

THE CARP.

Libretto by

FRANK DESPREZ

Music by

ALFRED CELLIER

This opera played at the Savoy Theatre from February 1886 through January 1887, as a companion piece to both *The Mikado* and *Ruddigore*.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

PISCATOR (*a fisherman*).

AMANDUS (*a love-lorn lad*).

AMANDA (*a love-lorn lass*).

TIME: — *Seventeenth Century*.

The Carp

The scene represents a pretty rural landscape. On the right, across the fields, can be seen a quaint "Queen Anne" country house; on the left, a rustic bridge crosses a little stream, which is supposed to supply a large pond, the fence and rushes surrounding which are noticeable on the right. There is a rustic bench on this side of the picture. It is a warm summer evening.

Piscator enters, carrying his rod and fishing-basket. He stops at the seat to arrange his tackle.

PISCATOR. The day's a fair one – no doubt of that!
I've studied all the best authorities;
And circumstance unusual and strange –
All the authorities are here agreed.
Now, my rod's ready. (*He looks around.*) Not a soul about:
No rival in the field, or (what is worse)
Intrusive passers-by with beastly dogs,
Eager to fetch projected walking-sticks,
And spoil projected sport. Ah! 'tis, in truth,
A merry, merry life!

SONG – PISCATOR.

The fisherman, at the break of day,
Merrily starts upon his way;
Cheerfully, too, he digs for worms,
Laughing, ha! ha! as the captive squirms;
Thoughtfully, doubtfully, bends his eyes
On the dark, uncertain skies;
Then on he hastens, lest the spot
Some earlier rival may have got.

Fisherman, fisherman, go thy way,
With the merry minnow, and gentle gay.

The fisherman, at close of day,
Finding the fish don't come his way,
Arises; his steps are homeward bent:
He has had a bite, and he feels content!
He meets a lad with a perch and a roach,
And he joyfully hails that lad's approach,
And soon those pretty purchased fish
Are laid on his wife's expectant dishe!
(*Slyly, with fingers laid to his nose.*)

Fisherman, fisherman, go thy way,
With the merry minnow, and gentle gay.

Through all the fish bill of fare I went,
Until at last one day – I had a nibble!

AMANDUS. And what of that?

PISCATOR. What of it! Ecstasy!

Half-hesitating, trembling ecstasy!

But – ’twas some years ago, and I was young –

I struck too soon – (*sadly*) and lost him!

AMANDUS. Very sad!

PISCATOR. But I was not discouraged. Though I failed,
I tried again.

AMANDUS. (*aside*). Ah Cupid, so did I!

PISCATOR. But with the same result! Why, sir, I’ve thrown

Some tons of ground-bait in this peaceful pond!

And now I’ve ta’en the house across the fields,

And every evening for the last five years

I’ve come to catch that carp!

AMANDUS. (*going to him*). But what’s all this

To one who wants to die?

PISCATOR. Young man, young man!

You have some sense of charity, I hope?

AMANDUS. I hope I have, sir! Well?

PISCATOR. When younder sun goes down, and half-past six,

My hopes are at an end. But one small hour

Is left me for my task. While you can come

At any time to-night, and drown yourself, –

And yet you will not wait!

AMANDUS. (*moving towards the pond*). Certainly not!

PISCATOR. Oh, listen to me yet! My very soul

Is centered on that carp. In business hours

My thoughts oft wander carpward. Think, oh, think –

Think of the envy of admiring friends!

The contradiction of the incredulous spouse,

Who never saw me bring home anything,

And thinks I never shall! Think of the joy

When I shall have him stuffed, in a glass case –

A life-long monument of fishy fame!

This is the only evening for a week

That seems to promise that the fish will bite;

My hopes are at their highest; and you come

To plunge into this pond, and blast them all,

Because, forsooth, you “want to drown yourself!”

Young man, young man, you cannot have a heart!

AMANDUS. (*relenting and returning to PISCATOR*)

Your pleading leaves me not insensible:

I, too, have had a nibble!

PISCATOR. From a fish?

AMANDUS. No; from a maiden. But (*sighing*) she would not bite!

PISCATOR. Perhaps she scratched?

AMANDUS. No, no!

E’en that would have been something! She is cold,

Unfeeling, heartless, stony, hard as nails;
And I, alas! I loved, and love her still!

BALLAD – AMANDUS.

I loved her! I love her!
I cannot tell you how;
I loved her! I love her!
But all is over now.
What love of life to me is left,
When all that made life sweet's bereft?
Then let me die, and leave behind
A world where I no joy can find!
I loved! I cannot tell you how!
The fatal word is spoken.
I loved her then, I love her now –
Now that my heart is broken!

(PISCATOR gets rod and basket from seat, between the verses.)

I loved her – I love her!
I cannot tell you why!
I loved her – I love her!
'Tis all that I can sigh!
There are no laws that Love bind down:
He cares not for the cynic's frown;
But, like a bee, he pitches where
He finds the flower that seems most rare!
I loved, I cannot tell you why;
My death shall be the token
Of sad, serene fidelity –
For my poor heart is broken!

PISCATOR (*softened*). If you will only wait till half-past six,
I promise you to let you have your way.

AMANDUS. Thanks, kindly fisherman of middle age,
A fellow feeling binds us. (*Shakes hands with him.*)
I will wait!

PISCATOR (*cheerily*). All things do come to him who can but wait,
If he wait long enough. I'll to my sport! (*He goes out.*)

(*Enter AMANDA across the bridge.*)

AMANDA (*resigned*). At last my mind's made up – what's left of it,
After the mouse-like gnawing of my woes, –
And, once made up, that remnant is a dress
Never to be unpicked! Oh! why, when I'm
So very sad, is everything so gay?

BALLAD. – AMANDA

Why does azure deck the sky?
 Why are leaves on trees so green?
 Why do birds sing merrily?
 Why doth climb the kidney-bean?
 Why are daisies pearly-white?
 Why of gold's the butter-cup?
 Riddles puzzle me outright –
 I give it up! I give it up!

Why is love a traitor sad?
 Why are women's hearts so soft?
 Why are men's so false and bad?
 Why are we taken in so oft?
 Why am I maid forlorn?
 Why with sorry brims my cup?
 Why – why was I ever born?
 I give it up! I give it up!

AMANDA. I've but one hope in life – and that's to die!
 Off, wretched weeds? (She flings away her cloak.)
 One plunge, and then my woes –

(At this moment PISCATOR returns for his bait-can, and AMANDA, hurrying towards the pond, runs against him.)

PISCATOR. (*bowing*). I beg a thousand pardons!

AMANDA. (*wildly*). Double them!!

And multiply by anything you please;
 Add what you like; produce the quotient,
 E'en to the farthest limit of the dot
 That marks an oft-recurring decimal;
 Let x be equal to a million;
 Subtract not from the nth power of apology
 One single surd; but do not bar my way!

PISCATOR. (*amazed*). Indeed! Why not? Kindly explain yourself!

AMANDA. (*gripping his arm with demented earnestness*).

If two to one bar one, they may succeed;
 But 'tis but you and I; and I am young,
 Healthy and vigorous –

PISCATOR. (*rubbing his arm*). I feel you are!

AMANDA. Whilst you are but a feeble, frail, old man,
 Puny and weak –

PISCATOR. (*drawing himself up*). Indeed? I bet your pardon!

AMANDA. I'm desperate. Be warned, and let me pass!

PISCATOR. (*aside*). She's rather muscular. I'll temporise.

(*Aloud*) Where do you want to go?

AMANDA. To yonder pool!

PISCATOR. To drink? Insanitary!

AMANDA. No! To drown!

PISCATOR. Puppies or kittens, may I ask?

AMANDA. Myself!

PISCATOR. Your motive?

AMANDA. Hopeless love!

PISCATOR. (*turning away disgusted*). Another of them!

Why can't they leave a fisherman in peace?

TRIO –PISCATOR, AMANDA *and* AMANDUS.

PISCATOR. It's really very hard,
When you sit upon the sward
In a carefully selected situation,
How many foolish folks
Will crack their silly jokes
And intrude upon your peaceful meditation,
With "Have you any sport?"
And questions of a sort
That their idiocy utter plainly show!
Their remarks excite my ire;
And, to all who thus inquire,
My answer is emphatically "No!"

Now sunset – half-past six –
Is the time to-day I fix
My labour piscatorial to leave;
Till then, leave me alone;
And your header please postpone
Till the advent of the over-dewy eve.
Till that I hour I must decline
To put up my rod and line,
And home with creel untenanted to go!
Have a little patience, please! (*AMANDA kneels to him.*)
Psha! don't go on your knees:
My decision is emphatically "No!"

AMANDA. Gentle fisher, hear my prayer!
Turn not from me thus away!
Eye me not with stony stare;
Hear a love-lorn maiden's lay!
Vainly do I pray – protest!
He doth pity not my pain;
Hope deserts my aching breast –
Dark Despair begins his reign!

AMANDUS. Whom have we here? A maiden gay.
She little knows what I intend!
Prithee, fair one, trip away;
Leave me to my gloomy end.
Woman, woman, born to vex,

Ever 'cross our path ye stray;
Why is it your lovely sex
Is so often in the way?

AMANDA *and* AMANDUS.

PISCATOR.

Haste on, ye hours, with flying feet!
Your silver sandals cast away:
Enwrap with twilight's winding-sheet
The beauties of the dying day!
Haste on, ye hours! Ye stay too long
For lovers who are lorn and lone;
For everything on earth goes wrong!
Haste on, ye hours! haste on! haste on!

Hold back, ye hours, etc.

AMANDA. Is this your ultimatum?

PISCATOR. Yes, it is! (*Looking towards pond*)

I think I have a nibble. Yes! Good-evening!

(*He goes out at right. AMANDUS and AMANDA are left alone together.*)

AMANDA. (*angrily*). Hard-hearted creature! (*She becomes conscious for the first time of the presence of AMANDUS, who has been standing at the back of the scene.*)

Ah! who have we here?

Some meditative idler, I suppose!

How little he imagines my intent!

AMANDUS. (*looking at his watch*). How long will he remain, I wonder?

AMANDUS. (*coughing*).

Hem!

I wish he'd go!

AMANDUS. Why does she linger here?

AMANDA. He doesn't seem inclined to move just yet!

AMANDUS. She seems come here to stop.

AMANDA. (*pettishly*). How sad it is

That ladies cannot even drown themselves

Without annoyance from the other sex!

AMANDUS. I'll try to draw her into conversation,

And find out her intent. (*Aloud*) A lovely evening!

[*He goes towards her.*]

AMANDA. (*rising, stiffly*). I beg your pardon?

AMANDUS. (*timidly*).

I remarked the weather

Was very fine.

AMANDA. I can't deny the truth

Of what you say –

AMANDUS. Especially so,

For this time of the year?

AMANDA. As you remark,

For this time of the year the day is fine.

[*A pause. They both appear embarrassed.*]

AMANDA. (*taking a step towards him*). You were about to speak?

AMANDUS. Yes, after you. (*He takes a step towards her.*)
 I was about to ask you if you meant
 To stay hear long?

AMANDA. How curious! The question
 I meant to put to you!

AMANDUS. (*with reserve*). As mine came first,
 Perhaps you'll answer –

AMANDA. First? Why, certainly!
 I merely mean to stay here (*with meaning*) all my life!

AMANDUS. Indeed! Then you're a fixture?

AMANDA. (*impulsively, going to him*). Promise me
 You'll keep my secret?

AMANDUS. Faithfully, I swear!

AMANDA. I'm crossed in love, and mean to end it all
 In one quick splash in younder slimy pool!

AMANDUS. (*aside*). What a remarkable coincidence!
 (*Aloud*) Excuse me, but the pool's bespoke!

AMANDA. By whom?

AMANDUS. (*bowing*). By me!

AMANDA. Indeed; and for what purpose, pray?

AMANDUS. I, like yourself, desire to drown myself.
 The ancient fisherman who guards the spot
 Has promised me –

AMANDA. (*smiling sadly*). But to oblige a lady –

AMANDUS. Of course, if you insist on it, I yield.
 But say we compromise, and jump together?

AMANDA. (*holding out her hand*). We will. Your hand? (*They shake hands.*)
 Now that we've settled that –
 Excuse me if I seem inquisitive –
 Tell me what brought you to this fatal step?

(*AMANDUS motions AMANDA to be seated. Both bow and sit on seat.*)

AMANDUS. The fairest and the falsest of her sex!

AMANDA. The falsest, very likely, but the fairest?

AMANDUS. She cares not for me; she is heartless, quite!
 So, for Clorinda's sake –

AMANDA. (*starting*). Clorinda?

AMANDUS. Yes.

Ah! if you only knew her!

AMANDA. If? I do!

She is my dearest friend!

AMANDUS. Ah! then you know
 How good, how fair, she is!

AMANDA. (*without enthusiasm*). Oh yes, of course.

AMANDUS. Say, is she not perfection?

AMANDA. Well, you know,
 We're none of us quite perfect.

AMANDUS. She, at least,

Comes closest up to absolute perfection!

AMANDA. You think so?

AMANDUS. No, I don't! I'm sure of it!

AMANDA. (*meaningly*). Ah!

AMANDUS. You say, "Ah!" What mean you by that "ah"?

AMANDA. Nothing; an interjection – nothing more.

AMANDUS. (*interested*). Explain yourself! I really must insist –

AMANDA. I'd really rather not. We all of us

Have our small faults, our innocent deceptions.

It's true, she wouldn't mind exposing me!

But still, I'll show myself superior.

Don't ask me to say more – pray don't!

AMANDUS. Excuse me;

But after what you said –

AMANDA. I? I said nothing!

AMANDUS. Perhaps not; but, uttered in a certain way,

Nothing means everything.

AMANDA. Excuse me, pray;

You really mustn't press me. There is nothing

I hate so much as a scandal!

AMANDUS. Scandal, madam?

Who couples scandal and Clorinda's name?

AMANDA. No one, I hope; that's why I hold my tongue.

AMANDUS. (*changing tone*). Pardon me; but it really looks as if

You envied her her peerless excellences,

And would insidiously detract from them.

AMANDA. (*scornfully, yet amused*). I? Envious of Clorinda! How absurd!

AMANDUS. If so, you've missed your aim (*with conviction*). I love Clorinda,

And I shall love her ever!

AMANDA. (*pityingly*). Poor young man!

AMANDUS. Perhaps you'd deny her beauty?

AMANDA. I? Oh no!

I'd ne'er deny the needy what they lack!

AMANDUS. (*enthusiastically*). Her eyes are bright as sapphires, and her lashes

Are black as Indian wood!

AMANDA. Say India ink!

AMANDUS. Her hair's so long that she can sit upon it.

AMANDA. (*thoughtfully*). Ah! yes; I sat upon it once myself.

AMANDUS. You sat upon it? How could that be, pray?

AMANDA. Oh, very simply. When I called one day,

Her maid had left it lying on a chair!

AMANDUS. But these exterior beauties are as nought

Compared with the beauties of her mind,

Her temper – perhaps you will deny her that?

AMANDA. Oh no! She has a temper – most decidedly!

AMANDUS. You speak with confidence. May I ask how

You know all this?

AMANDA. I am her dearest friend!

See! here's a letter from her (*gives it*). No; I ought not

To show you that.

AMANDUS. Why not?

AMANDA. Why, it is private;
And in it she describes a silly swain –
His name's Amandus.

AMANDUS. Ah! that is my name,
And I've a right to read it.

AMANDA. Oh, please don't!
Some passages, perhaps, might hurt your feelings.

AMANDUS. My feelings? Ha! My feelings? Let me read. (*He takes the letter.*)

AMANDA. The passage I refer to's on the top
Of page the second; kindly pass it o'er.

AMANDUS. On page the second? Good! Ah! here it is. (*Reads*)
"You ask me to describe him. Well, imagine
A lanky, melancholy sort of youth,
With lantern jaws, figure ridiculous,
And with a kind of face, something between
An amorous monkey and an undertaker!"

AMANDA. (*jumping up and taking letter*). Stay! you shall read no more!

AMANDUS. I've read enough!
"An amorous monkey," eh?

AMANDA. You seem annoyed.

AMANDUS. Oh! not at all; she always was satirical.
(*Aside*) "An undertaker!" Humph!

AMANDA. I'm sure you're hurt.

AMANDUS. Hurt? Not a jot. Lantern-jawed, am I? Ah!

AMANDA. (*smiling*). She doesn't flatter you, though, does she now?

AMANDUS. Scoff on, scoff on! I see you've never loved!

AMANDA. He says "I've never loved!" Oh, Corydon!

AMANDUS. "Corydon," eh? Did you say Corydon?

AMANDA. That is the name that's graven on my heart!

AMANDUS. Corydon? Oh, impossible! Not Corydon.

AMANDA. And why impossible? (*She rises.*)

AMANDUS. Oh, never mind;
The word slipped out!

AMANDA. (*firing up*). What do you know against him?

AMANDUS. Nothing! Nothing!

AMANDA. I charge you, be explicit!

AMANDUS. Ask anything but that. Meanwhile, allow me
To hand you back this ring, since you're the lady.
(*Shows her ring, with portrait set in rubies.*)

AMANDA. "Since I'm the lady"? Why, what do you mean?
This ring? Why, 'tis the one I gave to him
When we did plight our troth! And when we parted
I sent him back his presents, and he told me
He'd lost this ring. Tell me, how you came by it?

AMANDUS. Corydon and I were friends. That is to say,
We often dined together: on a day
We played at cards. He'd drunk too much, and lost.
To raise the funds for "jush another game,"
Said he – (excuse my slightly imitating

His half-intoxicated, drunken speech) –
 “I’ll go and pawn this ruby ring of mine.
 There’s a plain chit – a silly love-sick goose –
 That hangs upon my arm, and gave it me.”
 I, of course, objecting,
 Showed him the meanness of the act; but no!
 Half-tipsey as he was, he staggered out,
 Pawned the poor ring, and then we played again.
 He lost the money, and the ticket too!

AMANDA. “The ticket!” Horrid, vulgar, low idea!

AMANDUS. Half-sad, half-curious, next day I went,
 Redeemed the ring, and looked upon the portrait.
 Thought I, “This lady loved this pimpled knave,
 Fancies him something more than chivalrous;
 And when I find her, by the likeness here
 That’s set in precious stones, I’ll give it her.”
 I’ve found her now; and thus I keep my vow.

(Gives her the ring.)

AMANDA. Sir, you are very kind. *(Breaking down.)* I “a plain chit!”
 How could you say such things? Corydon! Corydon! *(She weeps.)*

DUET – AMANDA *and* AMANDUS.

AMANDA.	My heart is doubly broken!
AMANDUS.	Don’t say that!
AMANDA.	By all that you have spoken.
AMANDUS.	Don’t say that!
AMANDA.	I’d not hurt you, even slightly, Or wound you e’er so lightly! But you haven’t acted rightly!
AMANDUS.	Don’t say that!
AMANDA.	I shall never love another!
AMANDUS.	Don’t say that!
AMANDA.	My affections I shall smother!
AMANDUS.	Don’t say that!
AMANDA.	To some convent far from fun I’ll incontinently run, And I’ll live and die a nun!
AMANDUS.	Don’t say that!
AMANDA.	Yes, I’ll live and die a nun!
AMANDUS.	Don’t say that! Don’t say that!

AMANDA. *(rising, overcoming her emotion).*

Down, selfish grief! and from another’s sorrow
 Some consolation let me try and borrow!
 Tell me, how came Clorinda to reject
 So nice a man as you without regret?
 You did not urge your suit well, I expect.

AMANDUS. All man can do, I did.
 AMANDA. What did you do?
 AMANDUS. I'll tell to thee.
 AMANDA. Yes; tell to me.
 AMANDUS. First I took her lily hand.
 AMANDA. How?
 AMANDUS. (*suiting his action to his words*). Just like this.
 Then her waist I gently spanned.
 AMANDA. How?
 AMANDUS. (*as before*). Just like this;
 Crying, "Cruel Clorinda, hear!
 Oh, I love you very dear!"
 Then I drew her still more near.
 AMANDA. How?
 AMANDUS. Just like this.

BOTH.

Mem'ries, old mem'ries, sadly sweet are ye;
 Painful, yet precious, we keep you long in store;
 Like faded rose-leaves shaken from the tree.
 Bringing back the summer when summer-time is o'er.

AMANDUS. Then I sighed and softly squeezed her.
 AMANDA. How?
 AMANDUS. Just like this.
 Kissed her hand; methought it pleased her.
 AMANDA. How?
 AMANDUS. Just like this.
 Then I begged her of her grace
 Not to turn away her face,
 But let me on her lips place – (*Pause.*)
 AMANDA. (*shyly*). What?
 AMANDUS. (*kissing her*). Only this.

BOTH.

Mem'ries, old mem'ries, etc.

(*A church clock strikes half-past six in the distance.*)

AMANDUS. 'Tis half-past six! My time has come at last!
 Sweet maiden, would we two had met before;
 But 'tis too late – (*waving his hand to landscape*) – So, love and life, adieu!
 AMANDA. Oh no! You really mustn't think of it.
 For my sake, wait until to-morrow night;
 Postpone your plunge, and tell to the reporters
 How 'twas Amanda died!
 AMANDUS. A lady's wish
 To me was ever law. On one condition,
 I'll do as you desire.
 AMANDA. I grant it freely.
 AMANDUS. 'Tis that you do take time – a day or two –

Just to think over it.

AMANDA. Nay! that were vain! (*Going.*)
Stranger, farewell! I seek my watery bed!

AMANDUS. Do not! Please, do not! (*He brings her back.*)

AMANDA. Tell me truly this (*tenderly*).
Would it annoy you greatly if I did?

AMANDUS. (*solemnly*). Upon my word, it would!

AMANDA. (*sweetly*). Well then, I yield:

Out of politeness, I'll consent to live.

AMANDUS. (*with effusion*). How can I thank you for this courtesy?

AMANDA. Support my trembling steps through yonder wood:

We may perhaps discover, on our way,
A quiet, well-conducted hermitage
Where they may take in lodgers; there I'll stop,
And there, in solitude, await my end!

(He gives her his arm, and they move towards the bridge.)

AMANDUS. (*turning back, as an idea strikes him*).

But think – perchance the hermit may object
To single ladies without references!

AMANDA. (*tenderly and softly*). Wilt thou not be my reference?

AMANDUS. (*solemnly*). I will!

(He takes her round the waist, and she lays her head upon his shoulder for a moment. Then they go across the bridge together. A sound of scuffling feet is heard near the pond, and PISCATOR rushes in, in ecstasy, with a fine carp struggling in his landing-net.)

PISCATOR (*joyfully*). His hour has come at last. He's mine! He's mine!

Young man, the pool is at your service now!

(He looks up, and sees AMANDUS and AMANDA standing in affectionate attitudes upon the bridge.)

What do I see? No! Yes!

(AMANDUS and AMANDA move off slowly, singing the refrain of the duet.)

PISCATOR (*sinking on seat, and holding his sides*).

Ha, ha, ha, ha!

VOICES OUTSIDE. “Mem’ries, old mem’ries,” etc.

(The refrain dies away as the curtain slowly falls.)