

Iolanthe

CHORUS.

Yes, we live on lover!
Tripping hither, etc.

(At the end of Chorus, all sigh wearily.)

CELIA. Ah, it's all very well, but since our Queen banished Iolanthe, fairy revels have not been what they were!

LEILA. Iolanthe was the life and soul of Fairyland. Why, she wrote all our songs and arranged all our dances! We sing her songs and we trip her measures, but we don't enjoy ourselves!

FLETA. To think that five-and-twenty years have elapsed since she was banished! What could she have done to have deserved so terrible a punishment?

LEILA. Something awful! She married a mortal!

FLETA. Oh! Is it injudicious to marry a mortal?

LEILA. Injudicious? It strikes at the root of the whole fairy system! By our laws, the fairy who marries a mortal dies!

CELIA. But Iolanthe didn't die!

(Enter FAIRY QUEEN.)

QUEEN. No, because your Queen, who loved her with a surpassing love, commuted her sentence to penal servitude for life, on condition that she left her husband and never communicated with him again!

LEILA. That sentence of penal servitude she is now working out, on her head, at the bottom of that stream!

QUEEN. Yes, but when I banished her, I gave her all the pleasant places of the earth to dwell in. I'm sure I never intended that she should go and live at the bottom of a stream! It makes me perfectly wretched to think of the discomfort she must have undergone!

LEILA. Think of the damp! And her chest was always delicate.

QUEEN. And the frogs! Ugh! I never shall enjoy any peace of mind until I know why Iolanthe went to live among the frogs!

FLETA. Then why not summon her and ask her?

QUEEN. Why? Because if I set eyes on her I should forgive her at once!

CELIA. Then why not forgive her? Twenty-five years – it's a long time!

LEILA. Think how we loved her!

QUEEN. Loved her? What was your love to mine? Why, she was invaluable to me! Who taught me to curl myself inside a buttercup? Iolanthe! Who taught me to swing upon a cobweb? Iolanthe! Who taught me to dive into a dewdrop – to nestle in a nutshell – to gambol upon gossamer? Iolanthe!

LEILA. She certainly did surprising things!

FLETA. Oh, give her back to us, great Queen, for your sake if not for ours! *(All kneel in supplication.)*

QUEEN *(irresolute).* Oh, I should be strong, but I am weak! I should be marble, but I am clay! Her punishment has been heavier than I intended. I did not mean that she should live

Iolanthe

among the frogs – and – well, well, it shall be as you wish – it shall be as you wish!

INVOCATION – QUEEN.

Iolanthe!
From thy dark exile thou art summoned!
Come to our call –
Come, come, Iolanthe!
CELIA. Iolanthe!
LEILA. Iolanthe!
ALL. Come to our call, Iolanthe!
Iolanthe, come!

(IOLANTHE rises from the water. She is clad in water-weeds. She approaches the QUEEN with head bent and arms crossed.)

IOLANTHE. With humbled breast
And every hope laid low,
To thy behest,
Offended Queen, I bow!

QUEEN. For a dark sin against our fairy laws
We sent thee into life-long banishment;
But mercy holds her sway within our hearts –
Rise – thou art pardoned!

IOL. Pardoned!
ALL. Pardoned!

(Her weeds fall from her, and she appears clothed as a fairy. The QUEEN places a diamond coronet on her head, and embraces her. The others also embrace her.)

CHORUS.

Welcome to our hearts again,
Iolanthe! Iolanthe!
We have shared thy bitter pain,
Iolanthe! Iolanthe!
Every heart and every hand
In our loving little band
Welcomes thee to Fairyland,
Iolanthe!

QUEEN. And now, tell me, with all the world to choose from, why on earth did you decide to live at the bottom of that stream?

IOL. To be near my son, Strephon.

QUEEN. Bless my heart, I didn't know you had a son.