

MILTON'S COMUS

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Freeeditorial 

THE PERSONS

The Attendant Spirit, afterwards in the habit of Thyrsis.

Comus, with his Crew.

The Lady.

First Brother.

Second Brother.

Sabrina, the Nymph.

The Chief Persons which presented were:—

The Lord Brackley;

Mr. Thomas Egerton, his Brother;

The Lady Alice Egerton.

The first Scene discovers a wild wood.

The Attendant Spirit descends or enters.

Before the starry threshold of Jove's court My mansion is, where those immortal shapes Of bright aërial spirits live insphered In regions mild of calm and serene air, Above the smoke and stir of this dim spot Which men call Earth, and, with low-thoughted care, Confined and pestered in this pinfold here, Strive to keep up a frail and feverish being, Unmindful of the crown that Virtue gives, After this mortal change, to her true servants Amongst the enthroned gods on sainted seats. Yet some there be that by due steps aspire To lay their just hands on that golden key That opes the palace of eternity. To such my errand is; and, but for such, I would not soil these pure ambrosial weeds With the rank vapours of this sin-worn mould. But to my task. Neptune, besides the sway Of every salt flood and each ebbing stream, Took in by lot, 'twixt high and nether Jove, Imperial rule of all the sea-girt isles That, like to rich and various gems, inlay The unadornéd bosom of the deep; Which he, to grace his tributary gods, By course commits to several government, And gives them leave to wear their sapphire crowns And wield their little tridents. But this Isle, The greatest and the best of all the main, He quarters to his blue-haired deities; And all this tract that fronts the falling sun A noble Peer of mickle trust and power Has in his charge, with tempered awe to guide An old and haughty nation, proud in arms: Where his fair offspring, nursed in princely lore, Are coming to attend their father's state, And new-intrusted sceptre. But their way Lies through the perplexed paths of this drear wood, The nodding horror of whose shady brows Threats the forlorn and wandering passenger; And here their tender age might suffer peril, But that, by quick command from sovran Jove, I was despatched for their defence and guard: And listen why; for I will tell you now What never yet was heard in tale or song, From old or modern bard, in hall or bower. Bacchus, that first from out the purple grape Crushed the sweet poison of misuséd wine, After the Tuscan mariners transformed, Coasting the Tyrrhene shore, as the winds listed, On Circe's island fell: (who knows not Circe, The daughter of the Sun, whose charmèd cup Whoever tasted lost his upright shape, And downward fell into a grovelling swine?) This Nymph, that gazed upon his clustering locks, With ivy berries wreathed, and his blithe youth, Had by him, ere he parted thence, a son Much like his father, but his mother more, Whom therefore she brought up, and Comus named: Who, ripe and frolic of his full-grown age, Roving the Celtic and Iberian fields, At last betakes him to this ominous wood, And, in thick shelter of black shades imbowered, Excels his mother at her mighty art; Offering to every weary traveller His orient liquor in a crystal glass, To quench the drouth of Phœbus; which as they taste (For most do taste through fond intemperate thirst), Soon as the potion works, their human count'nance, The express resemblance of the gods, is changed Into some brutish form of wolf or bear, Or ounce or tiger, hog, or bearded goat, All other parts remaining as they were. And they, so perfect is their misery, Not once perceive their foul disfigurement, But boast themselves more comely than before, And all their friends and native home forget, To roll with pleasure in a sensual sty. Therefore, when any favoured of high Jove Chances to pass

through this adventurous glade, Swift as the sparkle of a glancing star I shoot from heaven, to give him safe convoy, As now I do. But first I must put off These my sky-robcs, spun out of Iris' woof, And take the weeds and likeness of a swain That to the service of this house belongs, Who, with his soft pipe and smooth-dittied song, Well knows to still the wild winds when they roar, And hush the waving woods; nor of less faith, And in this office of his mountain watch Likeliest, and nearest to the present aid Of this occasion. But I hear the tread Of hateful steps; I must be viewless now.

Comus enters, with a charming-rod in one hand, his glass in the other; with him a rout of monsters, headed like sundry sorts of wild beasts, but otherwise like men and women, their apparel glistening. They come in making a riotous and unruly noise, with torches in their hands.

Comus. The star that bids the shepherd fold Now the top of heaven doth hold; And the gilded car of day His glowing axle doth allay In the steep Atlantic stream; And the slope sun his upward beam Shoots against the dusky pole, Pacing toward the other goal Of his chamber in the east. Meanwhile, welcome joy and feast, Midnight shout and revelry, Tipsy dance and jollity. Braid your locks with rosy twine, Dropping odours, dropping wine. Rigour now is gone to bed; And Advice with scrupulous head, Strict Age, and sour Severity, With their grave saws, in slumber lie. We, that are of purer fire, Imitate the starry quire, Who, in their nightly watchful spheres, Lead in swift round the months and years. The sounds and seas, with all their finny drove, Now to the moon in wavering morrice move; And on the tawny sands and shelves Trip the pert fairies and the dapper elves. By dimpled brook and fountain-brim, The wood-nymphs, decked with daisies trim, Their merry wakes and pastimes keep: What hath night to do with sleep? Night hath better sweets to prove; Venus now wakes, and wakens Love. Come, let us our rights begin; 'Tis only daylight that makes sin, Which these dun shades will ne'er report. Hail, goddess of nocturnal sport, Dark-veiled Cotytto, to whom the secret flame Of midnight torches burns! mysterious dame, That ne'er art called but when the dragon womb Of Stygian darkness spets her thickest gloom, And makes one blot of all the air! Stay thy cloudy ebon chair, Wherein thou ridest with Hecat', and befriend Us thy vowed priests, till utmost end Of all thy dues be done, and none left out, Ere the blabbing eastern scout, The nice Morn on the Indian steep, From her cabined loop-hole peep, And to the tell-tale Sun descry Our concealed solemnity. Come, knit hands, and beat the ground In a light fantastic round. [The Measure. Break off, break off! I feel the different pace Of some chaste footing near about this ground. Run to your shrouds within these brakes and trees; Our number may affright. Some virgin sure (For so I can distinguish by mine art) Benighted in these woods! Now to my charms, And to my wily trains: I shall ere long Be well stocked with as fair a herd as grazed About my mother Circe. Thus I hurl My dazzling spells into the spongy air, Of power to cheat the eye with blear illusion, And give it false presentments, lest the place And my quaint habits breed astonishment, And put the damsel to suspicious flight; Which must not be, for that's against my course. I, under fair pretence of friendly ends, And well-placed words of glozing courtesy, Baited with reasons not unplausible, Wind me into the easy-hearted man, And hug him into snares. When once her eye Hath met the virtue of this magic dust, I shall appear some harmless villager Whom thrift keeps up about his country gear. But here she comes; I fairly step aside, And hearken, if I may, her business here.

The Lady enters.

Lady. This way the noise was, if mine ear be true, My best guide now. Methought it was the sound Of riot and ill-managed merriment, Such as the jocund flute or gamesome pipe Stirs up among the loose unlettered hinds, When, for their teeming flocks and granges full, In wanton dance they praise the bounteous Pan, And thank the gods amiss. I should be loth To meet the rudeness and swilled insolence Of such late wassailers; yet, oh! where else Shall I inform my unacquainted feet In the blind mazes of this tangled wood? My brothers, when they saw me wearied out With this long way, resolving here to lodge Under the spreading favour of these pines, Stepped, as they said, to the next thicket-side To bring me berries, or such cooling fruit As the kind hospitable woods provide. They left me then when the grey-hooded Even, Like a sad votarist in palmer's weed, Rose from the hindmost wheels of Phœbus' wain. But where they are, and why they came not back, Is now the labour of my thoughts. 'Tis likeliest They had engaged their wandering steps too far; And envious darkness, ere they could return, Had stole them from me. Else, O thievish Night, Why shouldst thou, but for some felonious end, In thy dark lantern thus close up the stars That Nature hung in heaven, and filled their lamps With everlasting oil to give due light To the misled and lonely traveller? This is the place, as well as I may guess, Whence even now the tumult of loud mirth Was rife, and perfect in my listening ear; Yet nought but single darkness do I find. What might this be? A thousand fantasies Begin to throng into my memory, Of calling shapes, and beckoning shadows dire, And airy tongues that syllable men's names On sands and shores and desert wildernesses. These thoughts may startle well, but not astound The virtuous mind, that ever walks attended By a strong siding champion, Conscience. O, welcome, pure-eyed Faith, white-handed Hope, Thou hovering angel girt with golden wings, And thou unblemished form of Chastity! I see ye visibly, and now believe That He, the Supreme Good, to whom all things ill Are but as slavish officers of vengeance, Would send a glistering guardian, if need were, To keep my life and honour unassailed.... Was I deceived, or did a sable cloud Turn forth her silver lining on the night? I did not err: there does a sable cloud Turn forth her silver lining on the night, And casts a gleam over this tufted grove. I cannot hallo to my brothers, but Such noise as I can make to be heard farthest I'll venture; for my new-enlivened spirits Prompt me, and they perhaps are not far off.

Song.

Sweet Echo, sweetest nymph, that liv'st unseen Within thy airy shell By slow Meander's margent green, And in the violet-embroidered vale Where the love-lorn nightingale Nightly to thee her sad song mourneth well: Canst thou not tell me of a gentle pair That liketh thy Narcissus are? O, if thou have Hid them in some flowery cave, Tell me but where, Sweet Queen of Parley, Daughter of the Sphere! So may'st thou be translated to the skies, And give resounding grace to all Heaven's harmonies!

Comus. Can any mortal mixture of earth's mould Breathe such divine enchanting ravishment? Sure something holy lodges in that breast, And with these raptures moves the vocal air To testify his hidden residence. How sweetly did they float upon the wings Of silence, through the empty-vaulted night, At every fall smoothing the raven down Of darkness till it smiled! I have oft heard My mother Circe with the Sirens three, Amidst the flowery-kirtled Naiades, Culling their potent herbs and baleful drugs, Who, as they sung, would take the prisoned soul, And lap it in Elysium: Scylla wept, And chid her barking waves into attention, And fell Charybdis murmured soft applause. Yet they in pleasing slumber lulled the sense, And in sweet madness robbed it of itself; But such a sacred and home-felt delight, Such sober certainty of waking bliss, I never heard till now. I'll speak to her, And she shall be my queen.—Hail, foreign wonder! Whom certain these rough shades did never breed, Unless the goddess that in rural shrine Dwell'st here with Pan or Sylvan by blest song Forbidding every bleak unkindly fog To touch the prosperous growth of this tall wood.

Lady. Nay, gentle shepherd, ill is lost that praise That is addressed to unattending ears. Not any boast of skill, but extreme shift How to regain my severed company, Compelled me to awake the courteous Echo To give me answer from her mossy couch.

Comus. What chance, good Lady, hath bereft you thus?

Lady. Dim darkness and this leafy labyrinth.

Comus. Could that divide you from near-ushering guides?

Lady. They left me weary on a grassy turf.

Comus. By falsehood, or discourtesy, or why?

Lady. To seek i' the valley some cool friendly spring.

Comus. And left your fair side all unguarded, lady?

Lady. They were but twain, and purposed quick return.

Comus. Perhaps forestalling night prevented them.

Lady. How easy my misfortune is to hit!

Comus. Imports their loss, beside the present need?

Lady. No less than if I should my brothers lose.

Comus. Were they of manly prime, or youthful bloom?

Lady. As smooth as Hebe's their unrazored lips.

Comus. Two such I saw, what time the laboured ox
In his loose traces from the furrow came, And the
swinked hedger at his supper sat. I saw them under a green mantling vine,
That crawls along the side of yon small hill,
Plucking ripe clusters from the tender shoots;
Their port was more than human, as they stood
I took it for a faery vision Of some gay creatures of the element,
That in the colours of the rainbow live,
And play i' the plighted clouds. I was awe-strook,
And, as I passed, I worshiped. If those you seek,
It were a journey like the path to Heaven
To help you find them.

Lady. Gentle villager, What readiest way would bring me to that place?

Comus. Due west it rises from this shrubby point.

Lady. To find out that, good shepherd, I suppose,
In such a scant allowance of star-light,
Would overtask the best land-pilot's art,
Without the sure guess of well-practised feet.
Comus. I know each lane, and every alley green,
Dingle, or bushy dell, of this wild wood,
And every bosky bourn from side to side,
My daily walks and ancient neighbourhood;
And, if your stray attendance be yet lodged,
Or shroud within these limits, I shall know
Ere morrow wake, or the low-roosted lark
From her thatched pallet rouse. If otherwise,
I can conduct you, lady, to a low
But loyal cottage, where you may be safe
Till further quest.

Lady. Shepherd, I take thy word,
And trust thy honest-offered courtesy,
Which oft is sooner found in lowly sheds,
With smoky rafters, than in tapestry halls
And courts of princes, where it first was named,
And yet is most pretended. In a place
Less warranted than this, or less secure,
I cannot be, that I should fear to change it.
Eye me, blest Providence, and square my trial
To my proportioned strength! Shepherd,
lead on. [Exeunt.]

Enter the Two Brothers.

Elder Brother. Unmuffle, ye faint stars; and thou, fair moon, That wont'st to love the traveller's benison, Stoop thy pale visage through an amber cloud, And disinherit Chaos, that reigns here In double night of darkness and of shades; Or, if your influence be quite dammed up With black usurping mists, some gentle taper, Though a rush-candle from the wicker hole Of some clay habitation, visit us With thy long levelled rule of streaming light, And thou shalt be our star of Arcady, Or Tyrian Cynosure.

Second Brother. Or, if our eyes Be barred that happiness, might we but hear The folded flocks, penned in their wattled cotes, Or sound of pastoral reed with oaten stops, Or whistle from the lodge, or village cock Count the night-watches to his feathery dames, 'Twould be some solace yet, some little cheering, In this close dungeon of innumerable boughs. But, Oh, that hapless virgin, our lost sister! Where may she wander now, whither betake her From the chill dew, amongst rude burs and thistles? Perhaps some cold bank is her bolster now, Or 'gainst the rugged bark of some broad elm Leans her unpillowed head, fraught with sad fears. What if in wild amazement and affright, Or, while we speak, within the direful grasp Of savage hunger, or of savage heat!

Elder Brother. Peace, brother: be not over-exquisite To cast the fashion of uncertain evils; For, grant they be so, while they rest unknown, What need a man forestall his date of grief, And run to meet what he would most avoid? Or, if they be but false alarms of fear, How bitter is such self-delusion! I do not think my sister so to seek, Or so unprincipled in virtue's book, And the sweet peace that goodness bosoms ever, As that the single want of light and noise (Not being in danger, as I trust she is not) Could stir the constant mood of her calm thoughts, And put them into misbecoming plight. Virtue could see to do what Virtue would By her own radiant light, though sun and moon Were in the flat sea sunk. And Wisdom's self Oft seeks to sweet retired solitude, Where, with her best nurse, Contemplation, She plumes her feathers, and lets grow her wings, That, in the various bustle of resort, Were all to-ruffled, and sometimes impaired. He that has light within his own clear breast May sit i' the centre, and enjoy bright day: But he that hides a dark soul and foul thoughts Benighted walks under the mid-day sun; Himself is his own dungeon.

Second Brother. 'Tis most true That musing meditation most affects The pensive secrecy of desert cell, Far from the cheerful haunt of men and herds, And sits as safe as in a senate-house; For who would rob a hermit of his weeds, His few books, or his beads, or maple dish, Or do his grey hairs any violence? But Beauty, like the fair Hesperian tree Laden with blooming gold, had need the guard Of dragon-watch with unenchanted eye To save her blossoms, and defend her fruit, From the rash hand of bold Incontinence. You may as well spread out the unsunned heaps Of miser's treasure by an outlaw's den, And tell me it is safe, as bid me hope Danger will wink on Opportunity, And let a single helpless maiden pass Uninjured in this wild surrounding waste. Of night or loneliness it recks me not; I fear the dread events that dog them both, Lest some ill-greeting touch attempt the person Of our unowned sister.

Elder Brother. I do not, brother, Infer as if I thought my sister's state Secure without all doubt or controversy; Yet, where an equal poise of hope and fear Does arbitrate the event, my nature is That I incline to hope rather than fear, And gladly banish squint suspicion. My sister is not so defenceless left As you imagine; she has a hidden strength, Which you remember not.

Second Brother. What hidden strength, Unless the strength of Heaven, if you mean that?

Elder Brother. I mean that too, but yet a hidden strength, Which, if Heaven gave it, may be termed her own. 'Tis chastity, my brother, chastity: She that has that is clad in complete steel, And, like a quivered nymph with arrows keen, May trace huge forests, and unharboured heaths, Infamous hills, and sandy perilous wilds; Where, through the sacred rays of chastity, No savage fierce, bandite, or mountaineer, Will dare to soil her virgin purity. Yea, there where very desolation dwells, By grots and caverns shagged with horrid shades, She may pass on with unblenched majesty, Be it not done in pride, or in presumption. Some say no evil thing that walks by night, In fog or fire, by lake or moorish fen, Blue meagre hag, or stubborn unlaid ghost, That breaks his magic chains at curfew time, No goblin or swart faery of the mine, Hath hurtful power o'er true virginity. Do ye believe me yet, or shall I call Antiquity from the old schools of Greece To testify the arms of chastity? Hence had the huntress Dian her dread bow Fair silver-shafted queen for ever chaste, Wherewith she tamed the brinded lioness And spotted mountain-pard, but set at nought The frivolous bolt of Cupid; gods and men Feared her stern frown, and she was queen o' the woods. What was that snaky-headed Gorgon shield That wise Minerva wore, unconquered virgin, Wherewith she froze her foes to congealed stone, But rigid looks of chaste austerity, And noble grace that dashed brute violence With sudden adoration and blank awe? So dear to Heaven is saintly chastity That, when a soul is found sincerely so, A thousand liveried angels lackey her, Driving far off each thing of sin and guilt, And in clear dream and solemn vision Tell her of things that no gross ear can hear; Till oft converse with heavenly habitants Begin to cast a beam on the outward shape, The unpolluted temple of the mind, And turns it by degrees to the soul's essence, Till all be made immortal. But, when lust, By unchaste looks, loose gestures, and foul talk, But most by lewd and lavish act of sin, Lets in defilement to the inward parts, The soul grows clotted by contagion, Imbodies, and imbrutes, till she quite loose The divine property of her first being. Such are those thick and gloomy shadows damp Oft seen in charnel-vaults and sepulchres, Lingering and sitting by a new-made grave, As loth to leave the body that it loved, And linked itself by carnal sensuality To a degenerate and degraded state.

Second Brother. How charming is divine Philosophy! Not harsh and crabbed, as dull fools suppose, But musical as is Apollo's lute, And a perpetual feast of nectared sweets, Where no crude surfeit reigns.

Elder Brother. List! list! I hear Some far-off hallo break the silent air.

Second Brother. Methought so too; what should it be?

Elder Brother. For certain, Either some one, like us, night-founded here, Or else some neighbour woodman, or, at worst, Some roving robber calling to his fellows.

Second Brother. Heaven keep my sister! Again, again, and near! Best draw, and stand upon our guard.

Elder Brother. I'll hallo. If he be friendly, he comes well: if not, Defence is a good cause, and Heaven be for us!

Enter the Attendant Spirit, habited like a shepherd.

That hallo I should know. What are you? speak. Come not too near; you fall on iron stakes else.

Spirit. What voice is that? my young Lord? speak again.

Second Brother. O brother, 'tis my father's shepherd, sure.

Elder Brother. Thyrsis! whose artful strains have oft delayed The huddling brook to hear his madrigal, And sweetened every musk-rose of the dale. How camest thou here, good swain? Hath any ram Slipped from the fold, or young kid lost his dam, Or straggl'ing wether the pent flock forsook? How couldst thou find this dark sequestered nook?

Spirit. O my loved master's heir, and his next joy, I came not here on such a trivial toy As a strayed ewe, or to pursue the stealth Of pilfering wolf; not all the fleecy wealth That doth enrich these downs is worth a thought To this my errand, and the care it brought, But, oh! my virgin Lady, where is she? How chance she is not in your company?

Elder Brother. To tell thee sadly, Shepherd, without blame Or our neglect, we lost her as we came. Spirit. Ay me unhappy! then my fears are true.

Elder Brother. What fears, good Thyrsis? Prithee briefly shew.

Spirit. I'll tell ye. 'Tis not vain or fabulous (Though so esteemed by shallow ignorance) What the sage poets, taught by the heavenly Muse, Storied of old in high immortal verse Of dire Chimeras and enchanted isles, And rifted rocks whose entrance leads to Hell; For such there be, but unbelief is blind. Within the navel of this hideous wood, Immured in cypress shades, a sorcerer dwells, Of Bacchus and of Circe born, great Comus, Deep skilled in all his mother's witcheries, And here to every thirsty wanderer By sly enticement gives his baneful cup, With many murmurs mixed, whose pleasing poison The visage quite transforms of him that drinks, And the inglorious likeness of a beast Fixes instead, unmoulding reason's mintage Charáctered in the face. This have I learnt Tending my flocks hard by i' the hilly crofts That brow this bottom glade; whence night by night He and his monstrous rout are heard to howl Like stabled wolves, or tigers at their prey, Doing abhorred rites to Hecate In their obscuréd haunts of inmost

bowers. Yet have they many baits and guileful spells To inveigle and invite the unwary sense Of them that pass unweeting by the way. This evening late, by then the chewing flocks Had ta'en their supper on the savoury herb Of knot-grass dew-besprent, and were in fold, I sat me down to watch upon a bank With ivy canopied, and interwove With flaunting honeysuckle, and began, Wrapt in a pleasing fit of melancholy, To meditate my rural minstrelsy, Till fancy had her fill. But ere a close The wonted roar was up amidst the woods, And filled the air with barbarous dissonance; At which I ceased, and listened them awhile, Till an unusual stop of sudden silence Gave respite to the drowsy frightened steeds That draw the litter of close-curtained Sleep. At last a soft and solemn-breathing sound Rose like a steam of rich distilled perfumes, And stole upon the air, that even Silence Was took ere she was ware, and wished she might Deny her nature, and be never more, Still to be so displaced. I was all ear, And took in strains that might create a soul Under the ribs of Death. But, oh! ere long Too well I did perceive it was the voice Of my most honoured Lady, your dear sister. Amazed I stood, harrowed with grief and fear; And "O poor hapless nightingale," thought I, "How sweet thou sing'st, how near the deadly snare!" Then down the lawns I ran with headlong haste, Through paths and turnings often trod by day, Till, guided by mine ear, I found the place Where that damned wizard, hid in sly disguise (For so by certain signs I knew), had met Already, ere my best speed could prevent, The aidless innocent lady, his wished prey; Who gently asked if he had seen such two, Supposing him some neighbour villager. Longer I durst not stay, but soon I guessed Ye were the two she meant; with that I sprung Into swift flight, till I had found you here; But further know I not.

Second Brother. O night and shades, How are ye joined with hell in triple knot Against the unarmed weakness of one virgin, Alone and helpless! Is this the confidence You gave me, brother?

Elder Brother. Yes, and keep it still; Lean on it safely; not a period Shall be unsaid for me. Against the threats Of malice or of sorcery, or that power Which erring men call Chance, this I hold firm: Virtue may be assailed, but never hurt, Surprised by unjust force, but not enthralled; Yea, even that which Mischief meant most harm Shall in the happy trial prove most glory. But evil on itself shall back recoil, And mix no more with goodness, when at last, Gathered like scum, and settled to itself, It shall be in eternal restless change Self-fed and self-consumed. If this fail, The pillared firmament is rottenness, And earth's base built on stubble. But come, let's on! Against the opposing will and arm of Heaven May never this just sword be lifted up; But, for that damned magician, let him be girt With all the grisly legions that troop Under the sooty flag of Acheron, Harpies and Hydras, or all the monstrous forms 'Twi't Africa and Ind, I'll find him out, And force him to return his purchase back, Or drag him by the curls to a foul death, Cursed as his life.

Spirit. Alas! good venturous youth, I love thy courage yet, and bold emprise; But here thy sword can do thee little stead. Far other arms and other weapons must Be those that quell the might of hellish charms. He with his bare wand can unthread thy joints, And crumble all thy sinews.

Elder Brother. Why, prithee, Shepherd, How durst thou then thyself approach so near As to make this relation?

Spirit. Care and utmost shifts How to secure the Lady from surprisal Brought to my mind a certain shepherd lad, Of small regard to see to, yet well skilled In every virtuous plant and healing herb That spreads her verdant leaf to the morning ray. He loved me well, and oft would beg me sing; Which when I did, he on the tender grass Would sit, and hearken even to ecstasy, And in requital ope his leathern scrip, And show me simples of a thousand names, Telling their strange and vigorous faculties. Amongst the rest a small unsightly root, But of divine effect, he culled me out. The leaf was darkish, and had prickles on it, But in another country, as he said, Bore a bright golden flower, but not in this soil: Unknown, and like esteemed, and the dull swain Treads on it daily with his clouted shoon; And yet more med'cinal is it than that Moly That Hermes once to wise Ulysses gave. He called it Hæmony, and gave it me, And bade me keep it as of sovran use 'Gainst all enchantments, mildew blast, or damp, Or ghastly Furies' apparition. I pursed it up, but little reckoning made, Till now that this extremity compelled. But now I find it true; for by this means I knew the foul enchanter, though disguised, Entered the very lime-twigs of his spells, And yet came off. If you have this about you (As I will give you when we go) you may Boldly assault the necromancer's hall; Where if he be, with dauntless hardihood And brandished blade rush on him: break his glass, And shed the luscious liquor on the ground; But seize his wand. Though he and his curst crew Fierce sign of battle make, and menace high, Or, like the sons of Vulcan, vomit smoke, Yet will they soon retire, if he but shrink.

Elder Brother. Thyrsis, lead on apace; I'll follow thee; And some good angel bear a shield before us!

The Scene changes to a stately palace, set out with all manner of deliciousness: soft music, tables spread with all dainties. Comus appears with his rabble, and the Lady set in an enchanted chair: to whom he offers his glass; which she puts by, and goes about to rise.

Comus. Nay, lady, sit. If I but wave this wand, Your nerves are all chained up in alabaster, And you a statue, or as Daphne was, Root-bound, that fled Apollo.

Lady. Fool, do not boast. Thou canst not touch the freedom of my mind With all thy charms, although this corporal rind Thou hast immanacled while Heaven sees good.

Comus. Why are you vexed, lady? why do you frown? Here dwell no frowns, nor anger; from these gates Sorrow flies far. See, here be all the pleasures That fancy can beget on youthful thoughts, When the fresh blood grows lively, and returns Brisk as the April buds in primrose season. And first behold this cordial julep here, That flames and dances in his crystal bounds, With spirits of balm and fragrant syrups mixed. Not that Nepenthes which the wife of Thone In Egypt gave to Jove-born Helena Is of such power to stir up joy as this, To life so friendly, or so cool to thirst. Why should you be so cruel to yourself, And to those dainty limbs, which Nature lent For gentle usage and soft delicacy? But you invert the covenants of her trust, And harshly deal, like an ill borrower, With that which you received on other terms, Scorning

the unexempt condition By which all mortal frailty must subsist, Refreshment after toil, ease after pain,
That have been tired all day without repast, And timely rest have wanted. But, fair virgin, This will
restore all soon.

Lady. 'Twill not, false traitor! 'Twill not restore the truth and honesty That thou hast banished from thy
tongue with lies. Was this the cottage and the safe abode Thou told'st me of? What grim aspects are these,
These oughly-headed monsters? Mercy guard me! Hence with thy brewed enchantments, foul deceiver!
Hast thou betrayed my credulous innocence With vizored falsehood and base forgery? And would'st thou
seek again to trap me here With liquorish baits, fit to ensnare a brute? Were it a draught for Juno when
she banqueted, I would not taste thy treasonous offer. None But such as are good men can give good
things; And that which is not good is not delicious To a well-governed and wise appetite.

Comus. O foolishness of men! that lend their ears To those budge doctors of the Stoic fur, And fetch their
precepts from the Cynic tub, Praising the lean and sallow Abstinence! Wherefore did Nature pour her
bounties forth With such a full and unwithdrawing hand, Covering the earth with odours, fruits, and
flocks, Thronging the seas with spawn innumerable, But all to please and sate the curious taste? And set
to work millions of spinning worms, That in their green shops weave the smooth-haired silk, To deck her
sons; and, that no corner might Be vacant of her plenty, in her own loins She hatched the all-worshipped
ore and precious gems, To store her children with. If all the world Should, in a pet of temperance, feed on
pulse, Drink the clear stream, and nothing wear but frieze, The All-giver would be unthanked, would be
unpraised, Not half his riches known, and yet despised; And we should serve him as a grudging master,
As a penurious niggard of his wealth, And live like Nature's bastards, not her sons, Who would be quite
surcharged with her own weight, And strangled with her waste fertility: The earth cumbered, and the
winged air darked with plumes, The herds would over-multitude their lords; The sea o'erfraught would
swell, and the unsought diamonds Would so emblaze the forehead of the deep, And so bestud with stars,
that they below Would grow inured to light, and come at last To gaze upon the sun with shameless brows.
List, lady; be not coy, and be not cozened With that same vaunted name, Virginity. Beauty is Nature's
coin; must not be hoarded, But must be current; and the good thereof Consists in mutual and partaken
bliss, Unsavoury in the enjoyment of itself. If you let slip time, like a neglected rose It withers on the stalk
with languished head. Beauty is Nature's brag, and must be shown In courts, at feasts, and high
solemnities, Where most may wonder at the workmanship. It is for homely features to keep home; They
had their name thence: coarse complexions And cheeks of sorry grain will serve to ply The sampler, and
to tease the huswife's wool. What need of vermeil-tinctured lip for that, Love-darting eyes, or tresses like
the morn? There was another meaning in these gifts; Think what, and be advised; you are but young yet.

Lady. I had not thought to have unlocked my lips In this unhallowed air, but that this juggler Would think
to charm my judgment, as mine eyes, Obtruding false rules pranked in reason's garb. I hate when vice can
bolt her arguments And virtue has no tongue to check her pride. Impostor! do not charge most innocent
Nature, As if she would her children should be riotous With her abundance. She, good cateress, Means
her provision only to the good, That live according to her sober laws, And holy dictate of spare
Temperance. If every just man that now pines with want Had but a moderate and beseeming share Of that
which lewdly-pampered Luxury Now heaps upon some few with vast excess, Nature's full blessings

would be well dispensed In unsuperfluous even proportions, And she no whit encumbered with her store; And then the Giver would be better thanked, His praise due paid: for swinish gluttony Ne'er looks to Heaven amidst his gorgeous feast, But with besotted base ingratitude Crams, and blasphemes his Feeder. Shall I go on? Or have I said enow? To him that dares Arm his profane tongue with contemptuous words Against the sun-clad power of chastity Fain would I something say;—yet to what end? Thou hast nor ear, nor soul, to apprehend The sublime notion and high mystery That must be uttered to unfold the sage And serious doctrine of Virginitie; And thou art worthy that thou shouldst not know More happiness than this thy present lot. Enjoy your dear wit, and gay rhetoric, That hath so well been taught her dazzling fence; Thou art not fit to hear thyself convinced. Yet, should I try, the uncontrollèd worth Of this pure cause would kindle my rapt spirits To such a flame of sacred vehemence That dumb things would be moved to sympathise, And the brute Earth would lend her nerves, and shake, Till all thy magic structures, reared so high, Were shattered into heaps o'er thy false head.

Comus. She fables not. I feel that I do fear Her words set off by some superior power; And, though not mortal, yet a cold shuddering dew Dips me all o'er, as when the wrath of Jove Speaks thunder and the chains of Erebus To some of Saturn's crew. I must dissemble, And try her yet more strongly.—Come, no more! This is mere moral babble, and direct Against the canon laws of our foundation. I must not suffer this; yet 'tis but the lees And settlings of a melancholy blood.

But this will cure all straight; one sip of this Will bathe the drooping spirits in delight Beyond the bliss of dreams. Be wise, and taste.

The Brothers rush in with swords drawn, wrest his glass out of his hand, and break it against the ground: his rout make sign of resistance, but are all driven in. The Attendant Spirit comes in.

Spirit. What! have you let the false enchanter scape? O ye mistook; ye should have snatched his wand, And bound him fast. Without his rod reversed, And backward mutters of dissevering power, We cannot free the Lady that sits here In stony fetters fixed and motionless. Yet stay: be not disturbed; now I bethink me, Some other means I have which may be used, Which once of Melibœus old I learnt, The soothest shepherd that e'er piped on plains. There is a gentle nymph not far from hence, That with moist curb sways the smooth Severn stream: Sabrina is her name: a virgin pure; Whilom she was the daughter of Loctrine, That had the sceptre from his father Brute. She, guiltless damsel, flying the mad pursuit Of her enragéd stepdame, Guendolen, Commended her fair innocence to the flood That stayed her flight with his cross-flowing course. The water-nymphs, that in the bottom played, Held up their pearly wrists, and took her in, Bearing her straight to aged Nereus' hall; Who, piteous of her woes, reared her lank head, And gave her to his daughters to imbathe In nectared lavers strewed with asphodel, And through the porch and inlet of each sense Dropt in ambrosial oils, till she revived, And underwent a quick immortal change, Made Goddess of the river. Still she retains Her maiden gentleness, and oft at eve Visits the herds along

the twilight meadows, Helping all urchin blasts, and ill-luck signs That the shrewd meddling elf delights to make, Which she with precious vial'd liquors heals: For which the shepherds, at their festivals, Carol her goodness loud in rustic lays, And throw sweet garland wreaths into her stream Of pansies, pinks, and gaudy daffodils. And, as the old swain said, she can unlock The clasping charm, and thaw the numbing spell, If she be right invoked in warbled song; For maidenhood she loves, and will be swift To aid a virgin, such as was herself, In hard-besetting need. This will I try, And add the power of some adjuring verse.

Song.

Sabrina fair, Listen where thou art sitting Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave, In twisted braids of lilies knitting The loose train of thy amber-dropping hair; Listen for dear honour's sake, Goddess of the silver lake, Listen and save!

Listen, and appear to us, In name of great Oceanus. By the earth-shaking Neptune's mace, And Tethys' grave majestic pace; By hoary Nereus' wrinkled look, And the Carpathian wizard's hook; By scaly Triton's winding shell, And old soothsaying Glaucus' spell; By Leucothea's lovely hands, And her son that rules the strands; By Thetis' tinsel-slippered feet, And the songs of Sirens sweet; By dead Parthenope's dear tomb, And fair Ligea's golden comb, Wherewith she sits on diamond rocks Sleeking her soft alluring locks; By all the Nymphs that nightly dance Upon thy streams with wily glance; Rise, rise, and heave thy rosy head From thy coral-paven bed, And bridle in thy headlong wave, Till thou our summons answered have. Listen and save!

Sabrina rises, attended by Water-nymphs, and sings.

By the rushy-fringed bank, Where grows the willow and the osier dank, My sliding chariot stays, Thick set with agate, and the azurn sheen Of turkis blue, and emerald green, That in the channel strays; Whilst from off the waters fleet Thus I set my printless feet O'er the cowslip's velvet head, That bends not as I tread. Gentle swain, at thy request I am here!

Spirit. Goddess dear, We implore thy powerful hand To undo the charméd band Of true virgin here distressed Through the force and through the wile Of unblessed enchanter vile.

Sabrina. Shepherd, 'tis my office best To help ensnared chastity. Brightest Lady, look on me. Thus I sprinkle on thy breast Drops that from my fountain pure I have kept of precious cure; Thrice upon thy finger's tip, Thrice upon thy rubied lip: Next this marble venom'd seat, Smear'd with gums of glutinous heat, I touch with chaste palms moist and cold. Now the spell hath lost his hold; And I must haste ere morning hour To wait in Amphitrite's bower.

Sabrina descends, and the Lady rises out of her seat.

Spirit. Virgin, daughter of Loocrine, Sprung of old Anchises' line, May thy brimméd waves for this Their full tribute never miss From a thousand petty rills, That tumble down the snowy hills: Summer drouth or singéd air Never scorch thy tresses fair, Nor wet October's torrent flood Thy molten crystal fill with mud; May thy billows roll ashore The beryl and the golden ore; May thy lofty head be crown'd With many a tower and terrace round, And here and there thy banks upon With groves of myrrh and cinnamon. Come, Lady; while Heaven lends us grace, Let us fly this curséd place, Lest the sorcerer us entice With some other new device. Not a waste or needless sound Till we come to holier ground. I shall be your faithful guide Through this gloomy covert wide; And not many furlongs thence Is your Father's residence, Where this night are met in state Many a friend to gratulate His wish'd presence, and beside All the swains that there abide With jigs and rural dance resort. We shall catch them at their sport, And our sudden coming there Will double all their mirth and cheer. Come, let us haste; the stars grow high, But Night sits monarch yet in the mid sky.

The Scene changes, presenting Ludlow Town, and the President's Castle; then come in Country Dancers; after them the Attendant Spirit, with the Two Brothers and the Lady.

Song.

Spirit. Back, shepherds, back! Enough your play Till next sunshine holiday. Here be, without duck or nod, Other trippings to be trod Of lighter toes, and such court guise As Mercury did first devise With the mincing Dryades On the lawns and on the leas.

This second Song presents them to their Father and Mother.

Noble Lord and Lady bright, I have brought ye new delight. Here behold so goodly grown Three fair branches of your own. Heaven hath timely tried their youth, Their faith, their patience, and their truth, And sent them here through hard assays With a crown of deathless praise, To triumph in victorious dance O'er sensual folly and intemperance.

The dances ended, the Spirit epiloguizes.

Spirit. To the ocean now I fly, And those happy climes that lie Where day never shuts his eye, Up in the broad fields of the sky. There I suck the liquid air, All amidst the gardens fair Of Hesperus, and his daughters three That sing about the golden tree. Along the crispéd shades and bowers Revels the spruce and jocund Spring; The Graces and the rosy-bosomed Hours Thither all their bounties bring. There eternal Summer dwells, And west winds with musky wing About the cedarn alleys fling Nard and cassia's balmy smells. Iris there with humid bow Waters the odorous banks, that blow Flowers of more mingled hue Than her purfled scarf can shew, And drenches with Elysian dew (List, mortals, if your ears be true) Beds of hyacinth and roses, Where young Adonis oft reposes, Waxing well of his deep wound, In slumber soft, and on the ground Sadly sits the Assyrian queen. But far above, in spangled sheen, Celestial Cupid, her famed son, advanced Holds his dear Psyche, sweet entranced After her wandering labours long, Till free consent the gods among Make her his eternal bride, And from her fair unspotted side Two blissful twins are to be born, Youth and Joy; so Jove hath sworn. But now my task is smoothly done, I can fly, or I can run Quickly to the green earth's end, Where the bowed welkin slow doth bend, And from thence can soar as soon To the corners of the moon. Mortals, that would follow me, Love Virtue; she alone is free. She can teach ye how to climb Higher than the sphery chime; Or, if Virtue feeble were, Heaven itself would stoop to her.

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