

DIALOGUE SELECTIONS - "IOLANTHE"

LORD CHANCELLOR:

LORD CH. By all means. Phyllis, who is a Ward of Court, has so powerfully affected your Lordships, that you have appealed to me in a body to give her to whichever one of you she may think proper to select, and a noble Lord has just gone to her cottage to request her immediate attendance. It would be idle to deny that I, myself, have the misfortune to be singularly attracted by this young person. My regard for her is rapidly undermining my constitution. Three months ago I was a stout man. I need say no more. If I could reconcile it with my duty, I should unhesitatingly award her to myself, for I can conscientiously say that I know no man who is so well fitted to render her exceptionally happy. (PEERS: Hear, hear!) But such an award would be open to misconstruction, and therefore, at whatever personal inconvenience, I waive my claim.

LORD TOLL. My Lord, I desire, on the part of this House, to express its sincere sympathy with your Lordship's most painful position.

LORD CH. I thank your Lordships. The feelings of a Lord Chancellor who is in love with a Ward of Court are not to be envied. What is his position? Can he give his own consent to his own marriage with his own Ward? Can he marry his own Ward without his own consent? And if he marries his own Ward without his own consent, can he commit himself for contempt of his own Court? And if he commit himself for contempt of his own Court, can he appear by counsel before himself, to move for arrest of his own judgement? Ah, my Lords, it is indeed painful to have to sit upon a woolsack which is stuffed with such thorns as these!

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**LORD CH.** Now, sir, what excuse have you to offer for having disobeyed an order of the Court of Chancery?

**STREPH.** My Lord, I know no Courts of Chancery; I go by Nature's Acts of Parliament. The bees – the breeze – the seas – the rooks – the brooks – the gales – the vales – the fountains and the mountains cry, "You love this maiden – take her, we command you!" 'Tis writ in heaven by the bright barbèd dart that leaps forth into lurid light from each grim thundercloud. The very rain pours forth her sad and sodden sympathy! When chorused Nature bids me take my love, shall I reply, "Nay, but a certain Chancellor forbids it"? Sir, you are England's Lord High Chancellor, but are you Chancellor of birds and trees, King of the winds and Prince of thunderclouds?

**LORD CH.** No. It's a nice point. I don't know that I ever met it before. But my difficulty is that at present there's no evidence before the Court that chorused Nature has interested herself in the matter.

**STREPH.** No evidence! You have my word for it. I tell you that she bade me take my love.

**LORD CH.** Ah! But, my good sir, you mustn't tell us what she told you – it's not evidence. Now an affidavit from a thunderstorm, or a few words on oath from a heavy shower, would meet with all the attention they deserve.

**STREPH.** And have you the heart to apply the prosaic rules of evidence to a case which bubbles over with poetical emotion?

**LORD CH.** Distinctly. I have always kept my duty strictly before my eyes, and it is to that fact that I owe my advancement to my present distinguished position.

**EARL OF MOUNTARARAT / EARL TOLLOLLER:**

**LORD MOUNT.** Phyllis! My darling!

**LORD TOLL.** Phyllis! My own!

**PHYL.** Don't! How dare you? Oh, but perhaps you're the two noblemen I'm engaged to?

**LORD MOUNT.** I am one of them.

**LORD TOLL.** I am the other.

**PHYL.** Oh, then, my darling! (*to LORD MOUNTARARAT*). My own! (*to LORD TOLLOLLER*). Well, have you settled which it's to be?

**LORD TOLL.** Not altogether. It's a difficult position. It would be hardly delicate to toss up. On the whole we would rather leave it to you.

**PHYL.** How can it possibly concern me? You are both Earls, and you are both rich, and you are both plain.

**LORD MOUNT.** So we are. At least I am.

**LORD TOLL.** So am I.

**LORD MOUNT.** No, no!

**LORD TOLL.** I am indeed. Very plain.

**LORD MOUNT.** Well, well – perhaps you are.

**PHYL.** There's really nothing to choose between you. If one of you would forgo his title, and distribute his estates among his Irish tenantry, why, then, I should then see a reason for accepting the other.

**LORD MOUNT.** Tolloller, are you prepared to make this sacrifice?

**LORD TOLL.** No!

**LORD MOUNT.** Not even to oblige a lady?

**LORD TOLL.** No! Not even to oblige a lady.

**LORD MOUNT.** Then, the only question is, which of us shall give way to the other? Perhaps, on the whole, she would be happier with me. I don't know. I may be wrong.

**LORD TOLL.** No. I don't know that you are. I really believe she would. But the awkward part of the thing is that if you rob me of the girl of my heart, we must fight, and one of us must die. It's a family tradition that I have sworn to respect. It's a painful position, for I have a very strong regard for you, George.

**LORD MOUNT.** (*much affected*). My dear Thomas!

**LORD TOLL.** You are very dear to me, George. We were boys together – at least *I* was. If I were to survive you, my existence would be hopelessly embittered.

**LORD MOUNT.** Then, my dear Thomas, you must not do it. I say it again and again – if it will have this effect upon you, you must not do it. No, no. If one of us is to destroy the other, let it be me!

**LORD TOLL.** No, no!

**LORD MOUNT.** Ah, yes! – by our boyish friendship I implore you!

**LORD TOLL.** (*much moved*). Well, well, be it so. But, no – no! – I cannot consent to an act which would crush you with unavailing remorse.

**LORD MOUNT.** But it would not do so. I should be very sad at first – oh, who would not be? – but it would wear off. I like you *very much* – but not, perhaps, as much as you like me.

**LORD TOLL.** George, you're a noble fellow, but that tell-tale tear betrays you. No, George; you are very fond of me, and I cannot consent to give you a week's uneasiness on my account.

**LORD MOUNT.** But, dear Thomas, it would not last a week! Remember, you lead the House of Lords! On your demise I shall take your place! Oh, Thomas, it would not last a day!

**PHYL.** (*coming down*). Now, I do hope you're not going to fight about me, because it's really not worth while.

**LORD TOLL.** (*looking at her*). Well, I don't believe it is!

**LORD MOUNT.** Nor I. The sacred ties of Friendship are paramount.

**PRIVATE WILLIS:**

**WILLIS** (*coming to "attention"*). Private Willis, B Company, 1st Grenadier Guards.

**QUEEN.** You're a very fine fellow, sir.

**WILLIS.** I am generally admired.

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WILLIS Well, ma'am, I don't think much of the British soldier who wouldn't ill-convenience himself to save a female in distress.

STREPHON / PHYLLIS (1) :

STREPH. (*embracing her*). My Phyllis! And to-day we are to be made happy for ever.

PHYL. Well, we're to be married.

STREPH. It's the same thing.

PHYL. I suppose it is. But oh, Strephon, I tremble at the step I'm taking! I believe it's penal servitude for life to marry a Ward of Court without the Lord Chancellor's consent! I shall be of age in two years. Don't you think you could wait two years?

STREPH. Two years. Have you ever looked in the glass?

PHYL. No, never.

STREPH. Here, look at that (*showing her a pocket mirror*), and tell me if you think it rational to expect me to wait two years?

PHYL. (*looking at herself*). No. You're quite right – it's asking too much. One must be reasonable.

STREPH. Besides, who knows what will happen in two years? Why, you might fall in love with the Lord Chancellor himself by that time!

PHYL. Yes. He's a clean old gentleman.

STREPH. As it is, half the House of Lords are sighing at your feet.

PHYL. The House of Lords are certainly extremely attentive.

STREPH. Attentive? I should think they were! Why did five-and-twenty Liberal Peers come down to shoot over your grass-plot last autumn? It couldn't have been the sparrows. Why did five-and-twenty Conservative Peers come down to fish your pond? Don't tell me it was the gold-fish! No, no – delays are dangerous, and if we are to marry, the sooner the better.

STREPHON / PHYLLIS (2) :

STREPH. I suppose one ought to enjoy oneself in Parliament, when one leads both Parties, as I do! But I'm miserable, poor, broken-hearted fool that I am! Oh Phyllis, Phyllis! –

(Enter PHYLLIS.)

PHYL. Yes.

STREPH. *(surprised).* Phyllis! But I suppose I should say “My Lady.” I have not yet been informed which title your ladyship has pleased to select?

PHYL. I – I haven't quite decided. You see, I have no *mother* to advise *me*!

STREPH. No. I have.

PHYL. Yes; a *young* mother.

STREPH. Not very – a couple of centuries or so.

PHYL. Oh! She wears well.

STREPH. She does. She's a fairy.

PHYL. I beg your pardon – a what?

STREPH. Oh, I've no longer any reason to conceal the fact – she's a fairy.

PHYL. A fairy! Well, but – that would account for a good many things! Then – I suppose *you're* a fairy?

STREPH. I'm half a fairy.

PHYL. Which half?

STREPH. The upper half – down to the waistcoat.

PHYL. Dear me! *(Prodding him with her fingers.)* There is nothing to show it!

STREPH. Don't do that.

PHYL. But why didn't you tell me this before?

STREPH. I thought you would take a dislike to me. But as it's all off, you may as well know the truth – I'm only half a mortal!

PHYL. *(crying).* But I'd rather have half a mortal I do love, than half a dozen I don't!

STREPH. Oh, I think not – go to your half-dozen.

PHYL. *(crying).* It's only two! and I hate 'em! Please forgive me!

STREPH. I don't think I ought to. Besides, all sorts of difficulties will arise. You know, my grandmother looks quite as young as my mother. So do all my aunts.

PHYL. I quite understand. Whenever I see you kissing a very young lady, I shall know it's an elderly relative.

STREPH. You will? Then, Phyllis, I think we shall be very happy! *(Embracing her.)*

PHYL. We won't wait long.

STREPH. No. We might change our minds. We'll get married first.

PHYL. And change our minds afterwards?

STREPH. That's the usual course.

QUEEN OF THE FAIRIES (1) / CELIA / LEILA / FLETA:

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

QUEEN OF THE FAIRIES (2):

QUEEN. Oh, shame – shame upon you! Is this your fidelity to the laws you are bound to obey? Know ye not that it is death to marry a mortal?

LEILA. Yes, but it's not death to *wish* to marry a mortal!

FLETA. If it were, you'd have to execute us all!

QUEEN. Oh, this is weakness! Subdue it!

CELIA. We know it's weakness, but the weakness is so strong!

LEILA. We are not all as tough as you are!

QUEEN. Tough! Do you suppose that I am insensible to the effect of manly beauty? Look at that man! (*Referring to Sentry.*) A perfect picture! (*To Sentry.*) Who are you, sir?

WILLIS (*coming to "attention"*). Private Willis, B Company, 1st Grenadier Guards.

QUEEN. You're a very fine fellow, sir.

WILLIS. I am generally admired.

QUEEN. I can quite understand it. (*To Fairies.*) Now here is a man whose physical attributes are simply godlike. That man has a most extraordinary effect upon me. If I yielded to a natural impulse, I should fall down and worship that man. But I mortify this inclination; I wrestle with it, and it lies beneath my feet! That is how I treat my regard for that man!

IOLANTHE:

IOL. To be near my son, Strephon.

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

IOL. He was born soon after I left my husband by your royal command – but he does not even know of his father's existence.

FLETA. How old is he?

IOL. Twenty-four.

LEILA. Twenty-four! No one, to look at you, would think you had a son of twenty-four! But that's one of the advantages of being immortal. We never grow old! Is he pretty?

IOL. He's extremely pretty, but he's inclined to be stout.

ALL (*disappointed*). Oh!

QUEEN. I see no objection to stoutness, in moderation.

CELIA. And what is he?

IOL. He's an Arcadian shepherd – and he loves Phyllis, a Ward in Chancery.

CELIA. A mere shepherd! And he half a fairy!

IOL. He's a fairy down to the waist – but his legs are mortal.

ALL. Dear me!

QUEEN. I have no reason to suppose that I am more curious than other people, but I confess I should like to see a person who is a fairy down to the waist, but whose legs are mortal.

IOL. Nothing easier, for here he comes!

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IOL. (*to STREPHON, who is in tears*). My son in tears – and on his wedding day!

STREPH. My wedding day! Oh, mother, weep with me, for the Law has interposed between us, and the Lord Chancellor has separated us for ever!

IOL. The Lord Chancellor! (*Aside.*) Oh, if he did but know!

STREPH. (*overhearing her*). If he did but know what?

IOL. No matter! The Lord Chancellor has no power over you. Remember you are half a fairy. You can defy him – down to the waist.

STREPH. Yes, but from the waist downwards he can commit me to prison for years! Of what avail is it that my body is free, if my legs are working out seven years' penal servitude?

IOL. True. But take heart – our Queen has promised you her special protection. I'll go to her and lay your peculiar case before her.