aren't they lovely? They came up from Selby this morning.

LORD DARLINGTON. They are quite perfect. [Sees a fan lying on the table.] And what a wonderful fan! May I look at it?

LADY WINDERMERE. Do. Pretty, isn't it! It's got my name on it, and everything. I have only just seen it myself. It's my husband's birthday present to me. You know to-day is my birthday?

LORD DARLINGTON. No? Is it really?

LADY WINDERMERE. Yes, I'm of age to-day. Quite an important day in my life, isn't it? That is why I am giving this party to-night.  
Do sit down. [Still arranging flowers.]

LORD DARLINGTON. [Sitting down.] I wish I had known it was your birthday, Lady Windermere. I would have covered the whole street in front of your house with flowers for you to walk on. They are made for you. [A short pause.]

LADY WINDERMERE. Lord Darlington, you annoyed me last night at the Foreign Office. I am afraid you are going to annoy me again.

LORD DARLINGTON. I, Lady Windermere?

[Enter PARKER and FOOTMAN C., with tray and tea things.]

LADY WINDERMERE. Put it there, Parker. That will do. [Wipes her hands with her pocket-handkerchief, goes to tea-table, and sits down.] Won't you come over, Lord Darlington?

[Exit PARKER C.]

LORD DARLINGTON. [Takes chair and goes across L.C.] I am quite miserable, Lady Windermere. You must tell me what I did. [Sits

down at table L.]

LADY WINDERMERE. Well, you kept paying me elaborate compliments the whole evening.

LORD DARLINGTON. [Smiling.] Ah, nowadays we are all of us so hard up, that the only pleasant things to pay ARE compliments. They're the only things we CAN pay.

LADY WINDERMERE. [Shaking her head.] No, I am talking very seriously. You mustn't laugh, I am quite serious. I don't like compliments, and I don't see why a man should think he is pleasing a woman enormously when he says to her a whole heap of things that he doesn't mean.

LORD DARLINGTON. Ah, but I did mean them. [Takes tea which she offers him.]

LADY WINDERMERE. [Gravely.] I hope not. I should be sorry to have to quarrel with you, Lord Darlington. I like you very much, you know that. But I shouldn't like you at all if I thought you were what most other men are. Believe me, you are better than most other men, and I sometimes think you pretend to be worse.

LORD DARLINGTON. We all have our little vanities, Lady Windermere.

LADY WINDERMERE. Why do you make that your special one? [Still seated at table L.]

LORD DARLINGTON. [Still seated L.C.] Oh, nowadays so many conceited people go about Society pretending to be good, that I think it shows rather a sweet and modest disposition to pretend to be bad. Besides, there is this to be said. If you pretend to be good, the world takes you very seriously. If you pretend to be bad, it doesn't. Such is the astounding stupidity of optimism.

LADY WINDERMERE. Don't you WANT the world to take you seriously then, Lord Darlington?

LORD DARLINGTON. No, not the world. Who are the people the world takes seriously? All the dull people one can think of, from the Bishops down to the bores. I should like YOU to take me very seriously, Lady Windermere, YOU more than any one else in life.

LADY WINDERMERE. Why--why me?

LORD DARLINGTON. [After a slight hesitation.] Because I think we might be great friends. Let us be great friends. You may want a friend some day.

LADY WINDERMERE. Why do you say that?



LORD DARLINGTON. Oh!--we all want friends at times.

LADY WINDERMERE. I think we're very good friends already, Lord Darlington. We can always remain so as long as you don't -

LORD DARLINGTON. Don't what?

LADY WINDERMERE. Don't spoil it by saying extravagant silly things to me. You think I am a Puritan, I suppose? Well, I have something of the Puritan in me. I was brought up like that. I am glad of it. My mother died when I was a mere child. I lived always with Lady Julia, my father's elder sister, you know. She was stern to me, but she taught me what the world is forgetting, the difference that there is between what is right and what is wrong. SHE allowed of no compromise. I allow of none.

LORD DARLINGTON. My dear Lady Windermere!

LADY WINDERMERE. [Leaning back on the sofa.] You look on me as being behind the age.--Well, I am! I should be sorry to be on the same level as an age like this.

LORD DARLINGTON. You think the age very bad?

LADY WINDERMERE. Yes. Nowadays people seem to look on life as a speculation. It is not a speculation. It is a sacrament. Its

ideal is Love. Its purification is sacrifice.

LORD DARLINGTON. [Smiling.] Oh, anything is better than being sacrificed!

LADY WINDERMERE. [Leaning forward.] Don't say that.

LORD DARLINGTON. I do say it. I feel it--I know it.

[Enter PARKER C.]

PARKER. The men want to know if they are to put the carpets on the terrace for to-night, my lady?

LADY WINDERMERE. You don't think it will rain, Lord Darlington, do you?

LORD DARLINGTON. I won't hear of its raining on your birthday!

LADY WINDERMERE. Tell them to do it at once, Parker.

[Exit PARKER C.]

LORD DARLINGTON. [Still seated.] Do you think then--of course I am only putting an imaginary instance--do you think that in the case of a young married couple, say about two years married, if the

husband suddenly becomes the intimate friend of a woman of--well, more than doubtful character--is always calling upon her, lunching with her, and probably paying her bills--do you think that the wife should not console herself?

LADY WINDERMERE. [Frowning] Console herself?

LORD DARLINGTON. Yes, I think she should--I think she has the right.

LADY WINDERMERE. Because the husband is vile--should the wife be vile also?

LORD DARLINGTON. Vileness is a terrible word, Lady Windermere.

LADY WINDERMERE. It is a terrible thing, Lord Darlington.

LORD DARLINGTON. Do you know I am afraid that good people do a great deal of harm in this world. Certainly the greatest harm they do is that they make badness of such extraordinary importance. It is absurd to divide people into good and bad. People are either charming or tedious. I take the side of the charming, and you, Lady Windermere, can't help belonging to them.

LADY WINDERMERE. Now, Lord Darlington. [Rising and crossing R., front of him.] Don't stir, I am merely going to finish my flowers.

[Goes to table R.C.]

LORD DARLINGTON. [Rising and moving chair.] And I must say I think you are very hard on modern life, Lady Windermere. Of course there is much against it, I admit. Most women, for instance, nowadays, are rather mercenary.

LADY WINDERMERE. Don't talk about such people.

LORD DARLINGTON. Well then, setting aside mercenary people, who, of course, are dreadful, do you think seriously that women who have committed what the world calls a fault should never be forgiven?

LADY WINDERMERE. [Standing at table.] I think they should never be forgiven.

LORD DARLINGTON. And men? Do you think that there should be the same laws for men as there are for women?

LADY WINDERMERE. Certainly!

LORD DARLINGTON. I think life too complex a thing to be settled by these hard and fast rules.

LADY WINDERMERE. If we had 'these hard and fast rules,' we should find life much more simple.

LORD DARLINGTON. You allow of no exceptions?

LADY WINDERMERE. None!

LORD DARLINGTON. Ah, what a fascinating Puritan you are, Lady Windermere!

LADY WINDERMERE. The adjective was unnecessary, Lord Darlington.

LORD DARLINGTON. I couldn't help it. I can resist everything except temptation.

LADY WINDERMERE. You have the modern affectation of weakness.

LORD DARLINGTON. [Looking at her.] It's only an affectation, Lady Windermere.

[Enter PARKER C.]

PARKER. The Duchess of Berwick and Lady Agatha Carlisle.

[Enter the DUCHESS OF BERWICK and LADY AGATHA CARLISLE C.]

[Exit PARKER C.]

DUCHESS OF BERWICK. [Coming down C., and shaking hands.] Dear Margaret, I am so pleased to see you. You remember Agatha, don't you? [Crossing L.C.] How do you do, Lord Darlington? I won't let you know my daughter, you are far too wicked.

LORD DARLINGTON. Don't say that, Duchess. As a wicked man I am a complete failure. Why, there are lots of people who say I have never really done anything wrong in the whole course of my life. Of course they only say it behind my back.

DUCHESS OF BERWICK. Isn't he dreadful? Agatha, this is Lord Darlington. Mind you don't believe a word he says. [LORD DARLINGTON crosses R.C.] No, no tea, thank you, dear. [Crosses and sits on sofa.] We have just had tea at Lady Markby's. Such bad tea, too. It was quite undrinkable. I wasn't at all surprised. Her own son-in-law supplies it. Agatha is looking forward so much to your ball to-night, dear Margaret.

LADY WINDERMERE. [Seated L.C.] Oh, you mustn't think it is going to be a ball, Duchess. It is only a dance in honour of my birthday. A small and early.

LORD DARLINGTON. [Standing L.C.] Very small, very early, and very select, Duchess.

DUCHESS OF BERWICK. [On sofa L.] Of course it's going to be

select. But we know THAT, dear Margaret, about YOUR house. It is really one of the few houses in London where I can take Agatha, and where I feel perfectly secure about dear Berwick. I don't know what society is coming to. The most dreadful people seem to go everywhere. They certainly come to my parties--the men get quite furious if one doesn't ask them. Really, some one should make a stand against it.

LADY WINDERMERE. I will, Duchess. I will have no one in my house about whom there is any scandal.

LORD DARLINGTON. [R.C.] Oh, don't say that, Lady Windermere. I should never be admitted! [Sitting.]

DUCHESS OF BERWICK. Oh, men don't matter. With women it is different. We're good. Some of us are, at least. But we are positively getting elbowed into the corner. Our husbands would really forget our existence if we didn't nag at them from time to time, just to remind them that we have a perfect legal right to do so.

LORD DARLINGTON. It's a curious thing, Duchess, about the game of marriage--a game, by the way, that is going out of fashion--the wives hold all the honours, and invariably lose the odd trick.

DUCHESS OF BERWICK. The odd trick? Is that the husband, Lord

Darlington?

LORD DARLINGTON. It would be rather a good name for the modern husband.

DUCHESS OF BERWICK. Dear Lord Darlington, how thoroughly depraved you are!

LADY WINDERMERE. Lord Darlington is trivial.

LORD DARLINGTON. Ah, don't say that, Lady Windermere.

LADY WINDERMERE. Why do you TALK so trivially about life, then?

LORD DARLINGTON. Because I think that life is far too important a thing ever to talk seriously about it. [Moves up C.]

DUCHESS OF BERWICK. What does he mean? Do, as a concession to my poor wits, Lord Darlington, just explain to me what you really mean.

LORD DARLINGTON. [Coming down back of table.] I think I had better not, Duchess. Nowadays to be intelligible is to be found out. Good-bye! [Shakes hands with DUCHESS.] And now--[goes up stage] Lady Windermere, good-bye. I may come to-night, mayn't I? Do let me come.



LADY WINDERMERE. [Standing up stage with LORD DARLINGTON.] Yes, certainly. But you are not to say foolish, insincere things to people.

LORD DARLINGTON. [Smiling.] Ah! you are beginning to reform me. It is a dangerous thing to reform any one, Lady Windermere. [Bows, and exit C.]

DUCHESS OF BERWICK. [Who has risen, goes C.] What a charming, wicked creature! I like him so much. I'm quite delighted he's gone! How sweet you're looking! Where DO you get your gowns? And now I must tell you how sorry I am for you, dear Margaret.

[Crosses to sofa and sits with LADY WINDERMERE.] Agatha, darling!

LADY AGATHA. Yes, mamma. [Rises.]

DUCHESS OF BERWICK. Will you go and look over the photograph album that I see there?

LADY AGATHA. Yes, mamma. [Goes to table up L.]

DUCHESS OF BERWICK. Dear girl! She is so fond of photographs of Switzerland. Such a pure taste, I think. But I really am so sorry for you, Margaret

LADY WINDERMERE. [Smiling.] Why, Duchess?

DUCHESS OF BERWICK. Oh, on account of that horrid woman. She dresses so well, too, which makes it much worse, sets such a dreadful example. Augustus--you know my disreputable brother--such a trial to us all--well, Augustus is completely infatuated about her. It is quite scandalous, for she is absolutely inadmissible into society. Many a woman has a past, but I am told that she has at least a dozen, and that they all fit.

LADY WINDERMERE. Whom are you talking about, Duchess?

DUCHESS OF BERWICK. About Mrs. Erlynne.

LADY WINDERMERE. Mrs. Erlynne? I never heard of her, Duchess. And what HAS she to do with me?

DUCHESS OF BERWICK. My poor child! Agatha, darling!

LADY AGATHA. Yes, mamma.

DUCHESS OF BERWICK. Will you go out on the terrace and look at the sunset?

LADY AGATHA. Yes, mamma. [Exit through window, L.]

DUCHESS OF BERWICK. Sweet girl! So devoted to sunsets! Shows such refinement of feeling, does it not? After all, there is nothing like Nature, is there?

LADY WINDERMERE. But what is it, Duchess? Why do you talk to me about this person?

DUCHESS OF BERWICK. Don't you really know? I assure you we're all so distressed about it. Only last night at dear Lady Jansen's every one was saying how extraordinary it was that, of all men in London, Windermere should behave in such a way.

LADY WINDERMERE. My husband--what has HE got to do with any woman of that kind?

DUCHESS OF BERWICK. Ah, what indeed, dear? That is the point. He goes to see her continually, and stops for hours at a time, and while he is there she is not at home to any one. Not that many ladies call on her, dear, but she has a great many disreputable men friends--my own brother particularly, as I told you--and that is what makes it so dreadful about Windermere. We looked upon HIM as being such a model husband, but I am afraid there is no doubt about it. My dear nieces--you know the Saville girls, don't you?--such nice domestic creatures--plain, dreadfully plain, but so good--well, they're always at the window doing fancy work, and making ugly things for the poor, which I think so useful of them in these

dreadful socialistic days, and this terrible woman has taken a house in Curzon Street, right opposite them--such a respectable street, too! I don't know what we're coming to! And they tell me that Windermere goes there four and five times a week--they SEE him. They can't help it--and although they never talk scandal, they--well, of course--they remark on it to every one. And the worst of it all is that I have been told that this woman has got a great deal of money out of somebody, for it seems that she came to London six months ago without anything at all to speak of, and now she has this charming house in Mayfair, drives her ponies in the Park every afternoon and all--well, all--since she has known poor dear Windermere.

LADY WINDERMERE. Oh, I can't believe it!

DUCHESS OF BERWICK. But it's quite true, my dear. The whole of London knows it. That is why I felt it was better to come and talk to you, and advise you to take Windermere away at once to Homburg or to Aix, where he'll have something to amuse him, and where you can watch him all day long. I assure you, my dear, that on several occasions after I was first married, I had to pretend to be very ill, and was obliged to drink the most unpleasant mineral waters, merely to get Berwick out of town. He was so extremely susceptible. Though I am bound to say he never gave away any large sums of money to anybody. He is far too high-principled for that!

LADY WINDERMERE. [Interrupting.] Duchess, Duchess, it's impossible! [Rising and crossing stage to C.] We are only married two years. Our child is but six months old. [Sits in chair R. of L. table.]

DUCHESS OF BERWICK. Ah, the dear pretty baby! How is the little darling? Is it a boy or a girl? I hope a girl--Ah, no, I remember it's a boy! I'm so sorry. Boys are so wicked. My boy is excessively immoral. You wouldn't believe at what hours he comes home. And he's only left Oxford a few months--I really don't know what they teach them there.

LADY WINDERMERE. Are ALL men bad?

DUCHESS OF BERWICK. Oh, all of them, my dear, all of them, without any exception. And they never grow any better. Men become old, but they never become good.

LADY WINDERMERE. Windermere and I married for love.

DUCHESS OF BERWICK. Yes, we begin like that. It was only Berwick's brutal and incessant threats of suicide that made me accept him at all, and before the year was out, he was running after all kinds of petticoats, every colour, every shape, every material. In fact, before the honeymoon was over, I caught him winking at my maid, a most pretty, respectable girl. I dismissed

her at once without a character.--No, I remember I passed her on to my sister; poor dear Sir George is so short-sighted, I thought it wouldn't matter. But it did, though--it was most unfortunate.

[Rises.] And now, my dear child, I must go, as we are dining out. And mind you don't take this little aberration of Windermere's too much to heart. Just take him abroad, and he'll come back to you all right.

LADY WINDERMERE. Come back to me? [C.]

DUCHESS OF BERWICK. [L.C.] Yes, dear, these wicked women get our husbands away from us, but they always come back, slightly damaged, of course. And don't make scenes, men hate them!

LADY WINDERMERE. It is very kind of you, Duchess, to come and tell me all this. But I can't believe that my husband is untrue to me.

DUCHESS OF BERWICK. Pretty child! I was like that once. Now I know that all men are monsters. [LADY WINDERMERE rings bell.] The only thing to do is to feed the wretches well. A good cook does wonders, and that I know you have. My dear Margaret, you are not going to cry?

LADY WINDERMERE. You needn't be afraid, Duchess, I never cry.

DUCHESS OF BERWICK. That's quite right, dear. Crying is the

refuge of plain women but the ruin of pretty ones. Agatha,  
darling!

LADY AGATHA. [Entering L.] Yes, mamma. [Stands back of table  
L.C.]

DUCHESS OF BERWICK. Come and bid good-bye to Lady Windermere, and  
thank her for your charming visit. [Coming down again.] And by  
the way, I must thank you for sending a card to Mr. Hopper--he's  
that rich young Australian people are taking such notice of just at  
present. His father made a great fortune by selling some kind of  
food in circular tins--most palatable, I believe--I fancy it is the  
thing the servants always refuse to eat. But the son is quite  
interesting. I think he's attracted by dear Agatha's clever talk.  
Of course, we should be very sorry to lose her, but I think that a  
mother who doesn't part with a daughter every season has no real  
affection. We're coming to-night, dear. [PARKER opens C. doors.]  
And remember my advice, take the poor fellow out of town at once,  
it is the only thing to do. Good-bye, once more; come, Agatha.

[Exeunt DUCHESS and LADY AGATHA C.]

LADY WINDERMERE. How horrible! I understand now what Lord  
Darlington meant by the imaginary instance of the couple not two  
years married. Oh! it can't be true--she spoke of enormous sums of  
money paid to this woman. I know where Arthur keeps his bank book-

-in one of the drawers of that desk. I might find out by that. I WILL find out. [Opens drawer.] No, it is some hideous mistake. [Rises and goes C.] Some silly scandal! He loves ME! He loves ME! But why should I not look? I am his wife, I have a right to look! [Returns to bureau, takes out book and examines it page by page, smiles and gives a sigh of relief.] I knew it! there is not a word of truth in this stupid story. [Puts book back in drawer. As she does so, starts and takes out another book.] A second book--private--locked! [Tries to open it, but fails. Sees paper knife on bureau, and with it cuts cover from book. Begins to start at the first page.] 'Mrs. Erlynne--600 pounds--Mrs. Erlynne--700 pounds--Mrs. Erlynne--400 pounds.' Oh! it is true! It is true! How horrible! [Throws book on floor.] [Enter LORD WINDERMERE C.]

LORD WINDERMERE. Well, dear, has the fan been sent home yet? [Going R.C. Sees book.] Margaret, you have cut open my bank book. You have no right to do such a thing!

LADY WINDERMERE. You think it wrong that you are found out, don't you?

LORD WINDERMERE. I think it wrong that a wife should spy on her husband.

LADY WINDERMERE. I did not spy on you. I never knew of this woman's existence till half an hour ago. Some one who pitied me



was kind enough to tell me what every one in London knows already--  
your daily visits to Curzon Street, your mad infatuation, the  
monstrous sums of money you squander on this infamous woman!

[Crossing L.]

LORD WINDERMERE. Margaret! don't talk like that of Mrs. Erlynne,  
you don't know how unjust it is!

LADY WINDERMERE. [Turning to him.] You are very jealous of Mrs.  
Erlynne's honour. I wish you had been as jealous of mine.

LORD WINDERMERE. Your honour is untouched, Margaret. You don't  
think for a moment that--[Puts book back into desk.]

LADY WINDERMERE. I think that you spend your money strangely.  
That is all. Oh, don't imagine I mind about the money. As far as  
I am concerned, you may squander everything we have. But what I DO  
mind is that you who have loved me, you who have taught me to love  
you, should pass from the love that is given to the love that is  
bought. Oh, it's horrible! [Sits on sofa.] And it is I who feel  
degraded! YOU don't feel anything. I feel stained, utterly  
stained. You can't realise how hideous the last six months seems  
to me now--every kiss you have given me is tainted in my memory.

LORD WINDERMERE. [Crossing to her.] Don't say that, Margaret. I  
never loved any one in the whole world but you.

LADY WINDERMERE. [Rises.] Who is this woman, then? Why do you take a house for her?

LORD WINDERMERE. I did not take a house for her.

LADY WINDERMERE. You gave her the money to do it, which is the same thing.

LORD WINDERMERE. Margaret, as far as I have known Mrs. Erlynne -

LADY WINDERMERE. Is there a Mr. Erlynne--or is he a myth?

LORD WINDERMERE. Her husband died many years ago. She is alone in the world.

LADY WINDERMERE. No relations? [A pause.]

LORD WINDERMERE. None.

LADY WINDERMERE. Rather curious, isn't it? [L.]

LORD WINDERMERE. [L.C.] Margaret, I was saying to you--and I beg you to listen to me--that as far as I have known Mrs. Erlynne, she has conducted herself well. If years ago -

LADY WINDERMERE. Oh! [Crossing R.C.] I don't want details about her life!

LORD WINDERMERE. [C.] I am not going to give you any details about her life. I tell you simply this--Mrs. Erlynne was once honoured, loved, respected. She was well born, she had position--she lost everything--threw it away, if you like. That makes it all the more bitter. Misfortunes one can endure--they come from outside, they are accidents. But to suffer for one's own faults--ah!--there is the sting of life. It was twenty years ago, too. She was little more than a girl then. She had been a wife for even less time than you have.

LADY WINDERMERE. I am not interested in her--and--you should not mention this woman and me in the same breath. It is an error of taste. [Sitting R. at desk.]

LORD WINDERMERE. Margaret, you could save this woman. She wants to get back into society, and she wants you to help her. [Crossing to her.]

LADY WINDERMERE. Me!

LORD WINDERMERE. Yes, you.

LADY WINDERMERE. How impertinent of her! [A pause.]

LORD WINDERMERE. Margaret, I came to ask you a great favour, and I still ask it of you, though you have discovered what I had intended you should never have known that I have given Mrs. Erlynne a large sum of money. I want you to send her an invitation for our party to-night. [Standing L. of her.]

LADY WINDERMERE. You are mad! [Rises.]

LORD WINDERMERE. I entreat you. People may chatter about her, do chatter about her, of course, but they don't know anything definite against her. She has been to several houses--not to houses where you would go, I admit, but still to houses where women who are in what is called Society nowadays do go. That does not content her. She wants you to receive her once.

LADY WINDERMERE. As a triumph for her, I suppose?

LORD WINDERMERE. No; but because she knows that you are a good woman--and that if she comes here once she will have a chance of a happier, a surer life than she has had. She will make no further effort to know you. Won't you help a woman who is trying to get back?

LADY WINDERMERE. No! If a woman really repents, she never wishes to return to the society that has made or seen her ruin.

LORD WINDERMERE. I beg of you.

LADY WINDERMERE. [Crossing to door R.] I am going to dress for dinner, and don't mention the subject again this evening. Arthur [going to him C.], you fancy because I have no father or mother that I am alone in the world, and that you can treat me as you choose. You are wrong, I have friends, many friends.

LORD WINDERMERE. [L.C.] Margaret, you are talking foolishly, recklessly. I won't argue with you, but I insist upon your asking Mrs. Erlynne to-night.

LADY WINDERMERE. [R.C.] I shall do nothing of the kind.  
[Crossing L. C.]

LORD WINDERMERE. You refuse? [C.]

LADY WINDERMERE. Absolutely!

LORD WINDERMERE. Ah, Margaret, do this for my sake; it is her last chance.

LADY WINDERMERE. What has that to do with me?

LORD WINDERMERE. How hard good women are!

LADY WINDERMERE. How weak bad men are!

LORD WINDERMERE. Margaret, none of us men may be good enough for the women we marry--that is quite true--but you don't imagine I would ever--oh, the suggestion is monstrous!

LADY WINDERMERE. Why should YOU be different from other men? I am told that there is hardly a husband in London who does not waste his life over SOME shameful passion.

LORD WINDERMERE. I am not one of them.

LADY WINDERMERE. I am not sure of that!

LORD WINDERMERE. You are sure in your heart. But don't make chasm after chasm between us. God knows the last few minutes have thrust us wide enough apart. Sit down and write the card.

LADY WINDERMERE. Nothing in the whole world would induce me.

LORD WINDERMERE. [Crossing to bureau.] Then I will! [Rings electric bell, sits and writes card.]

LADY WINDERMERE. You are going to invite this woman? [Crossing to him.]

LORD WINDERMERE. Yes. [Pause. Enter PARKER.] Parker!

PARKER. Yes, my lord. [Comes down L.C.]

LORD WINDERMERE. Have this note sent to Mrs. Erlynne at No. 84A Curzon Street. [Crossing to L.C. and giving note to PARKER.]

There is no answer!

[Exit PARKER C.]

LADY WINDERMERE. Arthur, if that woman comes here, I shall insult her.

LORD WINDERMERE. Margaret, don't say that.

LADY WINDERMERE. I mean it.

LORD WINDERMERE. Child, if you did such a thing, there's not a woman in London who wouldn't pity you.

LADY WINDERMERE. There is not a GOOD woman in London who would not

applaud me. We have been too lax. We must make an example. I propose to begin to-night. [Picking up fan.] Yes, you gave me this fan to-day; it was your birthday present. If that woman

crosses my threshold, I shall strike her across the face with it.

LORD WINDERMERE. Margaret, you couldn't do such a thing.

LADY WINDERMERE. You don't know me! [Moves R.]

[Enter PARKER.]

Parker!

PARKER. Yes, my lady.

LADY WINDERMERE. I shall dine in my own room. I don't want dinner, in fact. See that everything is ready by half-past ten. And, Parker, be sure you pronounce the names of the guests very distinctly to-night. Sometimes you speak so fast that I miss them. I am particularly anxious to hear the names quite clearly, so as to make no mistake. You understand, Parker?

PARKER. Yes, my lady.

LADY WINDERMERE. That will do!

[Exit PARKER C.]

[Speaking to LORD WINDERMERE] Arthur, if that woman comes here--I



warn you -

LORD WINDERMERE. Margaret, you'll ruin us!

LADY WINDERMERE. Us! From this moment my life is separate from yours. But if you wish to avoid a public scandal, write at once to this woman, and tell her that I forbid her to come here!

LORD WINDERMERE. I will not--I cannot--she must come!

LADY WINDERMERE. Then I shall do exactly as I have said. [Goes R.] You leave me no choice. [Exit R.]

LORD WINDERMERE. [Calling after her.] Margaret! Margaret! [A pause.] My God! What shall I do? I dare not tell her who this woman really is. The shame would kill her. [Sinks down into a chair and buries his face in his hands.]

ACT DROP

SECOND ACT