

Lady windermere`s fan: overview



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

On his wife's birthday, Lord Windermere presented her with a beautiful, delicately wrought fan with her name, Margaret, engraved upon it. She intended to carry the fan at a ball she was giving that evening, a ball to which everyone of importance in London had been invited.

That afternoon, the Duchess of Berwick called on Lady Windermere, to tell her friend of a rumored affair between Lord Windermere and Mrs. Erlynne, a fascinating but notorious woman not received in the best houses. According to the duchess' story, Lord Windermere had for some months been supplying Mrs. Erlynne with funds for her support. The old dowager suggested that Lady Windermere take immediate steps to learn the relationship between the two. Lady Windermere was upset. Determined to find out if there were any truth to the gossip, she opened her husband's desk.

In a locked bank book, which she ripped open, she found evidence of her husband's duplicity, a record of checks issued to Mrs. Erlynne over a long period of time. Angry and hurt at Lord Windermere's apparent failure to appreciate love and virtue, she turned on him the moment he appeared. His main concern was annoyance that his wife had dared tamper with his property behind his back. He informed her that his relations with Mrs. Erlynne were perfectly honorable, that she was a fine but unfortunate woman who wished to win the regard of society once more. Moreover, Lord Windermere explicitly ordered his wife to send Mrs.

Erlynne an invitation to the ball. When Lady Windermere refused, her husband wrote an invitation. Angered at his act, Lady Windermere threatened to strike Mrs. Erlynne with the fan if she dared cross the

threshold of Windermere House. When Mrs. Erlynne appeared at the ball, Lady Windermere lost her resolution and let the fan drop to the floor. The guests, believing that Mrs.

Erlynne had been invited by Lady Windermere herself, accepted her. She was lionized by all the men, and the women, curious because of the many stories they had heard, wanted to see at first hand what she was really like. Among her special admirers was Lord Augustus Lorton, the Duchess of Berwick's disreputable brother, to whom she had just become engaged to be married. Mrs. Erlynne was not the only woman greatly admired that evening. Lord Darlington was persistently attentive to Lady Windermere. Having sharply turned Lord Darlington's advances down, Lady Windermere became despondent when she unexpectedly caught sight of her husband and Mrs.

Erlynne in rapt conversation. Without waiting to see her guests out, Lady Windermere wrote a letter informing Lord Windermere that she was leaving his house forever. She gave the letter to a servant to deliver and left for Lord Darlington's apartments. Mrs. Erlynne, who with Lord Augustus had remained behind to talk with Lord Windermere, discovered the letter Lady Windermere had written, and the thought of that lady's rash act brought back old memories. Twenty years before, Mrs. Erlynne had written a similar letter to her husband, and had left him and their child for a lover who had deserted her.

Her years of social ostracism had made her a stranger to her own daughter. Perhaps, however, she could keep her daughter from making the same mistake. Lady Windermere should never feel the remorse that her mother,

Mrs. Erlynne, had known. Mrs. Erlynne took Lady Windermere's letter and hurried to Lord Darlington's apartments, first persuading Lord Augustus to take Lord Windermere to his club and keep him there for the rest of the night. In Lord Darlington's rooms, without revealing her identity, Mrs.

Erlynne managed to persuade Lady Windermere to think of her child and go back to her husband. Out of the depths of her own bitter experience, Mrs. Erlynne insisted that Lady Windermere's first duty was not to her husband but to her child. As Lady Windermere was leaving, Lord Darlington returned, accompanied by Lord Windermere, Lord Augustus, and several cohorts. Ready to face the men, Mrs. Erlynne counseled Lady Windermere to slip behind a curtain to await a fortuitous moment for escape. Upon learning of Lord Augustus' presence, Mrs.

Erlynne went into the next room, hoping to avoid detection. Lord Windermere soon discovered his wife's fan and faced Lord Darlington with it. Giving Lady Windermere the opportunity to exit, Mrs. Erlynne appeared suddenly from the adjoining room, with the explanation that she had taken the fan, mistaking it for her own, when she left Windermere House. Her explanation saved Lady Windermere at the cost of her own reputation. Lord Windermere was furious, for he felt that he had in good faith befriended and helped a woman who was beneath contempt, and Lord Augustus turned away. The next morning, having realized that, by some strange irony, the "bad" woman had accepted public disgrace in order to save the "good" one, Lady Windermere defended Mrs.

Erlynne to her husband, who persisted in disparaging the adventuress.

Frustrated by Windermere's demand that she not see Mrs. Erlynne again, Lady Windermere poised herself to explain all. Then Mrs. Erlynne arrived to return the fan, but refused to reveal herself to her daughter, not wanting to shatter Lady Windermere's illusions. Taking advantage of the simultaneous arrival of Lord Augustus and her coach, Mrs. Erlynne asked her now-cold suitor to escort her out, where he accepted her explanation that his own interests had taken her to Lord Darlington's rooms.

When he returned to the Windermeres to share his good news, Lord Windermere told him that he was marrying a very clever woman. Lady Windermere insisted that he was marrying someone rarer, a good woman.