

Colonel: Well, here we are once more on the scene of our former triumphs. But where's the Duke?

(Enter Duke, listlessly, and in low spirits, R.)

Duke: Here I am! *(Sighs.)*

Colonel: Come, cheer up, don't give way!

Duke: Oh, for that, I'm as cheerful as a poor devil can be expected to be who has the misfortune to be a Duke, with a thousand a day!

Major: Humph! Most men would envy you!

Duke: Envy *me*? Tell me, Major, are you fond of toffee?

Major: Very!

Colonel: We are all fond of toffee.

All: We are!

Duke: Yes, and toffee in moderation is a capital thing. But to *live* on toffee— toffee for breakfast, toffee for dinner, toffee for tea—to have it supposed that you care for nothing *but* toffee, and that you would consider yourself insulted if anything but toffee were offered to you— how would you like *that*?

Colonel: I can quite believe that, under those circumstances, even toffee would become monotonous.

Duke: For "toffee" read flattery, adulation, and abject deference, carried to such a pitch that I began, at last, to think that man was born bent at an angle of forty-five degrees! Great heavens, what is there to adulate in me? Am I particularly intelligent, or remarkably studious, or excruciatingly witty, or unusually accomplished, or exceptionally virtuous?

Colonel: You're about as commonplace a young man as ever I saw.

All: You are!

Duke: Exactly! That's it exactly! That describes me to a T! Thank you all very much! *(Shakes hands with the Colonel.)* Well, I couldn't stand it any longer, so I joined this second class cavalry regiment. In the army, thought I, I shall be occasionally snubbed, perhaps even bullied, who knows? The thought was rapture, and here I am.

Colonel: *(looking off)* Yes, and here are the ladies.

Duke: But who is the gentleman with the long hair?

Colonel: I don't know.

Duke: He seems popular!

Colonel: He *does* seem popular!

(The Dragoons back up R., watching the entrance of the Ladies. Bunthorne enters, L.U.E., followed by the Ladies, two and two, playing on harps as before. He is composing a poem, and is quite absorbed. He sees no one, but walks across the stage, followed by the Ladies, who take no notice of the Dragoons — to the surprise and indignation of those officers.)

Angela: Will it please you read it to us, sir?

Saphir: This we supplicate. (*All kneel.*)

Bunthorne: Shall I?

All the Dragoons: No!

Bunthorne: (*annoyed—to Patience*) I will read it if *you* bid me!

Patience: (*much frightened*) You can if you like!

Bunthorne: It is a wild, weird, fleshly thing; yet very tender, very yearning, very precious. It is called, "Oh, Hollow! Hollow! Hollow!"

Patience: Is it a hunting song?

Bunthorne: A hunting song? No, it is *not* a hunting song. It is the wail of the poet's heart on discovering that everything is commonplace. To understand it, cling passionately to one another and think of faint lilies. (*They do so as he recites.*)

"Oh, Hollow! Hollow! Hollow!"

What time the poet hath hymned
The writhing maid, lithe-limbed,
Quivering on amaranthine asphodel,
How can he paint her woes,
Knowing, as well he knows,
That all can be set right with calomel?
When from the poet's plinth
The amorous colocynth
Yearns for the aloe, faint with rapturous thrills,
How can he hymn their throes,
Knowing, as well he knows,
That they are only uncompounded pills?
Is it, and can it be,
Nature hath this decree,
Nothing poetic in the world shall dwell?
Or that in all her works
Something poetic lurks,
Even in colocynth and calomel?
I cannot tell!

(*He goes off, L.U.E. All turn and watch him, not speaking until he has gone.*)

Angela: How purely fragrant!

Saphir: How earnestly precious!

Patience: Well, it seems to me to be nonsense.

Saphir: Nonsense, yes, perhaps,—but oh, what precious nonsense!

Colonel: This is all very well, but you seem to forget that you are engaged to us.

Saphir: It can never be. You are not Empyrean. You are not Della Cruscan. You are not even Early English. Oh, be Early English ere it is too late! (*Officers look at each other in astonishment.*)

Jane: (*looking at uniform*) Red and yellow! Primary colors! Oh, South Kensington!

Duke: We didn't design our uniforms, but we don't see how they could be improved!

Jane: No, you wouldn't. Still, there *is* a oobwebby grey velvet, with a tender bloom like cold gravy, which, made Florentine fourteenth century, trimmed with Venetian leather and Spanish altar lace, and surmounted with something Japanese—it matters not what—would at least be Early English! Come, maidens.

(*Exit Maidens, L.U.E., two and two, singing refrain of "Twenty lovesick maidens we". Patience goes off L. The Officers watch the Ladies go off in astonishment.*)

(At the end of the song, Patience enters, L. He sees her.)

Bunthorne: Ah! Patience, come hither. *(She comes to him, timidly.)* I am pleased with thee. The bitter-hearted one, who finds all else hollow, is pleased with thee. For you are not hollow. *Are you?*

Patience: No, thanks, I have dined; but—I beg your pardon—I interrupt you. *(Turns to go; he stops her.)*

Bunthorne: Life is made up of interruptions. The tortured soul, yearning for solitude, writhes under them. Oh, but my heart is a-weary! Oh, I am a cursed thing! *(She attempts to escape.)* Don't go!

Patience: Really, I'm very sorry.

Bunthorne: Tell me, girl, do you ever yearn?

Patience: I earn my living.

Bunthorne: *(impatiently)* No, No! Do you know what it is to be heart-hungry? Do you know what it is to yearn for the Indefinable, and yet to be brought face to face, daily, with the Multiplication Table? Do you know what it is to seek oceans and to find puddles? That's my case. Oh, I am a cursed thing! *(She turns again.)* Don't go.

Patience: If you please, I don't understand you—you frighten me!

Bunthorne: Don't be frightened—it's only poetry.

Patience: Well, if that's poetry, I don't like poetry.

Bunthorne: *(eagerly)* Don't you? *(aside)* Can I trust her? *(aloud)* Patience, you don't like poetry—well, between you and me, I don't like poetry. It's hollow, unsubstantial—unsatisfactory. What's the use of yearning for Elysian Fields when you know you can't get 'em, and would only let 'em out on building leases if you had 'em?

Patience: Sir, I—

Bunthorne: Patience, I have long loved you. Let me tell you a secret. I am not as bilious as I look. If you like, I will cut my hair. There is more innocent fun within me than a casual spectator would imagine. You have never seen me frolicsome. Be a good girl—a very good girl—and one day you shall. If you are fond of touch-and-go jocularities—this is the shop for it.

Patience: Sir, I will speak plainly. In the matter of love I am untaught. I have never loved but my great-aunt. But I am quite certain that, under any circumstances, I couldn't possibly love you.

Bunthorne: Oh, you think not?

Patience: I'm quite sure of it. Quite sure. Quite.

Bunthorne: Very good. Life is henceforth a blank. I don't care what becomes of me. I have only to ask that you will not abuse my confidence; though *you* despise me, I am extremely popular with the other young ladies.

Patience: I only ask that you leave me and never renew the subject.

Bunthorne: Certainly. Broken-hearted and desolate, I go. (*Goes up-stage, suddenly turns and recites.*)

"Oh, to be wafted away,
From this black Aceldama of sorrow,
Where the dust of an earthy today
Is the earth of a dusty tomorrow!"

It is a little thing of my own. I call it "Heart Foam". I shall not publish it. Farewell! Patience, Patience, farewell! (*Exit Bunthorne.*)

Patience: What on earth does it all mean? Why does he love me? Why does he expect me to love him? (*going R.*) He's not a relation! It frightens me!

(*Enter Angela, L.*)

Angela: Why, Patience, what is the matter?

Patience: Lady Angela, tell me two things. Firstly, what on earth is this love that upsets everybody; and, secondly, how is it to be distinguished from insanity?

Angela: Poor blind child! Oh, forgive her, Eros! Why, love is of all passions the most essential! It is the embodiment of purity, the abstraction of refinement! It is the one unselfish emotion in this whirlpool of grasping greed!

Patience: Oh, dear, oh! (*beginning to cry*)

Angela: Why are you crying?

Patience: To think that I have lived all these years without having experienced this ennobling and unselfish passion! Why, what a wicked girl I must be! For it *is* unselfish, isn't it?

Angela: Absolutely! Love that is tainted with selfishness is no love! Oh, try, try, try to love! It really isn't difficult if you give your whole mind to it.

Patience: I'll set about it at once. I won't go to bed until I'm head over ears in love with somebody.

Angela: Noble girl! But is it possible that you have never loved anybody?

Patience: Yes, one.

Angela: Ah! Whom?

Patience: My great-aunt—

Angela: Great-aunts don't count.

Patience: Then there's nobody. At least—no, nobody. Not since I was a baby. But *that* doesn't count, I suppose.

Angela: I don't know. Tell me all about it.

Grosvenor: Patience! Can it be that you don't recognize me?

Patience: (*down L.*) Recognize you? No, indeed I don't!

Grosvenor: Have fifteen years so greatly changed me?

Patience: (*turning to him*) Fifteen years? What do you mean?

Grosvenor: Have you forgotten the friend of your youth, your Archibald?—your little play-fellow? Oh, Chronos, Chronos, this is too bad of you! (*Comes down, C.*)

Patience: Archibald! Is it possible? Why, let me look! It is! It is! (*Takes his hands.*) It must be! Oh, how happy I am! I thought we should never meet again! And how you've grown!

Grosvenor: Yes, Patience, I am much taller and much stouter than I was.

Patience: And how you've improved!

Grosvenor: (*dropping her hands and turning*) Yes, Patience, I am very beautiful! (*Sighs.*)

Patience: But surely that doesn't make you unhappy?

Grosvenor: Yes, Patience. Gifted as I am with a beauty which probably has not its rival on earth, I am, nevertheless, utterly and completely miserable.

Patience: Oh, but why?

Grosvenor: My child-love for you has never faded. Conceive, then, the horror of my situation when I tell you that it is my hideous destiny to be madly loved at first sight by every woman I come across!

Patience: But why do you make yourself so picturesque? Why not disguise yourself, disfigure yourself, anything to escape this persecution?

Grosvenor: No, Patience, that may not be. These gifts—irksome as they are—were given to me for the enjoyment and delectation of my fellow-creatures. I am a trustee for Beauty, and it is my duty to see that the conditions of my trust are faithfully discharged.

Patience: And you, too, are a Poet?

Grosvenor: Yes, I am the Apostle of Simplicity. I am called "Archibald the All-Right"—for I am infallible.

Patience: And is it possible that you condescend to love such a girl as I?

Grosvenor: Yes, Patience, is it not strange? I have loved you with a Florentine fourteenth century frenzy for a full fifteen years.

- Patience: Oh, marvelous! I have hitherto been deaf to the voice of love. I seem now to know what love is! It has been revealed to me—it is Archibald Grosvenor!
- Grosvenor: Yes, Patience, it is! (*She goes into his arms.*)
- Patience: (*as in a trance*) We will never, never part!
- Grosvenor: We will live and die together!
- Patience: I swear it!
- Grosvenor: We both swear it!
- Patience: (*recoiling from him*) But—oh, horror!
- Grosvenor: What's the matter?
- Patience: Why, you are perfection! A source of endless ecstasy to all who know you!
- Grosvenor: I know I am. Well?
- Patience: Then, bless my heart, there can be nothing unselfish in loving *you*!
- Grosvenor: Merciful powers! I never thought of that!
- Patience: To monopolize those features on which all women love to linger! It would be unpardonable!
- Grosvenor: Why, so it would! Oh, fatal perfection, again you interpose between me and my happiness!
- Patience: Oh, if you were but a thought less beautiful than you are!
- Grosvenor: Would that I were! but candour compels me to admit that I'm not!
- Patience: Our duty is clear; we must part, and for ever!
- Grosvenor: Oh, misery! And yet I cannot question the propriety of your decision. Farewell, Patience!
- Patience: Farewell, Archibald! (*They both turn to go.*)
- Patience: (*suddenly*) But stay!
- Grosvenor: Yes, Patience?
- Patience: Although I may not love *you*—for you are perfection—there is nothing to prevent your loving *me*. I am plain, homely, unattractive!
- Grosvenor: Why, that's true!
- Patience: The love of such a man as you for such a girl as I must be unselfish!
- Grosvenor: Unselfishness itself!

Grosvenor: (*aside, not looking up*) The old, old tale! How rapturously these maidens love me, and how hopelessly! (*He looks up.*) Oh, Patience, Patience, with the love of thee in my heart, what have I for these poor mad maidens but an unvalued pity? Alas, they will die of hopeless love for me, as I shall die of hopeless love for thee!

Angela: Sir, will it please you read to us?

Grosvenor: (*sighing*) Yes, child, if you will. What shall I read?

Angela: One of your own poems.

Grosvenor: One of my own poems? Better not, my child. *They* will not cure thee of thy love. (*All sigh.*)

Ella: Mr. Bunthorne used to read us a poem of his own every day.

Saphir: And, to do him justice, he read them extremely well.

Grosvenor: Oh, did he so? Well, who am I that I should take upon myself to withhold my gifts from you? What am I but a trustee? Here is a decalet — a pure and simple thing, a very daisy — a babe might understand it. To appreciate it, it is not necessary to think of anything at all.

Angela: Let us think of nothing at all!

Grosvenor: (*reciting*) Gentle Jane was as good as gold,
 She always did as she was told;
 She never spoke when her mouth was full,
 Or caught bluebottles their legs to pull,
 Or spilt plum jam on her nice new frock,
 Or put white mice in the eight-day clock,
 Or vivisected her last new doll,
 Or fostered a passion for alcohol.
 And when she grew up she was given in marriage
 To a first - class earl who keeps his carriage!

Grosvenor: I believe I am right in saying that there is not one word in that decalet which is calculated to bring the blush of shame to the cheek of modesty.

Angela: Not one; it is purity itself.

Grosvenor: Here's another.

Teasing Tom was a very bad boy,
 A great big squirt was his favourite toy,
 He put live shrimps in his father's boots,
 And sewed up sleeves of his Sunday suits;
 He punched his poor little sisters' heads,
 And cayenne - peppered their four - post beds;
 He plastered their hair with cobbler's wax,
 And dropped hot halfpennies down their backs.
 The consequence was he was lost totally,
 And married a girl in the *corps de bally!*

(The Maidens express intense horror.)

Angela: Marked you how grandly — how relentlessly — the damning catalogue of crime strode on, till Retribution, like a poised hawk, came swooping down upon the Wrong-Doer? Oh, it was terrible! *(All shudder.)*

Ella: Oh, sir, you are indeed a true poet, for you touch our hearts, and they go out to you!

Grosvenor: *(aside)* This is simply cloying. *(aloud)* Ladies, I am sorry to appear ungallant, but this is Saturday, and you have been following me about ever since Monday. I should like the usual half - holiday. I shall take it as a personal favour if you will kindly allow me to close early to-day.

Saphir: Oh, sir, do not send us from you!

Grosvenor: Poor, poor girls! It is best to speak plainly. I know that I am loved by you, but I never can love you in return, for my heart is fixed elsewhere! Remember the fable of the Magnet and the Churn.

Angela: *(wildly)* But we don't know the fable of the Magnet and the Churn!

Grosvenor: Don't you? Then I will sing it to you.

That is the love_ that's pure, That _____ is_ the love, the

love_ that's true! ____

ad lib.

colla voce f a tempo

(At the end of the Ballad exit Patience, L., weeping. Enter Bunthorne, R., Jane following.)

Bunthorne: Everything has gone wrong with me since that smug-faced idiot came here. Before that I was admired — I may say, loved.

Jane: Too mild — adored!

Bunthorne: Do let a poet soliloquize! The damozels used to follow me wherever I went; now they all follow him!

Jane: Not all! *I* am still faithful to you.

Bunthorne: Yes, and a pretty damozel *you* are!

Jane: No, not pretty. Massive. Cheer up! I will never leave you, I swear it!

Bunthorne: Oh, thank you! I know what it is; it's his confounded mildness. They find me too highly spiced, if you please! And no doubt I *am* highly spiced.

Jane: Not for my taste!

Bunthorne: (*savagely*) No, but I am for theirs. But I will show the world I can be as mild as he. If they want insipidity, they shall have it. I'll meet this fellow on his own ground and beat him on it.

Jane: You shall. And I will help you.

Bunthorne: You will? Jane, there's a good deal of good in you, after all!

Colonel: (*attitude*) Yes, it's quite clear that our only chance of making a lasting impression on these young ladies is to become as æsthetic as they are.

Major: (*attitude*) No doubt. The only question is how far we've succeeded in doing so. I don't know why, but I've an idea that this is not quite right.

Duke: (*attitude*) I don't like it. I never did. I don't see what it means. I do it, but I don't like it.

Colonel: My good friend, the question is not whether we like it, but whether they do. They understand these things — we don't. Now I shouldn't be surprised if this is effective enough — at a distance.

Major: I can't help thinking we're a little stiff at it. It would be extremely awkward if we were to be "struck" so!

Colonel: I don't think we shall be struck so. Perhaps we're a little awkward at first — but everything must have a beginning. Oh here they come! 'Tention!

(*They strike fresh attitudes, as Angela and Saphir enter, L.*)

Angela: (*seeing them*) Oh, Saphir — see — see! The immortal fire has descended on them, and they are of the Inner Brotherhood — perceptively intense and consummately utter. (*The Officers have some difficulty in maintaining their constrained attitudes.*)

Saphir: (*in admiration*) How Botticellian! How Fra Angelican! Oh, Art, we thank thee for this boon!

Colonel: (*apologetically*) I'm afraid we're not quite right.

Angela: Not supremely, perhaps, but oh, so all — but! (*to Saphir*) Oh, Saphir, are they not quite too all — but?

Saphir: They are indeed jolly utter!

Major: (*in agony*) I wonder what the Inner Brotherhood usually recommend for cramp?

Colonel: Ladies, we will not deceive you. We are doing this at some personal inconvenience with a view of expressing the extremity of our devotion to you. We trust that it is not without its effect.

Angela: We will not deny that we are much moved by this proof of your attachment.

Saphir: Yes, your conversion to the principles of Aesthetic Art in its highest development has touched us deeply.

Angela: And if Mr. Grosvenor should remain obdurate —

Saphir: Which we have every reason to believe he will —

Major: (*aside, in agony*) I wish they'd make haste! (*The others hush him.*)

Angela: We are not prepared to say that our yearning hearts will not go out to you.

Colonel: (*as giving a word of command*) By sections of threes — Rapture! (*All strike a fresh attitude, expressive of æsthetic rapture.*)

Saphir: Oh, it's extremely good — for beginners it's admirable!

Major: The only question is, who will take who?

Colonel: Oh, the Duke chooses first, as a matter of course.

Duke: Oh, I couldn't think of it — you are really too good!

Colonel: Nothing of the kind. You are a great matrimonial fish, and it's only fair that each of these ladies should have a chance of hooking you. It's perfectly simple. Observe, suppose you choose Angela, I take Saphir, Major takes nobody. (*with increasing speed*) Suppose you choose Saphir, Major takes Angela, I take nobody. Suppose you choose neither, I take Angela, Major takes Saphir. Clear as day!