MACLEON MARY, УИЛЬЯМ ШЕКСПИР

THE SHAKESPEARE STORY-BOOK

Mary Macleon
Уильям Шекспир
The Shakespeare Story-Book

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The Shakespeare Story-Book:

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INTRODUCTION

Literary critics have many times during the past two thousand years waged battle with one another over the question whether drama owes its excellence chiefly to plot or chiefly to character. Is it the business of the dramatist, critics ask successively through the ages, to inspire the playgoer with a deeper interest in the external circumstances which mould the fortunes of his heroes and heroines than in their individual temperaments and the inner workings of their minds and hearts? But critics commonly "count it a bondage to fix a belief," and after clothing their question in the complexity of disquisition, they rarely "stay" for a clear and decisive answer. The glimmering light of dialectics usually involves in shadow one or other commanding phase of the problem. To the plain observer it would seem that both plot and character are essential constituents of perfect drama; that the strength of the one depends on the strength of the other; and that, except to the questioning critic, it is a matter of small practical consequence to which the greater importance be attached by the refinements of theory. In the best plays of Shakespeare the interest evoked respectively by plot and character is so evenly

balanced that he must be exceptionally short-sighted who would set the value of the one above the value of the other. The external circumstances that mould the fortunes of Hamlet, Macbeth, Lear, Othello, rivet the playgoer's and the reader's attention in no less a degree than the individual temperaments of these great dramatic personages or the inner workings of their minds and hearts. It is the perfectly harmonious co-operation of plot and character that is responsible for Shakespeare's noblest triumphs.

Close and constant study of the great plays of Shakespeare must ultimately rouse in the student a more absorbing interest in their characters than in their plots. That is the final effect of supreme dramatic genius. But the full appreciation of Shakespeare's sure and illimitable insight into character can never be reached until we have made ourselves thoroughly familiar with the plot in which the character has its substantive being. It follows, therefore, that if one would realise completely in due time the whole eminence of Shakespeare's dramatic achievement, one should be encouraged at the outset to study closely the stories of the plays rather than the characters apart from their settings. When the youthful mind has grasped the manner and matter of the plots, it will in adult age be in a far better position than it could be otherwise to comprehend all the excellences, all the subtleties of the characters. Only when plot and character have received equally full attention will Shakespeare stand revealed to the mature student in his manifold glory.

It was this point of view that led Charles Lamb and his sister Mary to prepare their "Tales from Shakespeare, designed for the use of young persons." Their volume was first published in 1807. The two writers narrated, in simple language for the most part, the plots of twenty of Shakespeare's plays, fourteen comedies and six tragedies. None of the historical dramas, whether English or Roman, were included, nor was a place found for the comedies of *Love's Labour's Lost*, and the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, nor for the tragedies of *Troilus and Cressida*, and *Titus Andronicus*. The greater part of the volume was the work of Mary Lamb. Although Charles Lamb's name alone appeared upon the title-page, he was responsible for no more than six of the tales – those of the six tragedies.

Mary Lamb had little of her brother's literary power. She was in sympathy with his literary tastes, she had something of his shrewdness of judgment, but she had none of his wealth of fancy, his pliancy of style, his humorous insight, or his learning. Although Mary Lamb's renderings of the plots of the comedies have the charm of matter-of-fact simplicity, they cannot be held on a close scrutiny to satisfy all the needs of the situation. They often trace the course of the stories too faintly and imperfectly to recall Shakespeare's own image. Frequently in Mary Lamb's work pertinent intricacies of plot are blurred by a silent omission of details, knowledge of which is essential to a complete understanding of the Shakespearean theme. For example, the story of the caskets is excluded altogether from

Mary Lamb's version of the plot of *The Merchant of Venice*. Of Bottom and his allies in *Midsummer Night's Dream* she has nothing to tell; Titania falls in love with a nameless sleeping "clown who had lost his way in the wood." And when (in Mary Lamb's version) the ass's head which Puck sets on the clown's neck is removed, he is "left to finish his nap with his own fool's head upon his shoulders." Nothing more is vouchsafed about the "rude mechanicals" of Theseus's Athens. Mary Lamb's rendering of *As You Like It* admits no mention of the melancholy Jaques, of the shrewdly witty Touchstone, or of the rustic Audrey. The ludicrously self-centred Malvolio and his comically tragic self-deception disappear from her version of *Twelfth Night*. Elsewhere in the comedies, and even in Charles Lamb's own work on the tragedies, Shakespeare's text is at times misinterpreted. Consequently, however fascinating in themselves the narratives of the Lambs may prove to young readers, Lamb's Tales offer them a very fragmentary knowledge of the scope of Shakespeare's plots. An endeavour to supply young readers with a fuller and more accurate account of them is therefore well justified, and this endeavour is made in the present volume.

In studying the stories on which Shakespeare based his plays, it is always worth bearing in mind that he cannot be credited with the whole invention of any of them, except in the case of one play – the comedy of *Love's Labour's Lost*. In accordance with the custom of all dramatists of the day, it was his practice to seek the main lines of his plots in prose-fictions, or in historical

chronicles by other hands.

Romantic fiction was born for modern Europe on Italian soil. Boccaccio of fourteenth-century Florence and Boccaccio's long line of disciples – Bandello of Milan, Giraldi Cinthio of Ferrara, and many writers of less familiar name of the sixteenth century – had for generations before Shakespeare's epoch furnished not only Italy, but all the Western countries of Europe with their chief recreative literature in prose. The Italian novels were through the second half of the sixteenth century constantly translated into English and French, and it was to those English or French translations of the Italian romances that Shakespeare owed the main suggestion for all the plots of his comedies (save *Love's Labour's Lost*) and for many of those of his tragedies. Belleforest's "Histoires Tragiques," a collection of French versions of the Italian stories of Bandello, was very often in his hands. Novels by Bandello are the ultimate sources of the stories of *Romeo and Juliet*, of *Much Ado about Nothing*, and of *Twelfth Night. All's Well that Ends Well* and *Cymbeline* largely rest on foundations laid by Boccaccio. The tales of *Othello* and *Measure for Measure* are traceable to Giraldi Cinthio.

But although Shakespeare's borrowings from the frank and vivacious fiction of sunny Italy were large and open-handed, his debt was greater in appearance than it was in reality. He freely altered and adapted the borrowed stories in accordance with his sense of dramatic and artistic fitness, so that the finished plays present them in shapes which bear little relation to their original

forms. At times he intertwined one borrowed story with a second, and his marvellous ingenuity completely changed the aspect of both; each assumed new and unexpected point and consistency. With such effect did he combine in *The Merchant of Venice* the story of the caskets with the story of Shylock's bond with Antonio. His capacity of assimilating all that he read was as omnipotent as his power of assimilating all that passed in life within range of his eye or ear. The stories that he drew from books on which to found his plays can only be likened to base ore, which the magic of his genius had the faculty of transmuting into gold.

But for young readers, who approach Shakespeare's work for the first time through the present narration of the stories of his plays, it is not necessary to learn whence Shakespeare derived their bare lineaments, or how he breathed into them the glowing spirit of life. It is essential that young readers should find delight and recreation in the tales as he finally presented them in his plays. Such delight and recreation I believe the contents of this volume is fitted to afford them.

It only remains to express the wish that the knowledge here conveyed to young readers of Shakespeare's plots may lead them to become in future years loving students of the text of his plays. The words employed by Charles Lamb in a like connection when he first sent into the world his and his sister's "Tales from Shakespeare" may fitly be echoed here. Young men and women cannot learn too early, in life how the study of Shakespeare's

work may, in a far higher degree than the study of other literature, enrich their fancy, strengthen them in virtue, withdraw them from selfish and mercenary thoughts. Life will bring them no better instructor in the doing of sweet and honourable action, no better teacher of courtesy, benignity, generosity, humanity; for of both stories and characters proffering the counsel to seek what is good and true and to shun what is bad and false Shakespeare's pages are full.

SIDNEY LEE.

The Tempest

The Magician's Isle

There was once a lonely island far away in the midst of a wide sea. Only four beings lived on this island: an elderly man called Prospero, noble, grave and learned; his daughter Miranda; and two attendants. One of these attendants was a beautiful and dainty spirit called Ariel, the other a sullen monster called Caliban. For Prospero had more than worldly learning; he knew the art of magic, and by his mighty spells he could control not only the spirits of light and darkness, but also the forces of Nature.

No travellers ever came to the island, and since the day when Miranda had been brought thither, a little baby girl, she had never seen the face of any man except her father. Peacefully the years slipped by, and Miranda had grown into a beautiful young maiden, when one day a terrible storm of thunder and lightning burst over the island. In the midst of the tempest a noble vessel seemed to be sinking, and Miranda ran to entreat her father that, if by his magic arts he had put the waves into such an uproar, he would now allay them.

"Be comforted, dear child; there is no harm done," said her father. "What I have done is only in care for you, and I have so

safely ordered this wreck that not a hair of anyone on board shall suffer hurt. Until now we have lived peacefully in this little spot, and you know nothing of what you are, nor that I am anything more than Prospero, the master of a poor enough cell, and your father."

"It never entered into my thoughts to inquire further," said Miranda.

"The time has come when you must know everything," said Prospero; and laying aside his magic mantle, he bade his daughter sit down beside him, and then he told her the story of their life.

"Can you remember a time before we came to this island?" he began. "I do not think you can, for you were then only a few years old."

"Certainly I can," replied Miranda. "It is far off, and more like a dream than a remembrance. Had I not four or five women once that waited on me?"

"You had, Miranda, and more. Twelve years ago your father was the Duke of Milan, and a Prince of power."

"Oh, heaven! what foul play had we that we came from thence? Or was it a blessing that we did?"

"Both, both, my girl. By foul play, as you say, were we driven from Milan, but blessedly helped thither. In those days Milan was the first State in Italy, and everywhere renowned for its splendour. I had so great a love for art and learning that I devoted much of my time to study, and left the government of the State to my brother Antonio, whom I loved best in the world and trusted

beyond measure. But he was false to the confidence reposed in him, and soon began to think that he was Duke in reality. He therefore entered into a plot with an inveterate enemy of mine, Alonso, King of Naples, and by promise of a large bribe obtained his assistance. A treacherous army was levied, and one midnight Antonio opened the gates of Milan to the King of Naples. In the dead of darkness you and I were seized and hurried away. So great was the love borne me by my people that the traitors dared not kill us, but we were cast adrift in a rotten boat, without sail, mast, or tackle. By the kindness of a noble Neapolitan, Gonzalo, rich stuffs, foods, and necessaries, had been placed in the boat, together with many valuable books from my library, which I prize more than my dukedom. The waves bore us to this island, and here we have lived ever since, and I have given such care to your teaching that you know more than many other Princesses with more leisure time and less careful tutors."

"Heaven thank you for it, dear father!" said Miranda. "And now, I pray you, tell me your reason for raising this storm."

By his magic art, Prospero replied, he knew that by chance his enemies had come near the island, and unless he seized this happy moment his fortunes would droop, never to recover.

"But ask no more questions, Miranda," he ended. "You are weary; rest here and sleep a little."

As soon as Miranda was asleep, Prospero summoned his dainty and nimble little sprite, Ariel, and asked whether he had performed his bidding.

"In every particular," replied Ariel; and he told his master how, in the guise of a flame, he had danced all over the storm-driven ship till the whole vessel seemed on fire, and every one on board except the mariners had plunged affrighted into the sea.

"But are they safe, Ariel?"

"Not a hair perished, not a thread of their garments hurt. I have scattered them in troops about the island, as you bade me. The King of Naples' son, Ferdinand, I have landed by himself, and now he is sitting and sighing alone in an odd corner of the isle."

"And the King's ship?"

"Safely in harbour, hidden in a deep nook. The mariners, already weary with their labour, I have charmed away to sleep. The rest of the fleet which I scattered have now all met again, and are in the Mediterranean, bound sadly home for Naples. They believe that they have seen the King's ship wrecked, and that all on board have perished."

Prospero was much pleased with the way Ariel had performed his charge, but he said there was still some further work to do. He promised that if all went well Ariel in two days should be set free from service, and henceforward should be his own master. He bade Ariel now take a new shape – that of a nymph of the sea, invisible to all but his own master. In this guise Ariel approached the young Prince of Naples, and began to sing in the sweetest fashion:

"Full fathom five thy father lies;
Of his bones a'e coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes:
Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.
Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell:
Hark! now I hear them, ding-dong, bell."

Lured by the sound of this sweet singing, which came he knew not whence, Ferdinand followed the unseen Ariel into the presence of Prospero and Miranda.

Now, excepting her father, Miranda had never seen a man, and at first she did not know what Ferdinand was.

"Is it a spirit, father?" she asked.

"No, child; it eats and sleeps, and has the same senses that we have. This gallant whom you see was in the wreck, and except that his handsome face is somewhat worn with grief and trouble, you might call him a goodly person. He has lost his companions, and wanders about to find them."

"I might call him a thing divine," replied Miranda warmly, "for I never saw anything so noble."

Ferdinand, in his turn, was equally enchanted with the sight of Miranda, and declared on the spot that, if there were no one else whom she already loved, he would make her Queen of Naples.

Prospero was delighted with the way matters were going, for it was his desire that the young people should love each

other; but fearing that a prize so easily won would be held too light, he began to throw some difficulties in the way. He pretended to believe that Ferdinand was not really a King's son, and had come to the island as a spy. He declared he would put him into fetters, and give him only the coarsest food to eat. In vain Miranda implored her father to treat the young Prince less harshly. Prospero told her to be silent, and roughly bade Ferdinand to follow him.

The Prince was naturally indignant at such uncourteous treatment, and hastily drew his sword in defiance. But Prospero threw a sudden spell over the young man, and he stood motionless, unable to stir.

"What? Put thy sword up, traitor!" commanded Prospero sternly.

And Ferdinand, feeling himself powerless to resist, and happy that in his prison he should at least have the pleasure of beholding the beautiful maiden who had so kindly pleaded for him, followed obediently when the magician again summoned him.

The Shipwrecked Wanderers

Meanwhile the rest of the royal party who had plunged into the sea from the King's ship were wandering in another part of the island. Among them were Alonso, King of Naples, and his brother Sebastian; Antonio, the usurping Duke of Milan; Gonzalo, an honest old counsellor of the King of Naples, with Adrian and Francisco, two of his lords.

Exhausted with the labour they had undergone, the whole party, with the exception of Sebastian and Antonio, presently fell asleep. Antonio, not content with having driven his own brother from the dukedom of Milan, now began to suggest treachery to Sebastian, the brother of the King of Naples. Ferdinand, the son of the King of Naples, he said, must certainly have been drowned, his only daughter, Claribel, was married, and far away in Africa – in fact, they were at this moment on their way home from her wedding festivities – there was therefore no near heir to the throne of Naples. Antonio suggested that Sebastian should seize the kingdom of Naples, as he himself had usurped that of Milan. He pointed out how easy it would be to slay King Alonso as he lay there asleep; in fact, he offered to do the deed himself, while Sebastian at the same moment was to put an end to the faithful Gonzalo. The other lords would offer no resistance, but would willingly agree to any suggestions made to them.

Sebastian was only too ready to fall in with this wicked

scheme, but in the meanwhile, invisible to them, Ariel came near, and at the very moment when the traitors had drawn their swords and were about to kill Alonso and Gonzalo he sang in the ear of the latter and awakened him.

"Good angels save the King!" cried Gonzalo; and Alonso started awake at the shout.

"Why! how now? Ho, awake!" cried the King. "Why are your swords drawn? Why do you look so ghastly?"

"What's the matter?" added Gonzalo, still dazed with sleep.

"While we stood here guarding your repose just now," said Sebastian, with a ready lie, "we heard a hollow burst of bellowing like bulls, or, rather, lions. Did it not wake you? It struck my ear most terribly."

"I heard nothing," said the King.

"Oh, it was din enough to frighten a monster – to make an earthquake!" said Antonio. "Surely it was the roar of a whole herd of lions."

"Did you hear this, Gonzalo?" asked the King.

"Upon mine honour, sir, I heard a humming, and that a strange one, too, which wakened me. I shook you, sir, and cried out. As my eyes opened I saw their weapons. There certainly was a noise. We had better stand on guard, or leave this place. Let us draw our weapons."

"Lead away from here," commanded the King. "Let us make further search for my poor son."

"Heaven keep him from these beasts!" said Gonzalo. "For he

is surely in the island."

"Lead away," repeated Alonso.

"Prospero shall know what I have done," said Ariel, as Alonso and his companions started again on their wanderings. "Go, King – go safely on to seek thy son."

The King's Son

Prospero, in order to carry out his plans, pretended to be very harsh and severe with the young Prince of Naples, and he set him a heavy task – to remove and pile up some thousands of logs. For the sake of the love he already bore to Miranda, Ferdinand obeyed patiently, and it sweetened and refreshed his labour to see how distressed the gentle maiden was at the sight of his toil.

"Alas! I pray you, do not work so hard," entreated Miranda, as she met him bearing a log. "I would the lightning had burnt up all these logs! Pray set that down and rest you. My father is hard at study: pray, now, rest yourself; he is safe for the next three hours."

"Oh, most dear lady!" said Ferdinand, "the sun will set before I can finish what I must strive to do."

"If you will sit down," said Miranda, "I will carry your logs the while. Pray give me that; I will carry it to the pile."

"No, dear lady, I had rather crack my sinews, break my back, than that you should undergo such dishonour while I sit lazy by."

"It would become me as well as it does you," said Miranda, "and I would do it the more easily, because I want to do it and you do not. You look weary."

"No, noble lady; when you are near me the night becomes fresh morning," said Ferdinand. "I do beseech you – chiefly that I may set it in my prayers – what is your name?"

"Miranda."

"Admired Miranda! Dearest name in the world!" cried Ferdinand. "Many gentle ladies I have been pleased to see and to talk with, and I have liked different women for different virtues; but never until now have I found one without some defect. But you – oh, you, so perfect and so peerless! – are created the best of every creature!"

"I do not know any other woman," said Miranda simply. "I remember no woman's face save, from my glass, mine own. Nor have I seen others that I may call men, except you, good friend, and my dear father. I do not know what they may be like, but, in simple truth, I would not wish any companion in the world but you, nor can I imagine anyone whose look I would like better. But I prattle too wildly, and in that forget my father's precepts."

"In rank I am a Prince, Miranda," said Ferdinand, "I think a King: would it were not so!" For he thought his father had perished with the ship. "I would not for one moment endure this slavery if it were not for you. The very instant I saw you my heart flew to your service, and for your sake I carry these logs patiently."

"Do you love me?"

"By heaven and earth, I love, prize, and honour you beyond all limit of everything else in the world!"

Miranda's eyes filled with tears of joy.

"I am foolish to weep for what I am glad of," she whispered.

"Why do you weep?" said Ferdinand.

"Because I am unworthy to offer the love I desire to give," said Miranda, "much less to take what I shall die for if I do not have. I am your wife if you will marry me; if not, I'll die a maid. You may refuse to have me as your companion, but I'll be your servant, whether you will or no."

"My Queen, dearest, and I thus humble ever," said Ferdinand, kneeling before her.

"My husband, then?"

"Ay, with a heart as willing as freedom after bondage: here's my hand."

"And mine, with my heart in it. And now, till half an hour hence, farewell!"

"A thousand thousand!" cried Ferdinand; and so they parted.

Unseen by the young lovers, Prospero, in his cell, had listened to all that passed, and his rejoicing was scarcely less than theirs to find that his schemes were working so well. But he had still much to do before supper-time, and he now returned to his books.

Mysterious Music

While Antonio and Sebastian were discussing their scheme to murder the King of Naples, another band of wretched creatures was plotting mischief against the lord of the island. When Prospero had first come to this island, he found it inhabited by a hideous young monster called Caliban, the son of a wicked witch who had been banished there from her own country. This witch – Sycorax – had for servant the dainty sprite Ariel, and because Ariel refused to obey her evil commands she imprisoned him as a punishment in the trunk of a cloven pine-tree. Here Ariel abode in torment and misery for twelve years, during which time Sycorax died, and left her son Caliban as the only inhabitant of the island.

Prospero, on his arrival, set Ariel free, and took him into his own service, and, pitying the young Caliban, he at first tried by kindness to tame his savage nature. But all his efforts were useless. Caliban hated everything good, and repaid Prospero's kindness with malice and evil doing. Prospero found that gentle means were of no avail, and that the only way in which to keep Caliban in order was to treat him with stern severity. For this Caliban hated his master, and was always longing to be revenged on him.

Among those saved from the King's ship were two worthless scamps – Trinculo, a jester, and Stephano, a drunken butler.

Caliban, meeting them by chance, immediately begged to become their servant, hoping by this means to escape from Prospero. He further offered to lead them to where Prospero lay asleep, so that they might kill the magician. It was agreed that Stephano was then to marry Miranda, and become the lord of the island, and Caliban was to be his servant.

While they were talking, Ariel entered, invisible. He listened to their plots, and amused himself by speaking a few words every now and then, which soon set the conspirators quarrelling, for they none of them knew where the voice came from, and thought it was one of themselves mocking the others. Finally Ariel began to play mysterious music on a pipe and tabor. Stephano and Trinculo were greatly alarmed, but Caliban soothed them, saying that the island was full of noises and sweet sounds which gave delight and did no hurt.

"Sometimes a thousand instruments will hum about mine ears," he said, "and sometimes voices, which, if I awake after a long sleep, will make me sleep again. Then in dreams the clouds seem to open and show riches ready to drop on me, so that when I awake I cry to dream again."

"This will prove a brave kingdom to me, where I shall have my music for nothing," said Stephano.

"When Prospero is destroyed," put in Caliban.

"That shall be at once," replied Stephano.

"The sound is going away; let us follow it, and do our work afterwards," said Trinculo.

"Go on, monster; we will follow," said Stephano to Caliban. "I would I could see this taborer; he plays bravely."

So with his mysterious music Ariel lured the three villains away. He led them a pretty dance, through briars, sharp furze, prickly gorse, and thorns, which ran into their poor shins; and finally he left them in the filthy water of a stagnant pool, not far from Prospero's cell.

In the meanwhile Alonso, King of Naples, and his party were still wandering about the island; but by-and-by they grew so weary that poor old Gonzalo declared he could go no further.

"I cannot blame you," said King Alonso, "for I myself am dull with weariness. Sit down and rest. Now here I give up hope that I shall ever see my son again. He is drowned, and the sea mocks our useless search on land."

The traitor Antonio was delighted to see that the King had lost all hope, and he begged Sebastian not to give up their wicked scheme because it had been once repulsed.

"The next advantage we will take thoroughly," Sebastian whispered back to Antonio.

"Let it be to-night," said Antonio, "for now they are so worn out with travel they will not and cannot use such vigilance as when they are fresh."

"I say to-night," agreed Sebastian. "No more."

At that moment strange and solemn music was heard.

"What harmony is this?" said the King. "Hark, my good friends!"

"Marvellous sweet music!" said Gonzalo.

Unseen by them, Prospero entered, and by his magic art he caused a number of strange and grotesque figures to appear, who brought in a banquet. After dancing round it with gentle actions of greeting, and inviting the King and his companions to eat, they disappeared.

"Give us kind keepers, heaven! What were these?" exclaimed the startled King.

"If I reported this in Naples, would they believe me?" said Gonzalo. "These must be islanders, and although they are of such strange shapes, yet note, their manners are more gentle and kind than many of our human race."

"You speak well, honest lord," said Prospero aside, "for some of you there are worse than devils."

"They vanished strangely," said Francisco.

"No matter, since they left their viands behind them," said Sebastian. "Will it please your Majesty to taste of what is here?"

"Not I," said Alonso.

"Faith, sir, you need not fear," said Gonzalo.

"Well, I will eat, although it be my last meal," said the King. "Brother, and you, my Lord Duke of Milan, do as we do."

At that instant there was a peal of thunder and a flash of lightning. Ariel, in the form of a harpy, a hideous bird of prey, flew in and flapped his wings over the table, and immediately the banquet vanished.

"You are three men of sin, whom Destiny has cast upon this

island because you are quite unfit to live among men," he said, addressing Alonso, Sebastian, and Antonio.

Enraged, they drew their swords, but Ariel only mocked at them.

"You fools! I and my fellows are ministers of Fate. Your swords might as well try to wound the winds or stab the water, as hurt one feather of my plumage. If you could hurt, your swords are now too heavy for your strength, and you cannot lift them. But remember – for this is my business to you – that you three supplanted the good Duke Prospero from Milan, cast him and his innocent child adrift on the sea, which hath now revenged it. The heavenly powers have delayed punishment for this foul deed, but they have not forgotten it, and now they have incensed the sea and the shore and all creatures against you. They have bereft you, Alonso, of your son, and they pronounce by me that lingering perdition worse than any death shall fall in this desolate island on you and all your ways, unless you heartily repent and amend your life."

Ariel vanished in thunder, and then to soft music entered the strange shapes again, and, with a mocking dance, carried out the table on which the banquet had been spread.

"Bravely done, my Ariel!" said Prospero aside, while the King of Naples and his companions stood mute with amazement. "My charms are working, and these my enemies are quite astounded. They are now in my power, and here I will leave them while I visit young Ferdinand – whom they think drowned – and his and

my loved darling."

"In the name of heaven, sir, why do you stand with that strange stare?" asked Gonzalo of the King.

"Oh, it is monstrous, monstrous!" cried the conscience-stricken Alonso. "I thought the billows spoke and told me of my wicked deed, the winds sang it to me, and the thunder pronounced the name of 'Prospero.' Therefore my son is drowned, and I will lie with him fathoms deep below the waves."

So saying, he hurried from the spot, followed at once by Sebastian and Antonio.

"All three of them are desperate," said Gonzalo. "Their great guilt, like poison which takes a long time to work, now begins to bite their spirit. I do beseech you," he added to the lords in waiting, "follow them swiftly, and hinder them from what this madness may provoke them to."

"Though the Seas threaten, they are merciful"

The hard toil which Prospero had set the Prince of Naples did not last long, and when the magician saw that the young people loved each other sincerely he put an end to the trial, and bade them be happy together. To give them pleasure and show them some proof of his magic powers, he summoned a troop of beautiful spirits – Iris, Ceres, Juno, some water-nymphs, and various reapers, who sang sweet songs to them and danced graceful dances.

But the moment of Caliban's plot was approaching. Prospero dismissed the spirits, and began to prepare for punishing the conspirators. Sending Ferdinand and Miranda to wait for him in his cell, he bade Ariel fetch some glistening apparel, and hang it up on a line near, in order to serve as a bait to catch the thieves.

His plan succeeded. Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo soon appeared, all wet from the stagnant pool into which they had been lured by Ariel's music.

"Pray you, tread softly, that the blind mole may not hear a footfall; we are now near his cell," said Caliban.

"O King Stephano! O peer! O worthy Stephano! Look what a wardrobe is here for you!" cried Trinculo, catching hold of the garments hanging on the line.

"Let it alone, you fool; it is but trash!" said Caliban.

"Put off that gown, Trinculo," said Stephano, equally greedy in his turn. "By this hand, I'll have that gown!"

"Your grace shall have it," said Trinculo submissively.

"Why do you waste time on this rubbish?" entreated Caliban. "Let us do the murder first. If Prospero awakens he will punish us cruelly for this."

"You be quiet, monster," said Stephano rudely; and he and Trinculo went on helping themselves to the fine clothes which Ariel had cunningly displayed. "Come, monster, take what we leave."

"I will have none of them," declared Caliban. "We shall lose our time, and if Prospero catches us, he will change us all into barnacles or apes."

"Help us to carry these away, or I'll turn you out of my kingdom. Go to, carry this!" commanded Stephano.

"And this," added Trinculo; and they began to load poor Caliban with their spoils.

Suddenly a noise of hunters was heard, and a band of spirits in the shape of dogs swept along, and set upon the three guilty men, chasing them about, while Prospero and Ariel urged on the dogs.

"Hey, Mountain, hey!"

"Silver! There it goes, Silver!"

"Fury, Fury! There, Tyrant, there! Hark, hark!"

When Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo had been driven away, Prospero spoke to Ariel.

"Let them be hunted soundly. Now all my enemies lie at my

mercy. My labours will soon be ended, and then thou shalt be free as air. Follow me still for a little, and do me service. Now, tell me, how fares the King and his followers?"

"Just as you left them – all prisoners, sir, in the grove of trees which shelters your cell. They cannot stir until you release them. The King, his brother, and your brother are quite distracted, and their lords are mourning over them, and chiefly he whom you termed 'the good old lord Gonzalo.' Your charm affects them so strongly that if you beheld them now you would pity them."

"Dost thou think so, spirit?"

"I would, sir, if I were human."

"And I will," said Prospero. "Now that they are penitent my purpose is accomplished. Go, release them, Ariel. I'll break my charms. I'll restore their senses, and they shall be themselves."

"I'll fetch them, sir," said Ariel; and he gladly hastened away to do his master's bidding.

Left alone, Prospero took a solemn farewell of all the powers of magic which he had practised for so long, and declared that, after one last charm which he was now going to work, he would break his wizard's wand and drown his book.

When Ariel returned with Alonso, Sebastian, and Antonio, and the lords in waiting, they all entered a charmed circle which Prospero had made, and stood there unable to move.

"There stand, for you are spell-bound," said Prospero. "O good Gonzalo, my true preserver, and loyal servant to your master, I will pay you both in word and deed. Alonso, most

cruelly did you use me and my daughter; your brother helped you in the deed – he is punished for it now. You, brother mine, unnatural though you are – I forgive you."

While Prospero was speaking, the King and his companions slowly began to recover their senses; but they did not yet recognise Prospero, for he was clad in his magic robes.

"Fetch me the hat and rapier in my cell, Ariel," he said. "I will discard these garments, and show myself as when I was Duke of Milan. Quickly, spirit! Thou shalt be free ere long."

Gladly Ariel set to work, singing a gay little song as he helped to attire his master:

> "Where the bee sucks, there suck I:
> In a cowslip's bell I lie;
> There I couch when owls do cry.
> On the bat's back I do fly
> After summer merrily.
> Merrily, merrily shall I live now
> Under the blossom that hangs on the bough."

Then Prospero sent him to find the King's ship, and to bring back the master and boatswain.

Poor old Gonzalo was greatly amazed and troubled at all the strange things that were happening.

"Some heavenly power guide us out of this fearful country!" he exclaimed.

"Behold, Sir King, the wronged Duke of Milan, Prospero,"

said the magician to Alonso. “To give thee more assurance that a living Prince speaks to thee, I embrace thee, and bid a hearty welcome to thee and thy company.”

“Whether thou be he or not, or some enchanted trifle to torment me, I do not know,” said the bewildered King. “Thy pulse beats like flesh and blood, and since I have seen thee my madness has abated. I resign thy dukedom, and entreat thy pardon for my wrong-doing. But how can Prospero be living and be here?”

“Welcome, my friends all!” said Prospero. “But you, my brace of lords,” he added, aside to Sebastian and Antonio, “if I were so minded, I could make his Highness frown on you and prove you traitors. At this time I will tell no tales.”

“The devil speaks in him,” muttered Sebastian, conscious of his guilt.

“No,” replied Prospero quietly. “For you, most wicked sir,” he said to his brother Antonio, “I forgive all your faults, and require my dukedom of thee, which perforce I know thou must restore.”

“If you are Prospero, tell us how you were saved, and how you have met us here,” said the King of Naples. “Three hours ago we were wrecked upon this shore – alas, where I have lost – how bitter is the remembrance! – my dear son Ferdinand.”

“I am sorry for it, sir,” said Prospero.

“The loss can never be made up, and is past the cure of patience.”

“I rather think you have not sought the help of patience,” said

Prospero. “For the like loss I have its sovereign aid, and rest myself content.”

“You the like loss?”

“As great to me; for I have lost my daughter.”

“A daughter?” cried Alonso. “Oh, would that they were both living in Naples as King and Queen! When did you lose your daughter?”

“In this last tempest,” said Prospero, smiling to himself. “But come, no more of this. Welcome, sir; this cell is my court. I have few attendants here, and no subjects abroad. Pray you, look in. Since you have given me back my dukedom, I will reward you with something equally good, or, at least, show you a wonder which will content you as much as my dukedom does me.”

And, drawing aside the curtain which veiled the entrance to his cell, Prospero disclosed to view Ferdinand and Miranda playing at chess.

“Sweet lord, you play me false,” said Miranda.

“No, my dearest love, I would not for the world,” said Ferdinand.

“If this prove a vision of the island, I shall lose my dear son a second time,” murmured Alonso.

“A most high miracle!” exclaimed Sebastian.

“Though the seas threaten, they are merciful,” cried Ferdinand, springing from his seat at the sight of his father, and falling on his knees before him.

“Now all the blessings of a glad father compass thee about,”

said Alonso, overcome with joy to see his dear son again.

Miranda in the meanwhile was gazing in wonder at all these strange visitors who had come to the island.

"Oh, brave new world that has such people in it!" she cried in delight.

"Who is this maiden?" Alonso asked his son. "Is she some goddess?"

"Sir, she is mortal, and she is mine," answered Ferdinand. "I chose her when I thought I had no father. She is daughter to the famous Duke of Milan, of whose renown I have so often heard."

Then Alonso gave his blessing to the young couple, and the good Gonzalo breathed a hearty "Amen!"

At this moment Ariel appeared, followed by the astonished master of the King's ship and the boatswain. They were overjoyed to see the King and his companions again, and brought word that the ship was as safe and bravely rigged as when they first put out to sea.

"Sir, all this service have I done since I left you," whispered Ariel to Prospero. "Was it well done?"

"Bravely, good spirit," said Prospero. "Thou shalt soon be free."

Then he commanded him to go and take off the spell from Caliban and his companions, and after a few minutes' absence Ariel returned driving in the three men, clad in their stolen apparel.

"Mark these men, my lords," said Prospero. "These three have

robbed me, and this witch's son had plotted with the others to take my life. Two of these fellows you must know and own; this thing of darkness I acknowledge mine."

"Is not this Stephano, my drunken butler?" said the King of Naples.

"Why, how now, Stephano?" said Sebastian mockingly.

"You would be King of the isle, sirrah?" demanded Prospero.

"I should have been a sore one, then," groaned Stephano, for he and his worthless friends were still aching all over from the punishment inflicted on them.

"That is as strange a thing as ever I looked on," said Alonso, pointing to Caliban.

"His manners are as ugly as his appearance," answered Prospero. "Go, sirrah, to my cell. Take your companions with you, and if you hope to have my pardon, behave properly."

"Ay, that I will," said Caliban; "and I will be wise hereafter, and try to be better. What a thrice-double ass I was to take that drunkard for my master!"

And he departed with his companions, glad to have escaped so lightly.

Then Prospero invited the King and his other guests into his cell, where they were to rest for one night. The next morning they were all to set sail for Naples, where the marriage between Prince Ferdinand and Miranda was to take place, after which Prospero would retire to his own dukedom of Milan. Finally he gave his last charge to Ariel, and bade him see that the King's ship should

have calm seas and fair winds to waft it quickly on its way.

"My Ariel, chick, that is thy charge," said Prospero. "Then be free as the elements, and fare thee well!"

Two Gentlemen of Verona

"Now let us take our Leave"

There lived once in Verona two friends who loved each other dearly; their names were Valentine and Proteus. They were both young and gallant gentlemen, but they were very different in character, as you will presently see. Valentine was simple and honest, a loyal and devoted friend, and too candid and sincere himself to think of treachery in others. Proteus had warm affections, but he was fickle and changeable, carried away by impulse, and always so desperately eager for what he happened to want at the moment that he stopped at no means to gain his ends.

Valentine and Proteus were very happy together as companions, but at last the time came when they were to part. Valentine was not content to settle down at Verona; he wanted to see something of the world and its wider life.

"Home-keeping youth have ever homely wits," he said to Proteus, who was trying to persuade him to stay. "If it were not that you were chained here by your affections I would rather beg your company to see the wonders of the world abroad. But since you are in love, love still, and thrive in it, even as I would when I once begin to love."

This he said because Proteus was deeply in love at that

moment with a fair lady of Verona called Julia. And then Valentine went on to tease Proteus, pretending that all love was folly, and that only foolish people let themselves be deluded into it. He little knew how soon he was himself to be caught in the same folly, and how basely and treacherously his friend was going to act towards him.

However, at that moment Proteus had no thought for anyone but Julia, and would not have left Verona on any account. The two friends took an affectionate farewell of each other, and Valentine went his way, to travel to the Court of Milan.

"He hunts after honour, I after love," thought Proteus, when his friend had left him. "He leaves his friends to bring more credit to them by improving himself. I leave myself, my friends, and all, for love. Thou, Julia, hast changed me, made me neglect my studies, lose my time, fight against good counsel, set the world at naught, weaken my brains with dreaming, and make my heart sick with thought!"

While Proteus was indulging in this rhapsody, Speed, the clownish servant of Valentine, came hurrying up.

"Sir Proteus, save you!" he cried, in the greeting of those days. "Saw you my master?"

"He has just this minute gone to embark for Milan," replied Proteus. "Did you give my letter to the Lady Julia?"

"Ay, sir, and she gave me nothing for my labour," said Speed, who was out of temper at not having received the handsome fee he was hoping for.

"But what did she say?" asked Proteus eagerly.

"Oh – she nodded!"

"Come, come, what did she say?"

"If you will open your purse, sir…"

"Well, there is something for your trouble. Now, what did she say?"

"Truly, sir, I think you will hardly win her," said Speed with a sly look, pocketing the piece of money Proteus threw to him.

"Why? Could you perceive so much from her manner?"

"Sir, I could perceive nothing at all from her – no, not so much as a ducat for delivering your letter. And as she was so hard to me who was your messenger, I fear she will prove equally hard to you. Give her no present but a stone, for she is as hard as steel."

"What did she say? Nothing?" repeated poor Proteus.

"No, not so much as 'Take that for your pains,'" said Speed, still harping on his own grievance. "I thank you for your bounty, sir. Henceforth carry your letters yourself. And so I will go seek my master."

"Go, go, to save your ship from wreck!" cried Proteus, incensed at the fellow's impertinence. "It cannot perish when you are aboard, for you are certainly destined for a drier death on shore! – I must find some better messenger to send," he added to himself, when the saucy serving-man had taken himself off. "I am afraid my Julia would not deign to accept my lines, receiving them from such a worthless envoy."

But, as it happened, the letter had so far not reached the hands

of the lady for whom it was intended, for it was only her waiting-maid Lucetta whom Speed had seen, and to whom he had given the letter in mistake for Julia.

Lucetta went in search of her mistress, and found her in the garden, musing over many things, for by this time Julia really loved Proteus, although she would not acknowledge it even to herself. When Lucetta handed her the letter, saying she thought it had been sent by Proteus, Julia pretended to be angry, and scolded her maid for daring to receive it.

"There, take the paper again," she said, "and see that it is returned, or never again come into my presence."

"To plead for love deserves a better reward than to be scolded," muttered Lucetta.

From being so much with her young mistress, the maid was treated more as a companion than as a servant, and was accustomed to speak out her mind frankly on every occasion.

"Go!" said Julia severely; but no sooner had Lucetta disappeared than she was seized with remorse.

"How churlishly I sent her away, when all the time I wanted her here!" she thought. "How angrily I tried to frown, when really my heart was smiling with secret joy! To punish myself I must call Lucetta back, and ask her pardon for my folly… What ho, Lucetta!"

"What does you ladyship want?" asked Lucetta, reappearing.

But at the sight of her maid Julia suddenly became shy again.

"Is it near dinner-time?" she asked, with an air of pretended

indifference.

"I would it were, madam, so that you might spend your anger on your meat, and not on your maid," replied Lucetta rather flippantly; and at that moment she let the letter fall, and picked it up ostentatiously.

"What is it you took up so gingerly?" inquired Julia.

"Nothing."

"Why did you stoop, then?"

"To pick up a paper I let fall."

"And is that paper nothing?"

"Nothing that concerns me."

"Then let it lie there for whom it does concern."

But Lucetta had no intention that the letter should lie unheeded on the ground, for her only purpose in dropping it was to bring it again to Julia's notice. She little knew how her mistress longed at that moment to have it in her own possession, but was too proud to acknowledge it. Lucetta could not refrain from some pert speeches, and her jesting words irritated Julia, especially when Lucetta declared she was taking the part of Proteus.

"I will have no more chatter about this," said Julia; and she tore the letter and threw the pieces on the ground. "Go, get you gone, and let the papers lie!"

"She pretends not to like it, but she would be very well pleased to be so angered with another letter," said the shrewd maid, half aloud, as she walked away.

"Nay, would I were so angered with the same!" cried Julia,

eagerly seizing some of the fragments. “O hateful hands to tear such loving words! I’ll kiss each little piece of paper to make amends. Look! here is written ‘Kind Julia!’ *Unkind* Julia! Be calm, good wind; do not blow any of the words away until I have found every letter.”

And with a loving touch she began carefully to collect the torn scraps of paper.

“Madam,” said Lucetta, coming back, “dinner is ready, and your father waits.”

“Well, let us go,” said Julia.

“Are these papers to lie here like tell-tales, madam?”

“If you care about them, you had better pick them up.”

“They shall not stay here, for fear of catching cold,” said Lucetta, with a mischievous little smile to herself.

“I see you are very anxious to have them,” said Julia.

“Ay, madam, you may say what sights you see,” said the maid, quite unabashed. “I see things, too, although you judge my eyes are shut.”

“Come, come, let us go,” said Julia.

Proteus had refused to accompany his friend Valentine, but he soon found that he was not to be allowed to remain at Verona. In those days it was considered that no young man was well brought up unless he had had the advantage of foreign travel, and an uncle of his spoke very strongly on the subject.

“I wonder that his father lets him spend his youth at home,” he said, “while other men of much less repute send out their

sons to seek preferment – some to the wars, to try their fortune there; some to discover islands far away; some to study at the universities. For any or for all of these Proteus is fit. It will be a great disadvantage to him in after-years to have known no travel in his youth."

To this Proteus's father, Antonio, answered that he had already been thinking over the matter.

"I have reflected how he is wasting his time, and how he can never be a perfect man unless he goes out in the world to learn by experience," he said.

And he came to the conclusion that he could not do better than send Proteus after Valentine, to the Court of the Duke of Milan. Proteus was ordered to hold himself in readiness to start the next day, and all appeals were useless. The only consolation he had in leaving Julia was that the lady now frankly admitted her love.

"Keep this remembrance for thy Julia's sake," she said, giving him a ring when the moment came to part.

"Why, then, we'll make an exchange," said Proteus. "Here, take you this. And here is my hand for my true constancy. If ever I do not remember you for a single hour, Julia, the next hour let some evil mischance torment me for my forgetfulness."

And so, with many protestations of love and fidelity, Proteus started to rejoin his friend Valentine at Milan, and Julia was left behind at Verona.

"Who is Silvia?"

Valentine had spoken many wise words to Proteus on the folly of being in love, but he had not been long in Milan before he was in just the same sad plight that he had cautioned his friend against. The Duke of Milan had a beautiful daughter called Silvia, and it was with her that Valentine fell deeply in love. She returned his affection, and they became secretly betrothed, but they dared not let this be known, for her father favoured another suitor, Sir Thurio, a rich and well-born gentleman, but foolish and extremely vain.

The Duke of Milan, as was the custom in those days, thought himself at perfect liberty to dispose of his daughter in marriage as best pleased himself, with but scant regard for her own feelings on the subject. He suspected there was some love between Silvia and Valentine, and saw many little things when they thought him blind. He often determined to forbid Valentine his Court and his daughter's company, but, fearing that his jealousy might perhaps be leading him into error, and that he might bring disgrace unworthily upon Valentine, he resolved not to act rashly, but by gentle means to try to discover the truth. In the meanwhile he kept a strict watch over Silvia, and, fearing some attempt on the part of the young lovers to escape secretly, he gave directions that Silvia should be lodged in an upper tower, the key of which was brought every night to himself.

Matters were in this state when, to Valentine's great joy, Proteus arrived at the Court of Milan. In the full warmth of his generous heart, Valentine lavished praises of his friend to the Duke of Milan and to Silvia, and for the sake of the love she bore to Valentine Silvia gave Proteus a hearty welcome.

But what a base return Proteus made for the kindness heaped on him! In spite of the devotion which he had professed for Julia, in spite of his lifelong friendship with Valentine, Proteus no sooner beheld Silvia than he imagined himself desperately in love with her. All thought of loyalty and honour was recklessly flung aside. He knew he was behaving shamefully. He remembered his faithful lady in Verona; he called to mind the duty he owed his dear friend Valentine. But for the moment his weak and selfish nature carried him beyond control. He had no thought but to gratify his own desires, and he determined to throw over Julia, and to win Silvia for himself at whatever cost of treachery and dishonour.

The task did not seem an impossible one, for Valentine, in the full glow of his unsuspicious nature, was ready to place unbounded trust in his friend, and in this way he gave into his hands the means by which he was betrayed. He told Proteus that, unknown to the Duke, her father, Silvia and he were betrothed – nay, more, that the hour of their marriage and the method of their flight were already arranged. Silvia was locked into her tower every night, but Valentine was to come with a ladder of ropes, by which he could climb up and help her to descend. That

very evening was fixed for the carrying out of their scheme, and Valentine was now on his way to procure the ladder of ropes by which the attempt was to be made.

Proteus listened to this plot, and then in the depths of his meanness he determined to give Silvia's father notice of what was planned, for he thought it would turn out greatly to his own advantage to do so. Valentine would be banished, and the way would then be left open for himself to try to win Silvia. True, her father favoured another suitor, Sir Thurio, but Proteus had little fear of that dull gentleman, and he thought it would be very easy to thwart his proceedings with some sly trick.

Proteus lost no time in carrying out his scheme, and it was immediately successful. With feigned reluctance, and under the hypocritical pretence that he was only acting from a sense of duty, Proteus repeated to the Duke of Milan what Valentine had told him. He made the Duke promise that he would not reveal his treachery, and pointed out how he could easily entrap Valentine as if the discovery had been made by himself. The Duke acted on this advice. He pretended to ask Valentine's counsel as to the best way of winning a lady to be his wife, whose friends kept her securely shut up. Valentine at once suggested the method of escape which he was hoping to use in his own case.

"A ladder quaintly made of cords," he said, "with hooks at the end, which you can throw up, and by which you can scale the tower."

"But how shall I convey the ladder?" asked the Duke.

“It will be so light, my lord, that you can easily carry it under your cloak,” said Valentine.

“Will a cloak as long as yours serve the purpose?”

“Why, any cloak will serve, my lord.”

“How shall I wear it?” said the Duke. “Pray let me feel your cloak upon me.”

Valentine could scarcely refuse, and the next moment the Duke had drawn forth from the cloak not only a letter addressed to Silvia, saying that Valentine would set her free that night, but also the ladder of ropes that was to be used for that purpose.

Then the Duke’s anger blazed forth.

“Go, base intruder! Overweening slave!” he exclaimed; and in words of the most contemptuous wrath he ordered Valentine to leave his Court and his territories, and never to be seen in them again on pain of death.

False to his Friend

The Duke of Milan had scarcely left Valentine, and the latter was still dazed by the calamity which had befallen him, when Proteus brought him word that the proclamation for his banishment had been made public.

Silvia, however, was still true to him. With sobs and tears, she implored pardon for him on her knees, but her father was relentless. If Valentine were found again in his dominions he should be put to death. Moreover, he was so enraged at his daughter's daring to plead for her young lover that he commanded she should be kept in close prison.

The crafty Proteus counselled Valentine to depart at once, bidding him not to lose hope, pretending the greatest sympathy with his love affairs, and promising that if he sent letters they should be safely conveyed to Silvia. Having thus hurried Valentine away with the utmost despatch, Proteus returned to the Duke of Milan, to let him know that his orders had been obeyed.

"My daughter is in great grief about his going," said the Duke.

"A little time will kill that grief, my lord."

"So I believe, but Sir Thurio here does not think so," said the Duke, and he then went on to consult Proteus as to the best way of winning Silvia's affections from the absent Valentine, in order that she might transfer them to Sir Thurio.

It was agreed among them that the best plan would be for

Proteus to speak all he could in dispraise of Valentine, while at the same time he was to speak in praise of Sir Thurio. For this purpose Proteus was to be allowed free access to Silvia, who, for his friend's sake, would be glad to see him.

Proteus agreed to this, but said that Thurio himself must do something to win the lady's favour. He suggested that he should try to please her with poetry and music, and that he should bring musicians, and sing a serenade by night under her chamber window. Thurio said he would put the plan in practice that very night; he knew some gentlemen well skilled in music, and he had a song written that would be just suitable. As for the Duke, he was delighted with the suggestion, and bade them set to work at once to carry it into effect.

Meanwhile, in Verona, Julia was sorrowing for the absence of Proteus, and at last her longing to see him again grew so keen that she determined to follow him to Milan. Her waiting-maid, Lucetta, who had plenty of shrewd common-sense, tried to persuade her not to go, but Julia would listen to no reason.

"I feel as if I were dying with starvation until I see him again," she said. "If you only knew what it is to love anyone, you would know how utterly useless it is to try to argue about it in words."

As a young and beautiful lady travelling alone would be likely to attract a good deal of notice, for safety's sake Julia decided to adopt the dress of a page, and she bade Lucetta procure for her all that was necessary to play the part properly. In vain Lucetta tried to warn her that perhaps Proteus would not be pleased to

see her. Many men were fickle and changeable, she said; they often pretended much more affection than they really felt.

Julia indignantly replied that some men might, but not her Proteus. Her trust in his fidelity was not to be shaken.

"His words are bonds, his oaths cannot be broken, his love is sincere, his thoughts are stainless, his tears are pure messengers straight from heaven, his heart is as free from fraud as heaven from earth!" she cried.

"Pray heaven he prove so when you come to him!" said the shrewd waiting-woman.

So the faithful, loving Julia set out on her journey to Milan. Alas, poor lady, she little knew what a sorry welcome was awaiting her!

“Alas, poor Lady, desolate and left!”

Proteus soon found that his scheme for winning Silvia met with small success. He had already been false to Valentine, and now he intended to be false to Sir Thurio; but his treachery was likely to be of little avail. Silvia was far too good and true to be corrupted by his worthless gifts. When he protested his loyalty to her, she twitted him with his falsehood to his absent friend; when he praised her beauty, she bade him remember how he had been forsworn in breaking faith with Julia, whom he loved. But, notwithstanding all her rebuffs and rebukes, the more she spurned Proteus the greater grew his admiration for her; and though he knew well how basely he was acting both to Valentine and Julia, he had not enough strength of mind to turn aside from the temptation.

That night, in accordance with what they had arranged, Sir Thurio brought a band of musicians, and they sang a charming serenade outside the Duke of Milan’s palace, under Silvia’s chamber. This is the pretty song they sang:

“Who is Silvia? What is she,
That all our swains commend her?
Holy, fair and wise is she;
The heaven such grace did lend her,
That she might admired be.

"Is she kind as she is fair?
For beauty lives with kindness.
Love doth to her eyes repair,
To help him of his blindness.
And, being help'd, inhabits there.

"Then to Silvia let us sing,
That Silvia is excelling;
She excels each mortal thing
Upon the dull earth dwelling:
To her, garlands let us bring."

Unknown to Proteus, there was another listener, of whom he little recked.

Julia, on arriving at Milan, had made inquiries for her faithless lover, and the landlord of the house where she lodged had brought her to this spot to see the man for whom she had been inquiring. Now, in her page's costume, she was a witness of her lover's inconstancy. Proteus had sworn a thousand vows of love to her, and yet here he was plainly playing court to another lady! Poor Julia! Sweet as the music was, it had little charm for her; she heard only the jarring discord of her lover's false words.

"Doth this Sir Proteus that we speak of often come to visit this gentlewoman?" she asked her host.

"I tell you what Launce, his man, told me – he loves her beyond all measure," replied the host.

"Peace, stand aside, they are going," said Julia, stepping

further back into the shadow; and she heard Proteus say:

"Sir Thurio, do not fear; I will plead your cause so well that you will own my cunning wit is matchless."

"Where do we meet?" asked Sir Thurio, as he prepared to depart with the musicians.

"At St. Gregory's Well."

"Farewell!"

And Proteus was left alone as Silvia appeared on the balcony of her window above.

"Madam, good even to your ladyship," said Proteus.

"I thank you for your music, gentlemen. Who was that who spoke?"

"One, lady, whom – if you knew his true heart – you would quickly learn to know by his voice."

"Sir Proteus, as I take it."

"Sir Proteus, gentle lady, and your servant."

"What is your will?"

"That I may fulfil yours."

"You have your wish. My will is this: that you immediately go home to bed, you subtle, perjured, false, disloyal man! Do you think I am so shallow, so witless, as to be won by your flattery – you, who have deceived so many with your vows! Return, return, and make amends to your own lady. As for me, I swear by this moon that I am so far from granting your request that I despise you for your wrongful suit, and could chide myself even for the time I spend in talking to you."

"I grant that I did love a lady," said Proteus, "but she is dead."

"Supposing that she is, yet Valentine, your friend, is alive, to whom you yourself are witness that I am betrothed. Are you not ashamed to wrong him with this persistency?"

"I hear likewise that Valentine is dead."

"Imagine, then, that I am also dead; for, be assured, my love is buried in his grave."

"Sweet lady, let me take it from the earth."

"Go to your own lady's grave, and call her love thence, or, at least, bury your own in hers."

"Madam, if your heart is so pitiless, yet grant me your picture, for the sake of my love. For since you yourself are devoted elsewhere, I am but a shadow, and to your shadow will I give my love."

"I am very loath to be your idol, sir, but since it suits your falsehood to admire shadows, send to me in the morning, and I will send the picture. And so, good rest!"

"As wretches have overnight who wait for execution in the morning," said Proteus.

Poor Julia overheard all this conversation between her faithless suitor and the lady Silvia. It was impossible to doubt his falsehood any longer, yet so true and loving was her nature that she could not harden her heart to go away and never see him again. As it happened, Sir Proteus was staying at the very house in Milan where she had found a lodging. His thoughts just then were entirely absorbed with his latest fancy, and it never occurred

to him to connect the stranger lad, who called himself Sebastian, with his own lady Julia at Verona. But something about the pretty boy attracted his liking. Proteus's servant Launce was a silly clown, whose half-witted blunders were always bringing his master into ridicule, and, judging from Sebastian's face and bearing that he was well-born and trustworthy, Proteus took him into his service as page.

What befell in the Forest

Those were dark days for the lady Silvia: her lover Valentine banished, she herself kept in close imprisonment by her angry and tyrannical father, threatened with marriage to a suitor whom she hated and despised. What prospect of release could she look forward to?

But she was not without courage, and she was not without hope.

At the Court of Milan there was one friend on whom she could rely – the kind Sir Eglamour, a gentleman, valiant, wise, compassionate, well-accomplished; one who had himself known sorrow, for his lady and true love had died, and his heart still mourned her memory.

Silvia told this gentleman that she was anxious to go to Valentine – to Mantua – where she had heard he was staying, and because the ways were dangerous she begged him to accompany her, in whose faith and honour she trusted. Pitying her distress, and knowing that the Duke was acting cruelly in trying to force his daughter into an unworthy marriage, Sir Eglamour willingly agreed, and it was arranged they should start that evening.

Sir Eglamour had scarcely left Silvia, when the messenger arrived from Proteus to claim the portrait which Silvia had promised. And who should Proteus have chosen for this errand but his new young page, Sebastian, whom he little thought was

his own dear lady Julia in disguise. Not only this, but he also entrusted a ring to Sebastian to give to Silvia, and this ring was no other than the one which Julia had given to him when they parted, and which he had received with so many protestations of affection and vows of fidelity.

Julia, or Sebastian, as we ought now to call her, was nearly heart-broken at the task imposed on her, but she carried it through faithfully. And in one way she met with her reward. For the noble lady Silvia showed no pleasure at this proof of Proteus's affection, only scorn and indignation at his treachery to his own love. She gave her portrait, as she had promised it, but she tore up his letter in contempt, without even reading it; and as for the ring, she refused to accept it.

"Madam, he sends your ladyship this ring," said the pretty lad Sebastian.

"The more shame for him that he sends it me!" said Silvia warmly. "For I have heard him say a thousand times that Julia gave it him at his departure. Though his false finger have profaned the ring, mine shall never do his Julia so much wrong," she declared.

Julia was deeply touched and grateful at Silvia's generous sympathy, and still more so when the lady went on to question her about Julia, and to say how much she felt for her and pitied her.

"Alas, poor lady, desolate and left! I could weep for her," she said. "Here, youth, there is my purse. I give you this for your sweet mistress's sake, because you love her. Farewell!"

"And she shall thank you for it if ever you know her," cried Julia, as Silvia retired with her attendants. "A virtuous gentlewoman, mild and beautiful! I hope my master's suit will be but cold, since she respects my mistress's love so much."

And somewhat comforted she returned to Proteus.

Silvia fled that night, as she had arranged with Sir Eglamour. The news soon reached her father's ears, and he immediately set out in pursuit of her, the party also including Sir Thurio, Proteus, and Sebastian. But in crossing a dangerous forest Sir Eglamour and Silvia had been seized by a band of outlaws. Sir Eglamour contrived to make his escape, but the outlaws were conveying Silvia to their chief, when Proteus came up with them and with some difficulty rescued their captive.

Now, the captain of these outlaws was no other than Valentine. On his way to Mantua he had been taken prisoner by the band, who, seeing that he was a brave and accomplished gentleman, had begged him to be their chief. Finding that they were not really bad men, but had been driven to this method of life by reckless behaviour in their youth, which had caused them to be banished from Milan, Valentine consented.

"I accept your offer, and will live with you," he said, "provided that you do no harm to women or poor travellers."

"No; we detest such vile practices," said one of the outlaws. "Come, go with us. We will take you to the rest of our crew, and show you all the treasure we have got, and everything shall be at your disposal."

On the day when the adventure occurred to Sir Eglamour and Silvia, Valentine happened to be alone, when, unseen by them in the thickness of the forest, he saw Proteus approaching with Silvia and the little page Sebastian.

"Madam," he heard Proteus say, "I have done this service for you and risked my life, though you do not respect anything that your servant does. Grant me but a kind look for my reward. I cannot ask a smaller boon than that, and less than that I am sure you cannot give."

"This is like a dream!" thought Valentine, aghast at his friend's treachery. But he tried to wait patiently for a few minutes to see what would happen.

"Oh, miserable, unhappy that I am," sighed Silvia.

"And I too!" murmured the poor little page, apart.

"Had I been seized by a hungry lion, I would rather have been a breakfast to the beast than have false Proteus rescue me!" cried Silvia. "Oh, heaven, be judge how I love Valentine, whose life is as dear to me as my soul! And just as much – for it cannot be more – do I detest false, perjured Proteus! Therefore begone; entreat me no more."

Seeing there was no chance of winning Silvia by fair words, Proteus, in a rage, seized hold of her roughly, whereupon Valentine sprang forth and struck him back.

"Ruffian, let go that rude, uncivil touch! Thou evil-fashioned *friend*!"

"Valentine!"

"You miserable *friend*, without faith or love!" continued Valentine, hurling his scorn on the convicted traitor. "Treacherous man! Thou hast beguiled my hopes! Nothing but my own eyes would have made me believe what I see. Now I dare not say I have one living friend, – whom could I trust, when the one nearest my heart is perjured? Proteus, I am sorry I must never trust thee more, but for thy sake count the whole world a stranger. Alas, that amongst all foes a *friend* should be the worst!"

Proteus's easily-moved nature was struck to the heart by Valentine's just reproaches. With deepest remorse, he implored Valentine's pardon, and so noble and generous was Valentine that he forgave him on the spot. Nay, more, in the impulse of the moment he even offered to resign his own claim on Silvia. The thought that Proteus would now really be lost to her for ever, struck Julia like a blow, and she fell fainting to the ground.

"Look to the boy," said Proteus.

"Why, boy, how now? What's the matter? Look up! Speak!" said Valentine.

"Oh, good sir, my master charged me to deliver a ring to Madam Silvia, which because of my neglect was never done," said Julia, in her guise of the little page.

"Where is that ring, boy?" asked Proteus.

"Here it is – this is it."

"How? Let me see. Why, this is the ring I gave to Julia."

"Oh, cry you mercy, sir, I have made a mistake," said Julia, pretending to discover her error, and holding out another one.

"*This* is the ring you sent to Silvia."

"But how did you come by this ring?" asked Proteus, looking at the first one. "When I left Verona I gave this to Julia."

"And Julia herself gave it to me, and Julia herself has brought it here."

"How? Julia!"

"Behold her to whom you swore so many vows, and who kept them tenderly in her heart! How often have you perjured yourself!" cried Julia, throwing off her disguise. "Oh, Proteus, let these clothes make you blush! Are you ashamed that I have put on the raiment of a boy? I tell you, it is less shameful for women to change their guise than men their minds!"

"Than men their minds!" echoed the conscience-stricken Proteus. "That is true."

"Come, come, give me each your hand," interposed Valentine. "Let me be blest in making a happy ending. It were pity that two such friends should be long foes."

"Bear witness, Heaven, I have my wish for ever!" said Proteus solemnly.

"And I mine," said Julia.

And it is to be hoped that this time the fickle gentleman kept faithful to his lady.

Matters had scarcely come to this happy conclusion, when the outlaws approached, bringing as captives the Duke of Milan and Sir Thurio.

"A prize! a prize! a prize!" shouted the outlaws.

"Forbear, forbear, I say! It is my lord, the Duke of Milan," said Valentine. "Your Grace is welcome to a man disgraced," he added courteously.

"Sir Valentine!"

"Yonder is Silvia, and Silvia's mine!" interrupted Sir Thurio, pressing rudely forward.

"Stand back!" commanded Valentine. "Come near, at your peril! Do not dare to call Silvia yours! Here she stands: I dare you to touch her, or even to come near."

"Sir Valentine, I care not for her – I!" said Thurio, quite cowed. "I hold him but a fool who will endanger himself for a girl who does not love him. I claim her not, and therefore she is yours."

"The more base of you to act as you have done, and then to leave her on such slight excuse!" said the Duke indignantly. "Now, by the honour of my ancestry, I applaud your spirit, Valentine; you are worthy of an Empress's love. Know, then, I cancel here all that has passed, and summon you home again Sir Valentine, you are a gentleman. Take you your Silvia, for you have deserved her."

"I thank your Grace; the gift has made me happy. I now beg you, for your daughter's sake, to grant one boon that I shall ask of you."

"I grant it you for your own, whatever it be," said the Duke.

Then Valentine begged him to pardon the band of outlaws and recall them from exile.

“They are reformed, civil, full of good, and fit for great employment,” he said.

The Duke willingly granted his pardon, and then the whole party returned happily to Milan, where the same day wedding feasts were appointed for the two marriages – Valentine with Silvia, and Proteus with Julia.

Much Ado about Nothing

"Dear Lady Disdain"

There was rejoicing in Messina, for the war was over, and Don Pedro, the victorious Prince of Arragon, was returning in triumph. Tidings were sent to Leonato, the Governor, to expect his speedy approach; and Leonato himself, with his daughter Hero and his niece Beatrice, received the Prince's messenger, and questioned him eagerly as to the welfare of their friends.

"How many gentlemen have you lost in this action?" inquired Leonato.

"But few of any sort, and none of name," replied the messenger.

"I find in this letter that Don Pedro has bestowed much honour on a young Florentine called Claudio," said Leonato.

"Much deserved on his part and equally remembered by Don Pedro," answered the messenger. "He has indeed borne himself gallantly, doing in the figure of a lamb the feats of a lion."

When she heard this outspoken praise of the young Florentine, Hero, the Governor's daughter, felt a warm thrill of joy, but she only smiled and blushed with pleasure.

"I pray you," put in Beatrice, the Governor's niece, who lived in her uncle's house, and was the dear companion of his only

daughter, "is Signor Mountanto returned from the wars or no?"

"I know none of that name, lady," said the messenger, looking rather puzzled; "there was none such in the army of any sort."

"Who is he that you ask for niece?"

"My cousin means Signor Benedick of Padua," explained Hero.

"Oh, he has returned, and as pleasant as ever he was," said the messenger.

"I pray you, how many has he killed and eaten in these wars?" said Beatrice mockingly. "But no, how many has he killed? For, indeed, *I* promised to eat all of his killing."

"Faith, niece, you are too hard on Signor Benedick," said Leonato. "But he will be even with you, I do not doubt."

"He has done good service, lady, in these wars," said the messenger; and then he went on to praise warmly the valour and noble qualities of the young lord; but Beatrice would do nothing but laugh and mock at all he said.

"You must not, sir, mistake my niece," said Leonato at last. "There is a kind of merry war betwixt Signor Benedick and her; they never meet but there is a skirmish of wit between them."

While they were still speaking, the Prince of Arragon, with his train of noble gentlemen, arrived. Leonato welcomed them most warmly. Count Claudio and Signor Benedick were old friends, and had previously stayed at the Governor's palace; indeed, before starting for the wars Claudio had looked with more than an eye of favour on the gentle lady Hero. As for Beatrice and

Benedick, they pretended to have a great aversion to each other, but, strange to say, instead of avoiding each other's society, they seemed to delight in seizing every opportunity to plague and tease each other as much as possible.

On the present occasion Beatrice had not long to wait, and on Benedick's making some jesting remark to Don Pedro and Leonato, she plunged into the fray.

"I wonder that you will still be talking, Signor Benedick; nobody marks you."

"What, my dear Lady Disdain! Are you yet living?" retorted Benedick.

"Is it possible that Disdain should die while she has such meet food to feed it as Signor Benedick? Courtesy herself must turn into disdain if you come into her presence."

"Then is Courtesy a turncoat. But it is certain I am loved of all ladies, only you excepted; and I would I could find in my heart that I had not a hard heart, for truly I love none," remarked Benedick in a lofty manner.

"That is very happy for women; they would otherwise have been troubled with a most annoying suitor," said Beatrice. "Thank Heaven, I am like you in that respect; I had rather hear my dog bark at a crow than a man swear he loves me."

"Heaven keep your ladyship still in that mind!" said the young lord devoutly. "So some gentleman or another shall escape injury."

It was all very well for Benedick to scoff at love, but the

young Count Claudio was of a different nature. Impulsive and passionate, he was not ashamed to own his love for the lady Hero, and with the sympathetic help of the Prince of Arragon he speedily won the lady's consent and her father's approval. The wedding-day was fixed for a week later, and the only trial the impatient young lover had to endure was the time that must elapse before the marriage.

Benedick, of course, did not spare his raillery on this occasion, and he laughed with the utmost scorn when Don Pedro and Claudio declared that his own turn would come.

"I shall see you, before I die, look pale with love," said Don Pedro.

"With anger, with sickness, with hunger, my lord, but never with love," declared Benedick.

"Well, if ever you fall from this faith you will prove a notable argument."

"If I do, hang me in a bottle and shoot at me," laughed Benedick.

"Well, as time shall try. 'In time the savage bull doth bear the yoke,'" quoted Don Pedro.

"The savage bull may, but if ever the sensible Benedick bear it, pluck off the bull's horns, and set them in my forehead; and let me be vilely painted, and in such great letters as they write 'Here is good horse to hire,' let them signify under my sign, 'Here you may see Benedick the married man!'"

Benedick's self-assured declaration that he never intended to

fall in love or get married, and Beatrice's equal scorn on the same subject, put a mischievous idea into Don Pedro's head, and it occurred to him that the week which had to elapse before the wedding might be most amusingly occupied.

"I will warrant that the time shall not pass dully," he said to Leonato and Claudio. "I will in the meanwhile undertake one of Hercules' labours, which is to bring Signor Benedick and the Lady Beatrice into a mountain of affection one for the other. I would fain have it a match, and I do not doubt of bringing it about, if you three will but help me in the way I point out."

"My lord, I am for you, though it cost me ten nights' watching," said Leonato.

"And I, my lord," said Claudio.

"I will do any modest office, my lord, to help my cousin to a good husband," said the gentle Hero.

"And Benedick is not the least hopeful husband I know," said the Prince. "Thus far I can praise him: he is of noble race, of approved valour, and of steadfast honesty. I will teach you how to humour your cousin that she shall fall in love with Benedick, and I, with the help of Leonato and Claudio, will so practise on Benedick that, in spite of his quick wit and fastidious temper, he shall fall in love with Beatrice. If we can do this, Cupid is no longer an archer; his glory shall be ours, for we are the only love-gods! Come with me, and I will tell you my plan."

A Plain-dealing Villain

Now, among the gentlemen in the Prince of Arragon's train there was one of a very different nature from Claudio and Benedick. This was Don John, a half-brother of the Prince, and a man of sullen, envious, and malicious temper. He was spiteful to all the world, but in especial he hated his half-brother, and he bore a furious grudge against the young Florentine lord Claudio, because the latter stood high in the favour of the Prince of Arragon. Don John had long sullenly opposed his brother, and had only lately been taken into favour again. It now only depended on his own behaviour as to whether he should go on and prosper, or whether he should fall again into disgrace. But Don John had no intention of acting more amiably than he could possibly help. His followers, Borachio and Conrade, urged him to conceal his feelings, and to bear a more cheerful countenance among the general rejoicings, but Don John flatly refused.

"I had rather be a canker in a hedge than a rose in my brother's grace," he said sullenly. "It better fits my humour to be disdained of all than to fashion a behaviour to rob love from any. In this, though I cannot be said to be a flattering, honest man, it must not be denied that I am a plain-dealing villain. I am trusted, – with a muzzle; and set free, – with a clog; therefore I have determined not to sing in my cage. If I had my mouth I would bite, if I had my liberty I should do my liking; in the meantime let me be what

I am, and do not seek to alter me."

The news that the gallant young Claudio was to wed the daughter of the Governor of Messina put Don John into a fresh fury.

"That young start-up has all the glory of my overthrow," he declared. "If I can cross him in any way, I shall only be too delighted."

His two men, Borachio and Conrade, who were as evil-natured as their master, promised to help him in any scheme of vengeance he could devise, and it was not long before Borachio came to him and said that he had found a way to cross Count Claudio's marriage.

"Any bar, any cross, any hindrance, will do me good," said Don John. "I am sick with displeasure, and whatsoever comes athwart his desire will go evenly with mine. How can you cross this marriage?"

"Not honestly, my lord, but so secretly that no dishonesty shall appear in me."

"Show me briefly how."

"I think I told your lordship a year since how much I am in favour with Margaret, the waiting gentlewoman to Hero."

"I remember."

"I can at any unseasonable instant of the night appoint her to look out at her lady's chamber window."

"What good will that be to put an end to the marriage?"

"The poison of it lies with you to mix. Go to the Prince your

brother, tell him he has wronged his honour in allowing the renowned Claudio – whom you must praise warmly – to marry lady like Hero, who has already another lover."

"What proof shall I make of that?"

"Proof enough to hurt the Prince, to vex Claudio, to ruin Hero, and to kill Leonato. Do you look for any other result?"

"I will do anything only to spite them."

"Go, then, find a fitting hour when Don Pedro and Count Claudio are alone, and tell them that you know Hero loves me," said the wicked Borachio. "They will scarcely believe this without proof. Offer them the opportunity to test the truth of your words. Bring them outside Leonato's house the night before the wedding; and in the meanwhile I will so fashion the matter that they shall see Margaret speak to me out of the window, they shall hear me call her 'Hero,' and there shall appear such seeming truth of Hero's disloyalty that Claudio in his jealousy will feel quite assured of it, and all the preparations for the wedding shall be overthrown."

"Let the issue of this be what it may, I will put it in practice," said Don John. "Be cunning in working this, and thy fee is a thousand ducats."

"You be steady in the accusation, and my cunning shall not shame me," was Borachio's response.

"Cupid's Crafty Arrow"

Benedick was strolling alone in Leonato's orchard, and as he went he mused to himself.

"I do wonder," he thought, "that one man, seeing how much another man is a fool when he is in love, after he has laughed at such shallow follies in others, will himself become the object of his own scorn by falling in love; and such a man is Claudio. I have known when there was no music with him but the drum and the fife, and now he had rather hear the tabor and the pipe. I have known when he would have walked ten miles on foot to see a good armour, and now will he lie ten nights awake, carving the fashion of a new doublet. He was wont to speak plain and to the purpose, like an honest man and a soldier; and now his words are a very fantastical banquet, just so many strange dishes. Shall I ever be so converted, and see with those eyes? I cannot tell. I think not. I will not be sworn that love may not transform me to an oyster, but I'll take my oath on it, till he have made an oyster of me, he shall never make me such a fool. One woman is fair, yet I am well; another is wise, yet I am well; another virtuous, yet I am well; but till all graces be in one woman one woman shall not come in my grace. Rich she shall be – that's certain; wise and virtuous, or I'll have none of her; fair, or I'll never look on her; mild, or come not near me; noble, or not I for an angel; of good discourse, an excellent musician, and her hair – her hair shall be

of what colour it pleases God… Ha! the Prince and Monsieur Love. I will hide me in the arbour."

And Benedick hastily concealed himself, as Don Pedro, Claudio, and Leonato approached, followed by some musicians.

"Come, shall we hear this music?" said Don Pedro, seating himself on a bench within earshot of the arbour. "See you where Benedick has hidden himself?" he added in a low voice.

"Oh, very well, my lord," answered Claudio. "When the music is ended, we will give him something to think about."

"Come, Balthasar, we'll hear that song again," said Don Pedro.

So the musicians lightly touched the strings of their instruments, and Balthasar began his song:

"Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more,
Men were deceivers ever,
One foot in sea, and one on shore,
To one thing constant never:
Then sigh not so, but let them go,
And be you blithe and bonny,
Converting all your sounds of woe
Into Hey nonny, nonny!

"Sing no more ditties, sing no more,
Of dumps so dull and heavy;
The fraud of man was ever so,
Since summer first was leafy:
Then sigh not so, but let them go,
And be you blithe and bonny,

Converting all your sounds of woe
Into Hey nonny, nonny!"

"By my troth, a good song!" said the Prince. "Balthasar, I pray you get us some excellent music, for to-morrow night we would have it at the lady Hero's chamber-window."

"The best I can, my lord."

"Do so; farewell… Come hither, Leonato," said Don Pedro, when the young musician had retired. "What was it that you told me of to-day – that your niece Beatrice was in love with Signor Benedick?"

"Go on," whispered Claudio. "We shall catch our bird. I did never think that lady would have loved any man," he added aloud, for Benedick's benefit.

"No, nor I neither," said Leonato; "but it is most wonderful that she should so doat on Signor Benedick, whom she has in all outward behaviour always seemed to abhor."

"Is it possible? Sits the wind in that corner?" murmured the astonished Benedick in his hiding-place.

"By my troth, my lord, I cannot tell what to think of it, but that she loves him frantically," continued Leonato. "It is past the bounds of belief."

"Has she made her affection known to Benedick?" asked Don Pedro.

"No, and swears she never will; that is the cause of her unhappiness."

"'Tis true indeed," put in Claudio. "'Shall I,' says she, 'that have so often encountered him with scorn, write to him that I love him?'"

"'I measure him by my own spirit,' she says," continued Leonato, "'for I should flout him if he wrote to me – yea, though I love him, I should.'"

"And then she weeps and sobs, beats her heart, tears her hair," said Claudio.

"My daughter is sometimes afraid she will do a desperate outrage to herself," said Leonato.

"It were good if Benedick knew it from someone else, if she will not reveal it," said Don Pedro.

"To what end?" asked Claudio. "He would make but a sport of it, and torment the poor lady worse."

"If he did it would be a charity to hang him," said Don Pedro indignantly. "She is an excellent, sweet lady."

"And she is exceedingly wise," put in Claudio.

"In everything but in loving Benedick," said Don Pedro.

"Oh, my lord, I am sorry for her, as I have just cause, being her uncle and her guardian," said Leonato.

"I would she had bestowed this affection on me," said Don Pedro. "I would marry her at once. Well, Leonato, I am sorry for your niece. I pray you tell Benedick of it, and hear what he will say."

"Never tell him, my lord," said Claudio. "Let her wear out her affection with good counsel."

"Nay, that's impossible," said Leonato; "she may wear her heart out first."

"Well, we will hear further of it from your daughter," said Don Pedro. "I love Benedick well, and I could wish he would modestly examine himself to see how much he is unworthy so good a lady."

"My lord, will you walk? Dinner is ready," said Leonato.

"If he do not doat on her after this, I will never trust my expectation," laughed Claudio, as the conspirators withdrew.

"Let there be the same net spread for Beatrice," said Don Pedro, "and that your daughter and her gentlewomen must carry out. The sport will be when they each believe in the other's doating, when there is no such matter; that's the scene I should like to see… Let us send her to call him in to dinner."

When the others had gone, Benedick came forth from his hiding-place, deeply impressed with what he had heard.

"Poor lady!" he thought. "So she really loves me! Well, her affection must be requited. I hear how I am censured. They say I will bear myself proudly if I see the love come from her. They say, too, she will rather die than give any sign of affection… I never thought to marry… I must not seem proud. Happy are those that hear their detractions and can put them to mending. They say the lady is fair; 'tis a truth, I can bear them witness. And virtuous; it is so. And wise; but for loving me. By my troth, it is no addition to her wit, and no great argument of her folly, for I will be horribly in love with her. I may chance to have some odd quirks and remnants of wit broken on me, because I have railed

so long against marriage; but does not a man's opinion alter?.. When I said I would die a bachelor, I did not think I should live till I was married. Here comes Beatrice. By this day, she is a fair lady! I do spy some marks of love in her."

Quite unconscious of all that had taken place, Beatrice advanced, and in her usual mocking style announced:

"Against my will I am sent to bid you come in to dinner."

"Fair Beatrice, I thank you for your pains," said Benedick.

"I took no more pains for those thanks than you take pains to thank me," said Beatrice carelessly. "If it had been painful I would not have come."

"You take pleasure, then, in the message?" said Benedick eagerly.

"Yes, just so much as you may take upon a knife's point, and choke a daw withal," laughed Beatrice. "You have no appetite, signor? Fare you well." And off she went gaily.

"Ha! 'Against my will I am sent to bid you come in to dinner.' There's a double meaning in that," thought the poor deluded Benedick. "'I took no more pains for those thanks than you took pains to thank me.' That's as much as to say, 'Any pains that I take for you is as easy as thanks.' If I do not take pity on her, I am a villain; if I do not love her, I am a Jew. I will go get her picture!"

The same trick which Don Pedro, Claudio, and Leonato had played on Benedick was played on Beatrice by her cousin Hero and her gentlewomen, Margaret and Ursula. Beatrice was lured into the garden, and there, unseen, as she imagined, by the others,

she heard them discussing Benedick's love for her. They followed much the same lines as the three men had done with regard to Beatrice. They spoke of Benedick's hopeless affection, of his many good qualities, and of his fear of exciting Beatrice's scorn if he should say anything of his devotion. They said it was a great pity that the lady Beatrice was so proud and hard-hearted, and that they certainly would never tell her of Benedick's feelings towards her, for she would only laugh at him and treat him with cruel scorn.

"Yet tell her of it; hear what she will say," Ursula pretended to urge Hero.

"No," said Hero, "I would rather go to Benedick and counsel him to fight against his passion."

Having skilfully performed their task, the ladies retired, leaving Beatrice overcome with wonder at what she had heard, and with all her pride melting into a strange new feeling of love.

The Night before the Wedding

It was not likely that Benedick's changed behaviour should escape notice, and Don Pedro and Claudio pretended to think he was in love, and began to tease him unmercifully. Benedick met their raillery with an air of lofty scorn, but nothing would stop the shafts of wit which the light-hearted gentlemen levelled at their deluded companion, and they continued to twit him on his pensive demeanour, and the new air of fashion which he was adopting.

But all gladness and gaiety were suddenly clouded over with heavy gloom.

Having carefully prepared his villainous plot by the aid of his follower Borachio, Don John came to Claudio and the Prince of Arragon, and told them what had been agreed – namely, that Hero was unworthy to be the wife of Claudio, for she was already in love with Borachio, and that if the Prince and Count Claudio wished to prove the truth of his statement they had only to go that night to the street outside Leonato's palace, where they would see Hero speaking out of a window to Borachio.

Don Pedro and Claudio were, of course, at first stunned and incredulous, but Don John never faltered in the terrible lie he was relating.

"If you will follow me I will show you enough," he concluded, "and when you have heard more and seen more, proceed

accordingly."

"If I see anything to-night why I should not marry her to-morrow," said Claudio, "in the congregation where I should wed, there will I shame her."

"And as I helped you to woo her, I will join with you to disgrace her," said Don Pedro.

Now, the watchmen who kept the streets of Messina were a set of silly old men, whose only idea of duty was to potter about the streets, and keep as far as possible out of the way of anyone who was likely to give them any trouble. Chief of them was a constable called Dogberry, whose ignorance and stupidity were only equalled by his enormous self-conceit. On the night before the wedding, however, these brilliant watchmen actually did contrive to effect a capture which led to the happiest results.

Dogberry had finished his string of ridiculous instructions to the band, and had just taken his departure, when two wayfarers came along from opposite directions, and stopped to speak to each other. These were Borachio and Conrade, the two followers of the wicked Don John.

The street was quite dark, and apparently deserted, and as at that moment it began to drizzle with rain, the two men took shelter under a convenient pent-house. Suspicious of some treason, the watchmen concealed themselves near, and thus overheard the whole tale of villainy which Borachio confessed to Conrade.

"Know that I have to-night wooed Margaret, the lady Hero's

gentlewoman, by the name of Hero," he said. "She leans out of the window to me, she bids me a thousand times good-night. But I should first tell you how the Prince, Claudio, and my master, placed and instructed by my master Don John, saw afar off in the orchard this affectionate interview."

"And did they think Margaret was Hero?"

"Two of them did – the Prince and Claudio – but the devil, my master, knew she was Margaret. Deceived partly by the darkness of the night, but chiefly by my villainy, which confirmed any slander that Don John invented, away went Claudio enraged, swore he would meet her as was appointed next morning at the church, and there, before the whole congregation, shame her with what he had seen, and send her home again without a husband."

Borachio had scarcely finished speaking when the watchmen pounced on the two villains. Surprised by the suddenness of the onslaught, they were quickly overpowered, and, finding any attempt at resistance useless, they had to submit to being led ignominiously away.

"Done to Death by Slanderous Tongues"

Next morning a brilliant company were assembled in the great church at Messina to see the wedding of Count Claudio and the lady Hero. Beatrice, of course, was there with her cousin, and Leonato to give his daughter away. The young maiden, in her snowy robe and veil, stood ready, and facing her was the gallant young Count, in his bridal splendour of white and gold.

"You come hither, my lord, to marry this lady?" said the Friar.

"No," said Claudio.

The bystanders were astonished at this curt response, but Leonato corrected the Friar's words.

"To be married to her; Friar, *you* come to marry her."

"Lady, you come hither to be married to this Count?"

"I do," said Hero, in a low but steady voice.

"If either of you know any inward impediment why you should not be conjoined, I charge you on your souls to utter it," said the Friar.

"Know you any, Hero?" demanded Claudio sternly.

"None, my lord," came the slightly wondering but unfaltering answer.

"Know you any, Count?"

"I dare make his answer, none," interposed Leonato.

"Oh, what men dare do! what men may do! what men daily do, not knowing what they do!" cried Claudio, in a burst of bitter

scorn. Then, turning to Leonato, he said: "Will you with free soul give me this maid, your daughter?"

"As freely, son, as God gave her to me," said Leonato.

"And what have I to give you that shall equal in worth this rare and precious gift?" said Claudio.

"Nothing, unless you render her again," said Don Pedro.

"Sweet Prince, you teach me noble thankfulness. There, Leonato, take her back again."

And then Claudio, as he had sworn, in the presence of the whole congregation, brought forth his terrible accusations against Hero, and declared he would not marry her. Stung to fury by what he considered her wickedness and deceit – for the young girl's blushing modesty and grace appeared to him nothing but seeming – he related what he and the Prince had seen the night before, and how Hero had spoken out of her window with a ruffian. It was useless for Hero to protest her innocence; nothing could destroy the evidence of their own eyes.

Unable to endure this cruel and astounding calumny, Hero sank fainting to the ground. Don Pedro, Claudio, and Don John left the church; the amazed wedding guests dispersed; and Leonato, Beatrice, Benedick, and the Friar were left alone with the unhappy Hero.

"How doth the lady?" asked Benedick, approaching the spot where Beatrice was eagerly trying to recall her cousin to consciousness.

"Dead, I think," cried Beatrice in despair. "Help, uncle! Hero

– why, Hero! Uncle! Signor Benedick! Friar!"

"Death is the fairest cover for her shame that can be wished for," said the heart-broken father.

"How now, Cousin Hero!" said Beatrice, as the young girl slowly opened her dazed eyes.

"Have comfort, lady," said the Friar tenderly.

"Do you look up?" said Leonato.

"Yes; wherefore should she not?" said the Friar.

In his terrible grief, not questioning the truth of the story, Leonato declared that death was the happiest thing that could happen to Hero after such dishonour, and that if her spirit had strength enough to survive such shame, he could almost be tempted to kill her with his own hands.

"Sir, sir, be patient!" pleaded Benedick. "For my part, I am so attired in wonder I do not know what to say."

"Upon my soul, my cousin is belied!" exclaimed Beatrice.

Then the Friar stepped forward, and declared his absolute belief in Hero's innocence, and his words were so clear and convincing that even Leonato began to think his daughter must be wrongfully accused. The mystery was puzzling, for, as Benedick remarked, the Prince and Claudio were the soul of honour, and were only too terribly convinced themselves of the truth of what they had said. If they had been misled in any way, it must be the work of Don John, who delighted in planning deeds of villainy.

By the good Friar's advice, it was agreed that for the present Hero should stay secretly in retirement, so that the outside world

should imagine she was really dead. Slander would then be changed to remorse, and she would be lamented, excused, and pitied by everyone. For it generally falls out that we do not prize to its full worth what we have; but when it is lacked and lost, then we appreciate its value. So it would fare with Claudio. When he should hear that Hero had died at his words, the sweet remembrance of her lovely life would creep into his soul; then he would mourn and wish he had not so accused her.

"Signor Leonato, let the Friar advise you," said Benedick. "And though you know my loyalty and love to the Prince and Claudio, yet by mine honour I will deal as secretly and justly in this matter as your soul would with your body."

So it was agreed, and then the good Friar and Leonato took away Hero to put their plan into execution.

Left alone with Benedick, Beatrice's rage and indignation found full vent. She was justly furious at the indignity that had been put on her gentle cousin, and though for a moment Benedick won her to a lighter mood by confessing his love for her, yet she speedily returned to the subject of which her heart was full.

"Oh that I were a man!" she cried, her one desire being to revenge Hero, and punish the dastards who had wrought such an insult on her. If Benedick really loved her, she declared, he would take this office on himself and kill Claudio.

"Kill Claudio!"

Benedick hesitated. No, he could not do that. Claudio was his friend… But he loved Beatrice; her generous, whole-hearted

sympathy for her cousin could not but prevail with one of Benedick's chivalrous nature.

"Think you in your soul that Count Claudio has wronged Hero?" he asked solemnly.

"Yes, as surely as I have a thought or a soul," said Beatrice, with noble pride.

"Enough; I am engaged. I will challenge him. I will kiss your hand, and so I leave you. By this hand, Claudio shall render me a dear account. Go, comfort your cousin. I must say she is dead. And so, farewell."

Benedick, the scoffer, the jester, the light-hearted wit of the Prince's Court, showed in this moment that he was also a high-souled chivalrous gentleman, fitting mate for the brave and noble-spirited Beatrice.

In accordance with his promise, Benedick went to seek Claudio. He presently found him with Don Pedro. The two gentlemen had just had a painful interview with Leonato, who had indignantly reproached them for their behaviour. They felt anything but happy, although they persisted in thinking that they were quite justified in acting as they had done. However, at the sight of Benedick their spirits rallied, and they tried to assume their usual teasing vein of raillery. But Benedick was in no jesting humour. With cold self-possession he delivered his challenge to Claudio, and then he took a dignified leave of the Prince of Arragon.

"My lord, for your many courtesies I thank you," he said. "I

must discontinue your company. Your brother Don John is fled from Messina; you have among you killed a sweet and innocent lady. For my Lord Lackbeard there, he and I shall meet; and till then peace be with him."

"He is in earnest," said the Prince, as Benedick withdrew.

"In most profound earnest," said Claudio; "and, I'll warrant you, for the love of Beatrice."

"And has challenged you."

"Most sincerely."

"What a pretty thing man is when he goes in his doublet and hose, and leaves off his wit!" said Don Pedro disdainfully.

But the self-satisfaction of the Prince and Claudio were soon to receive a severe shock. The watchmen now approached, bringing with them their capture of the night before, the culprits Borachio and Conrade, and the whole miserable tale of treachery was duly unfolded. Leonato was sent for in haste.

"Are you the slave that with your slander slew my innocent child?" he asked of Borachio.

"Yes, even I alone."

"No, not so, villain; you belie yourself," said Leonato. "Here stand a pair of honourable men; a third is fled that had a hand in it. I thank you, Princes, for my daughter's death: it was bravely done, if you bethink you of it."

Claudio was overwhelmed with remorse; he dared not ask pardon of the deeply-wronged Leonato, but he besought him to chose his own revenge, and to impose on him any penance he

choose to invent. Don Pedro also joined him in expressing his deep penitence.

"I cannot bid you bid my daughter live," replied Leonato, "but I pray you both proclaim to all the people in Messina how innocent she died. Hang an epitaph upon her tomb, and sing it there to-night. To-morrow morning come to my house, and since you cannot be my son-in-law, be my nephew. My brother has a daughter almost the copy of my child that's dead. Marry her, as you would have married her cousin, and so dies my revenge."

Claudio willingly agreed to carry out this suggestion, and that night he went to the church with a solemn company, and read aloud the following scroll:

> "Done to death by slanderous tongues
> Was the Hero that here lies;
> Death, in guerdon of her wrongs,
> Gives her fame which never dies.
> So the life that died with shame
> Lives in death with glorious fame."

"Hang thou there upon the tomb, praising her when I am dumb," he added, placing the scroll on the family monument of Leonato.

The following morning a large company again assembled in Leonato's house, for another wedding was to take place. This time all the ladies were veiled, and it was not until the words were spoken in which Claudio took an unknown maiden to be

his wife that the bride threw back her veil and revealed the well-loved face of Hero.

Benedick had already announced to the Friar that he intended to marry the lady Beatrice, and Leonato had given his willing approval. Benedick therefore approached the group of still masked figures to find his own lady, and called Beatrice by name.

"What is your will?" she inquired, taking off her mask.

"Do not you love me?" asked Benedick.

"Why, no – no more than reason," said Beatrice provokingly.

"Why, then, your uncle and the Prince and Claudio have been deceived; they swore you did."

Beatrice laughed.

"Do not you love me?" she asked in her turn.

"Troth, no; no more than reason," said Benedick loftily.

"Why, then, my cousin, Margaret and Ursula are much deceived, for they swore you did."

"They swore you were almost ill for me," declared Benedick.

"They swore that you were wellnigh dead for me," retorted Beatrice.

"'Tis no such matter. Then you do not love me?"

"No, truly, but in friendly recompense," said Beatrice, with airy indifference.

"Come, cousin, I am sure you love the gentleman," said Leonato.

"And I'll be sworn that he loves her," said Claudio.

"Come, I will have thee," said Benedick. "But by this light I

take thee for pity."

"I would not deny you," said Beatrice, "but by this good day I yield upon great persuasion, and partly to save your life, for I was told you were in a consumption."

"Peace, I will stop your mouth!" said Benedick; and he silenced her merry chatter with a loving kiss.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Don Pedro, with shy malice. "How dost thou, *Benedick the married man*?"

But the lovers' happiness was proof against any raillery that could be lavished on them, and no lighter hearts led off the revelry that wedding-day than those of Beatrice and Benedick.

A Midsummer-Night's Dream

Helena and Hermia

Theseus, Duke of Athens, was to wed Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons, and the whole city was given up to merriment in honour of the occasion. Theseus had won his bride by the sword, but he was to wed her in another fashion – with pomp, with triumph, and with revelling. Four days had yet to elapse before the marriage, and during that time the citizens of Athens were to busy themselves with preparations for the great event.

In the midst of the general rejoicing, a gentleman of Athens, by name Egeus, came to invoke the authority of the Duke. Full of vexation, he came to complain against his child, his daughter Hermia. Egeus wished her to marry a certain gentleman called Demetrius; but meanwhile Hermia had already fallen in love with another gentleman called Lysander, and she declared she would marry no one but Lysander.

Now, the law of Athens at that time gave full power to a father to dispose of his daughter as he chose; that is to say, if she declined to marry the man he selected, the father had power to put her to death or to shut her up in a convent.

The Duke of Athens gave Hermia four days to make her choice. At the end of that time she must either consent to marry

Demetrius, in accordance with her father's wishes, or else she must retire to a convent for the rest of her days.

Hermia answered without hesitation: she would rather be shut up in a convent all her life than marry a man she did not love.

Lysander himself pleaded that he was in every way as suitable a match as Demetrius – quite as well born and equally wealthy. Beyond all this, he was beloved of Hermia. Why, then, should he not try to win her? Besides, he added, Demetrius had already paid court to another lady – Helena – and had won her heart; and this sweet lady was still devoted to this fickle and unworthy man.

"I must confess I have heard of this, and I intended to speak to Demetrius on the subject," said the Duke. "But being so overfull of my own affairs, the matter slipped out of my mind. But come, Demetrius, and come, Egeus, I wish to speak to you both in private. As for you, fair Hermia, see that you prepare to obey your father's will, or else the law of Athens which I have no power to alter, yields you up to death or to a vow of single life."

The Duke went off with Egeus and Demetrius, and Hermia and Lysander were left alone. They were very sorry for themselves, and began to lament the misfortunes and the difficulties that always seem to beset the path of true love.

Hermia was inclined to submit without further struggle, but Lysander was not going to give in so easily, and he hurriedly unfolded a plan to save Hermia from the fate that lay before her.

"I have a widow aunt, very wealthy, who has no child," he said. "Her house is seven leagues distant from Athens, and she treats

me as her own son. There, gentle Hermia, I can marry you, and in that place the sharp law of Athens cannot touch us. If you love me, then, steal from your father's house to-morrow night, and I will wait for you a league outside the town, in that wood where I met you once with Helena, gathering flowers before the dawn on the first of May."

"My good Lysander!" cried Hermia, hiding her real earnestness under half-jesting words, "I swear to you by Cupid's strongest bow – by his best arrow with the golden head – and by all the vows that ever men broke, that I will truly meet you to-morrow in the place you have appointed."

"Keep promise, love. Look! here comes Helena."

From their earliest days Helena and Hermia had been the dearest of friends and the closest of companions, never apart, either at work or play, growing up together side by side, like a double cherry, or two lovely berries moulded on one stem.

But, alas! love – or, rather, jealousy – had come to thrust them apart. Demetrius, who had at first paid court to Helena, afterwards transferred his affection to Hermia, and persuaded her father Egeus to favour his suit. Hermia cared nothing at all for Demetrius, and loved no one but Lysander. But Helena could not forgive her friend for having taken her fickle lover from her, and now she bitterly lamented that her own charms had been powerless to retain him.

"I frowned upon Demetrius, but he loves me still," said Hermia, for she did not wish her friend to think she had acted

unfairly. “The more I hate, the more he follows me.”

“The more I love, the more he hates me,” said Helena sadly.

“His folly, Helena, is no fault of mine,” said Hermia.

“None. Your only fault is your beauty. Would that fault were mine,” sighed Helena.

“Take comfort; he shall see my face no more,” said Hermia. “Lysander and I are going to fly this place. We are to meet to-morrow in that wood where you and I have so often wandered, and thence we shall turn our eyes from Athens to seek new friends and strange companions. Farewell, sweet playfellow; pray for us, and good luck grant you your Demetrius.”

Helena’s passion for Demetrius was so strong that it overpowered all other consideration, and on this occasion it made her do a very mean and disloyal action. Anxious to win back a little affection from her faithless lover, no matter at what cost, she determined to betray Hermia’s secret, and to go and tell Demetrius of her flight. Then Demetrius would pursue her to-morrow night to the wood, and if he rewarded Helena with even a little gratitude for the information, she felt her attempt would not have been in vain.

Playing the Lion

Unknown to the lovers, that same wood was chosen as a meeting-place for the following night by a very different set of people. Several of the petty artisans of Athens, anxious to celebrate the wedding in proper style, had decided to perform a little play – or "interlude," as it was called – in the presence of the Duke and Duchess. Quince, the carpenter, was supposed to direct the proceedings of this little band of amateur actors, but the ruling spirit of the company was in reality Bottom, the weaver. Bursting with self-conceit, never able to keep silent a moment, Bottom was ready to instruct everyone else in his duties, and if it had only been possible for him to have played every character in the piece, in addition to his own, he would have been quite content. As each part was mentioned, and Quince began to apportion them out, Bottom's voice was heard again and again, declaring how well *he* could perform each one. The play was to be "The Most Lamentable Comedy and Most Cruel Death of Pyramus and Thisby," and Bottom was selected for Pyramus, the hero.

"What is Pyramus – a lover or a tyrant?" he inquired.

"A lover that kills himself most gallantly for love," answered Quince.

"That will ask some tears in the true performing of it," said Bottom, swelling with self-importance. "If *I* do it, let the

audience look to their eyes."

The next character was Thisby, the heroine, and this was given to Flute, the bellows-mender, a thin, lanky youth with a squeaky voice.

"Nay, faith, let me not play a woman; I have a beard coming," he said piteously.

"That's all one; you shall play it in a mask, and you may speak as small as you will," said Quince.

"If I hide my face, let *me* play Thisby, too," cried Bottom eagerly. "I'll speak in a monstrous little voice. 'Thisne, Thisne!' 'Ah, Pyramus, my lover dear! Thy Thisby dear, and lady dear!'"

"No, no! you must play Pyramus, and, Flute, you Thisby," said Quince.

"Well, proceed," said Bottom.

Quince went on with his list, and presently he called out the name of Snug, the joiner.

"You will play the lion's part, Snug," he said; "and now, I hope, there is the play fitted."

"Have you the lion's part written? Pray you, if it be, give it me, for I am slow of study," said Snug modestly, for he was a very meek and mild little man.

"You may do it extempore, for it is nothing but roaring," said Quince.

"Let *me* play the lion, too," burst in Bottom. "I will roar that it will do any man's heart good to hear me. I will roar that I will make the Duke say: 'Let him roar again.'"

"If you should do it too terribly, you would frighten the Duchess and the ladies out of their wits, so that they would shriek, and that were enough to hang us all," said Quince.

"That would hang us, every mother's son," agreed the rest of the little band, quaking with terror.

"I grant you, friends, that if you should frighten the ladies out of their wits, they would have no more discretion but to hang us," said Bottom. "But I will aggravate my voice so that I will roar as gently as any sucking dove; I will roar as if it were any nightingale."

"You can play no part but Pyramus," said Quince firmly. So Bottom had reluctantly to give in, and to devote his energies to deciding what coloured beard it would be best to play the important part of Pyramus in. It was really quite a difficult matter, there were so many to choose from, – straw-colour, orange tawny, purple-in-grain, or French-crown, which was perfect yellow. But Quince said any colour would do, or he might play it without a beard.

"Masters, here are your parts," he concluded, "and I am to entreat you, request you, and desire you, to know them by to-morrow night, and meet me in the palace wood, a mile outside the town, by moonlight. There we will rehearse, for if we meet in the city we shall be dogged with company, and our devices known. I pray you, do not fail me."

The Magic Flower

Now, the wood which Hermia and Lysander had appointed as their trysting-place, and where Bottom and his fellow-actors were also to meet to rehearse their play, was the favourite haunt of fairies, and on this Midsummer Night Oberon, King of the Fairies, was to hold his revels there. Sad to say, for some time past there had been great dissension between Oberon and his Queen, Titania, and because of their quarrels nothing went well in the surrounding country. The cause of their disagreement was a lovely Indian boy, the sweetest little changeling imaginable. Queen Titania had him as her attendant, and jealous Oberon wanted the boy for his own page. Titania refused to give him up; he was the child of a dear friend, now dead, and for her sake she had reared up the boy, and for her sake she would not part with him.

Oberon and Titania never met now, in grove or green, by the clear fountain, or in the spangled starlight, without quarrelling so fiercely that their elves crept for fear into acorn-cups, and hid themselves there. They generally tried to keep out of each other's way, but on this night it happened that as King Oberon, with his little sprite Puck and his train, approached from one direction, Queen Titania and her attendant fairies came near from the other. Titania reproached Oberon with all the ill-luck that was happening because of their dissension, and Oberon replied that

it only lay with her to amend it.

"Why should Titania cross her Oberon?" he asked. "I do but beg a little changeling boy to be my henchman."

"Set your heart at rest," replied Titania; "the whole of Fairyland will not buy the child of me."

"How long do you intend to stay in this wood?" asked Oberon.

"Perhaps till after Theseus's wedding-day," said Titania. "If you will join patiently in our dance, and see our moonlight revels, go with us. If not, shun me, and I will take care to avoid your haunts."

"Give me that boy, and I will go with you," said Oberon.

"Not for your fairy kingdom!" was the decided answer. "Fairies, away! We shall quarrel in earnest if I stay any longer."

As he could not win the boy by entreaty, Oberon resolved to try another plan to gain his desire. Calling his little sprite Puck to him, he bade him go and fetch a certain magic flower, which maidens call "love-in-idleness." The juice of this flower had a wonderful charm. When laid on the eyelids of a sleeping man or woman it had the power of making that person doat madly on the next living creature that was seen. Oberon determined to squeeze some of the juice of this flower on Titania's eyes while she slept, so that when she woke up she should immediately fall in love with the first creature she saw, whether it were lion, bear, wolf, or bull, meddling monkey or busy ape. He determined also that he would not take off the charm (which he could do with another herb) until she had rendered up the little Indian boy as

page to him.

"Fetch me this herb," he said to Puck, "and be thou here again before the leviathan can swim a league."

"I'll put a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes," cried the prompt little messenger, and away he flew.

While King Oberon was awaiting Puck's return, he saw the unhappy lady Helena approaching with her faithless lover Demetrius. Oberon was invisible, and thus he overheard what they said. Demetrius had come to the wood in search of Hermia and Lysander, for Helena had told him of their proposed flight. Oberon heard Helena confess how deeply she loved Demetrius, and he heard Demetrius spurn her roughly, and declare he loved no one but Hermia.

Oberon was sorry for Helena, and he determined to punish Demetrius. He resolved to put some of the magic juice on the eyes of Demetrius, so that when he woke and saw Helena he should fall in love with her again, and then it would be Helena's turn to repulse Demetrius and refuse to listen to him.

Demetrius and Helena had scarcely gone on their way when Puck returned.

"Hast thou the flower there? Welcome, wanderer," said Oberon.

"Ay, there it is," said Puck.

"I pray thee, give it me," said Oberon, and his voice glided into a sweet chant:

"I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,
Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,
Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,
With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine:
There sleeps Titania some time of the night,
Lulled in these flowers with dances and delight;
And there the snake throws her enamelled skin,
Weed wide enough to wrap a fairy in:
And with the juice of this I'll streak her eyes,
And make her full of hateful fantasies."

Oberon found Titania, as he had expected, and, stealing up quietly while she slept, he squeezed some of the magic juice on her eyelids, repeating this charm as he did so:

"What thou seest when thou dost wake,
Do it for thy true-love take,
Love and languish for his sake;
Be it ounce, or cat, or bear,
Pard, or boar with bristled hair,
When thou wakest, it is thy dear.
Wake when some vile thing is near."

And, laughing to himself at the strange experience which was likely to befall Titania, off went Oberon.

The next wanderers to pass through that part of the wood were Hermia and Lysander in their flight from Athens. Being weary, they lay down to rest, and speedily fell asleep.

King Oberon had told Puck to go in search of a sweet Athenian lady who was in love with a disdainful youth. When Puck found them, he was to drop some of the juice on the eyes of the man, but to take care to do this when the next thing he espied would be the lady. Puck would know the man by his Athenian garments, added Oberon. Of course, by this, Oberon meant Demetrius; but Puck came across Lysander and Hermia instead, and, thinking they must be the couple referred to, he squeezed the magic juice on the eyelids of Lysander.

This mistake of little Puck's led to a great deal of fresh mischief.

Soon afterwards Demetrius came running along, followed by Helena. In the darkness of the night Demetrius did not notice the very people he was in search of – Lysander and Hermia. Demetrius was very angry that Helena would persist in following him, and, bidding her roughly stay where she was, he hurried off alone. Helena, indeed, was too weary to pursue him further. She was just bewailing his unkind treatment, when she was startled to see Lysander lying on the ground. She did not know whether he were dead or asleep, and hastily roused him.

Now, what happened? The fairy charm began to take effect. Lysander had gone to sleep in love with Hermia, but, opening his eyes, his first glance fell on Helena, and, in accordance with the fairy charm, his affections were immediately transferred to Helena. He began speaking at once to Helena, and told her that he no longer cared for Hermia.

Helena could not understand what all this meant. She thought Lysander was mocking her, and left him indignantly. But Lysander followed, for he was now determined to have no one but Helena.

Poor Hermia awoke in terror from a horrible dream. She thought a serpent was crawling over her, eating her heart, and that Lysander sat by smiling. She shrieked to Lysander to come and help her. But there was no answer; Lysander had gone. Again she called:

"Lysander, lord! What, out of hearing? Gone? No sound, no word! Alack, where are you? Speak, if you can hear! Speak! I almost swoon with dread."

But when again no answer came to her piteous appeal, Hermia knew in truth that Lysander was gone, and she set off at once to try to find him.

Puck in Mischief

Queen Titania, meanwhile, was quietly sleeping, and she did not even waken when Quince and Bottom, with their ambitious little troupe of actors, came and began to rehearse their play close by. Bottom, as usual, took the lead, and made himself very officious in directing all the rest.

But if Titania did not see them, someone else did.

Puck, the little imp, or Robin Goodfellow, as he was also called, was always alert for any mischief. Sometimes he played pranks to frighten the village maidens; sometimes he frolicked in the churn, and prevented the butter coming, so that the busy housewife toiled in vain; at other times, as Hobgoblin or Will-o'-the-Wisp, he led astray unwary travellers by night; sometimes he took the guise of a roasted apple in a bowl of hot spiced ale, and bobbed against the lips of some old gossip as she was drinking; or perhaps just when some sedate elderly spinster was sitting down to tell a sad story, Puck would skip away with her three-legged stool, and down she would go on the ground – bang! – while all the other old cronies shook with laughter.

Puck was much diverted with the strange crew of petty artisans from Athens, who had come into the wood to rehearse their play, and he presently played one of his pranks on the conceited Bottom. The latter, having spoken some of his lines, stood aside for a few minutes, while the others went on with their

parts, and, unseen by anyone, Puck seized this opportunity to pop an ass's head on Bottom.

Quite unconscious of the strange change that had taken place in his appearance, Bottom calmly advanced when his turn came again, but at the sight of the ass's head all his companions shrieked and fled in terror, calling out that they were bewitched. Bottom could not imagine why they behaved in this queer fashion, and thought it was some trick to frighten him.

"I will not stir from this place, do what they can," he said stolidly. "I will walk up and down here, and I will sing, so that they shall hear I am not afraid."

So he began to pace up and down, singing in a very harsh, discordant manner, more like an ass's bray than a man's voice:

> "The ousel-cock so black of hue,
> With orange-tawny bill,
> The throstle with his note so true,
> The wren with little quill – "

"What angel wakes me from my flowery bed?" cried Titania, starting up from slumber.

The charm was beginning to work, and she gazed with rapture on the curious monster.

Bottom sang on:

> "The finch, the sparrow, and the lark,
> The plain-song cuckoo gray,

Whose note full many a man doth mark,
And dares not answer nay."

"I pray thee, gentle mortal, sing again," entreated Titania. "My ear is charmed as much with your music as my eye is enthralled with your appearance. Thou art as wise as thou art beautiful."

"Not so, neither," said Bottom bluntly; "but if I had wit to get out of this wood I have enough to serve my own turn."

"Do not desire to go out of this wood," pleaded Titania. "Thou shalt remain here, whether thou wish it or not. I am a spirit of no common kind, and I love thee; therefore go with me. I'll give thee fairies to attend on thee, and they shall fetch thee jewels, and sing while thou liest sleeping on a bank of flowers. Peaseblossom! Cobweb! Moth! and Mustard-seed!"

Four little elves came flying at the summons, and the infatuated Queen of the Fairies gave this new object of her affections into their special charge. They led him away to the bower of the Queen, and there they decked him with flowers, while Titania lavished caresses on the clownish monster.

Bottom was not in the least impressed with the dainty loveliness of the Queen of the Fairies. He accepted all her attentions with stolid indifference, and ordered the little elves about with loutish stupidity. But the magic charm was so strong that Titania was quite bewitched with him.

"Say, sweet love, what thou desirest to eat," she said coaxingly.

"Truly, a peck of provender," was the gruff reply. "I could

munch you your good dry oats. But, I pray you, let none of your people stir. I feel I am getting sleepy."

"Sleep thou, and I will stay here beside thee," said the Queen. "Fairies, begone! Oh, how I love thee! how I doat on thee!"

Hermia had gone in search of Lysander, but instead of finding him she came across Demetrius. The latter immediately began, as usual, to declare his affection for her, and Hermia, as before, repulsed him angrily. Lysander was the only person in the world for whom she would ever care, though she could not imagine why he had deserted her so cruelly while she lay asleep.

"This is the Athenian whose eyes I told you to anoint," said King Oberon to Puck, as they watched from the thicket all that was happening.

"This is the woman, but this is not the man," said Puck.

"What have you done?" exclaimed the King. "You have made a great mistake. You have placed the love-juice on some true-love's eyes, and now, because of your error, some true love has turned false, instead of some false love turning true! Go swifter than the wind through the wood, and look you find Helena of Athens. She is pale and ill with sighing for love. See that you bring her here by some device. I will charm the eyes of Demetrius before she appears."

Puck flew off, eager to repair the mischief he had done, and King Oberon squeezed some of the magic juice on the eyes of Demetrius.

A few minutes later Helena arrived, but Lysander was with

her. Now there were fresh troubles and perplexities. Demetrius woke up, and, as the first object on which his eyes fell was Helena, he immediately fell in love with her again, and forgot Hermia.

But Helena could not understand what all this meant. She thought both men were mocking and insulting her. She knew that only the day before Lysander had wanted to marry Hermia, and that Demetrius also wanted to marry Hermia, although he had originally paid court to herself. Why, then, did they both now pretend that it was herself that they wanted? She did not know it was all the fault of that mischievous little flower.

Hermia was as much distressed as Helena. It was perplexing enough when Demetrius suddenly turned round and would have nothing more to say to her; but what cut Hermia to the heart was that her own faithful Lysander should not only forsake her for Helena, but shower insults on her whenever she came near.

A pretty tangle Puck had caused by his mistake!

Demetrius and Lysander became so enraged with jealousy that they challenged each other to fight, but here Puck interfered again to good effect. He contrived so to baffle and mislead them that, instead of meeting, they did nothing but chase each other about in the darkness. At last, quite wearied out, Lysander sank down to rest, while the faithful Hermia took up her place near him. Then Puck applied the love-juice again to Lysander's eyes, and this time when he woke his glance fell first on Hermia, so at last all went well. His affection was restored to her, and as

Demetrius was already in love again with Helena, both sets of lovers could be happy.

In the meanwhile, King Oberon began to pity his beautiful Queen, for he could not bear to see her doating on such a hideous monster. Titania, in the height of her new folly, had willingly yielded up the little changeling, and now that Oberon had got possession of the boy he dissolved the spell without delay.

> "Be as thou wast wont to be;
> See as thou wast wont to see!"

he chanted. "Now, my Titania, wake, my sweet Queen!"

"My Oberon! What visions I have had!" said the Queen. "I thought I was in love with an ass."

"There lies your love," said the King, pointing to where Bottom still lay snoring.

"How came these things to pass? Oh, how I loathe his visage now!" exclaimed Titania, shrinking back in disgust.

Oberon next bade Puck remove the ass's head from Bottom, so that when he awoke he should think that all that had happened was nothing but a dream, and then, to the sound of sweet music, the King and the Queen of the Fairies took flight, once more good friends.

Early the next morning, Theseus, Duke of Athens, with his promised bride, Hippolyta, went hunting in the wood, and there they came across the two pairs of lovers. Egeus, the father of

Hermia, was with the Duke, but there was no need now to enforce the cruel law. Demetrius resigned all claim on Hermia, and declared that the only person he wished to marry was his first love, Helena. To these happy lovers it seemed now that everything that had passed was a dream.

"Are you sure that we are awake?" said Demetrius. "It seems to me that yet we sleep, we dream."

But their happiness was no dream, and did not melt away with morning light. The wedding of Lysander and Hermia and of Demetrius and Helena took place at the same time as that of Duke Theseus and Hippolyta. Great were the festivities at Athens, and one of the most notable features of the evening's entertainment was undoubtedly the play acted by Bottom and his valiant companions.

"A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus and his love Thisbe: very tragical mirth," ran the title in the programme, and very mirthful tragedy most of the spectators found it.

The Merchant of Venice

A Merry Bond

Shunned, hated, despised, insulted, the Jews in the Middle Ages led a cruel and embittered existence among their Christian brethren. But beaten down and oppressed as they were in most of the countries of Europe, they still prospered as far as money matters were concerned, and, in spite of the demands continually levied on them, they contrived to amass large hoards of wealth. When the great nobles or merchant princes of those days got into difficulties, it was to the Jews they turned for help, and the enormous sums charged as interest for the loan enabled the Jews to fill their coffers rapidly.

Shylock was one of the richest Jews in Venice, although he lived in a wretched, penurious style, with only a clownish lad to act as servant. Shylock had one child, a pretty, flighty daughter called Jessica, whose nature was very different from her father's. Jessica was gay, extravagant, without much heart, and with no respect or affection for her own race and kindred. She longed to free herself from the miserly restraint of her father's house, and to join in the amusements from which his severity debarred her. Not only this, but she had become acquainted with a handsome young Venetian called Lorenzo. She had secretly promised to

become his wife, and intended on the first opportunity to elope with Lorenzo and to give up the Jewish religion.

Shylock hated all Christians, which was scarcely to be wondered at, considering the way in which he had been treated, but the special object of his aversion was a certain wealthy merchant named Antonio. Shylock hated Antonio partly because, whenever they happened to meet, the merchant treated him with contemptuous scorn, but chiefly because Antonio lent out money gratis, and so brought down the rate of usury in Venice. Antonio had also, at different times, released poor people whom Shylock had imprisoned for debt, and often on the Rialto (which was the public place in Venice, where the merchants congregated) Antonio had railed against the grasping avarice of the Jewish extortioner.

Thus Antonio had wounded Shylock in the two most intense passions of his life – his pride of race (for in his own way Shylock was a strict follower of his religion) and his love of money. Shylock brooded over his wrongs, and if ever the opportunity came when he could gratify his ancient grudge, he resolved to be bitterly revenged.

He had long to wait, but at last his chance came.

Antonio had a friend called Bassanio, a gallant, high-spirited gentleman, but one whose open-handed, generous disposition made him spend more freely than his means allowed. Bassanio was in love with a beautiful lady called Portia, and had good reason for believing that he was looked on with an eye of favour.

He would gladly have come forward in earnest as a suitor for her hand, but his somewhat extravagant mode of living had for the moment exhausted his means, and it was impossible for him to appear at Belmont, Portia's house, in the style befitting a suitor.

Antonio, who was devoted to Bassanio, had often helped him before, and on this occasion Bassanio turned to him again. Antonio was more than ready to help, and placed all he possessed at Bassanio's disposal. But, unfortunately, at that moment he could not lay his hand on a large sum of ready money, for all his fortune was on the high seas. However, he bade Bassanio go forth, and see what his credit could do in Venice; and he promised to become surety to the uttermost of his means, in order that Bassanio might be fittingly equipped on his quest to Belmont.

In his search for money Bassanio came across Shylock, one of the chief usurers in Venice, and to him he applied for a loan. Shylock did not at first appear very willing to grant his request.

"Three thousand ducats; – well?" he said in a pondering, deliberate fashion.

"Ay, sir, for three months," said Bassanio.

"For three months; – well?"

"For the which, as I told you, Antonio shall be bound."

"Antonio shall become bound; – well?" echoed Shylock, still in the same slow voice.

"Can you help me? Will you oblige me? Shall I know your answer?" said Bassanio rather impatiently.

"Three thousand ducats – for three months – and Antonio bound," murmured the Jew reflectively.

"Your answer to that?" demanded Bassanio.

"Antonio is a good man," mused Shylock.

"Have you heard any imputation to the contrary?"

"Oh, no, no, no, no! My meaning in saying he is a good man is to have you understand me that he is sufficient. Yet his means are in supposition. He hath an argosy bound to Tripolis, another to the Indies. I understand, moreover, on the Rialto, he hath a third at Mexico, a fourth for England, and other ventures he hath, squandered abroad. But ships are but boards, sailors but men; there be land-rats and water-rats, land-thieves and water-thieves – I mean, pirates; and then there is the peril of waters, winds, and rocks. The man is, notwithstanding, sufficient. I think I may take his bond."

"Be assured you may," said Bassanio.

"I *will* be assured I may," said Shylock, with a sudden snarl, "and that I will be assured, I will bethink me. May I speak with Antonio?"

"Here he comes," said Bassanio; and at that moment Antonio joined them.

The merchant repeated the request that Bassanio had already made, and pressed Shylock for his answer. Could he oblige them with the loan? Then for a moment of ungovernable fury Shylock's long-hoarded venom broke forth. He reminded Antonio of the pitiless contempt with which he had always treated him, of the

way in which he had publicly heaped insults and abuse on him.

"It now appears you need my help," continued Shylock bitterly. "You come to me and you say, 'Shylock, we would have money' —*you* say so, that spurned me as you would a stranger cur over your threshold! Money is your suit! What should I say to you? Should I not say, 'Hath a dog money? Is it possible a cur can lend three thousand ducats?' Or shall I bend low, like a slave, and, with bated breath and whispering humbleness, say this, 'Fair sir, you spat on me on Wednesday last; you spurned me such a day; another time you called me dog; and for these *courtesies* I'll lend you thus much money'?"

"I am as like to call you so again, to spit on you again, to spurn you, too," burst out Antonio. "If you will lend me this money, do not lend it as if to a friend, but rather as if to your enemy, from whom, if he fails to pay, you can with better face exact the penalty."

Then Shylock suddenly turned round, and became very fawning, and pretended that his only wish was to be friends with Antonio and have his love. He would supply his present needs, he said, and not take one farthing of interest. The only condition he imposed was that Antonio should go with him to a notary, and there, in merry sport, sign a bond that if the money were not repaid by a certain day the forfeit should be a pound of flesh, cut off and taken from what part of the merchant's body it pleased Shylock.

"Content, in faith; I'll seal to such a bond, and say there is

much kindness in the Jew," said Antonio.

"You shall not seal to such a bond for me," cried Bassanio, aghast at the idea of such an agreement.

"Why, do not fear, man," said Antonio; "I will not forfeit it. Within the next two months – that's a month before the forfeit becomes due – I expect the return of thrice three times this bond."

And Shylock chimed in, pointing out that even if the bond *did* become forfeit, what should he gain by exacting the penalty? A pound of man's flesh would be of no use to him – not nearly so profitable as the flesh of mutton, beef, or goat.

"Yes, Shylock, I will seal this bond," declared Antonio; and it was useless for Bassanio to argue further, although his mind misgave him at such a sinister agreement.

The Three Caskets

Portia, the lady whom Bassanio hoped to win for his wife, had inherited great wealth, but there was one strange clause in her father's will. She was not free to choose her own husband. Her father had ordained that there should be three caskets – one of gold, one of silver, one of lead – and Portia's portrait was to be placed in one of these caskets. Every suitor had to make his choice, and whoever was fortunate enough to select the one containing the portrait was to be rewarded with the lady's hand.

The report of Portia's wealth and wondrous beauty spread abroad, and many adventurers came in search of her. Portia liked none of them, and felt much aggrieved to be so curbed by her dead father's will. Her waiting-maid Nerissa tried to console her by reminding her how wise and good her father had always been. Holy men, she said, had often at their deaths good inspirations, and it would very likely come to pass that the casket would never be rightly chosen except by someone who rightly loved.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.