

TAMING OF THE SHREW

SYNOPSIS

ACT I; scene i

Shakespeare's play proper opens with Lucentio, a Florentine traveler who has come to study in Padua, and his servant Tranio. Upon their arrival, they see Baptista Minola, a rich gentleman of Padua, approaching with his two daughters, Katherine and her younger sister Bianca, as well as Gremio and Hortensio, both suitors to Bianca. Baptista is in the process of rejecting both suitors for Bianca because Katherine must wed before he will allow her younger sister to do so. Kate is a sharp-tongued young woman, and, based on the remarks of Hortensio and Gremio, it does not seem likely she will easily acquire a husband, thereby lessening their chances of ever being with Bianca. Both men agree to do their best to find Katherine a husband so that they may have a chance at winning the younger, more beautiful and desirable daughter, Bianca.

Lucentio himself has fallen hopelessly in love with Bianca. Lucentio devises a plan to bring him closer to Bianca while appearing to honor her father's wishes: He proposes to disguise himself as a schoolmaster and thereby work his way into the Minola household. Tranio reminds his master that he is expected in Padua and, if he doesn't arrive, trouble will arise. As a remedy to this potential problem, Lucentio quickly dictates Tranio impersonate him while he is disguised as a tutor—a ruse that is sure to work since no one in Padua has ever met either of them. Another of Lucentio's servants, Biondello, arrives and is confused at seeing Tranio dressed in his master's clothes. Lucentio tells Biondello Tranio has agreed to impersonate him because he has killed a man in Padua and his life is on the line.

ACT I; scene ii

Petruchio and his servant, Grumio, enter. Petruchio has come from Verona to Padua to seek his fortune. He arrives at his old friend Hortensio's house and fills Hortensio in on his financial situation. Hortensio jokingly asks Petruchio whether he would like a shrewish, yet rich, wife. Petruchio assures his friend that no woman could be too shrewish, too unattractive, or too hard to handle, as long as her dowry was sufficient and swears that day to make Katherine his. As Petruchio prepares to head to Minola's, Hortensio volunteers to accompany him because "in Baptista's keep [his] treasure is" (117). Since Bianca's father refuses to let her have suitors, Hortensio asks Petruchio to offer him, "disguised in sober robes" (131), as a music instructor to Bianca so that he might court her secretly.

Gremio arrives with Lucentio (disguised as a schoolmaster). In offering Lucentio as a tutor to Baptista's daughters, Gremio's real plan is to have the scholar (Lucentio) sing his praises to Bianca. When all the men meet, Hortensio informs Gremio that he, too, has found a tutor to send to the Minola's. He also informs Gremio he has also found a man who "will undertake to woo curst Katherine, / Yea, and to marry her, if her dowry please" (182-183). Petruchio, undaunted by the horrific tales of Kate, assures the men she will be easily won. As the scene ends, Tranio (disguised as Lucentio) appears with Biondello as they, too, head to Minola's house. Tranio informs Gremio and Hortensio that he, too, shall be considered as a suitor for Bianca.

ACT II; scene i

The action shifts back to Baptista Minola and his daughters. Katherine enters, dragging her sister behind her, and proceeds to question Bianca about which man she loves. Bianca, a bit frightened by her sister's actions, offers to give Kate whichever man she wants. Their father enters and tries to placate the fighting sisters. He chastises Kate cruelly and rescues Bianca, wondering why he is plagued by such an unruly daughter. Gremio, Lucentio (disguised), Petruchio, Hortensio (disguised), Tranio (disguised), and Biondello enter. Petruchio announces his intent to court Kate and presents Hortensio (disguised as Litio) as a music tutor to the two women. Seeing Baptista's easy acceptance of Litio's services, Gremio quickly advances his man, Cambio (the disguised Lucentio), as a scholar for Baptista's daughters. He, too, is welcomed into the house. Tranio announces himself as a suitor for Bianca; then the two tutors are taken inside to begin their work.

Petruchio claims he is ready to draw up the marriage contract, but Baptista insists he must first get Kate's love. As Petruchio and Baptista discuss the likelihood of Petruchio's wooing successfully, Hortensio re-enters with his lute hanging around his head, courtesy of Kate. When Petruchio and Kate are finally left alone, Petruchio insists Kate is the most demure, lovely woman on earth, but she is not drawn in by his rhetoric. They banter and exchange quips until Kate, having had enough, hits Petruchio. He does not strike her back but threatens he will do so, if need be. Petruchio remains undaunted in his quest for a wealthy wife, though, and vows to marry her despite her obvious objections.

When the men return to check on Petruchio's progress, he announces the wedding will be on Sunday. Kate raises her voice in protest, which leads Petruchio to make up a story about how in private Kate is coy and gentle but they have come to an agreement that "she shall be curst in company" (303). Baptista agrees to the match and Petruchio exits. Baptista then turns his attention to Bianca's suitors. Gremio and Tranio vie for her by outlining for Baptista all they can offer her. Whatever Gremio offers, Tranio offers more, until Baptista has no choice but to accept Tranio's dower, provided he can provide proof that he does, in fact, possess the riches he claims. Tranio now realizes that he must get someone to impersonate Vincentio, Lucentio's father, in order to continue the masquerade and win Bianca for his master.

ACT III; scene ii

The wedding day arrives, and everyone is in place—except for Petruchio. As the wedding party waits for the tardy groom, they become more and more uneasy. Katherine, believing she is being stood up at the altar, refuses to be humiliated publicly and leaves. Biondello approaches and announces Petruchio is on his way, dressed in worn, mismatched clothes and riding an old, diseased horse. Grumio travels with him in much the same attire. When Petruchio arrives, he insists he will not change to more appropriate clothing. Kate, he reasons, will be married to him, not his clothes. The principals go to the church, while Lucentio and Tranio remain behind, discussing their need for someone willing to assume the role of Vincentio, Lucentio's father, and confirm the availability of the riches Tranio has promised Baptista in order to win Bianca. Gremio enters with news of the commotion at the church. The wedding has taken place, but not without a struggle (complete with Petruchio striking the priest). At the wedding reception, Petruchio declares the wedding feast shall take place but without the bride and groom. Kate, furious, demands they stay, but Petruchio will not hear of it. He will leave, he says, and he will take all of his possessions with him—Kate included. The couple leaves, and the remaining wedding guests marvel at what they have just witnessed.

ACT IV; scene i

The action switches to Petruchio's country house as the newlyweds approach. Grumio goes ahead to build a fire and, upon his arrival, tells Curtis, another of Petruchio's servants, of the adventures the couple has had while en route. Kate and Petruchio have been fighting the entire way, Grumio recounts. At one point, Katherine's horse stumbles and falls. She is thrown, and the horse lands on her. Petruchio, rather than assisting his bride, goes to Grumio and begins to beat him because Kate's horse stumbled. Katherine, covered in mud and mire, pulls Petruchio off Grumio, and the two begin to fight in earnest, scaring even the horses so much that they run away. When Kate and Petruchio arrive, the servants line up to greet them. Petruchio wastes no opportunity to rant and rave at his serving men. The couple proceeds to dinner. As Kate's washes, a serving man accidentally spills water and in return receives a sound beating from Petruchio. Kate, in the servant's defense, claims it was an accident. When the long-awaited dinner is presented to the couple, Petruchio finds fault with it, begins a tirade, and throws the food at the servants. A hungry Kate declares "the meat was well" (157). Petruchio retorts the meat was burnt and therefore bad for their health. An evening's fast will serve them much better, and so they head to the bedchamber where Petruchio continues to censure his new bride. Returning to the stage, Petruchio explains his plan: to keep Kate hungry and uncomfortable until he successfully tames her wild behavior.

ACT IV; scene ii

Hortensio, angered by what he has learned of Bianca's behavior, attempts to sour Lucentio (Tranio) against Bianca. Tranio feigns indignation at the situation, appearing unwilling to believe Bianca would love anyone but him. Before long, Tranio must admit Bianca exhibits more than a passing interest in Cambio (the real Lucentio). Hortensio, increasingly enraged, vows he will foreswear Bianca and gets Tranio to agree to reject her as well. Hortensio continues, pledging to marry a wealthy widow "Ere three days pass," resolving "Kindness in women, not their beauteous looks, / Shall win my love" (41-42). Lucentio, Bianca, and Tranio are overjoyed to hear Hortensio has abandoned his pursuit of Bianca. As they discuss their good fortune, Biondello enters with news: An old man approaches. Lucentio and Tranio are still looking for an old man to assume the role of Lucentio's father (so the imposter-father can vouch for the financial solvency of imposter-Lucentio). Tranio, still masquerading as Lucentio, convinces the old man, a Mantuan schoolteacher, that his life is in peril if he is found in Padua (because of a supposed war between the Duke of Padua and the Duke of Mantua). Tranio tells the old man that he may disguise himself as Vincentio of Pisa and thereby avoid risking his life. In return, the old man need only confirm the dower he offered Baptista for marrying Bianca.

ACT IV; scene iii

The third scene of Act VI opens on Kate and Grumio at Petruchio's house. A very hungry and sleep-deprived Kate attempts to convince Grumio to bring her some nourishment. Not unlike Petruchio, Grumio taunts Kate with thoughts of food, only to claim he cannot produce any food because "'tis choleric" and therefore not good for her. In exasperation, Kate orders Grumio away after having given him a beating for tormenting her so. Petruchio and Hortensio enter, and Petruchio offers Kate some food. Until she thanks him for providing it, however, she cannot have it. Reluctantly

she gives in and receives her meal. Petruchio announces they will return to Baptista's house, dressed in the finest clothes money can buy. As if to prove his intention, Petruchio calls forth a tailor with a gown and a haberdasher with a hat, both for Kate. He proceeds to berate the haberdasher's work, turning a deaf ear to his wife's declaration that the hat is perfect. After berating the work of the haberdasher, Petruchio turns to the work of the tailor, finding countless faults with the dress. In the end, the tailor is sent away with the gown (although Petruchio slyly makes arrangements to pay for the goods, unbeknownst to his wife). Petruchio turns to Kate, claiming they'll just travel in the clothes they have "For 'tis the mind that makes the body rich," not the clothes (168). He announces that it is currently 7 a.m. so they should be to Minola's around noon. Kate corrects him, stating it is almost 2 p.m. and they won't arrive until suppertime. Petruchio rants that the trip is off because his wife can't agree with what he says, and until she learns to do so, the awaited trip home is postponed.

ACT IV; scene v

Petruchio, Kate, and Hortensio are on their way to Baptista Minola's house in Padua. It is midday, yet Petruchio notes the moon shines brightly. When Kate contests his claim, insisting it is the sun which shines, Petruchio threatens to force the party to return to his home, insisting "It shall be moon, or star, or what I list / Or ere I journey to your father's house —" (7–8). At this point, Katherine begins truly to understand the elaborate game Petruchio is playing. She learns that if she humors him, she will get something she wants, and so she agrees with whatever Petruchio says. Kate's willingness to compromise is quickly put to the test when old Vincentio, father to Lucentio, meets the travelers. Petruchio, as if testing his wife, asks her whether she has ever seen a "fresher gentlewoman." Kate, aware she is being tested, plays Petruchio's game with good-natured zeal, no matter how many times Petruchio changes his mind.

Once the couple is through playing their game, Petruchio gets Vincentio to explain what brings him toward Padua. Vincentio notes that he is on his way to visit his son. Petruchio, now assuming the dignity and kindness which befits a man of his status, notes that Lucentio has married his wife's sister. He speaks well of Bianca but leaves Vincentio marveling at what he's just heard. Despite their earlier joking, Petruchio insists he speaks the truth. The party moves on, leaving Hortensio behind to marvel at the change he has just witnessed in Katherine. He ends the scene by suggesting that he will follow Petruchio's lead and tame his widow, if need be.

ACT V; scene i

Lucentio (no longer disguised as Cambio) and Bianca head to the church to be married while her father is busy making arrangements with Tranio and the Pedant. Petruchio, Kate, Vincentio, and Grumio arrive in Padua and stop at Lucentio's house. Vincentio insists his companions join him for a drink, but upon knocking at the door and announcing himself, he is surprised to find another man who claims to be Lucentio's father. When Biondello appears, Vincentio questions him. Biondello pretends not to recognize his master's father. When Tranio comes to investigate the commotion, he too pretends not to know Vincentio. When the Pedant defends Tranio, claiming he's Lucentio, Vincentio moans that Tranio must have murdered the real

Lucentio and assumed his persona. Baptista, unwilling to put up with such wild behavior, orders Vincentio to prison. At this point the newlyweds, Lucentio and Bianca, return.

Lucentio explains what has happened, why Tranio was masquerading as his master, and announces his marriage to Bianca. Baptista and Vincentio reconcile minimally and enter the house to untangle the situation in which they find themselves. Gremio, realizing he has no hope for a spouse, goes inside to join the wedding feast. Petruchio asks Kate for a kiss, and when she refuses, he threatens to return home again. Good humoredly, she kisses her husband before heading in to the feast.

ACT V; scene ii

In this final scene, all the characters come together to celebrate Bianca and Lucentio's wedding. Hortensio has arrived with his new wife, the *Widow*, and the three couples begin to converse. Petruchio notes how Hortensio appears to be afraid of his wife, with the *Widow* offering a few particularly nasty retorts. Kate and the *Widow* exchange words, and shortly thereafter the three women exit, leaving the men to their devices. The men decide to wager on who has the most obedient wife. They bet one hundred crowns and one by one send for their wives. Lucentio is immediately refused by Bianca. Hortensio is next to be refused, with his wife adding the command he should come to her. Finally Petruchio takes his turn, and all are surprised when Kate comes to do his bidding. Petruchio sends Kate to fetch the other women and, upon their arrival, tells Kate to destroy the hat she wears (which she does) and then lecture the women on "What duty they do owe their lords and husbands" (135). After Kate delivers an elaborate speech about a woman's duty to her husband, the party-goers are left dumbfounded, and Petruchio and Kate leave the party, headed to bed.

