

Audition scenes - "Lady Windermere's Fan"

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Scene 1: Lord Darlington's visit

LADY WINDERMERE.

Lord Darlington, you annoyed me last night at dinner. I am afraid you are going to annoy me again.

LORD DARLINGTON.

I am quite miserable, Lady Windermere. You must tell me what I did.

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.

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?

LORD DARLINGTON.

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 politicians down to the bores. I should like you to take me very seriously, Lady Windermere, you more than any one else in life.

Scene 2: The Duchess of Berwick's visit

(Lord Darlington has just left.)

DUCHESS OF BERWICK.

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. Agatha, darling!

LADY AGATHA.

Yes, mamma.

DUCHESS OF BERWICK.

Will you go and look over the photograph album that I see there?

LADY AGATHA.

Yes, mamma. *(Goes to table.)*

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 balcony and look at the sunset?

LADY AGATHA.

Yes, mamma. (*Exits.*)

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 party every one was saying how extraordinary it was that, of all men here, Windermere should behave in such a way.

Scene 3: Lady Windermere confronts her husband

LADY WINDERME RE.

(Lady Windermere has just found out that her husband has paid enormous sums of money to Mrs Erlynne.)

Enter LORD WINDERMERE centre.

LORD WINDERMERE.

Well, dear, has the fan been sent home yet? (*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 here knows already - your daily visits to her room, your mad infatuation, the monstrous sums of money you squander on this infamous woman!

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 -

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 weeks seems to me now - every kiss you have given me is tainted in my memory.

LORD WINDERMERE.

Don't say that, Margaret. I never loved any one in the whole world but you.

LADY WINDERMERE.

Who is this woman, then? Why do you take a room for her here?

LORD WINDERMERE.

I did not take a room for her here.

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?

LORD WINDERMERE.

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.

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.)*

Scene 4: The guests arrive

DUCHESS OF BERWICK.

So strange Lord Windermere isn't here. Mr Hopper is very late, too. You have kept those five dances for him, Agatha? *(Comes down.)*

LADY AGATHA.

Yes, mamma.

DUCHESS OF BERWICK.

Just let me see your card. I'm so glad Lady Windermere has revived cards. - They're a mother's only safeguard. You dear simple little thing! *(Scratches out two names.)* No nice girl should ever waltz with such particularly younger sons! It looks so fast! The last two dances you might pass on the terrace with Mr Hopper.

Enter MR DUMBY and LADY PLYMDALE.

LADY AGATHA.

Yes, mamma.

DUCHESS OF BERWICK.

(Fanning herself.) The air is so pleasant there.

PARKER.

Mrs Cowper-Cowper. Lady Stutfield. (Sir James Royston.)

These people enter as announced.

DUMBY.

Good evening, Lady Stutfield. I suppose this will be the last ball of the season?

LADY STUTFIELD.

I suppose so, Mr Dumby. It's been a delightful season, hasn't it?

DUMBY.

Quite delightful! - Good evening, Duchess. I suppose this will be the last ball of the season?

DUCHESS OF BERWICK.

I suppose so, Mr Dumby. It has been a very dull season, hasn't it?

DUMBY.

Dreadfully dull! Dreadfully dull!

MRS COWPER-COWPER.

Good evening, Mr Dumby. I suppose this will be the last ball of the season?

DUMBY.

Oh, I think not. There'll probably be two more.

Scene 5: Mr Hopper arrives

HOPPER.

How do you do, Duchess? (*Bows to LADY AGATHA.*)

DUCHESS OF BERWICK.

Dear Mr Hopper, how nice of you to come so early. We all know how busy you are.

HOPPER.

Well, my dear Duchess, of course I had to come! Sydney is far too nice this time of the year.

DUCHESS OF BERWICK.

Ah! We know your value, Mr Hopper. We wish there were more like you. It would make life so much easier. Do you know, Mr Hopper, dear Agatha and I are so much interested in Australia. It must be so pretty with all the dear little kangaroos flying about. Agatha has found it on the map. What a curious shape it is! Just like a large packing case. However, it is a very young country, isn't it?

HOPPER.

Wasn't it made at the same time as the others, Duchess?

DUCHESS OF BERWICK.

How clever you are, Mr Hopper. You have a cleverness quite of your own. Now I mustn't keep you.

HOPPER.

But I should like to dance with Lady Agatha, Duchess.

DUCHESS OF BERWICK.

Well, I hope she has a dance left. Have you a dance left, Agatha?

LADY AGATHA.

Yes, mamma.

DUCHESS OF BERWICK.

The next one?

LADY AGATHA.

Yes, mamma.

HOPPER.

May I have the pleasure? (*LADY AGATHA bows.*)

DUCHESS OF BERWICK.

Mind you take great care of my little chatterbox, Mr Hopper.

Scene 6: Who is Mrs Erlynne?

LORD AUGUSTUS.

(*Coming up to LORD WINDERMERE.*) Want to speak to you particularly, dear boy. I'm worn to a shadow. Know I don't look it. None of us men do look what we really are. Demmed good thing, too. What I want to know is this. Who is she? Where does she come from? Why hasn't she got any demmed relations? Demmed nuisance, relations! But they make one so demmed respectable.

LORD WINDERMERE.

You are talking of Mrs Erlynne, I suppose? I only met her at the beginning of the season. Till then, I never knew of her existence.

LORD AUGUSTUS.

You have seen a good deal of her since then.

LORD WINDERMERE.

(*Coldly.*) Yes, I have seen a good deal of her since then. I have just seen her.

LORD AUGUSTUS.

Egad! The women are very down on her. I have been dining with Arabella this evening! By Jove! You should have heard what she said about Mrs Erlynne. She didn't leave a rag on her. ... (*Aside.*) Berwick and I told her that didn't matter much, as the lady in question must have an extremely fine figure. You should have seen Arabella's expression! ... But, look here, dear boy. I don't know what to do about Mrs Erlynne. Egad! I might be married to her; she treats me with such demmed indifference. She's deuced clever, too! She explains everything. Egad! She explains you. She has got any amount of explanations for you - and all of them different.

LORD WINDERMERE.

No explanations are necessary about my friendship with Mrs Erlynne.

LORD AUGUSTUS.

Hem! Well, look here, dear old fellow. Do you think she will ever get into this demmed thing called Society? Would you introduce her to your wife? No use beating about the confounded bush. Would you do that?

LORD WINDERMERE.

Mrs Erlynne is coming here to-night.

LORD AUGUSTUS.

Your wife has sent her a card?

LORD WINDERMERE.

Mrs Erlynne has received a card.

LORD AUGUSTUS.

Then she's all right, dear boy. But why didn't you tell me that before? It would have saved me a heap of worry and demmed misunderstandings!

Scene 7: Mr Graham arrives

CECIL GRAHAM.

(Shakes hands with LORD WINDERMERE.) Good evening, Arthur. Why don't you ask me how I am? I like people to ask me how I am. It shows a wide-spread interest in my health. Now, to-night I am not at all well. Been dining with my people. Wonder why it is one's people are always so tedious? My father would talk morality after dinner. I told him he was old enough to know better. But my experience is that as soon as people are old enough to know better, they don't know anything at all. Hallo, Tuppy! Hear you're going to be married again; thought you were tired of that game.

LORD AUGUSTUS.

You're excessively trivial, my dear boy, excessively trivial!

CECIL GRAHAM.

By the way, Tuppy, which is it? Have you been twice married and once divorced, or twice divorced and once married? I say you've been twice divorced and once married. It seems so much more probable.

LORD AUGUSTUS.

I have a very bad memory. I really don't remember which. *(Exits.)*

LADY PLYMDALE.

Lord Windermere, I've something most particular to ask you.

LORD WINDERMERE.

I am afraid - if you will excuse me - I must join my wife.

LADY PLYMDALE.

Oh, you mustn't dream of such a thing. It's most dangerous nowadays for a husband to pay any attention to his wife in public. It always makes people think that he beats her when they're alone. The world has grown so suspicious of anything that looks like a happy married life. But I'll tell you what it is at supper.

Scene 8: Mrs Erlynne arrives

PARKER.

Mrs Erlynne.

MRS ERLYNNE's surprising arrival at the party startles Lady Windermere. She drops her fan.

LORD DARLINGTON.

You have dropped your fan, Lady Windermere. *(Picks it up and hands it to her.)*

MRS ERLYNNE.

How do you do, again, Lord Windermere? How charming your sweet wife looks! Quite a picture!

LORD WINDERMERE.

(In a low voice.) It was terribly rash of you to come!

MRS ERLYNNE.

(Smiling.) The wisest thing I ever did in my life. And, by the way, you must pay me a good deal of attention this evening. I am afraid of the women. You must introduce me to some of them. The men I can always manage. How do you do, Lord Augustus? You have quite neglected me lately. I have not seen you since yesterday. I am afraid you're faithless. Every one told me so.

LORD AUGUSTUS.

Now really, Mrs Erlynne, allow me to explain.

MRS ERLYNNE.

No, dear Lord Augustus, you can't explain anything. It is your chief charm.

LORD AUGUSTUS.

Ah! If you find charms in me, Mrs Erlynne -

They converse together. LORD WINDERMERE moves uneasily about the room watching MRS ERLYNNE.

LORD DARLINGTON.

(To LADY WINDERMERE.) How pale you are!

LADY WINDERMERE.

Cowards are always pale!

LORD DARLINGTON.

You look faint. Come out on the terrace.

LADY WINDERMERE.

Yes. *(To PARKER.)* Parker, send my cloak out.

Scene 9: That woman

MRS ERLYNNE.

(talking to LORD WINDERMERE) So that is poor Dumby with Lady Plymdale? I hear she is frightfully jealous of him. He doesn't seem anxious to speak to me to-night. I suppose he is afraid of her. Those straw-coloured women have dreadful tempers. Do you know, I think I'll dance with you first, Windermere. It will make Lord Augustus so jealous! Lord Augustus!

LORD AUGUSTUS enters.

MRS ERLYNNE.

Lord Windermere insists on my dancing with him first, and, as it's his wife's party, I can't well refuse. You know I would much sooner dance with you.

LORD AUGUSTUS.

(With a low bow.) I wish I could think so, Mrs Erlynne.

MRS ERLYNNE.

You know it far too well. I can fancy a person dancing through life with you and finding it charming.

LORD AUGUSTUS.

(Placing his hand on his waistcoat.) Oh, thank you, thank you. You are the most adorable of all ladies!

MRS ERLYNNE.

What a nice speech! So simple and so sincere! Just the sort of speech I like. Well, you shall hold my scarf. *(Goes towards ball-room, sees MR DUMBY)* Ah, Mr Dumby, how are you? I am so sorry I have been out the last three times you have called. Come and lunch on Friday.

DUMBY.

(With perfect nonchalance.) Delighted!

LADY PLYMDALE glares with indignation at MR DUMBY. LORD AUGUSTUS follows MRS ERLYNNE into the ball-room, holding her scarf.

LADY PLYMDALE.

(To MR DUMBY.) What an absolute brute you are! I never can believe a word you say! Why did you tell me you didn't know her? What do you mean by calling on her three times running? You are not to go to lunch there; of course you understand that?

DUMBY.

My dear Laura, I wouldn't dream of going!

LADY PLYMDALE.

You haven't told me her name yet! Who is she?

DUMBY.

(Coughs slightly and smooths his hair.) She's a Mrs Erlyne.

LADY PLYMDALE.

That woman!

DUMBY.

Yes; that is what every one calls her.

LADY PLYMDALE.

How very interesting! How intensely interesting! I really must have a good stare at her. *(Goes to door of ball-room and looks in.)* I have heard the most shocking things about her. They say she is ruining poor Windermere. And Lady Windermere, who goes in for being so proper, invites her! How extremely amusing! It takes a thoroughly good woman to do a thoroughly stupid thing. You are to lunch there on Friday!

DUMBY.

Why?

LADY PLYMDALE.

Because I want you to take my husband with you. He has been so attentive lately, that he has become a perfect nuisance. Now, this woman is just the thing for him. He'll dance attendance upon her as long as she lets him, and won't bother me. I assure you, women of that kind are most useful. They form the basis of other people's marriages.

DUMBY.

What a mystery you are!

LADY PLYMDALE.

(Looking at him.) I wish you were!

DUMBY.

I am - to myself. I am the only person in the world I should like to know thoroughly; but I don't see any chance of it just at present.

Scene 10: Lord Darlington declares his love

LADY WINDERMERE.

You said you would be my friend, Lord Darlington. - Tell me, what am I to do? Be my friend now.

LORD DARLINGTON.

Between men and women there is no friendship possible. There is passion, enmity, worship, love, but no friendship. I love you -

LADY WINDERMERE.

No, no!

LORD DARLINGTON.

Yes, I love you! You are more to me than anything in the whole world. What does your husband give you? Nothing. Whatever is in him he gives to this wretched woman, whom he has thrust into your society, to shame you before every one. I offer you my life -

LADY WINDERMERE.

Lord Darlington!

LORD DARLINGTON.

My life - my whole life. Take it, and do with it what you will ... I love you - love you as I have never loved any living thing. From the moment I met you I loved you, loved you blindly, adoringly, madly! You did not know it then - you know it now! You could leave your husband to-night. I won't tell you that the world matters nothing, or the world's voice, or the voice of society. They matter a great deal. They matter far too much. But there are moments when one has to choose between living one's own life, fully, entirely, completely - or dragging out some false, shallow, degrading existence that the world in its hypocrisy demands. You have that moment now. Choose! Oh, my love, choose.

LADY WINDERMERE.

(Moving slowly away from him, and looking at him with startled eyes.) I have not the courage.

LORD DARLINGTON.

(Following her.) Yes; you have the courage. There may be six months of pain, of disgrace even, but when you no longer bear his name, when you bear mine, all will be well. Margaret, my love, my wife that shall be some day - yes, my wife! You know it! What are you now? This woman has the place that belongs by right to you. Oh! Go - go out of this room, leave him, with head erect, with a smile upon your lips, with courage in your eyes. All London will know why you did it; and who will blame you? No one. If they do, what matter? Wrong? What is wrong? It's wrong for a man to abandon his wife for a shameless woman. It is wrong for a wife to remain with a man who so dishonours her. You said once you would make no compromise with things. Make none now. Be brave! Be yourself!

LADY WINDERMERE.

I am afraid of being myself. Let me think! Let me wait! My husband may return to me.

LORD DARLINGTON.

And you would take him back! You are not what I thought you were. You are just the same as every other woman. You would stand anything rather than face the censure of a world, whose praise you would despise. In a week you will be spending time with this woman. She will be your constant guest - your dearest friend. You would endure anything rather than break with one blow this monstrous tie. You are right. You have no courage; none!

LADY WINDERMERE.

Ah, give me time to think. I cannot answer you now. *(Passes her hand nervously over her brow.)*

Scene 11: Mr Hopper proposes to Lady Agatha

DUCHESS OF BERWICK.

Mr Hopper, I am very, very angry with you. You have taken Agatha out on the terrace, and she is so delicate.

HOPPER.

Awfully sorry, Duchess. We went out for a moment and then got chatting together.

DUCHESS OF BERWICK.

Ah, about dear Australia, I suppose?

HOPPER.

Yes!

DUCHESS OF BERWICK.

Agatha, darling! (*Beckons her over.*)

LADY AGATHA.

Yes, mamma!

DUCHESS OF BERWICK.

(*Aside.*) Did Mr Hopper definitely -

LADY AGATHA.

Yes, mamma.

DUCHESS OF BERWICK.

And what answer did you give him, dear child?

LADY AGATHA.

Yes, mamma.

DUCHESS OF BERWICK.

(*Affectionately.*) My dear one! You always say the right thing. Mr Hopper! James! Agatha has told me everything. How cleverly you have both kept your secret.

HOPPER.

You don't mind my taking Agatha off to Australia, then, Duchess?

DUCHESS OF BERWICK.

(*Indignantly.*) To Australia? Oh, don't mention that dreadful vulgar place.

HOPPER.

But she said she'd like to come with me.

DUCHESS OF BERWICK.

(*Severely.*) Did you say that, Agatha?

LADY AGATHA.

Yes, mamma.

DUCHESS OF BERWICK.

Agatha, you say the most silly things possible. I think on the whole that Grosvenor Square would be a more healthy place to reside in. There are lots of vulgar people live in Grosvenor Square, but at any rate there are no horrid kangaroos crawling about. But we'll talk about that to-morrow. James, you can take Agatha down. You'll come to lunch, of course, James. At half-past one, instead of two. The Duke will wish to say a few words to you, I am sure.

HOPPER.

I should like to have a chat with the Duke, Duchess. He has not said a single word to me yet.

DUCHESS OF BERWICK.

I think you'll find he will have a great deal to say to you to-morrow.

Scene 12: The guests leave

LADY PLYMDALE.

My dear Margaret, what a handsome woman your husband has been dancing with! I should be quite jealous if I were you! Is she a great friend of yours?

LADY WINDERMERE.

No!

LADY PLYMDALE.

Really? Good-night, dear. (*Looks at MR DUMBY and exits.*)

DUMBY.

Awful manners young Hopper has!

CECIL GRAHAM.

Ah! Hopper is one of Nature's gentlemen, the worst type of gentleman I know.

DUMBY.

Sensible woman, Lady Windermere. Lots of wives would have objected to Mrs Erlynne coming. But Lady Windermere has that uncommon thing called common sense.

CECIL GRAHAM.

And Windermere knows that nothing looks so like innocence as an indiscretion.

DUMBY.

Yes; dear Windermere is becoming almost modern. Never thought he would. (*Bows to LADY WINDERMERE and exits.*)

LADY JEDBURGH.

Good night, Lady Windermere. What a fascinating woman Mrs Erlynne is! She is coming to lunch on Thursday, won't you come too? I expect Mr Bishop and dear Lady Merton.

LADY WINDERMERE.

I am afraid I am engaged, Lady Jedburgh.

LADY JEDBURGH.

So sorry.

Scene 13: Talking business

MRS ERLYNNE.

Charming ball it has been! Quite reminds me of old days. *(Sits on sofa.)* And I see that there are just as many fools in society as there used to be. So pleased to find that nothing has altered! Except Margaret. She's grown quite pretty. The last time I saw her - twenty years ago, she was a fright in flannel. Positive fright, I assure you. The dear Duchess! And that sweet Lady Agatha! Just the type of girl I like! Well, really, Windermere, if I am to be the Duchess's sister-in-law...

LORD WINDERMERE.

(Sitting left of her.) But are you - ?

MRS ERLYNNE.

Oh, yes! He's to call to-morrow at twelve o'clock! He wanted to propose to-night. In fact he did. He kept on proposing. Poor Augustus, you know how he repeats himself. Such a bad habit! But I told him I wouldn't give him an answer till to-morrow. Of course I am going to take him. And I dare say I'll make him an admirable wife, as wives go. And there is a great deal of good in Lord Augustus. Fortunately it is all on the surface. Just where good qualities should be. Of course you must help me in this matter.

LORD WINDERMERE.

I am not called on to encourage Lord Augustus, I suppose?

MRS ERLYNNE.

Oh, no! I do the encouraging. But you will make me a handsome settlement, Windermere, won't you?

LORD WINDERMERE.

(Frowning.) Is that what you want to talk to me about to-night?

MRS ERLYNNE.

Yes.

LORD WINDERMERE.

(With a gesture of impatience.) I will not talk of it here.

MRS ERLYNNE.

(Laughing.) Then we will talk of it on the terrace. Even business should have a picturesque background. Should it not, Windermere? With a proper background women can do anything.

LORD WINDERMERE.

Won't to-morrow do as well?

MRS ERLYNNE.

No; you see, to-morrow I am going to accept him. And I think it would be a good thing if I was able to tell him that I had - well, what shall I say? - £50,000 a year left to me by a third cousin - or a second husband - or some distant relative of that kind. It would be an additional attraction, wouldn't it? You have a delightful opportunity now of paying me a compliment, Windermere. But you are not very clever at paying compliments. I am afraid Margaret doesn't encourage you in that excellent habit. It's a great mistake on her part. When men give up saying what is charming, they give up thinking what is charming. But seriously, what do you say to £50,000? £100,000, I think. In modern life margin is everything. Windermere, don't you think the world an intensely amusing place? I do!

Scene 14: A letter for Lord Windermere

MRS ERLYNNE.

Is Lady Windermere in the ball-room?

PARKER.

Her ladyship has just gone out.

MRS ERLYNNE.

Gone out? She's not on the terrace?

PARKER.

No, madam. Her ladyship has just...left.

MRS ERLYNNE.

(Starts, and looks at the servant with a puzzled expression in her face.) Left?

PARKER.

Yes, madam - her ladyship told me she had left a letter for his lordship on the table.

MRS ERLYNNE.

A letter for Lord Windermere?

PARKER.

Yes, madam.

MRS ERLYNNE.

Thank you.

PARKER exits.

MRS ERLYNNE

Left her own party! A letter addressed to her husband! *(Goes over to bureau and looks at letter. Takes it up and lays it down again with a shudder of fear.)* No, no! It would be impossible! Life doesn't repeat its tragedies like that! Oh, why does this horrible fancy come across me? Why do I remember now the one moment of my life I most wish to forget? Does life repeat its tragedies? *(Tears letter open and reads it, then sinks down into a chair with a gesture of*

anguish.) Oh, how terrible! The same words that twenty years ago I wrote to her father! And how bitterly I have been punished for it! No; my punishment, my real punishment is to-night, is now!

Scene 15: Mrs Erlynne's plan

MRS ERLYNNE.

What can I do? What can I do? I feel a passion awakening within me that I never felt before. What can it mean? The daughter must not be like the mother - that would be terrible. How can I save her? How can I save my child? A moment may ruin a life. Who knows that better than I? Windermere has to be distracted; that is absolutely necessary. But how shall I do it? It must be done somehow. Ah!

Enter LORD AUGUSTUS right, carrying scarf.

LORD AUGUSTUS.

Dear lady, I am in such suspense! May I not have an answer to my request?

MRS ERLYNNE.

Lord Augustus, listen to me. You are to take Lord Windermere down to the club at once, and keep him there as long as possible. You understand?

LORD AUGUSTUS.

To the club? At once?

MRS ERLYNNE.

(Nervously.) Do what I tell you. Do what I tell you.

LORD AUGUSTUS.

And my reward?

MRS ERLYNNE.

Your reward? Your reward? Oh! Ask me that to-morrow. But don't let Windermere out of your sight to-night. If you do I will never forgive you. I will never speak to you again. I'll have nothing to do with you. Remember you are to keep Windermere at the club, and don't let him come back to-night. *(Exit left.)*

LORD AUGUSTUS.

Well, really, I might be her husband already. Positively I might. *(Follows her in a bewildered manner.)*

Scene 16: Lady Windermere's soliloquy

LADY WINDERMERE.

Why doesn't Lord Darlington come? This waiting is horrible. He should be here. Why is he not here, to wake by passionate words some fire within me? I am cold - cold as a loveless thing. Arthur must have read my letter by this time. If he cared for me, he would have come after me, would have taken me back by force. But he doesn't care. He's entrammelled by this woman - fascinated by her - dominated by her. If a woman wants to hold a man, she has merely to appeal to what is worst in

him. We make gods of men and they leave us. Others make brutes of them and they fawn and are faithful. How hideous life is! ... Oh! It was mad of me to come here, horribly mad. And yet, which is the worst, I wonder, to be at the mercy of a man who loves one, or the wife of a man who at one's own party dishonours one? What woman knows? What woman in the whole world? But will he love me always, this man to whom I am giving my life? What do I bring him? Lips that have lost the note of joy, eyes that are blinded by tears, chill hands and icy heart. I bring him nothing. I must go back - no; I can't go back, my letter has put me in their power - Arthur would not take me back! That fatal letter! No! Lord Darlington leaves to-morrow. I will go with him - I have no choice. *(Sits down for a few moments. Then starts up and puts on her cloak.)* No, no! I will go back, let Arthur do with me what he pleases. I can't wait here. It has been madness my coming. I must go at once. As for Lord Darlington - Oh! Here he is! What shall I do? What can I say to him? Will he let me go away at all? I have heard that men are brutal, horrible ... Oh! *(Hides her face in her hands.)*

Scene 17: Mrs Erlynne tries to save Lady Windermere

MRS ERLYNNE.

(Hurriedly.) Think as you like about me - say what you choose against me, but go back, go back to the husband you love.

LADY WINDERMERE.

(Sullenly.) I do not love him!

MRS ERLYNNE.

You do, and you know that he loves you.

LADY WINDERMERE.

He does not understand what love is. He understands it as little as you do - but I see what you want. It would be a great advantage for you to get me back. Dear Heaven! What a life I would have then! Living at the mercy of a woman who has neither mercy nor pity in her, a woman whom it is an infamy to meet, a degradation to know, a vile woman, a woman who comes between husband and wife!

MRS ERLYNNE.

(With a gesture of despair.) Lady Windermere, Lady Windermere, don't say such terrible things. You don't know how terrible they are, how terrible and how unjust. Listen, you must listen! Only go back to your husband, and I promise you never to communicate with him again on any pretext - never to see him - never to have anything to do with his life or yours. The money that he gave me, he gave me not through love, but through hatred, not in worship, but in contempt. The hold I have over him -

LADY WINDERMERE.

(Rising.) Ah! you admit you have a hold!

MRS ERLYNNE.

Yes, and I will tell you what it is. It is his love for you, Lady Windermere.

LADY WINDERMERE.

You expect me to believe that?

MRS ERLYNNE.

You must believe it! It is true. It is his love for you that has made him submit to - oh! Call it what you like, tyranny, threats, anything you choose. But it is his love for you. His desire to spare you - shame, yes, shame and disgrace.

LADY WINDERMERE.

What do you mean? You are insolent! What have I to do with you?

MRS ERLYNNE.

(Humbly.) Nothing. I know it - but I tell you that your husband loves you - that you may never meet with such love again in your whole life - that such love you will never meet - and that if you throw it away, the day may come when you will starve for love and it will not be given to you, beg for love and it will be denied you - Oh! Arthur loves you!

Scene 18: Mrs Erlynne's sacrifice

MRS ERLYNNE.

(Starts, with a gesture of pain. Then restrains herself, and comes over to where LADY WINDERMERE is sitting. As she speaks, she stretches out her hands towards her, but does not dare to touch her.) Believe what you choose about me. I am not worth a moment's sorrow. But don't spoil your beautiful young life on my account! You don't know what may be in store for you, unless you leave this house at once. You don't know what it is to fall into the pit, to be despised, mocked, abandoned, sneered at - to be an outcast! To find the door shut against one, to have to creep in by hideous byways, afraid every moment lest the mask should be stripped from one's face, and all the while to hear the laughter, the horrible laughter of the world, a thing more tragic than all the tears the world has ever shed. You don't know what it is. One pays for one's sin, and then one pays again, and all one's life one pays. You must never know that. - As for me, if suffering be an expiation, then at this moment I have expiated all my faults, whatever they have been; for to-night you have made a heart in one who had it not, made it and broken it. - But let that pass. I may have wrecked my own life, but I will not let you wreck yours. You - why, you are a mere girl, you would be lost. You haven't got the kind of brains that enables a woman to get back. You have neither the wit nor the courage. You couldn't stand dishonour! No! Go back, Lady Windermere, to the husband who loves you, whom you love. You have a child, Lady Windermere. Go back to that child who even now, in pain or in joy, may be calling to you. *(LADY WINDERMERE rises.)* God gave you that child. He will require from you that you make his life fine, that you watch over him. What answer will you make to God if his life is ruined through you? Back to your room, Lady Windermere - your husband loves you! He has never swerved for a moment from the love he bears you. But even if he had a thousand loves, you must stay with your child. If he was harsh to you, you must stay with your child. If he ill-treated you, you must stay with your child. If he abandoned you, your place is with your child.

LADY WINDERMERE bursts into tears and buries her face in her hands.

MRS ERLYNNE.

(Rushing to her.) Lady Windermere!

LADY WINDERMERE.

(Holding out her hands to her, helplessly, as a child might do.) Take me home. Take me home.

MRS ERLYNNE.

(Is about to embrace her. Then restrains herself. There is a look of wonderful joy in her face.)
Come! Where is your cloak? *(Getting it from sofa.)* Here. Put it on. Come at once!

They go to the door.

LADY WINDERMERE.

Stop! Don't you hear voices?

MRS ERLYNNE.

No, no! There was no one!

LADY WINDERMERE.

Yes, there is! Listen! Oh! That is my husband's voice! He is coming in! Save me! Oh, it's some plot! You have sent for him.

Voices outside.

MRS ERLYNNE.

Silence! I'm here to save you, if I can. But I fear it is too late! There! *(Points to the curtain across the window.)* The first chance you have, slip out, if you ever get a chance!

LADY WINDERMERE.

But you?

MRS ERLYNNE.

Oh! Never mind me. I'll face them.

Scene 19: Among men

DUMBY.

Awfully commercial, women nowadays. Our grandmothers threw their caps over the mills, of course, but, by Jove, their granddaughters only throw their caps over mills that can raise the wind for them.

LORD AUGUSTUS.

You want to make her [*Mrs Erlynne*] out a wicked woman. She is not!

CECIL GRAHAM.

Oh! Wicked women bother one. Good women bore one. That is the only difference between them.

LORD AUGUSTUS.

(Puffing a cigar.) Mrs Erlynne has a future before her.

DUMBY.

Mrs Erlynne has a past before her.

LORD AUGUSTUS.

I prefer women with a past. They're always so demmed amusing to talk to.

CECIL GRAHAM.

Well, you'll have lots of topics of conversation with her then, Tuppy. *(Rising and going to him.)*

LORD AUGUSTUS.

You're getting annoying, dear-boy; you're getting demmed annoying.

CECIL GRAHAM.

(Puts his hands on his shoulders.) Now, Tuppy, you've lost your figure and you've lost your character. Don't lose your temper; you have only got one.

LORD AUGUSTUS.

My dear boy, if I wasn't the most good-natured man in London -

CECIL GRAHAM.

We'd treat you with more respect, wouldn't we, Tuppy? *(Strolls away.)*

DUMBY.

The youth of the present day are quite monstrous. They have absolutely no respect for dyed hair.

LORD AUGUSTUS looks round angrily.

CECIL GRAHAM.

Mrs Erlynne has a very great respect for dear Tuppy.

DUMBY.

Then Mrs Erlynne sets an admirable example to the rest of her sex. It is perfectly brutal the way most women nowadays behave to men who are not their husbands.

LORD WINDERMERE.

Dumby, you are ridiculous, and Cecil, you let your tongue run away with you. You must leave Mrs Erlynne alone. You don't really know anything about her, and you're always talking scandal against her.

CECIL GRAHAM.

(Coming towards him) My dear Arthur, I never talk scandal. I only talk gossip.

LORD WINDERMERE.

What is the difference between scandal and gossip?

CECIL GRAHAM.

Oh! Gossip is charming! History is merely gossip. But scandal is gossip made tedious by morality. Now, I never moralise. A man who moralises is usually a hypocrite, and a woman who moralises is invariably plain. There is nothing in the whole world so unbecoming to a woman as a Nonconformist conscience. And most women know it, I'm glad to say.

LORD AUGUSTUS.

Just my sentiments, dear boy, just my sentiments.

CECIL GRAHAM.

Sorry to hear it, Tuppy; whenever people agree with me, I always feel I must be wrong.

LORD AUGUSTUS.

My dear boy, when I was your age -

CECIL GRAHAM.

But you never were, Tuppy, and you never will be.

Scene 20: Lady Windermere's fan is discovered

LORD AUGUSTUS.

(to LORD WINDERMERE who is about to leave) My dear fellow, you mustn't go yet. I have a lot to talk to you about. And Cecil has something to show you.

LORD WINDERMERE.

(Walking over.) Well, what is it?

CECIL GRAHAM.

Darlington has got a woman here in his room. Here is her fan. Amusing, isn't it? *(A pause.)*

LORD WINDERMERE.

Good God! *(Seizes the fan - DUMBY rises.)*

CECIL GRAHAM.

What is the matter?

LORD WINDERMERE.

Lord Darlington!

LORD DARLINGTON.

(Turning round.) Yes!

LORD WINDERMERE.

What is my wife's fan doing here in your rooms? Hands off, Cecil. Don't touch me.

LORD DARLINGTON.

Your wife's fan?

LORD WINDERMERE.

Yes, here it is!

LORD DARLINGTON.

(Walking towards him.) I don't know!

LORD WINDERMERE.

You must know. I demand an explanation. *(To CECIL GRAHAM.)* Don't hold me, you fool.

LORD DARLINGTON.

(Aside.) She is here after all!

LORD WINDERMERE.

Speak, sir! Why is my wife's fan here? Answer me! By God! I'll search your room, and if my wife's here, I'll - *(Moves.)*

LORD DARLINGTON.

You shall not search my room. You have no right to do so. I forbid you!

LORD WINDERMERE.

You scoundrel! I'll not leave your room till I have searched every corner of it! What moves behind that curtain? *(Rushes towards the curtain centre.)*

MRS ERLYNNE.

(Enters behind right.) Lord Windermere!

LORD WINDERMERE.

Mrs Erlynne! *Every one starts and turns round.*

LADY WINDERMERE slips out from behind the curtain and glides from the room L.

MRS ERLYNNE.

I am afraid I took your wife's fan in mistake for my own, when I was leaving her party to-night. I am so sorry.

Takes fan from him. LORD WINDERMERE looks at her in contempt. LORD DARLINGTON in mingled astonishment and anger. LORD AUGUSTUS turns away. The other men smile at each other as she crosses the stage slowly and seductively and exits.

Scene 21: Mrs Erlynne's revelation

LORD WINDERMERE.

What do you mean by coming here this morning? What is your object? *(Crossing stage and sitting down.)*

MRS ERLYNNE.

(With a note of irony in her voice.) To bid good-bye to my dear daughter, of course.

LORD WINDERMERE bites his under lip in anger. MRS ERLYNNE looks at him, and her voice and manner become serious. In her accents as she talks there is a note of deep tragedy. For a moment she reveals herself.

MRS ERLYNNE.

Oh, don't imagine I am going to have a pathetic scene with her, weep on her neck and tell her who I am, and all that kind of thing. I have no ambition to play the part of a mother. Only once in my life have I known a mother's feelings. That was last night. They were terrible - they made me suffer - they made me suffer too much. For twenty years, as you say, I have lived childless - I want to live childless still. (*Hiding her feelings with a trivial laugh.*) Besides, my dear Windermere, how on earth could I pose as a mother with a grown-up daughter? Margaret is twenty-one, and I have never admitted that I am more than twenty-nine, or thirty at the most. Twenty-nine when there are pink shades, thirty when there are not. So you see what difficulties it would involve. No, as far as I am concerned, let your wife cherish the memory of this dead, stainless mother. Why should I interfere with her illusions? I find it hard enough to keep my own. I lost one illusion last night. I thought I had no heart. I find I have, and a heart doesn't suit me, Windermere. Somehow it doesn't go with modern dress. It makes one look old. And it spoils one's career at critical moments.

LORD WINDERMERE.

You fill me with horror - with absolute horror.

MRS ERLYNNE.

I suppose, Windermere, you would like me to retire into a convent, or become a hospital nurse, or something of that kind, as people do in silly modern novels. That is stupid of you, Arthur; in real life we don't do such things - not as long as we have any good looks left, at any rate. No - what consoles one nowadays is not repentance, but pleasure. Repentance is quite out of date. And besides, if a woman really repents, she has to go to a bad dressmaker, otherwise no one believes in her. And nothing in the world would induce me to do that. No; I am going to pass entirely out of your two lives. My coming into them has been a mistake - I discovered that last night.

LORD WINDERMERE.

A fatal mistake.

MRS ERLYNNE.

(*Smiling.*) Almost fatal.