

The Two Gentlemen of Verona

by William Shakespeare

Presented by Paul W. Collins

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Chapter One First Loves

This sunny morning in Verona is beautiful, even by the charming standards of Italy during its arts' rebirth and burgeoning. Under a bright blue sky, the breeze is crisply cool and clear, as Valentine, a nobleman just turned eighteen, prepares to embark on a new life of freedom, far from his father and the wide, limestone manse glowing in golden sunlight behind him, his ancestral estate.

"Cease to persuade, my loving Proteus," he tells his childhood friend, who is two years younger. He teases: "*Home-keeping youth have ever homely wits.*"

"Were't not that affection chains *thy* tender days to the sweet glances of thine honoured *love*," Lady Julia, "I would entreat thy company, to see the wonders of the world abroad, rather than to live dully, sluggardized at home, wearing out thy youth with shapeless idleness.

"But since thou *lovest*,"—Valentine says it with patronizing contempt, "love still, and thrive therein, even as *I* would—when I to love *begin!*" He has a quite-different priority regarding the female sex.

"Wilt thou *be gone!*" laughs Proteus, gently pushing him. But the timid, bookish boy dreads losing the encouragement of his bolder friend, who has seemed much more knowing ever since his voice first deepened. "Sweet Valentine, *adieu!* Think on thy Proteus, when, haply, thou seest some rare, note-worthy object in thy travel! Wish me partaker in *thy* happiness when thou dost meet good hap!

"And in thy *danger*, if ever danger do environ thee, commend thy grievance to my holy *prayers*, for I will be thy beadsman, Valentine!"

His friend offers an arch smile. "And on a love-book pray for my *success?*"

Proteus averts his eyes. "Upon some Book I love I'll pray for thee...."

Valentine laughs. "On some *shallow* story of deep *love*—how young Leander crossed the Hellespont!"—a myth, and one in which the archetypal lover drowns.

"That's a deep story, of a *deeper* love," counters Proteus, "for he was more than '*over shoes*' in love!"

The older lad grins. "'Tis true for *you!*—over *boots* in love! But as yet you've never *swum the Hellespont!*"—a gibe; both are virgins, but Valentine, a very unwilling one, intends to remedy that ailment soon.

Proteus laughs. "Over the boots?—nay, give me not *the boots!*"—a foot-crushing instrument of torture.

"No, I will not; for it boots *thee* not!"—would not help.

"*Why?*"

Valentine elaborates: "'Love' is where *scorn* is bought with *groans*, coy *looks* with heart-sore *sighs*; one fading *moment's* mirth with *twenty* watchful, weary, tedious *nights!*"

"If by hap it be *won*, perhaps a *hapless* gain!—if *lost*, why then a *grievous labour* lost! How ever: it is but a *folly* bought with *wit*, or else wit by folly *vanquished!*"

"So, by *your* criteria, you call me *fool!*" protests Proteus.

Valentine lays a hand on his shoulder. "By *your* criteria, so I fear you'll *prove!*"

"'Tis *Love* you cavil at!—I am not *Love!*"—Cupid.

Valentine laughs. "Love is your *master*, for he masters you! And methinks one who is *yokèd* with a fool should not be chronicled as *wise!*"

Proteus defends his decision to stay here with Julia: "Yet *writers* say: 'As in the *sweetest* bud the eating canker dwells, so an *eating* love"—consuming passion—"inhabits the *finest wits of all!*"

"*And*, writers say: as the most forward bud"—the earliest—"is eaten by the canker ere it *bloom*, even so the young and tender wit is turned by love to *folly!*—withering in the *bud*, losing

its verdure even in the *prime*, and all the fair effects of *future* hopes!" Thus warns Valentine, the marriage-wary youth, the lover of options and opportunities.

He shrugs. "But wherefore waste I time to counsel *thee*, who art a *votary* to *foolish* desire? Once more *adieu!*" He turns toward the big wagon waiting for him in the lane. "My father at the highway expects my coming, there to see me 'shipped'"—bundled off.

"And thither will I bring thee, Valentine!"

"Sweet Proteus, no; let us take our leave now." He points westward. "To *Milan!*" After the journey of thirty leagues, he is to reside as a courtier in the ducal palace of this wealthy and venerable domain. "Let me hear from thee, by letters, of thy *success* in love!—and what news else betideth here in the absence of thy friend. And likewise I will visit thee with mine."

Proteus smiles. "All happiness bechance to thee in Milan!"

Valentine clasps his hand warmly. "As much to you at home! And so, farewell!" He climbs onto the baggage-laden cart, much to the relief of its driver. A sharp whip-crack immediately begins their ride down a rutted path to the long, east-west route, where a carriage is waiting.

Proteus watches as the dusty black horse's muscles strain. Soon the wagon, shrinking from view, rounds a turn. The lad thinks of his friend. *He after honour hunts, I after love! He leaves his friends, to dignify him more; I leave myself, my friends, and all—for love!*

Thou, Julia!—thou hast metamorphosed me!—made me neglect my studies, lose my time, war with good counsel—set the world at nought!—made wit weak with musing, heart sick with thought!

A young servant comes rushing toward him, nearly out of breath, and clutching several travel bags. "Sir Proteus, ' save you! Saw you my master?" gasps Speed, also sixteen, Sir Valentine's lively page.

Proteus nods toward the road. "He parted hence but now, bound for Milan."

The boy, his tan face showing frustration, throws down the bags. "*Twenty-one*, then!"—no further card to draw. "He's *shipped* already!—and I have played the *sheep* in losing him!"

"Indeed, a sheep doth very often stray, the shepherd being a while away."

Speed hardly sees Valentine as pastoral. "You conclude that my master is a *shepherd*, then, and I a *sheep*?"

"I do."

"Why then my *horns* are *his* horns, whether I wake or sleep!" says the page mischievously; he, too, foresees possibilities in the setting of capital and court.

"A *wooly* answer"—fuzzily illogical, "fitting *well* a sheep!" laughs Proteus.

Speed frowns. "That proves me yet a sheep?"

"True! And thy master a shepherd."

"*Nay*, that I can *deny* by a circumstance!"—a logical proposition.

Proteus scoffs. "It shall go hard but I'll *prove* it by another!"

"The *shepherd* seeks the *sheep*, and not the sheep the shepherd," argues Speed, "but *I* seek my master, and my master seeks not *me*; therefore I am no sheep!"

"The sheep for *fodder* follows the shepherd," says Proteus. "The shepherd for *food* follows not the sheep. Thou for *wages* followest thy master; thy master for wages follows not *thee*—therefore thou *art* a sheep!"

Speed denies the syllogism: "Such *another* proof will make me cry *Bah!*"—his sounds like a sheep's bleating *baa*.

Says Proteus, turning to his own concerns, "But dost thou hear: gavest thou my letter to Julia?"

"Aye, sir! I, a *lost* mutton, gave your letter to her, a *laced* mutton!" The term is for a woman of ill repute. Speed grins, enjoying the slur all the more because it's wholly unwarranted. "And she, the laced mutton, gave me nothing for my labour!"—no tip.

In company, Proteus would object to such gross impertinence, but now he only laughs. "Here is too small a *pasture* for such store of muttons!"

Speed plays on a butcher's term: "If the ground be overchargèd, you were best *stick her!*"
"Nay, in that you are *astray*," says Proteus. "'Twere best 'pound you!'"—a jest on *impound*.
"Nay, sir, *less* than a pound shall serve me for carrying your letter!" He holds out a hand.
"You mistake! I mean the pound as *pinfold*"—a pen for animals.
"From a *pound* to a *pin!*" cries Speed indignantly. "Fold it over and over,"—as in *think* it over, "'tis *three-fold* too little for carrying a letter to your lover!"

"But what *said* she?"

Speed only nods.

Proteus raises his eyebrows, questioning.

"Aye."

"Nod... 'Aye'—why, that's 'noddy!'" The term, echoing *naughty*, means *silly*.

"You mistook, sir; I say *she* did nod; you asked me if she did nod, and I said, 'Aye.'"

"And *that* set together *is* noddy!"

The boy shrugs. "Now that you have taken pains to set it together, *take* it for your pains!"

"No, no," says Proteus, "*you* shall have it, for bearing the letter!"—as a gratuity.

"Well, I perceive I must be content to bear with you."

Proteus still wants to know what Julia said. "Why, how do *you* bear with *me*?"

"Marry, sir, bearing the letter very *poorly*, having nothing but the word 'noddy' for my pains!"

Proteus laughs. "Beshrew me but you have a quick wit!"

"And yet it cannot overtake your *slow purse*."

"Come, come, open the *matter!* In brief, what *said* she?"

Speed again extends a hand. "Open your *purse*, so that the money and the matter may *both at once* be delivered."

The young gentleman sighs as he unties the leather pouch hanging at his belt, and fishes out a coin. "Well, sir, here is for your pains. What *said* she?"

Speed looks down at the testern—worth sixpence. "Truly, sir, I think you'll hardly win her."

Proteus is alarmed. "*Why?*—couldst thou receive so much from her?"

"Sir, I could receive *nothing at all* from her!—*no*, not so much as a *doit*"—worth an eighth of a penny—"for delivering your letter! And being so hard to *me*, who brought your mind, I fear she'll prove as hard to *you* in *telling* your mind"—assessing his interest. "Give her no token but *stones*,"—a rude implication; stone is a term for *testicle*, "for she's hard as steel!"

"*What?*—*said* she *nothing*?"

"No, not so much as 'Take *this* for thy pains!' To *testify* your bounty, I thank you, you have *testernèd* me—in requital whereof, *henceforth carry your letters yourself!*

"And so, sir, I'll commend you to my master." He gathers up the baggage and tramps back toward the house—and the stable beyond, for a horse to carry him to Milan.

Proteus glares. "Go, go, be *gone!*" he calls, "to save from *wreck* your *ship!*—which *cannot* perish, having aboard *thee*—destined to a drier death *on shore!*"—by hanging.

He shakes his head, worried. *I must go send some better messenger! I fear my Julia would not deign my lines, —give them credence—receiving them from such a worthless post!*

Simply speaking to her himself does not occur to the boy, who is steeped in fictional descriptions of chivalrous courtship.

Lady Julia, in her high-ceilinged bedchamber at her father's massive house in Verona late this morning, has broached a delicate subject: romance.

"But, Lucetta, now we are alone, say: wouldst thou, then, counsel me on falling in love?" she asks the stout waiting-woman.

Her servant, at nineteen several years older, smiles at *falling*. "Aye, madam—so that you stumble not *unheedfully*," she says dryly.

Julia looks out the window. "Of all the fairer sort of gentlemen that every day with *parle*

encounter me, in thy opinion which is worthiest of love?"

Lucetta, too, pretends that the choice has not been made. "Please you repeat their names, I'll show my mind, according to my shallow, simple skill."

"What think'st thou of the fair Sir Eglamour?"

"As of a knight well-spoken, neat and fine; but, were I you, he never should be mine." The kind, courtly gentleman is handsome, if a bit quaint—but he's sixty.

"What think'st thou of the rich Mercutio?"

"*Well*, of his *wealth*; but of himself, so-so." The wryly glib libertine is twenty-five.

"What think'st thou of the gentle Proteus?"

Lucetta laughs. "Lord, *Lord!*—to *see* what *folly* reigns in us!"

Julia is taken aback. "*How now?* What means this passion at *his* name?"

"Pardon, dear madam! 'Tis a passing shame that I, unworthy body as I am, should censure thus on lovely gentlemen." Lucetta knows very well that Julia fancies the bashful boy.

Julia affects disinterested curiosity: "Why not on Proteus as on all the rest?"

"Then thus: of many *good*, I think him *best!*"

"Your reason?"

"I have no other but a *woman's* reason: I think him so because I *think* him so."

"And wouldst thou have me cast my love on him?"

Proteus has been very diffident. "Aye," says Lucetta, "if *you* thought your love not cast away."

"Why, he of all the rest hath never moved me!"—approached her.

"Yet he, of all the rest, I think, best *loves* ye."

Julia is piqued. "His *little speaking* shows his love but *small!*"

"Fire that's *closest* kept burns most of *all!*" Banked blazes hold their heat.

"They that do not *show* their love do not love!" insists Julia.

"Oh, men love *least* whom they let *know* of their love." Declarations, Lucetta has found, are often false.

"I would I *knew his mind!*"

At that, Lucetta pulls a letter from a pocket. "Peruse this paper, madam."

The lady reads the outside. "'*To Julia.*' Say: from whom?"

"That the contents will show."

"Say, *say!* Who *gave* it thee?"

"Valentine's page—but *sent*, I think, from *Proteus!*" She sees the blush. "He would have given it to *you*, but I, being in the path, did in your name receive it. Pardon the fault, I pray."

"Now, by my modesty, a goodly *broker!*" she says indignantly; but, actually, Julia is annoyed with Proteus. "Dare you presume to *harbour wanton lines?*—to *whisper* and *conspire* against my *youth?*" She adds, with scornful irony, "Now, trust me, 'tis an office of *great worth*—and you an officer *fit* for the work!"

"There, take the paper!" she says, thrusting it back. "See that it be *returned*, or else return no more into my sight!"

Lucetta, who had hoped the polite boy's missive, however pathetic, would please her mistress, protests: "To plead for *love* deserves more fee than *hate!*"

Julia turns her back. "Will ye *be gone?*"

"So that you may *ruminate!*" says Lucetta, *tsk*-ing and shaking her head as she leaves.

Now the girl has second thoughts. *And yet I would I had looked over the letter!* She glances at the door. *It were shaming to call her back again, and pray her to forgive the fault for which I chid her!*

She paces, thinking petulantly, *What a fool is she, who knows I am a maid, and yet would not force the letter to my view!—since maidens in modesty say 'no' to that for which they would have the profferer construe 'Aye!'*

Fie, fie! How wayward is this foolish love, that, like a testy child, will scratch the nurse, then

immediately, all humbled, kiss the switch!

How churlishly I chid Lucetta hence, when willingly I would have had her here! How I taught my brow to frown angrily, when inward joy enforced my heart to smile!

She sighs. *My penance is to call Lucetta back and ask remission for my folly past.* “What ho! Lucetta...”

The woman returns. “What would Your Ladyship?”

But Julia’s youthful pride restrains her. “Is’t... near dinner-time?”

“I would it *were*, that you might skill your carving on your *meat*, and not upon your maid!”

As she turns away to go, she lets the letter drop, then bends to retrieve it.

“What is’t that you took up so gingerly?”

“Nothing.”

“Why didst thou stoop, then?”

“To take a paper up that I let fall.”

“And is that paper *nothing*?”

“Nothing concerning *me*.”

“Then let it lie for those that it concerns.”

“Madam, it will not *lie* where it concerns—unless it have a false *interpreter*!”

“Some love of *yours* hath writ to you in rhyme...”

Lucetta picks up the folded sheet and says—with sarcasm, “So that I might *sing* it, madam, *to a tune*. Give me a *note*; Your *Ladyship* can set—”

“—as little *store* by such toys as may be *possible*! Best sing it to the tune of ‘Light o’ Love!’”

The ditty is popular among swains; its title plays on other meanings of light: *deficient*, *promiscuous*—or both.

Lucetta frowns; she likes Proteus. “It is too heavy for so light a tune.”

“Heavy? Belike it hath some *burden* then?”—a jest on the term for a song’s *refrain*.

“Aye!—but it were *melodious*, would *you* sing it.”

“And why not you?”

Proteus is a nobleman. “I cannot reach so high,” says Lucetta, pretending the key is above her vocal range.

“Let’s *see* your song.” Julia reaches for the paper. “How *now*, minion?” she complains, as Lucetta moves away. She grabs the letter and unfolds it.

“*Keep tune* then, if you will sing it out,” says the woman. “Methinks I do not like thy *tone*.”

“You do not?”

“No, madam; it is too *sharp*!”

“*You*, minion, are too *saucy*!”

“Nay, now you are too *flat*, and mar the concord with too harsh a *descant*!”—*counterpoint*. “There wanteth but a mean”—*baritone, male*—“to *fill* your song!”

Julia blushes at the hint of ribaldry. “The mean is drownèd by *your* unruly *bass*!”

Lucetta replies, eyes twinkling, “Indeed, I bid *Proteus* for thy *base*!”

Julia feigns further irritation. “This babble shall not henceforth trouble me!—here is a broil met with *protestation*!” She tears the letter in two and lets it flutter to the floor. “Go, get you gone—and let the pieces lie! You would be fingering them to anger me!”

The waiting-woman murmurs, going out past the tall door, “She *makes* it *strange*—but she would be best pleasèd to be so angered with *another* letter!”

Julia has heard, of course. *Aye, would I were so angered with the same!* She goes to close the door.

O hateful hands, to tear such loving words! Injurious wasps, to feed on such sweet honey and kill with your stings the bees that yield it! She scoops up the torn pieces. *I’ll kiss each several paper, for amends!*

Look!—here is writ ‘kind Julia.’ Un-kind Julia!—and in revenge for thy ingratitude, I throw thy name against the bruising stone, trampling contemptuously on thy disdain! She drops the torn

piece and steps on it.

Then she falls to her knees and sorts through the bits. *And here is writ 'love-wounded Proteus.'* She clutches the paper to her heart. *Poor, wounded name, my bosom as a bed shall lodge thee, till thy wound be thoroughly healed!* She brings the piece tenderly to her lips. *And thus I search it with a solemn kiss!*

She arranges the torn halves on the floor. *But twice or thrice was 'Proteus' written down. Be calm, good wind!—blow not a word away till I have found each letter in the letter! Except mine own name!* she thinks remorsefully. *Some whirlwind bear that unto a ragged, fearfully hanging rock, and throw it thence into the raging sea!*

Lo, here in one line is his name twice writ: 'Poor forlorn Proteus... passionate Proteus, to the sweet Julia!' As for her own name, she decides, penitently, *That I'll tear away!*

She studies the ragged-edged fragment longingly. *And yet I will not, sith so prettily he couples it to his so plaintive name!*

Thus will I fold them!—one on another! Now kiss, embrace, contend!—do what you will!

She flushes, surprised by the boldness, as she gently rubs the names together.

Lucetta knocks and enters. "Madam, dinner is ready, and your father stays"—is waiting.

Julia sighs, rising. "Well, let us go."

"What?—shall these papers lie here like *tell-tales*?"

"If *you* respect them," says Julia with seemingly careless indifference, "best take them up."

Lucetta laughs. "Nay, *I* was taken up for *laying them down!*" She notes that the pieces have been moved. "Yet here they shall not lie for catching *cold!*"

"I see you have a *monk's* mind for them!"—*want their confession*, says the lady peevishly.

Lucetta grins. "*Ah*, madam, you may say what sights *you* see; I see things, too, although you judge I blink!"

Julia reddens again. "Come, come," she says brusquely, "will't please you go?" She proceeds—eager to return here—to the dining chamber to partake of a light repast.

Lucetta will enjoy a satisfying lunch in the kitchen.

Lord Antonio of Verona has finished his supper, and now he settles into a chair for an evening in the study. "Tell me, Panthino, what serious talk was that wherewith my brother held you in the cloister?" he asks his trusted steward.

"'Twas of his nephew Proteus, your son."

"Why, what of him?"

"He wondered that Your Lordship would suffer him to spend his youth *at home*, while other men, of slenderer reputation, put forth their sons to seek preferment *out*: some to the wars, to try their fortune there; some to discover islands far away; some, studious, to the universities. For any or for all of these exercises, he said that Proteus your son was meet, and did request me to importune you to let him spend his time no more at *home*, which would be great impeachment to his *age*, in having known no travel in his youth."

Antonio nods. "Thou need'st not much importune me to that whereon this month *I* have been hammering! I have considered *well* his loss of time, and how he cannot be a completed man, not being tried and tutored in the *world!* Experience is by *industry* achieved, and perfected by the swift course of *time*."

"Then tell me: whither were I best to send him?"

"I think Your Lordship is not ignorant of how his companion, youthful Valentine, attends the emperor in his royal court." The proud Italians consider the Duchy of Milan, a renowned realm in Mediterranean commerce, to be something of an empire, its ruler a regal personage.

"I know it well."

"'Twere good, I think, Your Lordship sent him thither: there shall he practise tilts and tournaments, hear sweet discourse, converse with noblemen, and be in eye of every exercise worthy his youth and nobleness of birth."

Antonio nods again. "I like thy counsel; well hast thou advisèd. And that thou mayst perceive how *well* I like it the execution shall make it known! Even with the speediest expedition I will dispatch him to the emperor's court!"

Panthino smiles. "Tomorrow, may it please you, Don Alphonso and other gentlemen of good esteem are journeying to salute the emperor, and to commend their service to his will...."

"Good company," says Antonio. "With them shall Proteus go!" He spots the young man himself approaching. "And in good time!—now will we break it to him!"

Proteus is clutching a letter—written this very afternoon by Julia. *Sweet love! sweet lines! sweet life! Here is her hand, the agent of her heart! Here is her oath of love, her honour's pawn!*

Oh, that our fathers would applaud our loves, sealing our happiness with their consents! O heavenly Julia!

"How now!" calls his father in cheerful greeting. "What letter are you reading there?"

Proteus acts as he always has: cautiously. He folds the letter. "May't please Your Lordship, 'tis a word or two of commendations sent from Valentine, delivered by a friend that came from him."

Antonio approves of his son's more outgoing friend. "Lend me the letter; let me see what news!"

"There is no *news*, my lord," says Proteus, "but that he writes how *happily* he lives—how well belovèd and daily graced by the emperor—wishing me with him, partner of his fortune." He pockets the letter.

"And how stand you affected to his wish?"

"As one relying on *Your Lordship's* will," says Proteus dutifully, "and not depending on his friend's wish."

"My will is something sorted *with his wish!* Muse not that I thus *suddenly* proceed, for what I will, I *will*, and there an end." He smiles generously. "I am resolved that thou *shalt* spend some time with Valentine in the emperor's court!"

"What maintenance *he* from his friends receives, like exhibition thou shalt have from me! Tomorrow be in readiness to go! Excuse it not, for I am peremptory."

"My lord, I cannot be so soon provided!" protests the young man. "Please you, *deliberate* a day or two!"

But Lord Antonio has decided. "Look that what thou want'st shall be sent after thee; no more about *staying*; tomorrow thou must *go!*" He rises. "Come on, Panthino, you shall be employed to hasten on his expedition." The nobleman and his major domo leave the study to confer on the venture, and on the attendant household changes.

Proteus is highly distressed. *I fear to show my father Julia's letter, lest he should take exceptions to my love—and without th'advantage of mine own excuse—shyness—he had most excepted against my love!*

Thus have I shunned the fire for fear of burning, and drenched me in the sea, where I am drownèd!

Oh, how this spring of love resembleth the uncertain glory of an April day, which now shows all the beauty of the sun—and by and by a cloud takes all away!

Panthino leans in from the corridor. "Sir Proteus, your father calls for you! He is in haste; therefore, I pray you, go!"

Proteus nods and follows slowly, already beginning to imagine life in sunny Milan.

He will, after all, be rejoining his best friend, Valentine—and at the exhilarating capital, in its alluring royal court.

He realizes, quite surprised, *Why, thus it is: my heart accords thereto!*

Touching Julia's letter in his pocket, he frowns. *And yet a thousand times it answers, 'No!'*

Chapter Two Love at the Palace

The duke's sprawling estate is at Milan, west of Verona. His magnificent palace once served as home to rulers of the Roman Empire.

"Sir, your glove," says Speed, proffering it as he strolls with his master through a sunny-windowed corridor, approaching the courtiers' busy dining hall late this morning.

"Not mine," replies Sir Valentine, flashing both hands. "My gloves are on."

The page grins as he sniffs the soft, perfumed leather. "Then this *may* be yours—for this is *but one!*"—the mate of a remembrance given to a lady.

"Let me see," says Valentine. He smiles. "Aye, give it me, it's mine!—sweet ornament that bedecks a thing divine! *Ah, Silvia, Silvia!*"

Speed calls out, "Madam *Silvia!* Madam *Silvia!*"

Valentine stops, startled by the clamor. "*How now, sirrah?*"

"She is not within hearing, sir."

"Why, who bade you *call* her?"

"Your Worship, sir; or else I mistook."

Valentine shakes his head at the rascal. "Well, you'll ever be *too forward.*"

"And yet I was *last* chidden for being *too slow!*" Speed's tardy arrival here belied his name.

Valentine chuckles. "*Go to, sir!* Tell me, do you know Madam Silvia?"

Speed nods. "She that Your Worship loves."

"Why, how know you that I am *in love?*" asks Valentine, surprised.

"Marry, by these special marks: first, you have learned, like Sir *Proteus*, to wreath your arms like a *malcontent*; to *relish* a love-song as robin-redbreast does *its*; to walk *alone* like one that had the *pestilence*; to *sigh* like a school-boy that had lost his *ABC*; to *weep* like a young wench that has buried her *grandam*; to *fast*, like one that takes diet; to *watch*, like one that fears robbing; to speak *whiningly!*—like a *beggar* at *Hallowmas!*

"You *were* wont, when you laughed, to *crow* like a *cock*; when you walked, to walk like one of the *lions!*—when you fasted, it was only *after dinner!* When you looked sad, it was for lack of *money!*

"And now you are *metamorphosed* by a *mistress*—such that, when I look on you, I can hardly think you my master!"

Valentine is amazed. "Are all these things *perceived* in me?"

"They are all perceived *without ye!*"—on the surface.

"Without *me?* They cannot."

"Without you—aye, it's *certain!* For, without your being so *simple*, nothing *else* could be seen; but you are so '*without* these follies' that these follies are *within* you!—and shine through you like *urine in glass!*—so that not an eye that sees you but is a *physician* to comment on your *malady!*"

However transparent he may be, Valentine still wants to know: "But tell me, dost thou know my Lady Silvia?"

"She that you gaze on so, as she sits at supper?"

"Hast thou observed that? Even *she*, I mean."

Speed makes a coarse jest—lost, fortunately, on his innocently smitten master: "Why, sir, I *know* her not!"—has no carnal knowledge of her.

Valentine is puzzled. "Dost thou know her by my gazing on her, and yet knowest her not?"

"Is she not hard-favoured,"—*stern-faced*, "sir?"

Valentine pictures the lovely lady. "*Not so!*—*fair*, boy, *well* favoured!"

"Sir, I know *that* well enough."

"What dost thou know?"

“That she is *not so fair* as by you well favoured!”

“I mean that her *beauty* is *exquisite*,” says the gentleman earnestly, “and her favour *infinite*!”

Speed nods knowingly. “That’s because the one is *painted*, and the other *out of all count*.”

“How painted? And how out of count?”

“Marry, sir: painted to *make* her so fair that no *man* ’counts of her beauty!”—can account for it.

Valentine frowns. “How esteemest thou *me*? I account of her beauty!”

The boy shrugs. “*You* never saw her but since she was *deformed*.”

“How long hath she been deformed?”

“Ever since you *loved* her.”

Valentine shakes his head. “I have loved her ever since I saw her; and still I see her *beautiful*.”

“If you love her,” Speed argues, “you *cannot* see her.”

“Why?”

“Because Love is blind. Oh, that you had *mine* eyes—or your own eyes had the lights they were *wont* to have, when you chid at *Sir Proteus* for going ungartered!”—a common failing that reveals infatuation.

“What *should* I see, then?”

“*Your own present folly*, and her surpassing deformity! For *he*, being in love, could not see to garter his hose—but *you*, being in love, cannot see even to *put on* your hose!”

Valentine raises an eyebrow. “Belike, boy, then *you* are in love—for last morning you could not see to wipe my shoes!”—one of a page’s daily duties.

“True, sir; I was in love with my *bed*,” Speed admits. “I thank you that you swinge me for my love; it makes me the bolder to chide you for *yours*!”

But Valentine only sighs. “In conclusion: I stand affected to her.”

Speed takes *stand to her* as *grow erect*. He grins. “I would you *were*—so, your affection would soon cease!”

But Valentine isn’t listening; he has a concern. “Last night she enjoined me to write some lines to one *she* loves.”

“And have you?”

“I have.”

Love lines intended for *a rival*. “Are they lamely writ?”

“*No*, boy, but as well as I can do them!” says Valentine; that is his customary way. “Peace! Here she comes!”

Speed anticipates amusement: watching the infatuated country youth woo a cosmopolite, a sophisticated lady of the regal court. *Oh, excellent show!*—*oh, exceeding puppet!* *Now will he interpret to her!*—translate his meaning into the stock phrasing of courtly hyperbole.

As Lady Silvia approaches; Valentine bows. “Madam and mistress, a thousand good-morrows!”

- *Oh, give ye a ‘Good evening,’* laughs Speed to himself. *Here’s a million of manners!*

Silvia beams at the gentleman. “Sir Valentine!—my ‘*servant*’—to you *two thousand!*”

- *He should pay her interest—she gives it to him!*

Valentine offers her a sheet of paper. “As you enjoined me, I have writ your letter unto the *secret, nameless friend* of yours—which I was much unwilling to proceed in, but for my duty to Your Ladyship.”

Silvia, who is also eighteen, looks it over, then smiles at him. “I *thank* you, gentle servant; ’tis very clerkly done!”

Valentine wants to put forward his own suit. “Now trust me, madam, it came off hardly”—he ignores the page’s sputter of suppressed laughter. “For, being ignorant to whom it goes, I writ at random, very doubtfully.”

“Perchance you think such pains too much....”

“No, madam!” says Valentine quickly. “So it stead *you*, I will write, if you please to command it, a *thousand times* as much! And yet...”

A pretty period! thinks Silvia, noting the pause. *Well, I can guess the sequel....* She is aware of his backwardness. *And yet I will not name it; and yet I care not!* She can deal with it.

She hands him the letter. “Take *you* this again!” She smiles—warmly, and hopefully. “And yet I thank you!... meaning henceforth to *trouble* you no more....”

Thinks Speed, *And yet you will!—and yet another ‘yet’!* Lovers, in his view, are perpetually troublesome.

Valentine is disheartened. “What means Your Ladyship? Do you not like it?”

“Yes, *yes!*—the lines are very quaintly writ! But since *unwillingly*,”—clearly, he feels jealousy, “take them again!” She sees his continuing concern. “Nay, *take* them!”

“Madam, they are for *you!*”

“Aye, aye, you writ them, sir, at my *request*; but I will none of them—*they are for you!*” she confesses, blushing beautifully. She intended all along to return his strongest pleas, using them as her own. “I would have written them more... *movingly*,” she says, modestly averting her gaze.

The youth is still in the dark. “Please you, I’ll write Your Ladyship *another!*”

“And when it’s writ, for my sake *read it over!*... and if it please you, *so*,” she stammers, “if not, why... so.”

Poor Valentine is puzzled. “If it please *me*, madam, what then?”

“Why, if it please you, *take it...* for your labour...” Surprised at feeling so discomfited, she turns. “And so, good morrow, servant!” She hurries away.

Speed is laughing heartily. *Oh, jest* unseen!—*inscrutable!—invisible as a nose on a man’s face, or a weathercock on a steeple!*

My master sues to her—and she hath taught her tutor,

He being her pupil, to become her suitor!

Oh, excellent device!—was there ever heard a better?—

That my master, being scribe, to himself should write a letter!

Valentine stares at his page. “How *now*, sir? What?—are you *reasoning* with *yourself?*”—amused by his own foolishness.

“Nay, I was *rhyming*. ’Tis *you* that have the *reason*.”

“To do what?”

“To be a spokesman for Madam Silvia.”

“To whom?”

“To *yourself!*” cries the boy. “Why, she *woos you* by a figure!”—a clever device.

“What *figure?*”

“By a *letter*, I should say”—not a numeral.

Valentine still does not understand. “Why, *she* hath not writ to *me*....”

“What *need* she, when she hath *made you write to yourself?* Why, do you not perceive the *jest?*”

Valentine frowns. “No, believe me.”

“No believing *you*, indeed, sir!” Speed shakes his head. “Did you not perceive her *earnest?*”

Valentine takes *earnest* to mean a *partial payment*. “She gave me none, except an angry word.”

“Why, she hath given you a *letter!*”

“That’s the letter I writ to her *friend*.”

“And that letter hath she *delivered!*—and there an *end!*” says Speed, exasperated.

Sir Valentine finally begins to comprehend. “I would it were no *worse*....”

“I’ll warrant you, ’tis as *well!* For if *you* had writ to *her*, she—in modesty, or else for lack of idle time, or else fearing that some messenger might discover her mind—could not *reply!* So herself hath taught her love *himself* to write *unto her lover!*”

“All this I speak *‘in print,’*”—as certain, “for in print I *found* it!” He sees that Valentine’s smile is growing—but their noon meal is ready. “Why *muse* you, sir?—’tis *dinner-time!*”

The happy gentleman is sated with the revelation of Silvia’s affection. “I have *dined!*”

“Aye, but hearken, sir: though the chameleon *love* can feed on the air, *I* am one that am nourished by my *victuals*, and would fain have *meat!*”

“Oh, be like your *mistress,*” he says, urging the dazed lover forward, “be moved, be *moved!*”

Chapter Three Departure, Discovery

In Verona, at the gray-stone mansion of Lady Julia’s father, Proteus stands just inside the front door this evening—having delivered the news that he is to depart posthaste for Milan. “Have *patience*, gentle Julia.”

“I *must*, where is no *remedy!*” says she, upset by the sudden change.

“When I possibly can, I will return,” he assures her.

Tearfully, Julia makes a feeble jest: “If you *turn* not, you will *re-turn* the sooner!” She wipes her eyes and gives him her ring. “Keep this remembrance for thy Julia’s sake!”

“Why, then we’ll make exchange,” says Proteus, removing his own. “Here, take you this.”

She pulls it onto a finger, looks up, and touches his face. “And seal the bargain with a holy kiss!”

But he blushes, and regards her respectfully. “Here is my *hand* for my true *constancy.*” He shakes hers. “And when that hour o’erslips me in a day wherein I *sigh* not, Julia, for *thy* sake, may some foul mischance torment me the next ensuing hour, for my love’s forgetfulness.”

He looks outside. “Answer not; the tide is now. My father stays my coming.” He sees her starting to cry. “Nay, not thy tide of *tears!*—*that* tide will stay me longer than I should!” He pauses at her door. “Julia, farewell.”

She turns and runs into the house, sobbing.

He is a bit piqued. *What, gone without a word?*

The reader of much sagacity in literature turns away. *Aye, so true love should do: it cannot speak, for truth hath better deeds than words to grace it.* The irony does not occur him.

Panthino, hurrying up the front path from a waiting carriage, meets him. “Sir Proteus, you are stayed for!”

“Go. I come, I come.” *Alas, parting strikes poor lovers dumb!*—speechless. So thinks the ingenuous youth—a poor lover indeed.

But, walking away, he looks back at Julia’s home. A pang shadows his handsome face.

Sitting on a wide rock, Sir Proteus’s slender page, Launce, who is nineteen, thinks—dimly, within a fog brought on by strong red wine—about leaving his home here in Verona.

He sighs, and scowls blearily at the oblivious dog lolling beside him, a forty-pound black one, mostly retriever. *I have received my proportion, like the prodigious son, and am going with Sir Proteus to the Imperial’s court.*

Nay, ’twill be this hour ere I have done weeping, he moans to himself—although the usual phrase is “this hour *next,*” twelve hours from now. *All kindred of the Launces have this very fault. But I think Crab, my dog, be the sourest-natured dog that lives! My mother was weeping, my father wailing, my sister crying, our maid howling, our cat wringing her hands, and all our house in a great perplexity—yet this cruel-hearted cur did not shed one tear!*

He is a stone, a very pebble stone, and has no more pity in him than a dog! A rat would have wept to have seen our parting! Why, my grandam, having no eyes, look you, wept herself blind at my parting!

Nay, I’ll review the manner of it, he decides, pulling scuffed brown leather from his feet. *This*

shoe is my father... no, this shoe left is my father. He examines the two. *No, no, this left shoe is my mother.... Nay, that cannot be so neither.... Yes, it is so, it is so—it hath the worser sole.*

This shoe with the hole in it is my mother, and this my father, a vengeance on 't! He sniffs. *And there 'tis!* He rubs the shoe on the turf to remove dog shit.

Now, sit! he orders, positioning the pair on the grass before him. He gropes at his side. *This staff is my sister, for, look you, she is as white as a lily and as small as a wand!*

This hat is Nan, our maid. It is dusty and rumpled.

I am the dog. He blinks. *No, the dog is himself, and I am the dog—or the dog is me, and I am myself! Aye, so....*

So. He surveys the family reunion, as it were, and reenacts their piteous parting.

Now come I to my father: 'Father, your blessing!' Now, the shoe should not speak a word, for weeping. Now should I kiss my father... He looks at the soiled shoe. *Well, he weeps on.*

Now come I to my mother. Oh, that she could speak now, like a woe-èd woman! Well, I'll kiss her. He recoils from the shoe's smell. *Why, there 'tis!—here's my mother's breath, up and down!*

Now come I to my sister; mark the moan she makes! The stick lies mute.

He glares at the tranquil Crab. *Now the dog, all this while, sheds not a tear, nor speaks a word!*

But see how I lay the dust with my tears! Groaning, he also manages to belch, and to put his shoes back on.

Panthino, arriving on a wagon, finds the lad sprawled with his dog and his parcels beside the lane.

“Launce, away, *away—aboard!* Thy master is *shipped*—and thou art to post after with *oars!* What's the matter? Why *weepest* thou, man?” demands the steward. “*Away, ass!* You'll lose the tide, if you tarry any longer!” Down on the highway, a westward coach will soon be passing.

“It is no matter if the tied were lost,” groans Launce, “for it is the *unkindest* tied that ever any man tied!”

“What's the unkindest tide?”

“Why, he that's tied here!—*Crab, my dog.*”

“Oh, man!—I mean thou'lt lose the *flood,*” cries Panthino, “and, in losing the flood, lose thy *voyage,* and, in losing thy voyage, lose thy *master,* and, in losing thy master, lose thy *service*—and, in losing thy service—” Angrily, he pushes Launce's hand away. “Why dost thou stop my mouth?”

“For fear thou shouldst lose thy *tongue*”—run out of words.

“Where should I lose my tongue?”

“In thy tale.”

“In *thy* tale!” counters Panthino hotly—recognizing, too late, the blunder that has provoked a loud burst of laughter.

Launce moans, and staggers to his feet. “*Lose* the *tièd and* the tide!—and the voyage, and the master, and the service!” He wipes his eyes with a sleeve. “Why, man, if the river were *dry,* I am able to fill it with my *tears!* If the *wind* were down, I could drive a boat with my *sighs!*” Still, he picks up his faded cap and meager baggage.

Panthino, perturbed, motions him forward. “Come, come *away,* man! I was sent to call thee!”

Launce is tipsily defiant. “Sir, call me what thou *darest!*”

“*Wilt thou go?*” cries Panthino urgently.

“Well, I will go,” Launce decides. He turns, lifts the stolid Crab into the wagon, and climbs in after.

Lady Silvia is chatting with Sir Valentine, his page at his side, in the palace of her father, the Duke of Milan. “Servant....” says she.

“Mistress?” replies Valentine happily; they have now talked—and frankly. Her nod directs his attention to the double-doors where another suitor from Verona enters, with attendants; the

arriving gentleman is obviously annoyed.

“Master, Sir Thurio frowns on you,” notes Speed.

“Aye, boy; it’s for *love*.”

“Not of *you*!”

Valentine laughs. “Of my *mistress*, then.”

“’Twere good if you *knocked* him!” says the page. He detests the wealthy but supercilious Thurio. Speed bows, and heads for the kitchen.

Silvia sees Valentine’s expression change; he had been openly relishing their companionship. She touches hand. “Servant, you are sad.”

“Indeed, madam, I but *seem* so,” he tells her, as his rival joins them.

Thurio immediately challenges: “*Seem* you what you are *not*?”

“Perhaps I do.”

“So do *counterfeits*!”

“So do *you*!”

“What seem *I* that I am not?”

“Wise.”

Thurio scowls. “What instance of the contrary?”

“Your folly.”

“And how quote you ‘my folly’?”

Valentine eyes the popinjay’s clothes. “I quote it in your jerkin.”

“My ‘jerkin’ is a *doublet*!” sneers Thurio.

Valentine laughs. “Well then I *double* your folly.”

“*What*!”

Silvia laughs. “What, *angry*, Sir Thurio?—do you change colour?”

“Give him leave, madam,” says Valentine. “He *is* a kind of *chameleon*”—pale, changeable creatures thought to thrive on mere air.

Thurio glares. “That hath more mind to *feed on your blood* than live in your *air*!”

“You have said, sir,” Valentine replies calmly.

“Aye, sir, and am *done*, too—for *this* time.”

“I know it well, sir,” says Valentine. “You *always* end ere you *begin*.”

Silvia laughs again. “A fine *volley of words*, gentlemen—and quickly shot off!”

Valentine bows. “’Tis indeed, madam; we thank the *giver*.”

“Who is that, servant?”

“*Yourself*, sweet lady: for you gave the ‘*Fire*!’ Sir Thurio *borrow*s his wit from Your Ladyship’s *looks*—and kindly *spend*s what he borrows in your company.”

Thurio huffs: “Sir, if you spend word for word with *me*, I shall make your wit *bankrupt*!”

“I know it well, sir; you have an *exchequer* of *words*!”—a facility for producing many, “but no *other* treasure, I think, to give your followers; for it appears by their bare *liveries* that they live by your bare *words*!”

Silvia raises a delicate hand. “No more, gentlemen, *no more*!—here comes my father!”

The duke sees the suitors’ angry faces. “Now, daughter Silvia, you *are* hard beset!

“Sir Valentine, your father’s in good health.” He draws a paper from his coat. “What say you to a letter from your *friends*?—with much good *news*!”

“My lord, I will be thankful to any *happy* messenger from thence,” says Valentine, with a sour look at Thurio.

“Know ye Don Antonio, your countryman?”

“Aye, my good lord, I know the gentleman to be of worth, and worthy of *estimation*—and not without desert is so well reputed!”

“Hath he not a son?”

“Aye, my good lord!—a son that well deserves the honour and regard of such a father!”

“You know him well?”

“I know him as *myself!*—for from our infancy we have conversed and spent our hours together. And though myself have been an idle truant, omitting the sweet benefit of time to clothe mine aging with *angel*-like perfection, yet hath Sir Proteus—for that’s his name—made *use* and fair *advantage* of his days! In years he’s but young, in *experience old*, his head unmellowed, but his *judgment ripe!* And, in a word, far, far behind his *worth* come all of the praises that I now bestow!

“He is complete in *feature* and in *mind*, with all the good graces gracing a *gentleman!*”

The duke is impressed. “Beshrew me, sir, but if he make *this* good, he is as worthy for an *empress’s* love as meet to be an emperor’s *counsellor!*”

“Well, sir, this gentleman has *come to me*, with commendation from great potentates—and here he means to spend his time awhile!” He smiles. “I think ’tis no *unwelcome* news to you.”

Valentine is delighted. “Should I have *wished* a thing, it had been *he!*”

“*Welcome* him, then, according to his worth!” says the Duke. “Silvia, I speak to you, and *you*, Sir Thurio; as for Valentine, I need not incite *him* to it! I will send him hither to you presently.” As her father leaves, the lady curtseys, and her suitors bow.

Valentine is eager to see his friend. “This is the gentleman I told Your Ladyship would have come along *with* me, but that his mistress did *hold his eyes lockèd*, in her crystal looks!”

Silvia raises an eyebrow. “Then belike now she hath authorized them to fawn in fealty upon some *other.*”

Valentine shakes his head. “Nay, I think *she* surely holds them prisoner still!”

Silvia laughs. “Nay, then would he be *blind!*—and, being blind, how could he see his way to seek out *you?*”

“Why, lady, *love* hath *twenty* pair of eyes!”

Thurio frowns; Cupid is portrayed as blind. “They say that Love hath not an eye at all!”

“For seeing such lovers as *yourself*, Thurio,” says Valentine. “Upon a *homely* object, Love can *shut* his eyes!”

Silvia’s raised palm stifles fuming Thurio’s reply. “Have *done*, have *done*; here comes the gentleman!” Thurio bows to her stiffly, and—quite rudely—leaves just as Sir Proteus joins his friend.

Valentine embraces him and clasps his hand. “*Welcome*, dear Proteus!

“Mistress, I beseech you, confirm his welcome with some *special* favouring!”

Silvia beams. “His worth is warrant for his welcome hither, if this be he you oft have wished to hear from!”

“Mistress, it *is!* Sweet lady, entertain him to be my *fellow* servant to Your Ladyship!”

Silvia replies modestly: “Too low a mistress for so high a servant!”

Proteus is smiling warmly at her. “Not *so*, sweet lady, but too mean a servant to have a *look* from such a worthy mistress!”

“Leave off discourse of *disability!*” says Valentine. “Sweet lady, entertain him for your servant!”

Says Proteus, “My *duty* will I boast of—nothing else.”

“And duty never yet did want its meed”—lack reward, says Silvia. “Servant, you are welcome to a worthless mistress.”

“I’ll *dine* on him that *says* so but *yourself!*” says Proteus.

“That you are *welcome?*” she asks, teasing.

“That you are worthless!”

Thurio returns—from the duke, after airing a complaint. “Madam, my lord *your father* would speak with you,” he says smugly.

Silvia has grown accustomed to his pettishness. “I’ll wait upon his pleasure,” she says cheerfully. “Come, Sir Thurio, go with me.”

She turns to Proteus. “Once more, new servant, welcome! I’ll leave you to confer of home affairs; when you have done, we look to hear from you.”

Proteus bows. "We'll both attend upon Your Ladyship," he promises, as she leads Thurio away.

Valentine craves news from Verona. "Now tell me, how do all from whence you came?"

"Your friends are well, and have them much commended."

"And how do yours?"

"I left them all in health."

Valentine smiles. "How does your *lady*?—and how thrives your *love*?"

"My tales of love were wont to *weary* you; I know you joy not in a 'love' discourse."

"Aye, Proteus—but *that* life is *altered* now!" says Valentine happily. "I have *done penance* for contemning love: those high, imperious thoughts have punished me with bitter *fasts*, with penitential *groans*, with nightly *tears* and daily, heart-sore *sighs*! For in revenge of my contempt for love, Love hath chasèd sleep from my enthralled eyes, and made them watchers of mine *own* heart's sorrow!

"Oh, gentle Proteus, Love's a *mighty* lord, and hath so humbled me that I confess there is no *woe* to his correction!—nor to his *service*!—no such *joy* on *earth*!

"Now, no discourse except it be of *love*! Now can I break my fast, dine, sup—and *sleep*—upon the very, naked *name* of love!"

Proteus laughs. "Enough! I can read your fortune in your *eye*!" He nods toward the door where Silvia left. "Was this the idol that you worship so?"

"Even *she*!" says Valentine. "And is she not a heavenly *saint*?"

"No, but she *is* an earthly *paragon*."

"Call her *divine*!"

"I will not *flatter* her."

"Oh, flatter *me*!—for love delights in *praises*!"

"When *I* was sick, you gave me *bitter* pills," says Proteus with mock severity, "and I must administer the like to you."

"Then speak *the truth* of her! If not divine, yet let her be *angelic*—sovereign to all the creatures of the earth!"

"Except *my* mistress."

"Except not *any* sweet, except thou wilt except against my affection!"

"Have I not reason to prefer *mine own*?"

Valentine nods. "And I will *help* thee to prefer her, too!—she shall be dignified with *this* high honour: *to bear my lady's train*!—lest the base earth should from her vesture chance to *steal a kiss*, and, of so great a favour growing proud, disdain to root the summer-swelling *flower*, and make rough *winter* everlasting!"

Proteus laughs. "Why, Valentine, what *braggardism* is *this*?"

Valentine spreads his hands helplessly. "Pardon me, Proteus! *All I can* is *nothing* compared to *her*, whose worth makes *other* worthies nothing! She is *alone*!"—unique.

Proteus chuckles. "Then *let* her alone!"

"Not for the *world*! Why, man, she is *mine own*, and I as rich in having such a jewel as *twenty seas* if all their sand were *pearl*, the water *nectar*, and the rocks *pure gold*!"

But now Valentine peers toward the corridor. "Forgive me that I do not dote on *thee*, because thou see'st me dream upon my *love*. My foolish rival—that her *father* likes only because his possessions are so huge—is gone with her along, and I must *after*—for love, thou know'st, is full of jealousy!"

Proteus needs to know: "And she loves you?"

Valentine steps closer, and speaks privately: "*Aye*!—and we are *betrothed*! Nay, *more*!—our *marriage-hour* is determinèd!—along with the cunning manner of our *flight*: how I must climb her window on a ladder made of cords, and all the means plotted and agreed on for my *happiness*!"

"Good Proteus, go with me to my chamber, in these affairs to aid me with thy counsel!" He heads toward the double doors.

“Go on before,” says Proteus. “I shall inquire you forth. I must unto the road, to disembark some necessaries that I needs must use, and then I’ll presently attend you.”

“Will you make haste?”

“I will,” promises Proteus, as Valentine hurries away.

Alone now, Proteus is troubled. *Even as one beam another beam expels, or as one nail by strength drives out another, so the remembrance of my former love is, by a newer object, quite forgotten!*

He closes his eyes and sees the new object—Lady Silvia. *Is it mine or Valentine’s praise—her true perfection, or my false transgression—that makes me, struck reasonless, to reason thus? She is fair!*

But so is Julia that I love—that I did love; for now my love is thawed!—like a waxen image which, ’gainst a fire, bears no impression of the thing it was!

And methinks my zeal to Valentine is cold!—that I love him not as I was wont.

Oh, but I love his lady too, too much, and that’s the reason I love him so little!

His feelings, he knows, are ill-advised. *How shall I dote about her for more advice, who thus without advice begin to love her! ’Tis but her picture I have yet beheld—but that hath dazzled my reason’s light! When I but look on her perfections, there is no reason!—I shall be blind!*

For the first time, Proteus feels *desire*, strong and growing—and already it begins to overwhelm him. *If I can check my erring love, I will.*

If not, to ’compass her I’ll use my skill!

However ridiculously, the student of fabled amours thinks he *has* some skill that would work on a living lady.

Launch!” cries Speed. “By mine *honesty*, welcome to *Padua*!”—a wry jest: Padua is a university town, and forty leagues to their east. Proteus’s page has just arrived here in the servants’ quarters, in the cellar of a remote, eastern wing of Milan’s splendiferous palace.

“Forswear thyself not, sweet youth, for I am *not* well come,” groans the pale young man, punished by a nauseous return to sobriety during the bone-jumbling ride. “I reckon *this* always: that a man is never *undone* till he be *hanged*—nor never *welcome* to a place till some certain shot be paid,”—drink tossed down, “and the *hostess* say, ‘*Well come!*’”—to her tavern.

“Come *on*, you madcap!” Speed laughs and claps an arm around his older friend’s slender shoulders. “I’ll to the alehouse with you immediately—where for one shot of *five-pence* thou shalt have *five thousand* welcomes!

“But, sirrah, how did thy master part with Madam Julia?” She is a favorite with the servants in both of their households.

Dropping his canvas bags in a corner, Launce reports sourly on Proteus’s feeble departure: “Marry, after they *closed* in *earnest*, they parted very fairly—as if *in jest!*”

“But shall she *marry* him?”

“No.”

Speed thinks the other youth is quibbling. “How then? Shall *he* marry *her*?”

“No, neither.”

“What?—are they *broken*?”

“No, they are both as whole as a fish.”

“Why, then, how stands the matter with them?”

“Marry, thus: when it *stands* well with him,” says Launce, “it will stand well with *her*”—an allusion to his lack of ardor, and to her frustration.

“What an *ass* art thou! I understand thee not.”

“What a block art *thou*, that thou *canst* not!—my *staff* understands me!”

“What thou *sayest*?”

“Aye—and what I *do*, too!” He reaches for the walking stick. “Look thee, I’ll but *lean*, and my *staff* understands me!”

Speed frowns. "It stands *under* thee indeed..."

"Why, 'stand under' and 'under stand' is all one!"

The younger page makes a face. "But tell me true: will't be a match?"

Launce shrugs. "Ask my dog. If he say *aye*, it will; if he say *no*, it will; if he shake his tail and say nothing, it will."

"Thy conclusion is then that it *will!*"

Launce tips back his head and closes his eyelids, affecting a lofty discretion. "Thou shalt never get such a secret from *me* but by the parable."

"'Tis *well* that I get it," says Speed. And he, too, has interesting news—about Sir Valentine.

"But, Launce, how sayest thou that *my* master is become a notable *lover*?"

"I never knew him otherwise."

Speed, baffled, looks at him askance. "Than *how*?"

"A notable *lubber*, as thou reportest him to be."

"Why, thou whoreson ass, thou *mistakest* me!"

"Why, fool, I meant not *thee!*—I meant thy *master.*"

Speed tries again. "I tell thee, my master is become a *hot lover!*"

"Well, I tell *thee* I care not though he *burn himself up* in love!" Launce is beginning to feel at home. "If thou wilt, go with me to the alehouse; if *not*, thou art an heathen, and not worth the name of a Christian."

"Why?"

"Because thou hast not so much *charity* in thee as to 'go to the *ailed*' with a Christian!"—attend a church event to raise alms for the poor. "Wilt thou go?"

Speed replies in kind: "At thy *service!*" he says, bowing with exaggerated courtesy.

And soon these faithful are communing at the nearest inn.

Chapter Four Suffering Separation

Upstairs in the palace, young Proteus is again alone—and conscience-stricken. *To leave my Julia, shall I be forsworn? To love fair Silvia, shall I be forsworn? To wrong my friend I shall be much forsworn!* He paces. *And ever that power which gave me my first oath provokes me to this threefold perjury: love bade me swear, and love bids me forswear!*

He pauses, miserable. *O sweet-suggesting Love, if thou hast sinned, teach me, thy tempted subject, to excuse it!*

At first I did adore a twinkling star, but now I worship a celestial sun!

Unheedful vows may heedfully be broken, the lad argues to himself. *And he lacks wit who lacks the resolvèd will to teach his wit to exchange bad for better!*

But remembrance rebukes him. *Fie, fie, irreverent tongue!—to call her bad, whose sovereignty so oft thou hast preferrèd with twenty thousand soul-confirming oaths!*

I cannot leave loving—and yet I do! But where I leave loving, there I should love!

Julia I lose, and Valentine I lose! If I keep them, I needs must lose myself!

If I lose them, thus find I by their loss: for Valentine, myself; for Julia, Silvia!

Again he paces, weighing lust against fidelity—and thinking of both as "love."

I to myself am dearer than a friend, for my love in itself is still most precious! And Silvia—witness Heaven, that made her fair—shows Julia as but a swarthy shade!

He stops, his face set in guilty defiance.

I will forget that Julia is alive, remember that my love for her is dead; and Valentine I'll hold an enemy, aiming at Silvia as a sweeter friend!

I cannot now prove constant to myself without some treachery used against Valentine.

This night he meaneth with a corded ladder to climb to celestial Silvia's chamber-window; myself, in counsel, am his conspirator.

Immediately now I'll give her father notice of their disguising and intended flight!—who, all enraged, will banish Valentine!

He means that Thurio shall wed his daughter—but Valentine being gone, I'll quickly cross him—and by some sly trick, blunt Thurio's dull proceeding.

Still uneasy, but driven by fervor, he beseeches the blind boy-god: *Love, as thou hast lent me wit to plot this drift, lend me wings to make my purpose swift!*

At home in Verona, Julia sits, distraught; the sewing on her lap is untouched, the needle still unthreaded.

“Counsel, Lucetta!” she pleads. “Gentle girl, *assist* me! Even by kind Love I do *conjure* thee—who art the table wherein all my thoughts are visibly characterized and engraved—to *lesson* me, and tell me some good means how, with my honour, I may undertake a *journey to my loving Proteus!*”

Says Lucetta cautiously, “Alas, the way is wearisome and long....”

“A truly devoted pilgrim is not wary of measuring *kingdoms* with his feeble steps!” says Julia confidently. “Much *less* shall she that hath Love's *wings to fly!*—and when the flight is made to one so *dear*, of such divine *perfection*, as *Sir Proteus!*”

“Better forbear till Proteus make return.” Lucetta has cooled on the erstwhile suitor who left Julia so coldly.

“Oh, know'st thou not *his looks* are my soul's *food*? *Pity* the *dearth* that I have pinèd in, by longing for that food so long a time!” cries Julia. It's been three days. “Didst *thou* but know the *inly touch* of love, thou wouldst as soon go *kindle fire* with *snow* as seek to *quench* the fire of love with *words!*”

“I do not seek to quench your love's hot fire,” the woman replies, “but to *qualify* the fire's extreme *rage*, lest it should burn above the bounds of *reason.*”

“The more thou damm'st it up, the more it *burns!*” says Julia. “The current that with gentle murmur glides, being *stoppèd*, thou know'st, *impatiently* doth *run!* But when its fair course is not hindered, it makes sweet music with the enamelled stones, giving a gentle kiss to every sedge it overtaketh in its pilgrimage; and so by many winding nooks it strays with willing sport to the wild ocean.

“Then let me *go*, and hinder not *my course!*” says Julia. “I'll be as *patient* as the gentle stream, and make a *pastime* of each weary step, till the last step have brought me to my *love*—and there I'll rest, as after much turmoil a blessed soul doth in *Elysium!*”—in Greek mythology, a place of eternal happiness.

Lucetta considers travel by this passionate young pilgrim. “But in what *habit* will you go?—*alone!*”

“Not like a *woman*, for I would prevent the loose encounters of lascivious men. Gentle Lucetta, fit me with such garb as may beseem some well-reputed *page.*”

“Why... then Your Ladyship must *cut your hair!*”

“No, girl, I'll knit it up in silken strings with twenty odd-conceited true-love knots! To be fantastical may *become* a youth of greater time than *I* shall show to be.”

“What fashion, *madam*, shall I make your *breeches?*”

Julia only laughs. “That fits as well as, ‘Tell me, good my *lord*, what compass will you wear your *farthingale?*’”—how wide should his *skirt*-shaping hoops be? “Why, even what fashion thou best likest, Lucetta.”

“You must needs have them with a *codpiece*, madam.”

“*Out, out*, Lucetta!—that *would* be ill-favourèd!”

“And, madam, a round hose now's not *worth a pin* unless you have a codpiece to *stick pins in!*”—one enlarged with padding.

“Lucetta, as thou lovest me, let me have what thou thinkest *meet*.” Julia blushes, and quickly amends: “. . . is most *mannerly!*” Hearing *meet*, the woman had widened her eyes comically.

Lady Julia does have one concern. “But tell me, wench: how will the world repute me for undertaking so *un-staid* a journey? I fear me it will make me scandalized. . . .”

“If you think so, then stay at home, and go not.”

“Nay, *that* I will not!”

“Then never dream of infamy, but *go*. If *Proteus* like your journey when you *come*, no matter who’s displeas’d when you are *gone*.” The woman enjoys her own ribaldry; still, she feels she should warn her innocent mistress. “I fear me he will scarce be pleas’d withal.”

Julia scoffs. “Lucetta, that is the least, of *my* fears! A *thousand* oaths, an *ocean* of his tears, and insistence of *infinite* love warrant me welcome to my *Proteus!*”

Lucetta has received such pledges. “All those are *servants* to *deceitful* men,” she says, a bit sadly.

“*Base* men, that use them to some *base effect*,” says Julia. “But *truer* stars did govern *Proteus*’s birth! *His* words are *bonds*, his oaths are *oracles*—his love *sincere*, his thoughts *immaculate*, his tears pure messengers sent from his *heart*—his heart as far from fraud as *heaven* from *earth!*”

“*Pray* heaven he so *prove* when you come to him,” says Lucetta.

Julia rises. “Now, as thou lovest me, do him not that wrong to bear a hard opinion of his truth!—only deserve *my* love by loving *him*.”

“And presently go with me to my chamber, to take a note of what I stand in need of to furnish me upon my longing journey.

“All that is mine I leave at thy dispose: my goods, my lands, my *reputation*; only, in lieu thereof, *dispatch me hence!*”

“Come, answer not, but *to it immediately!* I am impatient in my tarriance!”

Sir Thurio, give us leave awhile, I pray. We have some *secrets* to confer about,” says the duke. The request was urgent, and he is curious. Thurio glares, but he bows and leaves the sovereign’s study. “Now, tell me, *Proteus*, what’s your will with me?”

The youth seems diffident this evening. “My gracious lord, . . . that which I would reveal, the law of *friendship* bids me to *conceal!* But when I call to mind Your Grace’s favours done to me, undeserving as I am, my duty pricks me on to utter that which else no worldly good should draw from me!

“Know, worthy prince: Sir Valentine, my friend, *this night* intends to *steal away your daughter!*” The duke frowns, but he listens. “Myself am one made *privy* to the plot! I know you have determined to bestow her on *Thurio*, whom your gentle daughter hates; and should she thus be *stolen away from you*, it would be much vexation to your age!

“Thus, for my *duty*’s sake,” he says obsequiously, “I rather chose to cross my friend in his intended drift than, by *concealing* it, heap on your head a *pack of sorrows* which, being unprevented, would *press you down* to your *timeless grave!*”

The old ruler studies the boy; *pricked* on indeed. “*Proteus*, I thank thee for thine honest *care*, which to requite, command me—while I *live*,” he adds, wryly, thinking of *timeless grave*. “This love of theirs *myself* have often seen, when they have perhaps judg’d me fast asleep; and oftentimes have I purpos’d to forbid Sir Valentine her company—and my *court*.”

“But fearing—lest my zealous aim might *err*, and so *disgrace* the man *unworthily*—a rashness that I ever yet have shunn’d,” he says, pointedly, “I gave him *gentle* looks, thereby to discover that which thysel’f hast now disclos’d to me.

“And—so that thou mayst perceive my fear of this—knowing that tender *youth* is soon *suggested*,”—gets ideas, “I nightly lodge her *in an upper tower*.” He pats a doublet pocket. “The *key* whereof *myself* have ever kept! And thence she *cannot* be convey’d away.”

But *Proteus* presses on: “Know, noble lord, they have devis’d *means* how he will ascend to

her chamber-window and fetch her down: *with a corded ladder!*—for which the youthful lover has now gone!

“And *this way* he comes with it presently—where, if it please you, you may *intercept* him!

“But, good my lord,” he pleads, “do it so cunningly that my revealing be not aimed at! For *love of you*, not hate unto my friend, hath made me publisher of this pretence.”

The duke nods. “Upon mine honour, he shall never know that I had any light from thee of this.”

They hear footsteps down the corridor. “*Adieu*, my lord!—Sir Valentine is coming!” Proteus bows and leaves by the back door, hurrying down the stairs.

The duke goes to stop the young gentleman passing just outside his study. “Sir Valentine, whither away so fast?”

“Please it Your Grace, there is... a messenger that stays to bear my letters to my friends, and I am going to deliver them.”

“Be they of much import?”

“The tenor of them doth but signify my health and happy being, at your court.”

“Nay then, no matter; stay with me awhile! I am to break with thee of some affairs that touch me near, wherein thou must be *secret!*”

“’Tis not unknown to thee that I have sought to match my friend Sir Thurio to my daughter...”

“I know it well, my lord,” says Valentine, “and, surely the match were *rich*—and honourable,” he adds, barely concealing his scorn. “Besides, the gentleman is full of *virtue* and *bounty*,”—irony; Thurio is full of *himself*, and hardly generous, “worthy qualities *beseeming* such a wife as your fair daughter.” The duke appears to be vexed. “Cannot Your Grace win her to fancy him?”

“*No*, trust me!—she is *peevish*, sullen, froward, proud, disobedient, *stubborn*—lacking *duty*, neither regarding that she is my *child*, nor fearing me as her *father!*”

“And, I may say to thee, this *pride* of hers, upon advice, hath drawn my love *from* her!”

The sovereign adds, angrily, “And, while I thought the remnant of mine age should have been cherished by her child-like duty, I now am full resolved to take a *wife!*—and turn Silvia out to whomever will take her in! Then let her *beauty* be her wedding-dower!—for *me* and my possessions she esteems *not!*”

But he looks, calmly, to see what effect his daughter’s allegedly bleak new prospects will have on her clandestine betrothed.

Valentine is nonplussed. “What would Your Grace have *me* to do in this?”

“There is a lady of Verona here whom I affect,” says the duke, watching his face. “But she is strict and coy, and nought esteems my aged eloquence; now therefore would I have thee as my *tutor*—for long ago I have forgot *courting*; besides, the fashion of the time is changed.

“How and which way may I bestow myself to be regarded sun-bright in her eye?”

Valentine ponders; he dislikes the duke’s regard for wealth. “Win her with *gifts*, if she respect not words,” he advises. “Often silent *jewels*, in their quiet kind, more than living words do move a woman’s mind.”

“But she did *spurn* a present that I sent her...”

“A woman sometimes scorns what best contents her,” the young sage pronounces. Valentine recites from his main source of wisdom on women: such popular verse as he and Proteus shared.

“*Send her another—never give her o’er!*

For scorn at first makes after-love the more!

If she do frown, ’tis not in hate of you,

But rather to beget more love in you!

If she do chide, ’tis not to have you gone;

As for why: the fools go mad if left alone!

*Take no repulse, whatever she doth say;
For by 'Get you gone' she doth not mean 'away'!
Flatter and praise!—commend, extol their graces;
Though ne'er so bleak, say they have angels' faces!*

“That man who hath a *tongue* I say is no *man*. if with his tongue he cannot win a woman!” Valentine adds, boldly—and innocently.

The silver-haired duke smiles; he is widower, but his memory is fine. He adds to his fiction: “But she I mean is promised, by her friends, unto a youthful gentleman of worth, and kept severely from resort of men, so that no man hath *access* by day to her.”

“Why, then,” says Valentine, shifting uneasily from foot to foot, “I would resort to her by *night*.”

“Aye, but the doors be *lockèd*, and keys kept safe, so that no man hath recourse to her by *night*.”

“May one not enter at her window?”

“Her chamber is *aloft*, far from the ground, and built so shelving-out that one cannot climb to it without apparent hazard of his life!”

Valentine has an idea, of course—one drawn from old tales. “Why, then a ladder quaintly made of *cords*, cast up with a pair of anchoring hooks, would serve to scale another *Lady Hero*'s tower, so a bold *Leander* would adventure it!”

The duke seems encouraged. “Now, as thou art a gentleman of blood, advise me where I may *have* such a ladder!”

“When would you *use* it? Pray, sir, tell me that.”

“This very night!—for love is like a child that longs for everything that he cannot come by!”

“By seven o'clock I'll get you such a ladder,” Valentine can assure him. If the duke undertakes his own elopement tonight, he may be more forgiving when he learns, tomorrow, of his daughter's.

The duke nods, and seems to think. “But, hark thee, I will go to her *alone*; how shall I best convey the *ladder* thither?”

“It will be so light, my lord, that you may bear it under a cloak that is of any length.”

The duke looks him up and down. “A cloak as long as *thine* will serve the turn?”

“Aye, my good lord.”

“Then let me see thy cloak. I'll get me another one of such length!”

Valentine, perspiring now, is alarmed. “Why, *any* cloak will serve the turn, my lord.”

The duke looks down at his regal red robe, trimmed with ermine. “How shall I fashion me to wear a *cloak*? I pray thee, let me feel thy cloak upon me.” Quickly, he reaches over and unclasps it at Valentine's neck.

As the black cloth swirls away from the courtier, the duke spots paper peeking from a pocket of Valentine's doublet. “What letter is this same?” he asks, pulling it out. “What's *here*?—‘To *Silvia*!’” And now, with the cloak hanging upon his bent left arm, he can see the rolled-up cord ladder, slung low at Valentine's back. “And here an engine fit for my proceeding!

“I'll be so bold as to break the seal at once,” he says gruffly, opening the letter.

Valentine wipes his forehead as the duke reads his words:

““*My thoughts do harbour with my Silvia nightly,
And slaves they are to me that sends them flying!
Oh, could their master come and go as lightly,
Himself would lodge where insensible they are lying!
My herald thoughts in thy pure bosom rest them,
While I, their king, who thither them importune,
Do curse the haste that with such grace hath blessed them,
Because myself do want my servants' fortune!*”

*I curse myself—for they are sent by me—
That they should harbour where their lord would be!”*

The duke sees the letter’s final line. “What’s *here?* ‘*Silvia, this night I will enfranchise thee!*’” He looks up from the paper. “’Tis *so!*—and here’s the *ladder* for the purpose!” He brusquely unhooks the bundle and waggles the coiled cords. “Why, *Phaëton*, as thou art *Merops’* son,”—a dry play on *me ropes*, “wilt thou aspire to guide the heavenly chariot, and with thy daring folly *burn the world?* Wilt thou reach *stars* because they *shine* on thee?

“*Go, base intruder!*” he cries. “*Overweening slave!* Bestow thy fawning smiles on *equal* mates!—and think *my patience*, more than thy deserving, is privilege for thy departure hence!—thank me for *this* more than for all the favours which all too much I have bestowed on thee!

“But if thou linger in my territories longer than swiftest expedition will give thee time to leave our royal court, by heaven, my *wrath* shall far exceed the love I ever bore my daughter or thyself!

“*Be gone!*” he cries. “I will not hear thy vain excuse!—but, as thou lovest thy *life, make speed from hence!*” He storms into the study, taking the cloak and ladder with him, and bangs the door shut.

Poor Valentine is crushed. *And why not death, rather than living torment? To die is to be banished from myself: Silvia is myself, and banished from her is self from self—a deadly banishment!*

He moans, alone in his devastation. *What light is light, if Silvia be not seen? What joy is joy, if Silvia be not by—unless it be to think that she is by, and feed upon the shadow of perfection! Unless I look on Silvia in the day, there is no day for me to look upon; except I be by Silvia in the night, there is no music in the nightingale.*

She is my essence, and I leave being, if I be not by her fair influence fostered, illumined, cherished—kept alive!

*Tarry I here, I but attend on death! But, fly I hence, I fly away from life!
Ifly not Death, in flying from this deadly doom.*

With Launce beside him, Proteus rushes up the steps to the courtier’s quarters. “*Run, boy, run!*—run and seek him out!”

The page rushes ahead, only to halt abruptly at an open door to a dim room. “*Soho! Soho!*” he cries, as might a fox-hunter.

Proteus catches up. “What *seest* thou?”

“Him we go to find: there’s not a hair on’s head but ’tis of a *valentine!*”—a lover.

“Valentine?” asks Proteus, going into the dark room.

“No,” says his friend sorrowfully.

“Who then? His spirit?”

“Neither.”

“What then?”

Valentine shakes his head sadly. “Nothing.”

Launce touches his rapier’s hilt. “Can *nothing speak?* Master, shall I *strike?*”

Proteus frowns at him. “Who wouldst thou strike?”

“*Nothing!*”—the ghost.

Proteus shakes his head. “Villain, forbear...”

“Why, sir, I’ll strike but *Nothing!*” says Launce. “I pray you—”

Proteus waves him away. “Sirrah, I say, *forbear.* Friend Valentine, a word...”

Valentine groans. “My *ears* are stopt and cannot hear *good* news, so much of bad already hath possessed them!”

“Then in them will I *bury* my news, for it is harsh, untuneable and bad.”

“Is Silvia dead?”

“No, Valentine—”

“*No Valentine*, indeed! As for sacred *Silvia*, hath she *forsworn* me?” He wonders what her father has said to her, demanded of her.

“No, Valentine.”

“*Not Valentine* if *Silvia* had *forsworn* me! What is your news?”

Launce pipes up: “Sir, there is a proclamation that you are *vanished!*”

“That thou art *banished!*” Proteus tells him. “*That’s* the news!—banished from hence, from *Silvia*, and from *me*, thy *friend!*”

“Oh, I have fed upon *this* woe already!” Valentine wails, “and now *excess* of it will make me *surfeit!*”

“Doth *Silvia* know that I am *banished?*”

Proteus nods. “Aye. Aye, and she hath *offered* to that doom—which stands unreversèd, in effectual force—a *sea* of melting pearl, which some call *tears!* Those she tendered at her father’s churlish feet upon her knees!—and with them her humble *self*, wringing her hands, whose whiteness then became them, as if now they waxèd pale but for *woe!*”

“But neither bended knees, pure hands held up, sad sighs, deep groans, nor shedding silver tears could penetrate her uncompassionate sire! ‘*Valentine*, if he be ta’en, must *die!*’

“Besides, her intercession *chafed* him so, when she for thy repeal was suppliant, that to closèd *prison* he commanded her—with many bitter threats of her *abiding* there!”

“No more!” cries Valentine, tears brimming, “unless the next word that thou speak’st have some malignant power upon my *life!* If so, I pray thee, *breathe it in mine ear*, as an ending anthem for my endless dolour!”

Proteus gently grasps his shoulder. “Cease to lament for that thou canst not help,” he urges, “and study *help* for that which thou lament’st! *Time* is thy nurse, and breeder of all good.

“Here, if thou stay, thou canst not *see* thy love; besides, thy staying will *abridge thy life!*”

“*Hope* is a lover’s *staff!*—walk hence with *that*, and manage against despairing thoughts. Though thou art hence, thy *letters* may come here—which, being writ to *me*, shall be delivered even unto the milk-white bosom of thy *love!*”

“The time now serves not *expostulating!*—come, I’ll convey thee through the city-gate, and ere I part with thee, confer at large of all that may concern thy love’s affairs.

“Though not for thyself, as thou lovest *Silvia*, regard thy *danger*, and come along with me!”

Valentine nods; he will not further distress the lady. “I pray thee, Launce, an if thou seest my boy, bid him make haste and meet me at the north gate.”

“Go, sirrah, find him out,” Proteus tells Launce. “Come, Valentine.”

The banished gentleman weeps. “O my dear *Silvia!* Hapless Valentine!”

Proteus leads him away, and soon they are out of the palace, headed for the gate—and the road away from the duke’s dominion.

Chapter Five Valuation and Calculation

Searching for Speed, Launce decides he should first check the kitchen; and here he sits, savoring the first taste of a hot, fresh roll that glistens with butter.

The page discerns some deceitful scheming behind Valentine’s sudden disgrace—and Proteus’s too-ready assistance. *I am but a fool, look you, and yet I have the wit to think my master is a kind of a knave!* He takes another bite. *But that’s all one—if he be but one knave.*

The lad considers his own secretive state of affairs. *He lives not now that knows me to be in love; yet I am in love—but a team of horse shall not pluck that from me!*

Nor who ’tis I love! And yet ’tis a woman—but what woman, I will not tell myself!

And yet ’tis a milkmaid—yet ’tis not a maid, for gossips she hath had! Rumors report her companions, and loss of virginity. *Yet ’tis a maid, for she is her master’s maid, and serves for*

wages.

She hath more qualities than a water-spaniel—which is much, in a bare Christian! he thinks fondly.

From a coat pocket, Launce pulls a wrinkled piece of paper. *Here is the catalog*—he calls it *cate-log*, list of delicacies—*of her condition*. The note he unfolds is from the woman, a household servant back in Verona.

He reads: *‘Imprimis: She can fetch and carry.’* He smiles. *Why, a horse can do no more! Nay, a horse cannot fetch, but only carry; therefore is she better than a jade!*—a term for nag or wanton woman.

Again he reads: *Item: ‘She can milk.’* He is stirred just thinking about it. *Look you, a sweet virtue, in a maid with clean hands!*

Each gentleman’s page will, sooner or later in a day, appear in the kitchen; the sprightly Speed now joins his friend, and he, too, helps himself to a yeasty bun. “How now, Signior Launce! What news with Your Mastership?”

“With my master’s *ship*? Why, it is *at sea!*”—Proteus, he knows, is perplexed.

Speed laughs. “Well, your old vice still: mistaking a word.” He points to the list. “What news, then, in your *paper*?”

“The blackest news that ever thou heardest.”

“Why, man, how *black*?”—in what way?

“Marry, as black as *ink*.”

Speed reaches for his news. “Let me read them.”

“*Fie* on thee, jolt-head!” says Launce, pulling the sheet away. “*Thou* canst not read!”

Speed is indignant. “*Thou* liest!—*I can!*”

“I will try thee. Tell me this: who *begot* thee?”

“Why, the son of my grandfather.”

Launce laughs scornfully. “O illiterate loiterer!—it was a son of thy *grandmother!* This proves that thou canst *not* read!”—read visible signs that Speed is illegitimate.

Speed frowns. “Come, come, fool!—try me with thy *paper!*”

Launce hands it over. “There—and *Saint Nicholas* be thy speed!”—do it before Christmas.

Speed sits beside him, and reads aloud: “*‘Imprimis: She can milk.’*”

Launce smiles, his eyes closed. “Aye, that she *can!*”

“Item: ‘She brews good ale.’”

Says Launce: “And thereof comes the proverb, ‘Bless your heart, you brew *good ale!*’”

Most take the aphorism *Blessing with your heart, you’ll brew good ale* to mean *Good intentions bring good results*. But Speed proceeds: “Item: ‘She can sew.’”

“That’s as much as to say, ‘*She can so!*’”—a denial of inability.

“Item: ‘She can knit.’”

“What need a man care about *stocks*,”—public punishment confining the legs, “when the wench can *knit* him a stocking!”—and rebuke at home.

“Item: ‘She can wash and scour.’”

“A special virtue: for then she need not *be* washed and scoured.”

“Item: ‘She can spin.’”

Launce laughs. “When *I* may set the world on *wheels*, then can *she* spin for her living!”

“Item: ‘She hath many nameless virtues.’”

Launce nods. “That’s as much as to say *bastard* virtues—that, indeed, know not their fathers, and therefore *have* no names.”

Speed looks down the sheet. “Here follow her *vices*.”

Launce is eager to share in those. “Close at the heels of her virtues!”

“Item: ‘She is not to be kissed while *fasting*,’—at night, “in respect of her breath.”

Launce shrugs. “Well, that fault may be mended with a *breakfast*. Read on.”

“Item: ‘She hath a sweet mouth’”—speaks softly.

“That makes amends for her sour *breath*.”

“Item: ‘She doth talk in her sleep.’”

“It’s no matter for that,” says Launce, “so she *sleep* not in her *talk*.”

“Item: ‘She is slow in words.’”

“O *villain*, who set this down among her *vices*! To be slow in words is a woman’s *virtue*! I pray thee, *out* with’t, and place it for her *chief* virtue!”

But neither has a pencil, so they continue. “Item: ‘She is proud’”—demanding.

“Out with *that*, too! It was *Eve’s legacy*, and cannot be ta’en from her.” He has enjoyed being tempted—and succumbing.

“Item: ‘She hath no teeth.’”

“I care not about that, neither, because *I* love *crusts*.”

“Item: ‘She is curst’”—shrewish.

“Well,” says Launce, scratching his head, “the best is, she hath no teeth to *bite*.”

“Item: ‘She will often praise her liquor.’”

“If her liquor be *good*, she shall,” says Launce. “If she will not, *I* will!—for *all* good things should be praised.”

“Item: ‘She is too liberal’”—gives too freely.

Launce considers. “Of her tongue she *cannot*, for that’s writ down she is slow of; of her purse she *shall not*, for that I’ll keep shut! Now, of *another* thing, she *may*,” he says, with a lascivious smile, “and that I cannot help!

“Well, proceed.”

Speed resumes. “Item: ‘She hath more hair than *wit*, and more *faults* than hairs, and more wealth than *faults*.’”

Launce sits up abruptly. “*Stop there!*—I’ll *have* her! She was mine, then not mine, twice or thrice in that last article. Rehearse that once more....”

“Item: ‘She hath more hair than *wit*.’”

“More hair than *wit*? It may be,” Launce allows. “I’ll examine it.” He thinks, and sizes it up this way: “The cover of the salt *hides* the salt, and therefore it *exceeds* the salt; so the *hair* that covers the *wit* is ‘*more than*’ the *wit*, for the greater hides the lesser.” He is satisfied. “What’s next?”

“‘And more *faults* than hairs.’”

Launce frowns. “That’s monstrous! Oh, that *that* were out!”

“‘And more *wealth* than *faults*.’”

Launce sighs, mollified. “Why, *that* word makes the *faults* *gracious*!”

“Well, I’ll have her,” he concludes, taking back the paper, “and if it be a match, as nothing is impossible....”

Speed looks at him expectantly. “What then?”

Launce grins mischievously. “Why, then will I tell thee that thy master stays for thee at the north gate.”

“For *me*?”

“For *thee*? Nay—who art *thou*? He hath stayed for a *better* man than *thee*!”—namely, for Launce, who has caused the delay.

Speed rises. “And must I go to him?”

“Thou must *run* to him!—for thou hast stayed so long that *going* will scarce serve the turn!”

“Why didst not tell me *sooner*?” demands Speed. He turns and dashes away. “*A pox* on your *love letter*!” he cries over his shoulder as he runs from the kitchen door.

Launce laughs heartily. *Now will he be swung for reading my letter!—an unmannerly slave, that will thrust himself into secrets!*

He stands, folds the paper, and brushes crumbs from his shirt and coat.

I’ll after, to rejoice in the boy’s correction, he decides, in sanctimonious satisfaction, and saunters out to follow poor Speed up to the city gate.

Sir Thurio, fear not but that she will love you,” the sovereign tells the pompous petitioner, “now that Valentine is banished from her sight.” He finishes writing, then seals the paper with warm wax, into which he presses his signet ring.

Thurio is hardly convinced. “Since his exile, she hath despised me *most!*—forsworn my company, and railed at me such that I am desperate of obtaining her,” he says gloomily.

“This weak *impression* of love is as a figure trenched in ice, which with an hour’s heat dissolves to water, and doth lose its form,” says the duke. “A little time will melt her frozen thoughts, and worthless Valentine shall be forgot.

“How now, Sir Proteus?” he asks, as the latest Veronese visitor returns. “Is your countryman, according to our proclamation, *gone?*”

“Gone, my good lord.”

“My daughter takes his going grievously,” says the duke.

“A little time, my lord, will kill that grief.”

“So I believe, but Thurio thinks not so.” He motions the newcomer closer. “Proteus, the good conceit I hold of thee—for thou hast shown some sign of good deserving—makes me the better to *confer* with thee.”

Proteus bows deeply. “Longer than I prove *loyal* to Your Grace, let me not live to look upon Your Grace.”

“Thou know’st how willingly I would effect a match between Sir Thurio and my daughter.”

“I do, my lord.”

“And also, I think, thou art not ignorant how she opposes her against my will.”

“She did, my lord, when *Valentine* was here....”

“Aye, and *perversely* she *persevers* so! What might we do to make the girl forget the love of Valentine, and love *Sir Thurio?*”

Proteus is ready. “The best way is to *slander* Valentine with the things that women hold high in *hate*: falsehood and cowardice, and poor descent.”

The duke strokes his beard. “But she’ll think that it is *spoken* in hate.”

“Aye—if his *enemy* deliver it,” replies Proteus shrewdly. “Therefore it must be spoken, with circumstance, by one whom she esteemeth as his *friend*.”

“Then *you* must undertake to slander him.”

“But that, my lord, I should be loath to do!—’tis an ill office for a *gentleman*, especially against his very *friend*.”

“Where your *good* word cannot advantage him, your slander can never *damage* him,” says the duke. “Therefore the office is indifferent, you being entreated to it by *your* friend.”

Proteus bows. “You have prevailed, my lord; if I can do it by ought that I can speak in his dispraise, she shall not long continue love to him.

“But, say this *does* wean her love from Valentine; it follows not that she will love Sir *Thurio*.”

“Therefore,” says Thurio, “as you unwind her love from him, lest it should unravel and be good to *none*, you must provide to bottom it on *me*—which must be done by *praising me* as much in worth as you dispraise Sir Valentine.”

“And, Proteus, we dare trust you in this kind,” says the duke, “because we know, on Valentine’s report, you are already Love’s firm votary, and cannot soon revolt and change your mind.”

He hands the new document to Proteus. “Upon this warrant you shall have access where you with Silvia may confer at large; she is lumpish, grave, and melancholy, but, for your *friend’s* sake, will be glad of *you*. There you may tempt her, by your persuasion, to hate young Valentine and love my friend.”

Proteus has other temptations in mind for her. “As much as I can do, I will effect,” he promises sincerely. “But you, Sir Thurio, act not sharply enough! You must *lay lime*”—set a

snare—"to entangle her desires, with wailful *sonnets* whose composed rhymes should be full-fraught with *serviceable* vows!"—pledges that sound sincere.

"Aye, much is the force of heaven-bred *poesy*," says the duke—although the proposed poems' purpose is hardly angelic.

Proteus is sure that, with Lady Silvia, such efforts will only further discredit the dim, shallow fop, and he draws on the literature of his youth to recommend time-worn conceits. "Say that upon the *altar* of her beauty you *sacrifice* your tears, your sighs, your *heart!*" he tells Thurio. "Write till your ink be *dry*—then moisten it again with your *tears*," he urges, "and frame some feeling line that may *show* much integrity!"

Thurio frowns; his actual devotion—to acquiring added wealth and rank—might better remain unshown.

But Proteus pushes: "Because Orpheus' lute was strung with *poets'* sinews, his golden touch could soften *steel* and *stones*, make *tigers* tame, and huge *leviathans* forsake unsounded deeps to dance on sands!" The legendary poet also managed—almost—to free his wife from Hades.

"After your dire, *lamenting elegies*," Proteus tells Thurio, "visit, by night, your lady's chamber-window *with some concert!* Tune the instruments to a *deploring* melody; the night's dead silence will well become such sweet, plaintive *grieving*."

"This, or else nothing, will inherit her!"

"This discipline shows thou hast been in love," says the duke, of feeling forlorn and miserable.

"And thy advice I'll put in practise *this night!*" says Thurio. "Therefore, sweet Proteus, my direction-giver, let us go into the city immediately to find some gentlemen well skilled in music. I have a sonnet that will serve the turn to give the *onset* of thy good advice." A month ago, Thurio bought it—a song, actually—from a peddler, while traveling here from Verona.

The duke concludes their romance business briskly: "*About* it, gentlemen!"

"We'll wait upon Your Grace till after supper," says Thurio, "and afterward determine our proceedings."

"Even *now* about it!" demands the duke. "I will pardon you"—for not being present.

Both gentlemen bow and go, very hungry—in Thurio's case, for food.

Chapter Six Banished Behavior

Along the highway east from Milan, a road near Verona heads south toward the Duchy of Mantua. Hidden at the crossing, a band of outlaws lies in wait, ready to pounce on anyone who dares make a journey on the rutted routes.

"Fellows, stand fast!" urges their chief. "I see a rider...."

"Even if there be *ten*, shrink not, but *down* with 'em!" his tall companion whispers to the others.

A third man, with a cocked pistol in his hand, springs from the bushes to accost Sir Valentine as he comes up the rise. "*Stand*, sir, and throw us what you have about ye! If not, we'll *make you still*, and *rifle* you!" The others emerge as well.

Speed looks at his master as they dismount. "Sir, we are *undone!* These are the villains that all travelers do *fear* so much!"

Valentine raises a hand, and says, soothingly, "My friends—"

"That's not *so*, sir!" says the chief. "We are your *enemies!*"

"*Peace!* We'll *hear* him," insists the brigand beside him. Noting Valentine's calm demeanor and fine clothes, he is thinking of ransom.

The outlaw pointing the loaded weapon casts his vote: "*Aye*, by my beard we *will*, for he's a *proper* man!"

Valentine spreads his arms wide. "Then know that I have *little* wealth to *lose*. I am a man crossèd with adversity; my riches are these poor habiliments. If you should here disfurnish me, you take the sum and substance that I have"—have *with* him, he means; his family is wealthy, but he has no scruple about deceiving thieves.

"Whither travel you?"

"To Verona."

"Whence came you?"

"From Milan."

"Have you long sojourned there?" the pistol wielder inquires.

"Some sixteen months. And *longer* might have stayed, if a *crookèd* fortune had not thwarted me."

The chief outlaw stares at him. "What, were you *banished* thence?"

"I was."

"For what offence?" ask the tall man.

Valentine looks down, thinking. "For that which now torments me to rehearse," he tells them. "I *killed* a man, whose death I much *repent!* But yet I slew him *manfully* in fight, without false 'vantage or base treachery!" He equivocates, but with genuine regret: the victim was himself.

The first outlaw tells him, "Why, ne'er repent it, if it were done *so!* But were you banished for so *small* a fault?"

"I was, and held me glad of such a doom"—as opposed to execution.

The band has had trouble robbing foreign victims; a thought occurs to the tall man. "Have you other tongues?"—languages.

Valentine nods. "They made me fortunate in my youthful travel, or else I often had been miserable."

The third man lowers his pistol. "By the bare scalp of Robin Hood's fat friar, *this* fellow were a *king* for our wild faction!"

The chief agrees. "We'll have him!" He calls the others into conference. "Sirs, a word..." They move away to talk.

Young Speed did not at all enjoy looking down the weapon's dark barrel, and he admires the legendary robber of the rich, defender of the poor. He urges, in a hushed voice, "Master, *be* one of them! It's an *honourable* kind of thievery!"

"*Peace*, villain!" says Valentine, keeping his eyes on living outlaws.

The tall man returns to ask about the outcast's options. "Tell us this: have you anything to *take us to?*"

"Nothing but my fortune." He has one, but Valentine says it so morosely that the thieves take it to mean *sad fate*.

"Know, then," says the third outlaw, his pistol now tucked safely under a broad belt, "that *some* of us are *gentlemen*, such as the fury of *ungovernèd youth* thrusts from the company of lawful men! Myself was from *Verona* banishèd, for practising to steal away a *lady*—an heiress, and near allied unto the duke."

"And I from Mantua—for a gentleman who, in my mood, I stabbed in the heart."

"And I," says their chief, "for such-like petty crimes as these.

"But to the purpose! For we cite our faults that thou may hold *excusèd* our lawless lives; *and*, partly—as you are beautified with goodly shape, and by your own report a linguist—seeing a man of such perfection as we do in our quality much *need*—"

"Indeed, because you are a *banished* man!" interjects the tall man. "*Therefore*, above the rest, we parley to you!

"Are you content to be our *general?*—to make a *virtue* of necessity, and live, as we do, in this wilderness?"

"What say'st thou?" demands the gentleman with the gun. "Wilt thou be of our consort? Say *aye*, and be the captain of us all! We'll do thee homage, and be ruled by thee—love thee as our

commander and our king!”

“But if thou scorn our courtesy,” the chief notes, “thou diest.”

The tall man nods. “Thou shalt not live to brag of what we have offered.”

“I’ll *take* your offer, and will live with you,” says Sir Valentine, “provided that you do no outrages on innocent *women* or *poor* passengers.”

“No, we *detest* such vile, base practises!” the third man assures him; they have no interest in decent women or penniless travelers. “Come, go with us! We’ll bring thee to our cave, and show thee all of the treasures we have gotten!—which, with ourselves, all rest at thy dispose!”

The gentleman-bandits stride into the greenwood, with the wide-eyed page in tow, leading the horses.

Proteus paces, very troubled, just outside the palace walls, in the near-darkness just after sunset. *Already have I been false to Valentine, and now I must be as unjust to Thurio! Under the colour of commending him, I have access my own love to prefer. But Silvia is too fair, too true, too holy, to be corrupted with my worthless gifts,* he notes sourly, with growing annoyance.

When I protest true loyalty to her, she twits me with my falsehood to my friend! When to her beauty I commend my vow, she bids me think how I have been forsworn, in breaking faith with Julia, whom I loved!

And notwithstanding all her sudden quips—the least whereof would quell a lover’s hope!—the more she spurns my love, the more it yet grows, and, spaniel-like, fawneth on her still!

He hears footsteps. *But here comes Thurio. Now must we go to her window, and give some evening music to her ear.*

Sir Thurio has hired several musicians from the nearby inn, and they have come to help him woo a lady.

“How now, Sir Proteus,” says Thurio. “Are you crept before us?” he asks boorishly—and pointlessly.

“Aye, gentle Thurio. For you know that love will *creep* in service where it cannot *go*.”

Thurio is taken aback. “Aye—but I hope, sir, that *you* love not *here*!”

“Sir, but I *do*—or else I would be *hence*.”

Thurio is upset. “Who? *Silvia*?”

“Aye, Silvia—for *your* sake.”

“I thank you, for your own,” mutters Thurio. Unduly relieved, he turns to the musicians. “Now, *gentlemen*, let’s tune, and to it *lustily* a while!”

As the players ready their instruments, two figures walk in the dark toward the castle: the graybeard host of the inn, and a slight but well-dressed boy, just arrived from Verona.

“Now, my young guest,” says the innkeeper, “methinks you’re allicholy”—*all melancholy*, as he hears hostlers put it. “I pray you, why is that?”

“Marry, mine host, because I cannot be *merry*”—a dodge; Julia is ill at ease in the disguise. Her golden tresses are crammed into a page’s soft cap, but her smile and lilted laughter are patently feminine.

“Come,” says the man kindly, “we’ll *have* you merry! I’ll bring you where you shall hear *music*, and see the gentleman that you asked about!”

“But shall I hear him speak?” she asks hopefully.

“Aye, that you shall.”

Julia is aglow. “That *will* be music!”

They stop well back, unnoticed, to stand at a corner in the shadow under high eaves.

“Hark, hark!” whispers the host.

Julia peers at the distant cluster. “Is he among these?”

“Aye, but *peace*!—let’s hear ’em!”

The singer is ready; he nods, and the musicians begin to play. Proteus steps below the high window to perform an adapted version of Thurio's sheet, "Who Is Beatrice?"

*Who is Silvia? What is she,
That all our swains commend her?
Holy, fair, and wise is she!
The heavens such grace did lend her,
That she might admirèd be!
Is she as kind as she is fair?—
For Beauty lives in kindness.
Love doth to her eyes repair,
To help him in his blindness,
And, being helped, inhabits there!
Then to Silvia let us sing
That Silvia is excelling!—
She excels each mortal thing
Upon the dull earth dwelling!
To her let us garlands bring!*

The innkeeper is surprised to see that the young visitor is quietly weeping. "How *now*? Are you sadder than you were *before*? How do you, man?" He pats the lad on the shoulder. "The music pleases you not."

"You mistake," moans Julia, "the *musician* pleases me not!"

"Why, my pretty youth?"

Julia looks up, eyes filled with tears. "He plays *false*, father!"

"How? Out of tune on the strings?"

"Not so—but yet so false that he grieves my very *heart*-strings!"

The old host blinks; the song sounded fine to him. "You have a *quick ear*."

"*Aye*—I would I were *deaf*; it makes me have a *slow heart*!" Julia tries to recover her composure.

"I perceive you delight not in music."

"Not a whit, when it *jars* so!"

The musicians now play a pretty, shifting ballad. "Hark, what a fine change is in the music..."

"*Aye*, that *change* is the *spite*!" she says bitterly.

The man raises his eyebrows. "You would have them always play but one thing?"

"I would always have *one* play but one thing!" She wipes her eyes. "But, host, doth this Sir Proteus that we talked of *often* resort unto this gentlewoman?"

"I'll tell *you* what Launce, his man, told *me*: he loves her out of all nick!"—beyond points of measure.

The suggestion of a man tallying up notches hardly soothes her. "Where is Launce?"

"Gone to seek his dog—which tomorrow, by his master's command, he must carry as a present to this lady."

Julia hushes him: "Peace! Stand aside; the company parts." They move farther back, into the deepest shadow, as the musicians pass, returning to play for guests at the inn.

"Sir Thurio, fear you not," says Proteus. "I will so plead that you shall say my cunning drift *excels*!"

Thurio is adjusting his gloves; he wants to resume drinking at the hostelry. "Where meet we?"

“At Saint Gregory’s Well”—the inn’s wryly named tavern; Pope Gregory VII was a great reformer.

Thurio has already turned away. “Farewell.” And he is gone, leaving the surrogate to woo. Above, in her candle-lit chamber, Silvia is looking down from the window into the dark courtyard below.

“Madam, good even to Your Ladyship!” calls Proteus.

“I thank you for your music, gentlemen,” she says courteously. “Who is that that spake?”

“One, lady, if you knew his *pure heart’s truth*, you would quickly learn to know by his voice!”

Says Silvia sourly, “Sir Proteus, as I take it.”

He bows. “Sir Proteus, gentle lady, and your *servant!*”

“What’s your will?” she demands, daring him to speak forthrightly.

“That I may compass *yours!*”

“You’ll *have* your wish; my will is even this: that you immediately *hie you home to bed!*”

“Thou *crafty, perjured, false, disloyal* man!” she cries angrily. “Think’st thou I am so shallow, so unimaginative, as to be seduced by *thy flattery!*—thou who hast *deceivèd* so many with thy vows?”

“Return, *return*, and make *thy love amends!*”—do right by Julia.

She glances at the moon. “As for *me*—by this pale queen of night I swear, I am so far from granting thy request that I *despise* thee for thy wrongful suit, and by and by intend to *chide myself* even for this time I spend in *talking* to thee!”

“I *grant*, sweet love, that I did love a lady,” says Proteus, “but she is dead!”

- Thinks Julia, *’Twere false if I should speak it—for I am sure she is not buried!*

Silvia is unmoved. “Say that she *be*; yet *Valentine*, thy *friend*, survives—to whom, thyself art witness, *I am betrothèd!* And art thou not *ashamed* to wrong him with thy importunacy?”

“I likewise hear that Valentine is dead.”

Her laugh is harsh. “And so, I suppose, am *I*—for in his grave, assure thyself, *my love* is buried!”

“Sweet lady, let me take it from the earth!”

“Go to *thy lady’s* grave, and call *hers* thence!—or, at the least, in hers *sepulchre thine!*”

- *He heard not that*, thinks Julia, seeing his dogged attention.

Proteus tries another tack. “Madam, if your heart be so obdurate, yet vouchsafe me your *picture* for my love—the picture that is hanging in your chamber. To *that* I’ll speak, to *that* I’ll sigh and weep! For since the *substance* of your perfect self is else devoted, *I* am but a *shadow*, and to *your shadow* will I offer true love.”

- *If ’twere a substance, you would surely deceive it*, thinks the late Lady Julia angrily, *and make it but a ‘shadow’—as I am!*

Silvia scowls. “I am very loath to be *your* idol, sir. But since worshipping shadows and adoring false shapes shall *well become* your *falsehood*, send to me in the morning and I’ll lend it.” She hopes it will keep him away for a while—because soon his interest won’t matter. “And so, good *rest!*”

After she pulls the shutters closed, he mumbles, glumly, “Such rest as *wretches* have o’ernight, waiting for *execution* in the morn!” He stalks away, even more deeply in the grip of desire, even more determined in his frustration.

After a few moments, Julia turns sadly to the old man, who is sitting with his back against the wall in the dark beside her. “Host, will you go?”

He rouses himself. “By my halidom, I was *fast asleep...*”

“Pray you, where lies Sir Proteus?”

The innkeeper yawns. “Marry, at my house.” He looks up at the cloudless black sky. “Trust me, I think ’tis almost *day*,” he groans, rising stiffly.

“Not so,” says the wounded lady. “But it hath been the longest night that e’er *I* watched, and

the most heaviest.”

In silence they return to the inn nestled beside the highway which, off to the east, runs through the old forest.

An aging knight of Milan, wearing clean but antique apparel, comes to the palace courtyard well before dawn to meet with a lady—the first such rendezvous, Sir Eglamour reflects, in many years.

This is the hour that Madam Silvia entreated me to call and know her mind. There's some great matter she would employ me in. “Madam,” he calls softly, “madam!”

Silvia quickly open the shutters. The moon has since passed overhead, and the yard is dark. “Who calls?” she asks, apprehensively.

“Your servant and your friend; one that attends Your Ladyship’s command.”

Silvia is relieved. “Sir Eglamour, a thousand times good morrow!”

“As many, worthy lady, to yourself! According to Your Ladyship’s impose, I am thus early come to know what service it is your pleasure to command me in.”

“O Eglamour, thou art a *gentleman*—think not I flatter, for I swear I do not—valiant, wise, well accomplished—*compassionate!*” says Silvia. “Thou art not ignorant what dear good will I bear unto the banished Valentine, nor how my father would enforce me to marry vain Thurio, whom my very *soul* abhors!

“Thyself hast loved; and I have heard thee say no grief did ever come so near thy heart as when thy lady and thy true love died, upon whose grave thou vowedst pure chastity.

“Sir Eglamour, I would *go to Valentine!*—to Mantua, where I hear he makes abode. And, for the ways are dangerous to pass, I do desire *thy* worthy company, upon whose faith and honour I repose.”

She anticipates objection: “Urge not my father’s anger, Eglamour, but think upon *my grief*, a lady’s grief—and on the *justice* of my flying hence to keep me from a *most unholy* match!—which Heaven *and* Fortune would reward with plagues!

“I do desire thee, from a heart even as full of sorrows as the sea of sands, to bear me company. Then go with me!” she pleads. “If not, hide what I have said to thee, so that I may venture to depart *alone.*”

“Madam, I *pitied much* your grievances,” says the knight, “for which, as I since know they *virtuously* are faced, I give consent to go along with you, recking as little what betideth *me* as much as I wish all *good* befortune *you!*”

“When will you go?”

“This evening coming!”

“Where shall I meet you?”

“At Friar Patrick’s cell, where I intend holy confession.”

“I will not fail Your Ladyship!” The old knight bows, slowly and elegantly. “Good morrow, gentle lady.”

“Good morrow, kind Sir Eglamour!” say Silvia happily, as the dark sky becomes tinged with deep blue, and the horizon begins to glow with the light of dawn.

Chapter Seven Tokens and Gifts

Launce has been shown the way up to a room in the palace this afternoon. He has brought his dog, and they are waiting for the page’s master, Sir Proteus.

Launce glares at Crab. *When a man’s servant shall play the cur with him, look you, it goes hard!*

One that I brought up from a puppy—one that I saved from drowning, when three or four of

his blind brothers and sisters went to it! —tossed, unwanted, into the river, tied in a sack.

I have taught him precisely—even as one would say, ‘Thus should I teach a dog!’

Launce trained the mongrel to behave with canine gentility; but he recalls yesterday’s visit. *I was sent to deliver him as a present to Mistress Silvia from my master. I no sooner come into the dining-chamber but he pulls me to her plate and steals her capon’s-leg!*

Oh, ’tis a foul thing when a cur cannot keep himself in all companies! I would have, as one should say, one that takes upon him to be a dog in deed—to be, as it were, a dog in all things.

If I had not had more wit than he, and taken upon me a fault that he did, I think verily he had been hanged for ’t! As sure as I live, he had suffered for ’t!

He glances upward. *You shall judge. He thrusts himself into the company of three or four gentleman-like dogs under the duke’s table. He had not been there, bless the mark, a pissing while, but all the chamber smelt him!*

The blooming odor of flatulence upset the nobles. *‘Out with the dog!’ says one! ‘What cur is that?’ says another! ‘Whip him out!’ says the third! ‘Hang him up!’ says the duke!*

I, having been acquainted with the smell before, knew it was Crab, and goes me to the fellow that whips the dogs. ‘Friend,’ quoth I, ‘you mean to whip the dog?’ ‘Aye, marry, do I!’ quoth he. ‘You do him the more wrong,’ quoth I; ‘twas I did the thing you wot of.’

He makes no more ado, but whips me out of the chamber!

How many masters would do that for a servant? Nay, I’ll be sworn I have sat in the stocks for puddings he hath stolen; otherwise he had been executed! I have stood on the pillory for geese he hath killed; otherwise he had suffered for ’t!

Looking at the ungrateful hound, he wags his head. *Thou thinkest not of that now!* he says reproachfully. *Nay, I still remember the trick you served me when I took my leave of Madam Silvia! Did I not bid thee, ‘Mark me, and do as I do’? When didst thou see me heave up my leg and make water against a gentlewoman’s farthingale? Didst thou ever see me do such a trick?*

Crab perks up as Proteus enters the room, accompanied by a young page.

Proteus asks the newcomer, “Sebastian is thy name? I like thee well, and will employ thee in some service immediately.”

The boy—Julia, her face and hands tinted tan—bows. “In what you please, I’ll do what I can!”

“I hope thou wilt.” Proteus turns to Launce and frowns. “How now, you whoreson peasant; where have you been loitering these two days?”

“Marry, sir, I carried Mistress Silvia the *dog*, as you bade me.”

Proteus smiles, and asks, hopefully, “And what *said* she of my little jewel?”

Launce shrugs. “Marry, she says your dog was a *cur*—and tells you *currish* thanks is good enough for such a present.”

Proteus, surprised, frowns. “But she *received* my dog...?”

“No, indeed, did she *not*—here have I brought him back again.”

Proteus stares at the big black form; Crab’s jowls dribble as he pants and blinks. “*What?*” cries the gentleman, aghast. “Didst thou offer her *this*, from *me*?”

“Aye, sir!” says Launce proudly. “The *other*, that *squirrel*,”—Proteus’s own dog, “was stolen from me by the hangman’s boys in the market-place,” he explains. “So then I offered her mine own—who is a dog as big as *ten* of yours, and therefore a gift the greater!”

Proteus rages: “*Go*, get thee *hence* and *find my dog again!*—or ne’er return again into my sight! *Away*, I say!” As Launce gapes, Proteus shouts. “Stay’st thou here to *vex* me?” Launce hurries away, intent on retrieving the purloined pug; Crab goes with him.

“A slave that still and end turns me to *shame!*” mutters Proteus. He tells the new page, “Sebastian, I have entertained *thee* partly because I have need of such a youth as can with some *discretion* do my business—’tis not for trusting to *yond foolish lout!*—but chiefly for thy *face* and thy *behavior*, which, if my augury deceive me not, witness good bringing up, fortune and truth.

“Therefore know thou that for this I entertain thee: go now, and take this *ring* with thee;

deliver it to *Madam Silvia*.”

For a moment he pauses, gazing sadly at the bright circle of gold nestled in his palm, remembering the pride he had once taken in it. “She *loved me well* who delivered it to me. . . .”

Julia watches his face. “It seems you loved not *her*, letting go her token. She is dead, belike?”

“Not so,” says Proteus, still looking at the ring. “I think she lives.”

“Alas!”

“Why dost thou cry ‘alas’?”

“I cannot choose but pity her,” says the page.

“Wherefore shouldst thou *pity* her?”

“Because methinks that she loved *you* as well as you do love your Lady *Silvia*. She dreams of him that has *forgotten* her love; you dote on her that *cares not* for *your* love. ’Tis pity love should be so *contrary*—and thinking of it makes me cry ‘alas!’”

“Well, give her that ring,” says Proteus, finally relinquishing it, “and therewithal this letter.” He points to a door down the corridor. “That’s her chamber. Tell my lady I claim the promise of her heavenly picture,” he says, without enthusiasm.

He sighs, surprised to feel somewhat forlorn. “Your message done, hie home unto my chamber, where thou shalt find me, sad and solitary.” He turns and walks away, slowly, ruminating.

Julia considers her unhappy assignment. *How many women would do such embassy?*

Alas, poor Proteus! she thinks, going to Silvia’s door. *Thou hast entertained a fox to be the shepherd of thy lambs!*

Why do I pity him, that with his very heart despiseth me? Alas, poor fool!

But she is no fool. *Because he loves her, he despiseth me; because I love him, I must pity him.*

She looks sadly at the gold band. *This ring I gave him when he parted from me, to bind him to remember my good will. And now am I, unhappy messenger, to proffer that which I would see refusèd, plead for that which I would not obtain, and praise his faith which I would hear dispraisèd!*

I am my master’s truly confirmèd love!—but cannot be true servant to my master unless I prove false traitor to myself!

Yet will I woo for him—but do so coldly, as heaven knows I would not have him speed!

Silvia emerges, with two attendants, from her chambers.

“Gentlewoman, good day!” says the new page. “I pray you, be my means to bring me where to speak with Madam Silvia.”

“What would you with her, if that *I* be she?”

“If you be she,” the page says politely, “I do entreat your patience to hear me speak the message I am sent with.” She is studying the rival lady intently.

“From whom?”

“From my master, Sir Proteus, madam.”

“Oh, he sends you for a picture.”

“Aye, madam.”

“Ursula, bring my picture here.” After a moment the waiting-gentlewoman returns, bringing a painted image in its gilded wooden frame. She leans it against the wall. “Go give your master this. Tell him from me: one *Julia*—whom his changing thoughts forget—would better befit his chamber than this *shadow!*”

Julia is startled; but she remembers *Sebastian*’s mission. She reaches into her coat pocket. “Madam, please you, peruse this letter.”

But as Silvia reads, frowning and shaking her head, Julia interrupts: “*Pardon* me, madam!”—and hastily reclaims the message, one she herself received from Proteus just before leaving Verona. “I have mistakenly delivered you a paper that I should not! *This* is the letter to Your Ladyship!”

Silvia accepts it, but says, "I pray thee, let me look on that again." She had spotted familiar, insincere declarations of love.

Julia demurs. "It may not be; good madam, pardon me." She has the answer to her question.

"Then hold it. I will *not* look upon *your master's* lines!" says Silvia, disgusted. "I know they are stuffed with *protestations*, and full of new-found *oaths*—which he will *break* as easily as I do tear his paper!" With that, she rips Proteus's latest letter into pieces—which brings to the other gentlewoman a blushing remembrance.

"Madam," says Julia quietly, "he sends Your Ladyship this ring." Despite the feeling of humiliation, she offers it.

Silvia looks at the ring—and scowls. "The *more shame* for him, that he sends it to me!—for I have heard him say a thousand times his *Julia* gave it him at his departure!" That lady's young heart races, hearing *a thousand times*. "Though *his* false finger have profaned the ring, *mine* shall not do his *Julia* so much *wrong!*"

The page's eyes glisten. "She thanks you."

Silvia is puzzled. "What say'st thou?"

"I thank you, madam, that you regard her tenderly," the boy explains, pocketing the ring. "Poor gentlewoman! My master wrongs her much."

"Dost thou know her?"

"Almost as well as I do know myself. I do protest that, thinking upon *her* woes, I have wept a *hundred* various times."

"Belike, then, she realizes that Proteus hath forsook her...."

"I think she *doth*, and that's her cause of *sorrow*."

By Valentine's report, the other lady is very attractive. "Is she not surpassingly fair?"

"She hath been fairer, madam, than she *is*," says Julia dryly. "When she did think my master loved her well, she, in my judgment, was as fair as you! But since she did neglect her looking-glass, and threw her sun-expelling mask away, the air hath starved the roses in her cheeks, and pinched the lily tincture of her face, so that now she is become as tan as I."

"How tall is she?"

"About my stature. At Pentecost, when all our pageants of delight were played, my youth got me the playing of a *woman's* part, and I was trimmèd in Madam Julia's gown—which served me as fitly, by all men's judgments, as if the garment had been made for *me!* Therefore I know she is about my weight.

"And at that time I made her *weep* a-good, for I did play a *lamentable* part, madam; 'twas *Ariadne* passioning over *Theseus'* perjury and unjust flight." In the legend, Ariadne had given that king the thread by which he escaped from the Labyrinth—and then deserted her. "Which I so lively acted with my tears that my poor mistress, movèd therewithal, wept bitterly! And would I might be dead if in thought I felt not her very sorrow!"

Silvia touches the boy's hand. "She is beholding to thee, gentle youth. *Alas, poor lady*, desolate and left!" A tear slips down her cheek. "I weep, myself, to think upon thy words. Here, youth; there is my purse; I give thee this for thy sweet mistress' sake, because thou lovest her.

"Farewell." Silvia and her attendants proceed down the stairs.

Julia is, indeed, touched. *And she shall thank you for't, if e'er you know her.* She watches Silvia go. *A virtuous gentlewoman, mild and beautiful. I hope my master's suit will be but cold, since she respects my mistress' love so much!*

Alas, how love can trifle with itself!

Here is her picture.... She regards the portrait. *Let me see; I think, if I had such attire, this face of mine were full as lovely as is this of hers! And yet the painter flattered her a little—unless I flatter myself too much! Her hair is auburn, mine is perfect yellow; if that be all the difference in his love, I'll get me such a coloured perwig! Her eyes are grey, and so are mine, in the glass. Aye, but her forehead's low, and mine's as high....*

What should it be that he respects in her but what I can make respective in myself?

*Oh, if this foolish Love were not a blind god! —could see beyond appearance.
 Come, shadow, come, she tells herself, and take up this shadow—for this is thy rival! She lifts
 the image. O thou senseless form, thou shalt be worshipped, kissed, loved and adorèd!
 But were there sense in his idolatry, my substance should be a statue in thy stead!
 I'll use thee kindly, for thy mistress' sake, who usèd me so.
 Her smile is bittersweet. Or else, by Jove I vow, I should have scratched out your unseeing
 eyes, to make my master out of love with thee!*

Just inside the quiet grounds of the old abbey, not far from the palace, white-haired Sir
 Eglamour walks beneath some fragrant apple-tree boughs.
*The sun begins to gild the western sky, and now it is about the very hour that Silvia at Friar
 Patrick's cell should meet me.
 She will not fail, for lovers break not hours, unless it be to come before their time, so much
 they spur their expedition!*
 He looks toward the lane. *See where she comes.* “Lady, a happy evening!” he calls to her.
 “Amen, *amen!*” says Silvia, hurrying in past the front gate. “Go on, good Eglamour—out at
 the postern by the abbey wall! I fear I am attended by some *spies!*”
 “Fear not!” says gallant Sir Eglamour, leading the way on their flight to Mantua—and
 Valentine. “The forest is not three leagues off. If we recover that”—make it into the old woods—
 “we are sure enough!”

In the palace throne room, Thurio looks up expectantly when his romantic emissary to Lady
 Silvia returns from her chambers. “Sir Proteus, what says Silvia to my suit?” he asks
 curtly.

“Ah, sir, I find her milder than she *was,*” Proteus reports. “And yet she takes exceptions at
 your *person.*” His new page watches both males carefully.

Thurio frowns. “What, that my leg is too *long?*”

“No, that it is too *little.*”

Thurio decides, missing the dig, “I’ll wear a boot to make it somewhat rounder.”

- Thinks Julia, *But love will not be spurred by what it loathes!*

“What says she of my face?” demands Thurio, his head tipped back haughtily.

“She says it is a fair one.”

Thurio scowls. “Nay then, the wanton *lies;* my face is *brown.*” A pale complexion is thought
 best for gentles.

“But *pearls* are fair,” says Proteus, “and the old saying is, ‘Sunburnt men are pearls, in
 beauteous ladies’ eyes.’”

- *'Tis true—such pearls as put out ladies’ eyes, —cataracts— for I had rather squint than
 look on him!*

Thurio strokes his drooping mustache. “How likes she my discourse?”

“Ill, when you talk of war.”

“But well, when I discourse of *love* and *peace,*” Thurio concludes.

- *Yet better indeed when you hold your peace!*

“What says she to my valour?”

“Oh, sir, she makes no issue of *that.*”

- *She need not, when she knows it cowardice!*

“What says she to my birth?”

“That you are well *derivèd.*”

- *True—from a gentleman to a fool!*

“Considers she my possessions?”

“Oh, aye,” says Proteus, “and pities them.”

“*Wherefore?*”

- *That such an ass should own them!*

“That they are but by *lease*,” explains Proteus.

The page sees movement at the entrance’s double doors. “Here comes the duke!”

The sovereign rushes to the gentlemen, as his courtiers and attendants clamber noisily after, trying to catch up. “How now, Proteus! How now, Thurio! Which of you saw *Sir Eglamour* of late?”

“Not I,” says Thurio.

“Nor I.”

The duke asks Proteus, “Saw you *my daughter*?”

“Neither.”

The duke is distraught. “Why then, she’s fled unto that peasant *Valentine!*—and *Eglamour* is in her company!”

The gentlemen look at each other doubtfully.

“’Tis *true!*” insists the ruler, “for Friar Laurence met them both, as he in penance wandered through the forest! *Him* he knew well, and *guessed* that it was she—but, she being masked, he was not sure of it. What’s more, she did intend confession at Friar Patrick’s cell last evening—and there she was *not!*”

“These likelihoods confirm her *flight* from hence! Therefore, I pray you, *stand not to discourse*, but mount you immediately, and meet with me upon the mountain-foot rising of the road that leads towards *Mantua*, whither they are fled!

“*Dispatch*, sweet gentlemen, and follow me!” He hurries away, heading for the stable.

“Why, this it is a *peevish girl*,” says Thurio, disgusted, “who *flies* her fortune when it *follows* her! I’ll go after, more to be revenged on *Eglamour* than for the love of reckless *Silvia!*” He stalks after the duke.

“And *I* will follow,” mutters Proteus, “more for *Silvia*’s love than hate of who goes *with* her!”

Julia stays with him. *And I will follow, more to cross that love than in hate for Silvia, who has gone to her love!*

Under the forest foliage’s canopy, three refined ruffians lead an indignant new captive toward their well hidden lair.

“Come, come, be *patient!*” the oldest outlaw urges Lady *Silvia* apologetically. “We must bring you to our captain!”

“A *thousand* greater mischances than *this* one have taught me how to brook this patiently,” she retorts proudly.

“Come, bring her away,” the tall bandit tells his fellows.

“Where is the gentleman that was with her?”

“Being nimble-footed, he hath outrun us,” says the third, “but *Moyses* and *Valerius* follow him.” He waves the first man on. “Go thou with her to the west end of the wood; there is our captain. We’ll follow him that’s fled. The thicket is beset—he cannot ’scape.”

The graying outlaw nods. “Come, I must bring you to our captain’s cave. Fear not,” he assures the lady. “He bears an honourable mind, and will not use a woman lawlessly.”

Oh, Valentine, this I endure for thee! thinks *Silvia*, as she strides on ahead of the man, going to face the robbers’ chieftain.

Chapter Eight Rediscovery and Reunion

Valentine, a sorrowful fugitive left by himself, briefly, in the criminals’ camp, is surprised to find he feels comfortable in his new role. *How use doth breed a habit in a man! This shadowy wilderness, unfrequented woods, I better brook than flourishing, peopled towns! Here*

can I sit alone, unseen by any, and to the nightingale's plaintive notes tune my distresses, and record my woes.

But his hope is changeless: *O thou that dost inhabit in my breast, leave not the mansion long tenantless, lest, growing ruinous, the building fall, and leave no memory of what it was! Repair me with thy presence, Silvia!—thou gentle nymph, cherish thy forlorn swain!*

He hears a commotion, nearby and coming closer. *What halloing and what stir is this today? He can discern some of the rough voices. These are my mates—who make their wills their law—that have some unhappy wayfarer in chase! They love me well; yet I have much to-do keeping them from uncivil outrages!*

Withdraw thee, Valentine!

If a traveler is being pursued pass here, he would not impede his flight. He moves quickly into the thick brush, facing the clearing—watching and listening. *Who's this comes here?* A loud male voice is complaining—and to his astonishment, he sees Silvia, followed by his best friend and a young page.

His rapier still drawn, Proteus protests, “Madam, *this service* I have done *for you!*—though you respect not *ought* your servant doth—*hazarding life*, and *rescuing* you from him that would have *forced* your honour and your love!

“Vouchsafe me, for my *meed*, but *one fair look!*” he pleads, much vexed. He vigorously sheathes his blade. “A *smaller* boon than that I cannot beg!—and *less* than this, I am sure, you cannot give!”

In the bushes, Valentine is stunned—and baffled. *How like a dream is this I see and hear! Love, lend me patience to forbear a while....*

Silvia rejects the censure: “Oh, *be* miserably unhappy!—that am *I!*”

Unhappy can mean *hapless*. “Unhappy *were* you, madam, ere *I* came!” insists Proteus. “But by my coming I have made you happy!”

“By thy *approach* thou makest me most *unhappy!*” says Silvia angrily.

- Thinks Julia, here as Sebastian, *And* me, *when he approacheth* to your *presence!*

“Had I been seized by a *hungry lion,*” says Silvia, I would rather have been a *breakfast* to the *beast* than have false *Proteus* rescue me!

“*O Heaven,* be judge how I love *Valentine*, whose life's as tender to me as my *soul!* And fully as *much*—for *more* there cannot be—I do *detest perjured Proteus!*” She scowls at him.

“Therefore be *gone!* *Solicit me no more!*”

Proteus is utterly exasperated. “What *dangerous action*, stood it next to *death*, would I not undergo for *one calm look!* Oh, 'tis a *curse* on love, ever *confirmèd* when women cannot love where they're *belovèd!*”

“When *Proteus* cannot love where *he's* *belovèd!*” retorts Silvia, sick of his references to printed authority. “Read again *Julia's heart*—thy *first, best* love, for whose dear sake thou didst then render thy *faith* into a *thousand oaths!*—and from *all* those oaths descended into *perjury*, to 'love' *me!*

“Thou hast *no faith* left now—unless thou hadst *two!*—and that's far worse than *none!* Better have none than a *plural* faith, which is too much by one, thou *counterfeit* to thy *true friend!*”

Proteus hotly waves away the painful matter. “In *love*, who respects *friend?*”

“*All men* but Proteus!” cries Silvia.

The young man is flushed with anger in a feverish frenzy of cumulative desire. “Nay, if the gentle spirit of moving *words* can no way change you to a milder form, I'll move you like a *soldier!*—at *arms'* end!—and love you 'gainst the *nature* of love—*force* ye!”

“*O heaven!*”

Proteus is red-faced with lustful frustration—and now, with the page watching, he fears humiliation. “I'll *force* thee yield to my desire,” he warns, and reaches for Silvia's arm.

“*Ruffian!*” shouts Valentine, rushing from his cover, “*let go* that rude uncivil touch, thou *friend* of an *ill fashion!*”

“Valentine!” Proteus backs away, releasing the equally startled Silvia.

“Thou *worthless* friend!” growls Valentine. “That’s one *without faith or love!*—for such is a *‘friend’* now!

“*Treacherous* man! Nought but *mine eye* could have persuaded me that *thou* hast beguiled my hopes! Now I dare not say I have *one* friend alive—*thou* wouldst *disprove* me! Who should be trusted, when one’s *own right hand* is *perjured in the bosom?*”

Valentine shakes his head sadly. “Proteus, I am sorry that I must *never trust thee more*—and for thy sake count the *world* a stranger! But the personal wound is *deepest!* O time most accurst!—amongst all foes, that a *friend* should be the *worst!*”

They all now watch Proteus. Pale and wilted, he seems almost relieved. He falls to his knees, unable to look up into their eyes. “My *shame* and *guilt* confound me!

“*Forgive* me, Valentine!” he sobs. “If *heartly sorrow* be a sufficient ransom for offence, I tender it here!

“I do truly *suffer* for all I e’er did commit,” he moans. Hands covering his face, he hunches forward, constricted in despair.

Valentine turns silently to Silvia.

She looks from her love to his fallen friend, now prostrate and heaving with sobs. She had intended to make confession with Father Patrick yesterday, for what she fears might be venial sins; but, feeling no true remorse, and unwilling to make amends, she did not. Her face softens, and, after a moment, she nods.

Valentine goes to Proteus. “Then I am paid,” he says gently, “and once again I do perceive thee as honest. Who is not satisfied by *repentance* is of neither heaven *nor* earth, for those are pleased by penitence—and the *Eternal’s* wrath is thus appeasèd.”

He kneels beside his childhood companion, and places a hand on his shoulder. “And, so that my love may show plain and free,”—fully forgiving, “all that was mine in Silvia I’d give to *thee*”—the purest kind of affection and joy. Sir Valentine smiles, wishing his friend peace.

Lady Julia, however, is not relieved; platonic love has failed her; restored, it will leave her as vulnerable as before. “Oh, *unhappy me!*” groans the page, falling to the forest floor.

Proteus rises, concerned, and wipes his eyes. “Look to *the boy!*”

Valentine goes to kneel beside Julia. “*Why, boy? Why, wag!*—how now?” He rubs her hands. “What’s the *matter?* Look up!—*speak!*”

The page recovers enough to sit up. “Oh, good sir,” she moans, fumbling to loosen the strings of Sebastian’s leather purse, “my master chargèd me with *delivering a ring* to Madam Silvia—which, out of my neglect, was never done!”

“Where is that ring, boy?” asks Proteus, at her side; he now treasures Julia’s ring.

Feebly, Julia reaches into the pouch. “Here ’tis; this is it.”

Proteus is startled. “*How? Let me see!* Why... this is the ring I gave to *Julia!*”

“Oh, I cry you mercy, sir, I have *mistook!*” mumbles the page. “*This* is the ring you sent to Silvia!” Julia hands him her own ring—again.

Proteus stands, both tokens in his hands, eyes fixed upon the first. “But how camest *thou* by this ring? At my depart I gave this unto *Julia!*”

“And Julia herself did give it me,” says the page, also rising. “And Julia herself hath brought it hither!”

Proteus stares. “What?—*Julia!*”

“Behold her that gave *aim* to all thy oaths!—and entertained ’em *deeply in her heart!* How oft hast thou with perjury *cleft it to the root?*” She clutches at her plain page’s coat. “Oh, Proteus, let this habit make *thee* blush!—be *thou* ashamed that I have taken upon me such an immodest raiment!

“If *shame* live in a disguise for *love*, it is a lesser blot, decency finds, for women to change their *shapes* than men their *minds!*” she says angrily.

Proteus is again staggered. His tears start anew. “Than men their minds’—’tis *true!*”

“O Heaven, were Man but *constant*, he were perfected!—that one error *fills* him with faults—makes him run through *all* the sins!—and *constancy* falls off ere it begins!”

Julia stands beside him, a hand on his arm. The two young lovers, having resumed their proper selves, look into each other’s eyes—and Proteus has an epiphany: *What is in Silvia’s face, but I may spy more fresh in Julia’s?—with a constant eye!*

Valentine goes to them. “Come, come, a hand from either! Let me be blest to make this happy close! ’Twere pity two such friends should long be foes!”

Proteus, tear streaks still glistening on his cheeks, takes Julia’s hand. “Bear witness, Heaven,” he says quietly, earnestly, “I have my wish forever.”

She looks up at the man she first loved—who once again wears her ring. Gently, she slips his ring onto her finger. “And I mine,” she whispers.

Just then, the noisy band of outlaws bursts into the clearing. They have captured two wealthy travelers and an old knight, and now bring them toward their captain. “A *prize*, a *prize*,” call the disorderly rascals—with young Speed jubilating among them. “A *prize!*”

“Forbear, *forbear*, I say!” demands Valentine, disconcerted. “It is *my lord the duke!*” He kneels. “Your Grace is welcome to a man disgracèd, banished Valentine!”

“Sir Valentine!” cries the surprised nobleman.

“Yonder is *Silvia*,” says Thurio, starting toward her, “and Silvia’s *mine!*”

Valentine draws his sword. “Thurio, *get back!*—or else embrace *thy death!*” He raises the blade in warning. “Come not within the measure of my wrath! Do not name Silvia *thine!*—if once *again*, Verona shall not hold *thee* again!

“Here she stands; take not possession of her with a *touch*—I dare thee but to *breathe* upon my love!”

Thurio has a change of heart. “Sir Valentine, I *care not* for her! *Ay!*—I hold him but a *fool* that will endanger his body for a girl that loves him not! I claim her not; and therefore she is *thine.*”

The lady’s father regards Thurio sourly. “The more *degenerate* and *base* art thou, to make such means for her as *thou* hast done, then *leave* her on such slight conditions!”

The duke remembers, now, that when he disinherited Silvia, Valentine was not deterred. “Now, by the honour of my ancestry, I do applaud *thy* spirit, Valentine, and think thee *worthy* of an empress’s love!

“*Know* then: I here *forget* all former griefs, *cancel* all grudge, *repeal thee home again!* And I pledge a *new estate* for thine unrivallèd merit!—to which I thus subscribe: Sir Valentine, thou art a *gentleman* and *well derived!*”

“Take thou thy Silvia, for thou hast *deserved* her!”

Valentine bows. “I thank Your Grace! The gift hath made *me* happy—now I beseech you, for your daughter’s sake, to grant one *boon* that I shall ask of you.”

The duke looks at Silvia and smiles. “I *grant* it as thine own,” he says jovially, “*whate’er* it be!”

But Valentine turns to the outlaws. “These banished men that I have kept withal are men endued with *worthy* qualities. Forgive them what they have committed here, and let them be recallèd from their exile! They are *reformed*, civil, full of good, and fit for great *employment*, worthy lord.”

The duke is hardly delighted, but he nods. “Thou hast prevailèd; I pardon thee *and* them! Dispose of them as thou know’st their deserts.

“Come, let us go! We will include all *jars* and *triumphs*, *mirth* and rare *solemnity!*”

Sir Valentine tells his soon-to-be father-in-law, “And, as we walk along, I’ll dare be so bold as to make Your Grace *smile* with our discourse! What think you of this *page*, my lord?”

Julia turns scarlet.

“I think the boy hath grace in him,” says the duke. “He blushes...”

Valentine laughs. “More *grace* than *boy*, I warrant you, my lord!”

“What mean you by that saying?” asks the sovereign.

Says Valentine happily, “Please you, I’ll *tell you*, as we pass along, and you will *wonder* at what hath fortunèd!

“Come, Proteus,” he says, clasping his friend around the shoulders, “’tis your penance but to hear the story of your loves discoverèd!

“That done, *our* day of marriage shall be *yours*! One feast, one house, one mutual happiness!”

The gentlewomen look at each other.

Close enough, their smiles seem to say.