

Taming of the Shrew

by William Shakespeare

adapted and retold by Charles and Mary Lamb

edited, reformatted, and with glosses by Kim Stegall

KATHARINE was the eldest daughter of Baptista, a rich gentleman of Padua. She was a lady of such an uncontrollable spirit and fiery temper, such a loud-tongued nag, that she was known in Padua by no other name than Katharine the Shrew. It seemed impossible, that any man would ever be found who would marry her. Therefore, Baptista was blamed for refusing any offers of marriage that were made to Katharine's gentle younger sister Bianca. Baptista put off all Bianca's suitors, saying that when the elder sister was off his hands, they could court young Bianca.

One day a man named Petruchio came to Padua to look for a wife. Now Petruchio was not discouraged by the reports of Katharine's temper. And when he heard she was rich and beautiful, he resolved to marry this famous *termagant* [bad-tempered woman] and tame her into a meek and manageable wife. Truly no one was so fit to set about this *herculean* [powerful] labor as Petruchio for his spirit was as high as Katharine's; and he was witty, happy-tempered, and wise. He knew how to pretend passion and fury when his spirits were so calm that he could have laughed merrily at himself. The *boisterous* [fierce, rough] airs he would later assume were in sport and affected by his excellent understanding as the way to overcome the passionate ways of the furious Katharine.

A-courting then Petruchio went to Katharine the Shrew. First of all he applied to Baptista her father for leave to woo his "gentle daughter Katharine," as Petruchio called her. He continued to say that having heard of her "bashful modesty and mild behavior," he had come from Verona to seek her love.

Baptista was forced to confess that Katharine was otherwise. Katharine's manner soon became obvious, for her music teacher rushed into the room complaining that the "gentle" Katharine, his pupil, had broken a *lute* [stringed instrument with a pear-shaped body] over his head. When Petruchio heard this, he said, "It is a brave wench; I love her more than ever, and long to have some chat with her." He rushed Baptista for a positive answer, saying, "My business is in haste, Signior Baptista, I cannot come every day to woo. Tell me, if I get your daughter's love, what dowry you will give with her." Baptista thought Petruchio's manner was somewhat blunt, but he answered that he would give twenty thousand crowns and half his estate at his death. So the match was quickly agreed on, and Baptista *apprised* [notified] his shrewish daughter of Petruchio's intentions and sent her in to Petruchio to listen to his suit.

In the meantime Petruchio decided how he should court the headstrong Katharine. He said to himself, "I will woo her with some spiri. If she rails at me, then I will tell her she sings as sweetly as a nightingale. If she will not speak a word, I will praise the *eloquence* [powerful fluency] of her language; and if she bids me leave her, I will give her thanks as if she bid me stay with her a week." When Katharine entered, Petruchio addressed her with, "Good morrow, Kate, for that is your name, I hear."

Katharine, not liking this plain salutation, said disdainfully, "They call me Katharine who do speak to me."

"You lie," replied Petruchio, "for you are called plain Kate, and bonny Kate, and sometimes Kate the Shrew: but, Kate, you are the prettiest Kate in Christendom, and

therefore, Kate, hearing your mildness praised in every town, I am come to woo you for my wife.”

Whereupon Katharine angrily showed him how she had gotten the name of Shrew. But Petruchio continued praising her sweetness till at length, hearing her father coming, he said, “Sweet Katharine, let us set this idle chat aside, for your father has consented that you shall be my wife, your dowry is agreed on, and whether you will or no, I will marry you.”

When Baptista entered, Petruchio said that Katharine had promised to marry him the next Sunday. This Katharine denied, saying she would rather see him hanged on Sunday. Petruchio desired her father not to regard her angry words, for they had agreed that she should seem reluctant before him, but that when they were alone he had found her very fond and loving. He said to her, “Give me your hand, Kate; I will go to Venice to buy you fine apparel against our wedding-day. Provide the feast, father, and bid the wedding guests. I will be sure to bring rings, fine array, and rich clothes, that my Katharine may be fine; and kiss me, Kate, for we will be married on Sunday.”

On the Sunday all the wedding guests were assembled. But they waited long, and Katharine wept to think that Petruchio had only been making a fool of her. At last he appeared. But he brought none of the bridal finery he had promised, nor was he dressed like a bridegroom. He was dressed very strangely, as if he meant to make fun of the serious business he came about. His servant and the horses on which they rode were outfitted the same odd way.

Petruchio could not be persuaded to change his clothes, saying that Katharine was to be married to him, not to his clothes. So off to the church they went with Petruchio still behaving in the same mad way. And when the priest asked Petruchio if Katharine should be his wife, Petruchio yelled so loudly that she should that the priest dropped his book. Throughout the ceremony Katharine trembled and shook with fear.

Baptista had provided a *sumptuous* [rich] marriage feast, but when they returned from church, Petruchio took hold of Katharine and declared his intention of carrying his wife home instantly. He hurried Katharine off, and no one dared stop him.

Petruchio put his new wife on a miserable horse that he had picked out for the purpose. He and his servant rode no better, and they journeyed through rough and miry ways. Whenever Katharine’s horse stumbled, Petruchio stormed at the poor beast.

After a weary journey, during which Katharine had heard nothing but the wild ravings of Petruchio at the servant and the horses, they arrived at his house. Petruchio welcomed her kindly to her home, but his mind was made up that she should have no rest or food that night. The tables were spread and supper served, but Petruchio pretended to find fault with every dish. He threw the meat on the floor and ordered the servants to take it away. All this he did, he said, in love for his Katharine, that she might not eat meat that was not good. When Katharine, weary and supperless, tried to rest, Petruchio found fault with the bed, throwing the pillows and sheets around the room. Katharine was forced to sit in a chair. If she chanced to fall asleep, she was wakened by the loud voice of her husband, storming at the servants for the ill-making of his wife’s bed.

The next day Petruchio did the same—speaking kind words to Katharine, but when she attempted to eat, finding fault with everything that was set before her. He threw the breakfast on the floor as he did with the supper. Katharine begged the servants to bring her a morsel of food. But they replied that they dared not give her anything unknown to their

master. “Ah,” said she, “did he marry me to famish me? I, who never knew what it was to entreat for anything, am starved for want of food, giddy for want of sleep, with oaths kept waking, and with *brawling* [loud quarreling] fed; and that which vexes me more than all, he does it under the name of perfect love, pretending that if I sleep or eat, it were present death to me.”

Here the *soliloquy* [speech to one’s self] was interrupted by Petruchio. He, not meaning she should be quite starved, had brought her a little meat, and he said to her, “How fares my sweet Kate? Here, love, you see how diligent I am, I have dressed your meat myself. I am sure this kindness merits thanks. What, not a word? Nay, then you love not the meat, and all the pains I have taken is to no purpose.” He then ordered the servant to take the dish away.

Extreme hunger, which had lessened the pride of Katharine, made her say, though angered to the heart, “I pray you let it stand.”

But Petruchio replied, “The poorest service is repaid with thanks, and so shall mine before you touch the meat.”

On this Katharine brought out a reluctant, “I thank you, sir.”

At this Petruchio gave her a slender meal, saying, “Much good may it do your gentle heart, Kate; eat apace! And now, my honey love, we will return to your father’s house, and revel it as bravely as the best, with silken coats and caps and golden rings, with ruffs and scares and fans and double change of finery.” And to make her believe he really intended to give her these things, he called in a tailor and a *haberdasher* [hatmaker], who brought new clothes he had ordered for her. But Petruchio found fault with everything and told the haberdasher to take the hat away.

Hearing this, Katharine said, “I will have this; all gentlewomen wear such caps as these.”

“When you are gentle,” replied Petruchio, “you shall have one too, and not till then.”

The food Katharine had eaten had revived her spirits, and she said, “Why, sir, I trust I may have leave to speak, and speak I will: I am no child, no babe; your betters have endured to hear me say my mind; and if you cannot, you had better stop your ears.”

Petruchio would not hear these angry words, for he had discovered a better way to manage his wife than arguing with her: “Why, you say true; it is a paltry cap, and I love you for not liking it.”

“Love me, or love me not,” said Katharine, “I like the cap, and I will have this cap or none.”

“You say you wish to see the gown,” said Petruchio, still pretending to misunderstand her. The tailor then came forward and showed her a fine gown he had made. Petruchio, who intended that she would not have cap or gown, found fault with that. “O what stuff is here! What, do you call this a sleeve? it is like a *demi-cannon* [miniature cannon], carved up and down like an apple tart.”

Katharine said she never saw a better gown. This was enough for Petruchio, and he arranged for the people to be paid and excuses made for the strange treatment he gave them. Then he with fierce words and furious gestures drove the tailor and the haberdasher out of the room and turning to Katharine said, “Well, come, my Kate, we will go to your father’s even in these mean garments we now wear.” Then he ordered his horses, saying that they should reach Baptista’s house by dinner-time, for that it was but seven o’clock in

the morning. Now it was not early morning but the very middle of the day, so Katharine ventured to say, though modestly, "I dare assure you, sir, it is two o'clock and will be supper-time before we get there."

But Petruchio wanted her to be so completely tamed that she would agree with everything he said before he carried her to her father. Therefore, he said it should be what time he pleased before he set forward. "For," he said, "whatever I say or do, you still are crossing it. I will not go to-day, and when I go, it shall be what o'clock I say it is." Even while they were traveling, Katharine feared going back because she happened to hint it was the sun when he declared that the moon shone brightly at noonday.

But Katherine, no longer Katherine the Shrew, but the faithful wife, said, "Let us go forward, I pray, now we have come so far, and it shall be the sun, or moon, or what you please, and if you please to call it a *rush candle* [a candle with a reed as the wick] henceforth, I vow it shall be so for me."

Petruchio decided to test her further, so he said again, "I say, it is the moon."

"I know it is the moon," replied Katherine.

"You lie, it is the blessed sun," said Petruchio.

"Then it is the blessed sun," replied Katherine; "but sun it is not, when you say it is not. What you will have it named, even so it is, and so it ever shall be for Katherine."

To test if this yielding spirit would last, Petruchio addressed an old gentleman they met on the road as if the man were a young woman, saying, "Good morrow, gentle mistress." Then he asked Katherine if she had ever beheld a fairer gentlewoman, praising the red and white of the old man's cheeks, and comparing his eyes to two bright stars; and again he addressed him, saying, "Fair lovely maid, once more good day to you!"

The now completely *vanquished* [conquered] Katharine quickly adopted her husband's opinion and said to him, "Young budding virgin, you are fair, and fresh, and sweet: whither are you going, and where is your dwelling? Happy are the parents of so fair a child."

"Why, how now, Kate," said Petruchio, "I hope you are not mad. This is a man, old and wrinkled, faded and withered, and not a maiden, as you say he is."

At this Katharine said, "Pardon me, old gentleman; the sun has so dazzled my eyes, that everything I look on seemeth *green* [fresh, new]. Now I perceive you are a reverend father: I hope you will pardon me for my sad mistake."

The old gentleman replied, "Fair sir, and you my merry mistress, your strange encounter has much amazed me. My name is Vincentio, and I am going to visit a son of mine who lives at Padua." Then Petruchio told Vincentio about the rich marriage Vincentio's son was about to make, and they journeyed together till they came to Baptista's house. There a large company was assembled to celebrate the wedding of Bianca and Lucentio.

When they entered, Baptista welcomed them to the wedding feast, and there was present also another newly married pair.

Lucentio, Bianca's husband, and Hortensio, the other newly married man, kept hinting at the shrewish disposition of Petruchio's wife. They seemed pleased with the mild tempers of the ladies they had chosen and laughed at Petruchio for his less fortunate choice. Petruchio took little notice of their jokes till the ladies had left after dinner. Then he realized that Baptista himself joined in the laugh against him. When Petruchio said that his wife would prove more obedient than theirs, Katharine's father said, "Now, in good

sadness, son Petruchio, I fear you have got the veriest shrew of all.”

“Well,” said Petruchio, “I say no, and therefore for assurance that I speak the truth, let us each one send for his wife, and he whose wife is most obedient to come at first when she is sent for, shall win a wager which we will propose.” To this the other two husbands willingly consented, for they were quite confident that their gentle wives would prove more obedient than the headstrong Katharine. They proposed a wager of twenty crowns, but Petruchio merrily said he would lay twenty times as much upon his wife.

Lucentio sent his servant to ask Bianca to come to him. But the servant returned and said, “Sir, my mistress sends you word she is busy and cannot come.”

“How,” said Petruchio, “does she say she is busy and cannot come? Is that an answer for a wife?” Then they laughed at him, and said, it would be well if Katharine did not send him a worse answer.

And now it was Hortensio’s turn to send for his wife; and he said to his servant, “Go, and entreat my wife to come to me.”

“Oh ho! entreat her!” said Petruchio. “Nay, then, she needs must come.”

“I am afraid, sir,” said Hortensio, “your wife will not be entreated.” But presently this husband looked a little sheepish when the servant returned without his mistress. Hortensio said to him, “How now! Where is my wife?”

“Sir,” said the servant, “my mistress says, you have some goodly jest in hand, and therefore she will not come. She bids you come to her.”

“Worse and worse!” said Petruchio; and then he sent his servant, saying, “Sirrah, go to your mistress, and tell her I command her to come to me.”

The company had scarcely time to think she would not obey this summons, when Baptista, all in amazement, exclaimed, “Here comes Katharine!”

She entered, saying meekly to Petruchio, “What is your will, sir, that you send for me?”

“Where is your sister and Hortensio’s wife?” said he.

Katharine replied, “They sit conferring by the fire.”

“Go, fetch them hither!” said Petruchio. Away went Katharine without reply.

“Here is a wonder,” said Lucentio, “if you talk of a wonder.”

“And so it is,” said Hortensio; “I marvel what it bodes.”

“Marry, peace it bodes,” said Petruchio, “and love, and a quiet life, and to be short, everything that is sweet and happy.”

Katharine’s father, overjoyed to see this reformation in his daughter, said, “Now, fair befall thee, son Petruchio! You have won the wager, and I will add another twenty thousand crowns to her dowry, as if she were another daughter, for she is changed as if she had never been,”

Katharine entered with the two ladies, and Petruchio said, “See where she comes, and brings your *froward* [headstrong] wives as prisoners to her womanly persuasion. Katharine, that cap of yours does not become you; off with that bauble, and throw it under foot.” Katharine instantly took off her cap and threw it down.

“O!” said Hortensio’s wife, “may I never have a cause to sigh till I am brought to such a silly pass!”

And Bianca said, “Fie, what foolish duty call you this?”

At this Bianca’s husband said to her, “I wish your duty were as foolish too! The wisdom of your duty, fair Bianca, has cost me a hundred crowns since dinner.”

“The more fool you,” said Bianca, “for laying on my duty.”

“Katharine,” said Petruchio, “I charge you tell these headstrong women what duty they owe their lords and husbands.” And to the wonder of all, the reformed shrewish lady spoke as heatedly in praise of the duty of obedience, as she had been against it before. And Katharine once more became famous in Padua, not as Katharine the Shrew, but as Katharine the most obedient and duteous wife in Padua.