

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 Queen of the Fairies)

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 without a word of explanation and never communicated with him again!

Leila: And 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!