

Wilfred: (*looking after Elsie*) 'Tis an odd freak, for a young man and his confessor to be closeted alone with a strange singing girl. I would fain have espied them, but they stopped up the keyhole. *My* keyhole!

(*Enter Phoebe with Meryll, L.U.E. Meryll remains in the background. unobserved by Wilfred.*)

Phoebe: (*aside*) Wilfred — and alone!

Wilfred: Now what could he have wanted with her? That's what puzzles me!

Phoebe: (*aside*) Now to get the keys from him. (*aloud, coming down to Wilfred*) Wilfred — has no reprieve arrived?

Wilfred: None. Thine adored Fairfax is to die.

Phoebe: Nay, thou knowest that I have naught but pity for the poor condemned gentleman.

Wilfred: I know that he who is about to die is more to thee than I, who am alive and well.

Phoebe: Why, that were out of reason, dear Wilfred. Do they not say that a live ass is better than a dead lion? No, I don't mean that!

Wilfred: Oh, they say that, do they?

Phoebe: It's unpardonably rude of them, but I believe they put it that way. Not that it applies to thee, who art clever beyond all telling!

Wilfred: Oh, yes, as an assistant-tormentor.

Phoebe: Nay, as a wit, as a humorist, as a most philosophic commentator on the vanity of human resolution.

(*Here Phoebe, leaning on Wilfred's shoulder, slyly abstracts the keys from his belt, and hands them back to Meryll, who tiptoes back into the Tower, R.U.E.*)

Wilfred: Truly, I have seen great resolution give way under my persuasive methods. (*working a small thumbscrew*) In the nice regulation of a thumbscrew—in the hundredth part of a single revolution—lieth all the difference between stony silence and a torrent of impulsive unbosoming that the pen can scarcely follow. Ha! Ha! I am a mad wag!

Phoebe: (*with a grimace*) Thou art a most light-hearted and delightful companion, Master Wilfred. Thine anecdotes of the torture-chamber are the prettiest hearing.

Wilfred: I'm a pleasant fellow an' I choose. I believe I am the merriest dog that barks. Ah, we might be passing happy together—

Phoebe: Perhaps. I do not know.

Wilfred: For thou wouldst make a most tender and loving wife.

Phoebe: Aye, to one whom I really loved. For there is a wealth of love within this little heart—saving up for—I wonder whom? Now, of all the world of men, I wonder whom? To think that he whom I am to wed is now alive and somewhere! Perhaps far away, perhaps close at hand! And I know him not! It seemeth that I am wasting time in not knowing him.

Wilfred: Now say that it is I—nay! Suppose it for the nonce. Say that we are wed—suppose it only—say that thou art my very bride, and I thy cheery, joyous, bright, frolicsome husband—and that, the day's work being done, and the prisoners stored away for the night, thou and I alone together—with a long, long evening before us!

Phoebe: (*with a grimace*) It is a pretty picture—but I scarcely know. It cometh so unexpectedly—and yet—and yet—*were* I thy bride—

Wilfred: Aye! wert thou my bride?

Phoebe: Oh, *how* I would love thee!

Wilfred *(Fairfax turns inquiringly to Phoebe.)*

Good sir, we are be-trothed,

Phoebe *(ad lib.)*

Or more or less — But rath-er less than

Wilfred

more! To thy fond care I do com-mend thy

Moderato

Recit.

sis-ter. Be to her An ev-er-watch-ful guar-dian—

ea - gle-eyed! And when she feels (as some - times she does feel)

Dis-posed to in-dis-crim-i-nate ca-ress, Be thou at hand to

♩ = 100
a tempo moderato

a tempo moderato

take those fa-vours from her!

Chorus of men (*laughing*) Be thou at hand to take those fa-vours from her!

Be thou at hand to take those fa-vours from her!

Phoebe (*tenderly*) *rall.*

Yes, yes, Be thou at hand to take those fa-vours from me!

p *rall.*

(J)

Allegro non troppo ♩ = 120

1st Verse Wilfred 1. To thy fra - ter - nal care Thy sis - ter I com -
 2nd Verse Phoebe a - mia - ble I've grown, So in - no - cent as

mend; — From ev - 'ry lurk - ing snare Thy
 well, — That if I'm left a - lone The

love - ly charge de - fend: And to a - chieve this end, Oh!
 con - se - quen - ces fell No mor - tal can fore - tell. So

grant, I — pray, this boon — Oh! grant this
 grant, I — pray, this boon — Oh! grant this

boon_ She shall not quit thy sight: From
boon_ I shall not quit thy sight:

morn to af - ter-noon - From af - ter-noon to night - From sev'n o'clock to

two - From two to e - ven-tide - From dim twi-light to 'levn at night, From

dim twi-light to 'levn at night, ^(She) shall not quit thy side!
_I

cresc.

(Enter Jack Point from house, R., in low spirits, reading from a huge volume.)

Point: *(Reads.)* "The Merrie Jestes of Hugh Ambrose. No. 7863. The Poor Wit and the Rich Councillor. A certayne poor wit, being an-hungered, did meet a well-fed Councillor. 'Marry, fool?' quoth the Councillor, 'whither away?' 'In truth,' said the poor wag, 'in that I have eaten naught these two dayes, I do wither away, and that right rapidly!' The Councillor laughed hugely, and gave him a sausage." Humph! The Councillor was easier to please than my new master the Lieutenant. I would like to take post under that Councillor. Ah! 'Tis but melancholy mumming when poor heart-broken, jilted Jack Point must needs turn to Hugh Ambrose for original light humour!

(Enter Wilfred, L.U.E., also in low spirits. He comes down on Point's L. Point puts the book on the bench, R.)

Wilfred: *(sighing)* Ah, Master Point!

Point: *(changing his manner)* Ha! friend jailer! Jailer that wast—jailer that never shalt be more! Jailer that jailed not, or that jailed, if jail he did, so unjailerly that 'twas but jerry-jailing, or jailing in joke—though no joke to him who by unjailer-like jailing, did so jeopardise his jailorship. Come, take heart, smile, laugh, wink, twinkle, thou tormentor that tormentest none—thou racker that rackest not—thou pincher out of place—come, take heart, and be merry, as I am! *(aside, dolefully)*—as I am!

Wilfred: Aye, it's well for thee to laugh. Thou hast a good post, and hast cause to be merry.

Point: *(bitterly)* Cause? Have we not all cause? Is not the world a big butt of humour, into which all who will may drive a gimlet? See, I am a salaried wit, and is there aught in nature more ridiculous? A poor, dull, heart-broken man, who must needs be merry, or he will be whipped; who must rejoice, lest he starve; who must jest you, jibe you, quip you, crank you, wrack you, riddle you, from hour to hour, from day to day, from year to year, lest he dwindle, perish, starve, pine, and die! Why, when there's naught else to laugh at, I laugh at myself till I ache for it!

Wilfred: Yet I have often thought that a jester's calling would suite me to a hair.

Point: Thee? Would suit *thee*, thou death's head and cross-bones?

Wilfred: Aye, I have a pretty wit—a light, airy, joysome wit, spiced with anecdotes of prison cells and the torture chamber. Oh, a very delicate wit! I have tried it on many a prisoner, and there have been some who smiled. Now it is not easy to make a prisoner smile. And it should not be difficult to be a good jester, seeing that thou art one.

Point: Difficult? Nothing easier. Nothing easier. Attend, and I will prove it to thee! *(He puts Wilfred down on bench, R.)*

— was dead, He wish-es he was dead! —

— was dead, He wish-es he was dead! —

— was dead, He wish-es he was dead! —

— was dead, He wish-es he was dead! — (Exeunt Fairfax and

Elsie. He leaves her at door, down L., and goes off, R.U.E. Exit Point sadly into house, R. Phoebe remains R.C. weeping.)

Phoebe: And I helped that man to escape, and I've kept his secret, and pretended that I was his dearly loving sister, and done everything I could think of to make folk believe I *was* his loving sister, and this is his gratitude! Before I pretend to be sister to anybody again, I'll turn nun, and be sister to everybody— one as much as another!

(Enter Wilfred, L.)

Wilfred: In tears, eh? What a plague art thou grizzling for now?

Phoebe: Why am I grizzling? Thou hast often wept for jealousy— Well, 'tis for jealousy I weep now. Aye, yellow, bilious, jaundiced jealousy. So make the most of that, Master Wilfred.

Wilfred: But I have never given thee cause for jealousy. The Lieutenant's cook-maid and I are but the merest gossips!

Phoebe: Jealous of thee! Bah! I'm jealous of no craven cock-on-a-hill, who crows about what he'd do an he dared! I am jealous of another and a better man than thou—set that down, Master Wilfred. And he is to marry Elsie Maynard, the little pale fool—set that down, Master Wilfred— and my heart is wellnigh broken! There, thou hast it all! Make the most of it!

Wilfred: The man thou lovest is to marry Elsie Maynard? Why, that is no other than thy brother, Leonard Meryll!

Phoebe: (*aside*) Oh, mercy! What have I said?

Wilfred: Why, what manner of brother is this, thou lying little jade? Speak! Who is this man whom thou hast called brother, and fondled, and coddled, and kissed! — with my connivance, too! Oh Lord, with my connivance! Ha! Should it be this Fairfax! (*Phoebe starts.*) It is! It is this accursed Fairfax! It's Fairfax! Fairfax, who —

Phoebe: Whom thou hast just shot through the head, and who lies at the bottom of the river!

Wilfred: A — I — I may have been mistaken. We are but fallible mortals, the best of us. But I'll make sure — I'll make sure. (*going*)

Phoebe: Stay — one word. I think it cannot be Fairfax — mind, I say I *think* — because thou hast just slain Fairfax. But whether he be Fairfax or no Fairfax, he is to marry Elsie — and — and — as thou hast shot him through the head, and he is dead, be content with that, and I will be thy wife.

Wilfred: Is that sure?

Phoebe: Aye, sure enough, for there's no help for it! Thou art a very brute — but even brutes must marry, I suppose.

Wilfred: My beloved! (*Embraces her*)

Phoebe: (*aside*) Ugh!

(*Enter Leonard, hastily, L.*)

Leonard: Phoebe, rejoice, for I bring glad tidings. Colonel Fairfax's reprieve was signed two days since, but it was foully and maliciously kept back by Secretary Poltwhistle, who designed that it should arrive after the Colonel's death. It hath just come to hand, and it is now in the Lieutenant's possession!

Phoebe: Then the Colonel is free? Oh, kiss me, kiss me, my dear! Kiss me, again, and again!

Wilfred: (*dancing with fury*) Ods bobs, death o' my life! Art thou mad? Am I mad? Are we *all* mad?

Phoebe: Oh, my dear — my dear, I'm wellnigh crazed with joy! (*kissing Leonard*)

Wilfred: Come away from him, thou hussy — thou jade — thou kissing, clinging cockatrice! And as for thee, sir, devil take thee, I'll rip thee like a herring for this! I'll skin thee for it! I'll cleave thee to the chine! I'll — oh! Phoebe! Phoebe! Who is this man?

Phoebe: Peace, fool. He is my brother!

Wilfred: Another brother! Are there any more of them? Produce them all at once, and let me know the worst!

Phoebe: This is the real Leonard, dolt; the other was but his substitute. The *real* Leonard, I say — my father's own son.