

TWELFTH NIGHT



Chapter 3

Sebastian and Viola were identical twins. They were born in the same hour. Sebastian was a young man of Elysium and his twin sister was the lady of Messalina. They were on a voyage together when a shipwreck occurred at the coast of Illyria. Their ship was split on a rock in a violent tempest and both were on the verge of death. The Captain of the ship, along with a few sailors, somehow got to the land in a small boat. They rescued Viola and brought her to the shore. The poor lady, instead of being happy for her own safety, mourned for the death of her brother, Sebastian. But the Captain comforted her with the assurance that he had seen him during the tempest. When the ship split, Sebastian had fastened himself to a strong mast and managed to remain above the waves. Viola was much consoled and gathered hope from this account. She now thought how she would settle down in a foreign country, far away from home. So, she asked the Captain if he knew anything of Illyria. “Yes, very well,” said the Captain, “for I was bred and born not three hours travel from this place.” He also told her that Illyria was governed by Duke Orsino who was indeed a noble man. Viola was surprised. She said, “Orsino! I have heard my father name him. He was a bachelor then.” The Captain told her that the Duke remained a bachelor and was seeking the love of the beautiful Olivia, the daughter of a Count who died a year ago. The virtuous lady was left behind to the protection of her brother, who also died shortly after, and for the love of her dear brother she had abjured the sight and company of men. Viola who was herself in such emotional condition, for the probable loss of her brother, desired to live with this lady. She asked the Captain if he could introduce her to Olivia as she would willingly serve this lady. But he confessed that it would be a hard thing to accomplish because Lady Olivia would not allow any person to enter her house since her brother’s death, not even the Duke himself. Then, Viola thought of another plan which was in a man’s camouflage and that was to serve the Duke as a page. It was indeed a strange fancy in a young lady to dress herself as a young man and serve the duke, since Viola was young and of uncommon beauty, alone in a foreign land.

Viola observed a fair behaviour from the Captain who showed friendly concern for her welfare and readily engaged to assist her. She gave him money and instructed him to provide her suitable dress of the same colour and of the same fashion her brother Sebastian

used to wear. When she dressed herself in the new clothes, she looked so exactly like her brother that some strange errors happened by means of their mistaken for each other, for Sebastian was also saved.

Viola's good friend had some interest in court and presented Viola in the disguise of a boy in the name of Cesario. The duke was pleased with the graceful appearance of this handsome youth and made Cesario one of his pages, the profession that Viola desired to be employed. She showed such ready observance and faithful attachment to her lord that she soon became his most favoured attendant. The duke even confided to Cesario the story of his love for Olivia, his long and unsuccessful attempts of courtship and that she even refused to allow the lord to her presence. The noble lady treated him with such unkindness that he passed his days in ignoble sloth, listening to the effeminate sounds of soft music, gentle airs and passionate love songs, and neglected the company of the wise and learned lords which he used to associate. All day long the duke talked with Cesario and his grave courtiers thought her to be the unmet companion of their noble master.

It was quite dangerous for young maidens to be confidant of a handsome duke which Viola very soon discovered to her sorrow. All that Orsino told her about his sufferance for love for Olivia, Viola soon realized that she suffered the same for her love of him. She wondered how Olivia could be so regardless of this for her peerless lord Orsino whom, she thought, no one could behold him without the deepest admiration. She even remarked that it was a pity the duke was in love of a lady who was blind to his worthy qualities. She told him, "If a lady were to love you, my lord, as you love Olivia, if you could not love her in return, would you not tell her that you could not love, and must she not be content with this answer?" But Orsino could not accept this reasoning. He said that no woman's heart was big enough to hold so much love, and therefore it was unfair to compare the love of any lady for him to his love for Olivia. Viola did not agree with this. She felt that her heart had as much love in it for Orsino as the duke had for Olivia. She knew very well how much women love men. "They are as true of heart as we are," said Viola. My father had a daughter, loved a man, as I perhaps, were I a woman, should love your lordship." When the duke was curious to know whether the lady died of love, Viola gave an evasive answer.

While they were talking, a gentleman entered. The duke had sent him to Olivia. He told the duke that he was not allowed to meet the gracious lady. But by her maid she sent the message for the duke that seven years from hence, even the element of Love would not be

allowed to see her face, while she would walk around the mansion with her face veiled like a cloister living nun and water the rooms of her house with her tears in remembrance of her dead brother. At this the duke told Viola, “You know Cesario, I have told you all the secrets of my heart; therefore good youth, go to Olivia’s house. Be not denied access; stand at her doors and tell her.” Olivia replied, “And if do speak to her, my lord, what then?” “Oh, then”, Orsino said, “Unfold to her the passion of my love.”

So Viola went away. However, she did not undertake courtship willingly, for she was to woo a lady to become a wife of the person whom she herself loved and desired to marry. But having undertaken the affair, she performed with fidelity. Olivia heard that a youth was at her door who insisted upon being admitted to her presence. The servant told Cesario that the lady was sick, but the latter persisted on meeting her. Curious to see who this peremptory messenger might be, Olivia wished that he might be admitted. Throwing the veil over her face, she declared she would once more listen to the duke’s message, as she had no doubt that he came from Orsino. Viola put on the manliest air that she could assume and courteously addressed the virtuous lady. Olivia asked her, “Are you a comedian?” “No”, replied Viola, “and I am not that which I play”. She meant to say that she as a woman but she feigned herself to be man. Viola again asked her, “Are you the lady of the house?” As Olivia confirmed it, Viola having utmost curiosity to see her rival’s beauty told her, “Good madam, let me see your face.” This bold request surprised Olivia but she complied with it and unveiled her face by saying: “Look you, sir, such a one I was, this present. Is it not well done?” Viola replied, “Excellently done, if God did all.”

She also told Olivia that her lord, the duke, loved the virtuous lady and such a love could scarcely be recompensed. Orsino used to love her with adoration and with tears and sighs of fire. Olivia replied, “Your lord knows well my mind. I cannot love him; yet I doubt not, he is virtuous; I know him to be noble and of high estate, of fresh and spotless youth. All voices proclaim him learned, courteous and valiant, yet I cannot love him; he might have taken his answer long ago.” Viola courteously said, “If I did love you as my master does, I would make a willow cabin at your gates, and call upon your name. I would write complaining sonnets on Olivia and sing them in the dead of night. Your name should sound among the hills, and I would make echo and cry out Olivia. You should not rest between the elements of earth and air, but you might pity me.” Then Olivia said, “You might do as much. What is your parentage?” At this Viola remarked, “Above my fortunes, yet my state is well, I am a gentleman.” Now Olivia reluctantly dismissed appeal of Viola and said, “Go

to your master, and tell him, I cannot love him. Let him send no more, unless by chance you come again to tell me how he takes it.”

So Viola departed from Olivia’s house but the virtuous lady recalled the parting words of the page. She wished Cesario to be the duke. Gradually she began to forget the inequality between her fortunes and that of the page and also of the maidenly reserve which is the chief ornament of a lady’s character. She thus resolved to court the love of young Cesario and sent a servant after him with a diamond ring under the pretence that Cesario had left it behind with her as a present from Orsino. She hoped by giving a present to Cesario artfully, she would give him some intimation of her intention. And truly, it made Viola suspect. She knew Orsino had not sent any ring through her to Olivia. So, she began to recollect her experience and found that Olivia’s looks and manner were expressive of admiration. She presently guessed that Olivia had fallen in love with her. “Alas,” she said, “the poor lady might as well love a dream. Disguise I see is wicked, for it has caused Olivia to breathe as fruitless sighs for me as I do for Orsino.”

Viola returned to Orsino’s palace and narrated about her unsuccessful venture repeating the command of Olivia that the duke should not trouble her any more. However, the duke hoped that the gentle Cesario would in time be able to persuade her and therefore he bade him to go to her again on the next day. In the meantime to pass away the tedious interval, Orsino desired for a song to be sung.

Viola did not fail to mark the words of the old song which described the pains of unrequited love. Her love looks were observed by Orsino who said to her, “My life upon it, Cesario, though you are so young, your eyes have look upon some face that it loves. Has it not boy?” Viola confessed, “A little, with your leave.” “And what kind of woman, and of what age is she?” asked the duke. “Of your age and of your complexion,” said Viola, which made the duke smile to hear this young boy loved a woman so much older, and of a man’s dark complexion.

When Viola revisited the house of Olivia, she found no difficulty in having access to her. The servants discovered that the moment Cesario arrived, the gates were thrown wide open and the duke’s page was shown into Olivia’s apartment with great respect. When Cesario told Olivia that he had come once more to plead for Orsino, Olivia said, “I desire you should never of him again; but if would undertake another suit, I would rather hear you solicit than music from the airs.” This was plain speaking but Olivia soon

expressed herself more plainly and openly and confessed her love. But the lady wooed in vain. Viola left the place with haste and told her that would never again come to plead for Orsino's love.

No sooner had Viola left the lady than a claim was made upon her valour. A gentleman, whose suit was rejected by Olivia, challenged Viola to fight a duel. Poor Viola, though dressed like a man, had a true woman's heart and so she feared to look at her own sword. When she saw the formidable opponent advancing towards her with open sword, she began to think of confessing to him that she was, actually, a woman, in the guise of a young boy. But she was relieved at once from terror and shame of discovery by a stranger who was passing by. He challenged her rival and said, "If this young gentleman has done any offence, I will take the fault on me, and if you offend him, I will accept for his sake and defy you." Before Viola had time to thank him for her protection or to inquire the reason for interference, the officers of justice came up in that instance and demanded an answer for an offence he had committed some years ago. The gentleman then turned towards Viola and said, "Now my necessity makes me ask for my purse and it grieves me much more for what I cannot do for you, than for what befalls myself. You stand amazed but of comfort." His words did surprise Viola and she protested that she did not know him, nor had she ever received any money from him. However, she offered him a small sum of money for the benevolence he just showed to her. The stranger became angry and charged her of ingratitude and unkindness. But the officers cared little for the complaints of their prisoner and hurried him off. As he was carried away, he called by the name of Sebastian reproaching him for disowning his friend. When Viola heard herself to be called Sebastian, she conjectured that she had been mistakenly identified with her brother. Besides, she began to cherish hope that it was her brother whose life this man had saved. The stranger, Antonio, was the captain of a ship. He rescued Sebastian and gradually became a friend of him. When the youth expressed curiosity to visit Orsino's court, Antonio came with him to Illyria though he knew that his life would be in danger as he had once dangerously wounded the duke's nephew. This was the offence for which he was now made a prisoner.

Antonio and Sebastian had landed together. He had given his purse to Sebastian desiring him to use it freely as the latter went to see the town. Since Sebastian did not return at the scheduled hour, Antonio had ventured to look out for him and found Viola, her identical twin sister in the guise of a young man, whom he mistakenly identified to be Sebastian. He

drew out his sword to save the youth. When Viola refused to recognize him and did not hand over the purse to him, she was accused of ingratitude.

When Antonio left, Viola returned home as fast as she could for she feared a second invitation to fight. No sooner had she left the place, her twin brother Sebastian reached there. Viola's adversary thought he saw her return and attacked him; but Sebastian was not a coward and he drew his sword to face the duel. Meanwhile, Olivia came out of her house. She also mistook Sebastian to be Cesario and invited him to come into the house. She expressed much sorrow for the rude attack he had to combat. Sebastian was as much surprised at the courtesy of the lady as at the rudeness of his unknown foe. However, he accepted the invitation and went into the house willingly. Olivia was delighted to find Cesario become more sensible of her attentions, for though his features were exactly the same like his sister, there was none of the contempt and anger to be seen in his face.

Sebastian did not oppose to the fondness that the beautiful lady lavished on him. He wondered if the lady was in her right senses, but perceiving that she was the mistress of the house and she ordered her affairs and seemed to govern her family discreetly, he well approved the courtship. Finding Cesario in such good humour, and fearing he might change his mind, Olivia proposed that they should get married immediately. Sebastian agreed to this proposal and their marriage was instantly solemnized. Soon after the marriage, Sebastian desired to go and tell his dear friend Antonio of the good fortune that he had met with. In the mean time Orsino came to visit Olivia. The moment he arrived before Olivia's house, the officers of justice, brought their prisoner, Antonio, before the duke. Viola accompanied her master. When Antonio saw Viola, whom he thought to be Sebastian, he told the duke in what manner he rescued the youth from the perils of the sea. He ended his complaint by saying that for three months this ungrateful youth had been with him.

Suddenly Olivia was seen coming out of the house. The duke could no longer hear the story of Antonio. He refused to believe in the story for the last months Cesario had been serving the duke. He ordered Antonio to be taken aside. Soon the duke heard words of kindness from Olivia for his page boy Cesario which gave the duke cause to accuse him with ingratitude alike Antonio and threatened him with instant death. It seemed that the duke out of jealousy and anger would doom Viola, yet her love made her no longer a coward. She told him that she would most joyfully suffer death to give her master ease. But Olivia would not lose her husband. She cried out: "Where goes my Cesario?" Viola

replied, "After him; I love more than my life." But Olivia stopped them by proclaiming that Cesario was her husband. She sent for the priest who declared that he solemnized marriage of the lady with this youth about two hours ago. Viola protested in vain that she was not married to Olivia. Just then a miracle occurred. Another Cesario appeared and he declared Olivia as his wife. The new Cesario was Sebastian, the real husband of Olivia and the brother of Viola. Everybody looked at the two identical twins, Sebastian and Viola, having the same face, the same voice and the same habit. Viola now acknowledged that she was a lady in disguise of a man.

When all the errors were cleared up they laughed at Olivia for the pleasant mistake she had made in falling in love with a woman, and Olivia also accepted heartily that she had wedded the instead of the sister. The hopes of Orsino were forever at an end with the marriage of Olivia. He now observed Viola with great attention and remembered that he had always thought how very handsome Cesario was. He also remembered how often she had said that she loved him. He concluded she would look very beautiful in a woman's dress. Hence, he resolved to make Viola his wife. He said to Viola: "Boy, you have said to me a thousand times that you should never love a woman like to me, and for the faithful service you have done for me so much beneath your soft and tender breeding, and since you have called me master so long, you shall now be your master's mistress, and Orsino's true duchess."

Olivia invited them to enter her house and offered the assistance of the good priest to solemnize the marriage of Orsino and Viola. Thus the twin bother and sister were both wedded on the same day. Viola became the wife of Orsino, the duke of Illyria, and Sebastian became the husband of the rich noble countess, Olivia.

Word Notes

Verge : very close

Abjured : renounce

Camouflage : disguise

Effeminate : unmanly

Peremptory : insisting on immediate obedience

Feigned : pretended

Unrequited : not returned

Page : young attendant

Conjectured : formed an opinion not based on firm evidence

Lavished : in large quantities

Solemnized : mark with a ceremony



OTHELLO



Chapter 4

Long time ago in Venice there was a rich Senator who was known as Brabantio. He had a beautiful daughter, the gentle Desdemona. She was sought by various suitors, both of her clime and complexion, but she found none of her choice. The noble lady, who regarded the heart more than the appearance and complexion of man, had chosen the person of her affections—a Moor, a dark complexioned nobleman, whom her father loved deeply and often invited him to their mansion. The noble Moor, Othello, was a valiant soldier and by his heroics in bloody wars against the Turks, he had been raised to the rank of the General and was highly esteemed and revered throughout the state.

Othello had been a great traveller and Desdemona was all the more keen to listen to the stories of adventure that Othello recollected from his experiences in the battles, sieges and encounters, the perils he had been exposed to, his hair-breadth escapes when he entered a breach, or marched up to the mouth of a cannon and how he had been captivated by the insolent enemy and sold as a slave, how he demeaned himself in that state, and escaped. Desdemona listened with rapt attention of all these accounts, added to the narration of the strange things Othello had seen in foreign countries: the vast wilderness and romantic caverns, the quarries, the rocks and lofty mountains that touched the clouds, the savage nations, the cannibals who are man-eaters, and of the Anthropophagi in Africa whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders. These stories enticed Desdemona so much that even if she was called for any household affairs, she would finish off the work with all haste and return to Othello with greedy ear to devour his discourse. At the end of his stories Desdemona would always sigh and then thank him and wished that if he had a friend who loved her, he had only to teach him, how to tell his story, and that would woo her. Upon this hint, delivered not with more frankness than modesty, and blushes, which Othello could not but understand and he spoke more openly of his love and thus gained the consent of the generous and gorgeous lady Desdemona to marry him.

Their marriage, which though was privately solemnized, could not be kept a secret for long. When the news reached Brabantio, he appealed to the Duke of Venice and prayed for justice against Othello accusing him of casting spell and witchcraft to seduce the gentle Desdemona, winning her heart and marrying her without taking the consent of her father.

Meanwhile, the state of Venice was in urgent need of Othello. The Senate received a news that the Turks had set sail a fleet with mighty preparation for hostility and they were moving

towards the island of Cyprus with the intent to regain it from the Venetians. In this state of emergency, Othello was deemed as the most competent General to defend Cyprus against the invasion of the Turks. Hence, Othello was summoned before the Senate. He was therefore called to the Senate both as a candidate for a noble employment and esteem as well as a culprit, charged with offences by Senator Brabantio.

The old Senator was heard with utmost patience in the assembly of the Senators and the infuriated father accused Othello in outrageous manner. Hence, when Othello was called upon for his defence, he had only to narrate a simple story of his love, which he did so in such artless eloquence that even the Duke had to confess that a tale so told would have won his daughter too. And the spells and conjurations which Othello had used in his courtship plainly appeared to have been no more than the honest arts of wooing and the only witchcraft which he had used is the skill of telling a soft tale to win a lady's heart.

The statement of Othello was confirmed by Desdemona who appeared in court and acknowledged that she was bound by duty to Brabantio for her life and education. But now she has a higher duty to perform for her lover and husband Othello, quite like her mother had done years ago in preferring Brabantio above her father. Unable to maintain his plea, Brabantio accepted the Moor as his son-in-law and told him that with all his heart he would keep her away from him. He was also glad that he had no other children, for this behaviour of Desdemona would have made him a tyrant and hang clogs on them for desertion. He even warned Othello about Desdemona who had deceived her father and might also deceive him.

After the trial, Othello readily went to the war in Cyprus along with Desdemona as she refused to stay with her father any more. She boldly declared, "I loved the Moor to live with him". So the newly married couple set sail for Cyprus. But, as soon they landed in Cyprus, the news arrived that a violent tempest had dispersed the Turkish fleet and the island was, thus, secure. But the war, which Othello was to suffer, was now beginning and the enemies which malice stirred up against Desdemona proved in their nature more deadly than strangers or infidels.

Among the friends of Othello, no one possessed his confidence more than Cassio. He was a young Florentine soldier, amorous, and of pleasing nature which attracted the women. He was handsome and eloquent. Any married man of advanced years having a young, beautiful wife would be much alarmed of such a person except Othello who was free from jealousy, as he was noble and incapable of suspecting him to be infidel. He had used

Cassio in his love affair with Desdemona for Othello feared that he lacked the amorous qualities of Cassio that would please ladies, and so would often depute Cassio to court for him; such innocent simplicity being rather an honour than a blemish to the character of the valiant Moor. It was therefore no wonder if, next to Othello, the gentle Desdemona loved and trusted Cassio. Hence, the marriage of this couple made little difference to their relationship with Cassio. He frequented their house, and his free and rattling talk was endearing to Othello for he himself was of a serious temper.

Othello had of late promoted Cassio to the rank of Lieutenant, a place of trust and nearest to the General. The promotion gave great offence to Iago, an elder nobleman, who thought he had a better claim than Cassio and would often scorn at Cassio to be a person befitting for the company of ladies, and knew little of the art of warfare. Iago hated Cassio. He also hated Othello for favouring Cassio and also for an unjust suspicion that the Moor was too fond of Emilia, Iago's wife. From these imaginary provocations, Iago conceived a scheme of revenge that would involve Cassio, Othello and Desdemona in one common ruin.

Iago was crafty. He studied human mind deeply. He knew that of all the kinds of afflictions that torment man, the pains of jealousy were the most unbearable and had the sorest sting. He thought if he could succeed in making Othello envious of Cassio, then it would be an excellent plot of revenge which might culminate in the death of Cassio or Othello or both, he cared little.

The arrival of the General and his lady in Cyprus, and receiving the news of the dispersion of enemy's fleet, created a sort of holiday mood in the island. Everybody was involved in feasting and merry making. Cassio had the direction of the guard that night with a charge from Othello to restrain the soldiers from drinking excessively. On that night Iago began his deep laid plans of mischief. Under the guise of loyalty and love to the General, he lured Cassio to have a drink, which was a great fault for an officer on guard. Although Cassio resisted initially, yet he soon fell into the guile of Iago. He swallowed wine glass after glass and became drunk. Provoked by Iago, he praised the gentle lady Desdemona. He even told Iago, "She is a most exquisite lady." At the end he got involved in a scuffle. Montano, a worthy officer, who interfered to pacify the dispute, was wounded in the scuffle. Taking advantage of the situation Iago spread the alarm causing the castle bell to be rung as if a dangerous mutiny had set in. The bell awakened Othello who dressed in haste came down to the scene of action and asked Cassio of the cause. By now, Cassio had regained some rationality, but was too ashamed to reply. Iago pretended to be reluctant to tell the truth, and, as if compelled by Othello, gave an account of the whole matter in such a manner that

it seemed to make Cassio's offence less, but actually made it appear greater than it was. Consequently, Othello who was a strict observer of discipline was forced to take away the rank of lieutenant from Cassio. Thus, Iago's first artifice succeeded. He had now undermined his hated adversary Cassio and was successful to thrust him out of his place.

Cassio, whom this misfortune had entirely sobered, now lamented to his seeming friend Iago :

“Reputation, reputation, reputation! O, I have lost my reputation! I have lost the immortal part of myself, and what remains is bestial. My reputation, Iago, my reputation!” He despised himself. He thought how he could ask the General for his place again. Iago advised him to apply to the lady to mediate for him with her lord.

Cassio did as Iago advised him. Desdemona promised him that she would be his solicitor with her lord. She immediately set about for this cause in so earnest and pretty manner that Othello, who was mortally offended with Cassio, could not put her off. When he pleaded delay because it was too soon to pardon such an offender, she insisted that it should be the next night, or the next morning to that at farthest. Then she showed how penitent and humbled poor Cassio was and that his offence did not deserve punishment of such magnitude. But Othello still hung back. So she said, “What my lord, that I should have so much to do to plead for Cassio, Michael Cassio, that came a-courting for you, and often times when I have spoken in dispraise of you, has taken your part. I count this but a little thing to ask of you. When I mean to try your love indeed, I shall ask a weighty matter.” Othello could deny nothing to such a pleader. He promised to receive Michael Cassio again in his favour, but only requested Desdemona to leave the time to him.

It happened that Othello and Iago had entered into the room where Desdemona was already present with Cassio who had been imploring her intercession. He departed through the opposite door as Othello entered and Iago who was full of art said in a low voice, as if to himself, “I like not that.” Othello took no notice of what he said. The interaction which immediately took place with Desdemona put it out of his head. But he recalled it later. When Desdemona departed from the scene Iago asked Othello, as if mere satisfaction of his thought, whether Cassio knew of the General's courtship with Desdemona. The General replied in affirmative and added that he had gone between them very often during the courtship. Iago raised his brow, as if he had got a fresh light on some terrible matter and remarked, “Indeed!”. This brought into Othello's mind the words of Iago which he said while entering the room. Thus he began to think there was some meaning in that private meeting of Desdemona with Cassio. Othello deemed Iago to be a just man, full of love and

honesty. So he urged Iago to speak out of what he knew. “And what,” said Iago, “if some thoughts very vile should have intruded into my breast?” he went on to say that it would be a pity if any trouble would arise to Othello out of his imperfect observation. So it would not be wise for Othello’s peace to know his thoughts. By then Othello’s curiosity was raised almost to distraction and Iago, as if in earnest care of Othello’s mind, sought him to be cautious of envy. By the very caution he pretended to give him against suspicion. “I know,” said Othello, “that my wife is fair, loves company and feasting, is free of speech, sings, plays, and dances well: but where virtue is, these qualities are virtuous. I must have proof before I think her dishonest.” Then Iago, as if glad that Othello slow to believe ill of his lady, frankly declared that he had no proof. He begged Othello to observe her behaviour well particularly when Cassio was near by. He should not be jealous or too secure. Iago knew the disposition of the Italian ladies better than Othello. He knew that in Venice the wives would let the world see their pranks but they dared not show their husbands. Iago craftily insinuated that Desdemona deceived her father in marrying with Othello and carried it so closely that old Brabantio thought that witchcraft had been used. Othello was much moved by this argument. He wondered if she could deceive her father, she might deceive her husband as well.

Iago begged apology for having moved him. But Othello urged him to go on. Iago pretended that he was reluctant to produce anything against Cassio. However, he reminded Othello how Desdemona had rejected many suitable matches of her own clime and complexion and married him, which showed unnatural in her and proved to have a strong will. So when better judgment returned, how probable it was that she would fall upon comparing Othello with the white complexioned young Italians of her nation. He therefore advised Othello to put off his reconciliation with Cassio a little longer. Meanwhile Othello should note with what earnestness Desdemona would solicit for Cassio. So mischievously the treacherous villain laid his plots to turn the gentle qualities of the innocent lady into her destruction, and make a net of her own goodness to entrap her: first by setting on Cassio to entreat her for mediation, and then out of the mediation contriving stratagems for her ruin.

Othello’s long conversation with Iago led him to restlessness. Neither poppy, nor the juice of mandragora nor all the sleeping potions of the world could once again restore to him that sweet rest which he had enjoyed only yesterday. His occupation sickened him. He could not fight delight in arms. His heart that used to be roused at the sight of troops would no longer stir at the sound of drums or the neighing of war horses. He seemed to have lost

all that pride and ambition which are the virtues of a soldier. Sometimes he thought his wife to be honest. Again he wondered that she was not. At times he thought Iago to be just, but at times he thought the contrary. Thus, he was pieces with these distracting thoughts. Once he laid hold on Iago's throat and demanded proof Desdemona's guilt or threatened instant death for his having belied her. Iago feigned indignation that his honesty was misinterpreted to be a vice. He pointed out if Othello had seen a handkerchief in the hand of Desdemona that was strawberry spotted and Othello acknowledged that it was his first gift to Desdemona. "That same handkerchief," said Iago, "did I see Michael Cassio this day wipe his face with." Othello replied, "If it be as you say, I will not rest till wide revenge swallow them up: first, for a token of your fidelity, I expect that Cassio shall be put to death within three days; and for that fair devil, I will withdraw and devise some swift means of death for her."

Othello did not care to enquire how Cassio came by with the handkerchief of Desdemona. He passed death sentence upon both of them. Desdemona had never given such a present to Cassio; nor would this constant lady have ever wronged her husband with doing so naughty a thing as to give her lord's presents to another man. The shrewd Iago used his wife, Emilia, to steal the handkerchief from Desdemona and drop it in Cassio's way where it might and thereby provide evidence to Iago's suggestion that it was Desdemona's present.

Soon after the meeting with Iago, Othello pretended that he had headache and longed her to lend him her handkerchief to hold on to his temples. Desdemona did so but Othello wanted the handkerchief which gave her. Desdemona could not find it. "That's a fault," said Othello. "That handkerchief was given to my mother by an Egyptian woman. She was a charmer and could almost read the thoughts of people; she told her while she kept it, it would make her amiable, and subdue my father entirely to her love; but if she lost it, or made a gift of it, my father's eye should hold her loathsomely." The lady said, "Is it possible?" Othello replied, "It is true. It is a magical handkerchief." Desdemona was ready to die with fear for she plainly perceived that she had lost it and with it, she feared, the love of her husband. She tried to divert him from too serious thoughts. She cheerfully told him that all his talk about the handkerchief was only to put her off from Cassio's suit and went on to praise him until Othello in perfect distraction burst out of the room. Then Desdemona began to suspect that her lord was jealous of Cassio.

When Othello and Desdemona met again he accused her more plainly of being unfaithful and of loving another man. Othello wept and told her that he could have borne all sorts of evils-poverty, disease and disgrace- with fortitude but her infidelity had broken his

heart. He called her a weed that looked so fair and smelled so sweet that the sense ached at it. He wished she had never been born. When Othello left her, Desdemona was so stupefied at her husband's untrue suspicion of her that a weight like sleep came over her. She only desired that her attendant to make her bed and to lay her bed sheets upon it. She said that when people teach their babies, they do it by gentle means and easy tasks and Othello might have chided her so; for in good faith she was but a child.

Desdemona soon fell asleep. Othello entered the room full of dark purpose which he had meditated of putting her lady to death. When he saw her asleep he thought he would not shed her blood, but he was resolved that should die else she would live to betray more as she had done him. Then he kissed her for the last time and he wept but he said they were cruel tears.

Desdemona was awakened by his kisses. She looked upon Othello and she saw him gnaw his lips and roll his eyes. She knew he was always fatal when he looked so. He told her to prepare for death and to say her prayers for he would not kill her soul. Desdemona begged for mercy and to know her fault. Then she named Cassio and the handkerchief which he said she had given him, and the guiltless lady was proceeding to clear herself but suddenly he would hear no more and covering her up in the bed clothes, stifled her till death.

At the same time Cassio came in, wounded and bleeding. Iago had set one of his men to assassinate him but the fellow was unable to kill Cassio. He was killed by Iago to prevent discovery. In his pockets were found certain letters which exposed the guilt of Iago and confirmed the innocence of Cassio who now came to Othello to beg apology and also to ask him the reason why Iago had been employed to murder him.

The discovery was like a thunder stroke to Othello who now felt he was no better than a murder and that his lady was innocent and faithful. Extreme anguish made life intolerable and killed himself and fell upon the lifeless body of his dear wife.

These rash acts raised much horror and passion among the bystanders. Othello had borne a fair reputation and until he was wrought upon by the art of a villain, he was indeed a loving and doting husband. He had loved Desdemona not wisely, but too well. When he was dead all his former merits and valiant acts were remembered. Iago was executed with strict tortures and the state of Venice lamented for the demise of their renowned General Othello.

Word Notes

Siege : a military operation to capture a town

Insolent : rude and disrespectful

Anthropophagi : a mythical race of cannibals

Devour : read or listen to some story eagerly

Seduce : persuade someone to do something unwise

Conjuration : make some thing appear in the mind

Blemish : a small flaw

Dispersion : go in different direction

Intercession : the action of intervening on behalf of someone

Disposition : the natural qualities of a person's character

Mandragora : a type of a plant whose root when eaten causes hallucination

Loathsomely : hatefully

Suit : the process of trying to win a woman's affection with a view to marriage

Infidelity : disloyalty

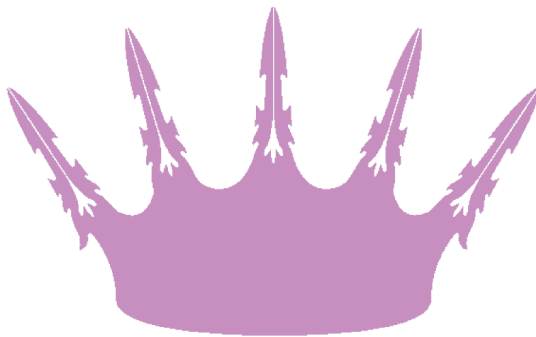
Chided : scolded

Gnaw : cause pain

Wrought : made



MACBETH



Chapter 5

When Duncan was the king of Scotland, there lived a brave General who was looked up to with high esteem throughout. Scotland for his great valour and skill in wars. He was also a close relative of the old king. He was Macbeth, the thane of Glamis. Of late, he defeated a rebel army assisted by the troops of Norway, in great numbers.

The two Scottish Generals, Macbeth and Banquo, were returning from the great battle. There was thunder and lightening. On the way they were stopped by the strange appearance of three figures that looked like women, except that they had beards, and their withered skin and wild dresses made them look like unearthly creatures. They were dancing, they were singing :

“Fair is foul, and foul is fair
Hover through the fog and filthy air.”

As they saw the two Generals, the first witch saluted Macbeth with the title of ‘thane of Glamis’. The general was scarcely startled to find himself known by such creatures. The second witch addressed him as the ‘thane of Cawdor’ to which he had no pretensions; and the third told him, “You will be the king of Scotland hereafter.” Such a prophetic greeting might well amaze him for he knew that as long as the king’s sons survived, he could scarcely hope to succeed the throne. By this time, Banquo was curious to know the reason why the witches had little to say about him whereas they kindled hope in the heart of his dearest friend. So the witches turned towards Banquo and told him in somewhat riddling terms: to be lesser than Macbeth and greater, not so happy but much happier. They also prophesied that although Banquo would never reign as the king of Scotland, yet his successors would be the kings. And then they turned into thin air and vanished, by which the Generals realized the weird sisters to be witches.

While they stood there pondering on the strangeness of this adventure, there arrived certain envoys, from the king, who were empowered to confer upon Macbeth the title of the thane of Cawdor. It was an event so miraculously corresponding with the predictions of the witches that Macbeth stood there wrapped in amazement, unable to respond to the greetings of the envoys. Hopes began to swell in his heart as he was now thinking of the

prediction of the third witch. Turning to Banquo, he said, “Do you not hope that your children will be the kings of the future, since, what the witches promised to me has so wonderfully come to pass?” “That hope,” replied Banquo, “might enkindle you to aim at the throne, but often times these ministers of darkness tell us truths in little things to betray us into deeds of greatest consequence.”

However, the prophesies of the witches had sunk too deep into the mind of Macbeth. He told his wife about the predictions of the three witches and also its partial accomplishment. Lady Macbeth was an extremely ambitious woman. She spurred on the reluctant purpose of Macbeth who felt compunction at the thought of blood. She did not cease to represent the murder of the king as a step absolutely necessary to the fulfillment of the flattering prophesies. It happened that at this time King Duncan came to visit Macbeth’s castle along with his two sons, Malcolm and Donalbain and numerous thanes and attendants to honour Macbeth for his triumph against the rebels.

Inverness, the castle of Macbeth was pleasantly situated on a hill and the air about it was sweet and wholesome. The nests that the swallows or the marlets had built under all the jutting friezes and buttresses of the building. The king was extremely pleased as he entered the palace not only for its wonderful ambience but also due to the attention and respect of his hostess, Lady Macbeth, who had developed the art of camouflaging her treacherous purposes with smiles and charming etiquette.

Tired of his long journey the king went early to bed. It was the middle of the night. Now over half the world’s nature seemed dead and wicked dreams abuse sleeping men’s minds, and none but the wolf or the murderer is out for hunt. This was the time when Lady Macbeth woke up to plot the murder of the king. She would not have undertaken a deed so abhorrent to her sex and she was well aware of her husband’s nature that was too full of the milk of human kindness to execute a contrived murder. She knew that her husband was ambitious but he was not prepared for the height of crime which commonly accompanies inordinate ambition. She had won his consent about the murder but she doubted his resolution and she feared the natural tenderness of his disposition could defeat the purpose. So armed with a dagger she approached the king’s chamber. There she found Duncan in sound sleep and as she viewed him earnestly, there was something in his face which resembled her own father. Thus she had not the resolution to proceed further.

She returned to confer with her husband. He thought there were strong reasons against the

murder. Macbeth was not only a subject but also a close relative to Duncan. Besides, he had been a host to the king; so his duty would be to protect the king from the threat of the murderers, not to bear the dagger himself. He also thought how just and benevolent a king was Duncan, how clear of offence to his subjects, how loving to his nobility that their subjects were doubly bound to avenge his death. Moreover, by the favours of the king, Macbeth stood high in the opinion of all sorts of men and how could those honours be stained by the reputation of so foul a murder!

In these conflicts of the mind Lady Macbeth found that her husband had resolved to proceed no further. But she was a woman not easily shaken from her evil purpose. She began to pour in at his ears words which infused a portion of her own spirit into his mind, assigning reason upon reason why he should not shrink from the resolution he had earlier undertaken and how the action of one night would give their all the coming days and nights to come sovereign power and royalty. She even accused him of cowardice and fickleness for reverting to his decision. She also told him how practicable it would be to lay the guilt of the deed on the drunken grooms who were sleeping in the king's chamber.

So Macbeth took the dagger in his hand and softly stole in the dark to the room where Duncan slept. As he advanced towards the bed-chamber he visualized another dagger hanging in the air with the handle pointed towards him and there were drops of blood on the tip and the blade of the dagger. Macbeth tried to grasp the dagger but it faded in to the air. It was only a phantasm created from his hot and oppressed brain for the business he had in hand.

Overcoming this fear, Macbeth entered Duncan's room and slew the hapless king with one stroke of the dagger. Just as he was about to leave the room, one of the grooms who were sleeping in the chamber, laughed and then cried out, "murder" for which both of them woke up; but then, one of them said, "God bless us" and the other responded, "Amen" and went off to sleep. Macbeth also tried to say "Amen" but the word seemed to be struck in his throat and he could not utter. He felt that he heard a voice which said, "Sleep no more; Macbeth murders sleep, the innocent sleep that nourishes life. Glamis has murdered sleep, and therefore Cawdor shall therefore sleep no more. Macbeth shall sleep no more."

Macbeth thus returned to his wife who by now had started to think that he had failed in his objective. He came in such a distracted state that she reproached him for his want of resoluteness and sent him to wash his hands of the blood that stained them. Meanwhile

she took the dagger to stain the cheeks of the grooms with blood in order to make it seem their guilt.

Day broke and with it was the discovery of the murder and though Macbeth and his wife showed their outmost grief and the evidence of murder were sufficiently strong against the grooms, yet the entire suspicion fell upon Macbeth. Duncan's two sons fled immediately. Malcolm, the elder, sought for refuge in the English court while Donalbain, the younger son fled to Ireland. With the death of the king the throne being vacated and the sons being unavailable, Macbeth who was the next heir was crowned the king of Scotland. Thus the prediction of the weird sisters was literally accomplished.

Macbeth and his queen could not forget prophesy of the weird sisters that though Macbeth would be the king but the children of Banquo and not of Macbeth would be the kings after him. The thought, that they had defiled their hands with blood by committing regicide, only to place the posterity of Banquo upon the throne had rankled within them. So they decide to kill Banquo and his son Fleance to nullify the prediction of the weird sisters. For this purpose they arranged a banquet to which they invited all the chief thanes along with Banquo and Fleance. Macbeth appointed some hired assassins and beset them on the way Banquo and his son were supposed to pass. The assassins pounced upon them and killed Banquo, but Fleance managed to escape.

Meanwhile, Macbeth and his wife played the role of perfect host with affable and graceful manners that conciliated everyone present in the banquet. Macbeth discoursed freely with the thanes and noblemen and regretted the absence of his dearest friend Banquo. No sooner did he lament for his friend whom he was missing in the banquet, Macbeth saw the ghost of Banquo occupying the seat reserved for him. At this horrible sight, his cheeks became white with fear and he stood quite unmannered with his eyes fixed upon the ghost. His queen and all other nobles saw nothing, but perceived him gazing upon an empty chair. They took it to be a fit of distraction and Lady Macbeth even reproached him and told him it was the same fancy which made him see the dagger in the air when he about to murder Duncan. But Macbeth continued to visualize the ghost of Banquo and gave no heed to all the noblemen could say and addressed the ghost with distracted words. Lady Macbeth fearing the dreadful secret would be disclosed, in great haste dismissed the guests excusing the infirmity of Macbeth.

Macbeth and his wife had their sleeps affected with terrible dreams and the blood of

Banquo troubled them not more than the escape of Fleance whom they now looked upon as father to a line of kings who would keep their posterity out of the throne. With these thoughts they found no peace and Macbeth decided to visit the heath once more in search of the three weird sisters to know his final outcome.

He found them in a cave near the heath where they were engaged in preparing their charms in which they conjured up infernal spirits to reveal them futurity. Their horrid ingredients were toads, bats and serpents, the eye of a newt, the tongue of a dog, the leg of lizard, the wing of a night-owl, the scale of a dragon, the tooth of a wolf, the mummy of a witch, the root of hemlock, the gall of a goat, the liver of a Jew and the finger of a dead child. All these were set on to boil in huge cauldron which was cooled with baboon's blood; to these they poured in the blood of a sow that had eaten her young, and they threw into the flame the grease that had sweeten from a murderer's goblet. By these charms they bound the informal spirits to answer their questions.

Macbeth demanded to know from them whether he would he would have his doubts resolved by them or by their masters, the spirits. He was not daunted by the ceremonies that he saw and boldly said, "Where are they? Let me see them." So they called the spirits. There were three of them. The first one looked like an armed head, called Macbeth by name and told him, "Beware of the thane of Fife." Macbeth thanked him for the caution. He was envious of Macduff, the thane of Fife.

The second spirit arose in the likeness of a bloody child. He called Macbeth by name and told him to have no fear of death but to laugh and scorn at the power of man born naturally born of a woman's womb. He advised him to be bold, bloody and resolute. "Then live Macduff," remarked the king, "what need do I fear of you, Macduff? But I will make assurance doubly sure. You will not live so that I can tell the pale-hearted Fear that it lies, and sleep in spite of thunder."

A spirit arose in the form of a crowned child with a tree in his hand. He also called Macbeth by name, comforted him against conspiracies and told him that he could never be vanquished until the woods of Birnam to Dunsinane Hill would come against him.

"Who can unfix the forest and move it from its earth bound roots?" said the king. "I see I shall live the usual period of man's life and not to be cut off by a violent death. But my heart throbs to know one thing: tell me, if you can tell me so much, if Banquo's issue shall ever reign in this kingdom."

Here the cauldron sank into the ground and a noise of music was heard, and eight shadows like kings passed by Macbeth, and Banquo was the last figure, all smeared with blood, and smiled at Macbeth. Banquo bore a glass which showed the figured of many more and pointed to the images. Macbeth realized that these were the posterity of Banquo who should reign after him in Scotland. The three witches danced with a sound of soft music, and making a show of duty and welcome to Macbeth, vanished in the air.

The first news that Macbeth got soon after coming out of the witches cave was that Macduff, the thane of Fife, had fled to England to join the army which was formed against him under the leadership of Malcolm to displace Macbeth and set Malcolm, the right heir, upon the throne of Scotland. Stung with rage, Macbeth set upon the castle of Macduff. Macduff's wife and children, whom the thane had left behind in Scotland, were brutally slaughtered. These merciless activities had gradually alienated the nobility from Macbeth. Many fled to join Malcolm and Macduff who were now approaching with a powerful army which had been raised in England, and the rest secretly wished success to their arms though for fear of Macbeth they could not take active part. Everybody hated Macbeth, the tyrant. Nobody honoured him but all suspected him and he began to envy the condition of Duncan who now slept soundly in his grave and against whom treason had done its worst. Neither steel nor poison, domestic malice or foreign levies, could hurt him any longer.

Meanwhile the queen who had been the sole partner in his wickedness, on whose bosom he could sometimes seek a momentary repose from those terrible dreams which affected them both, passed away. Unable to bear the remorse of guilt and as she suffered from somnambulism she ultimately committed suicide. Macbeth was left alone; he grew careless of life and longed for death. The new approach of Malcolm's army roused in him what remained of his ancient courage, and he was determined to die with armour. The hollow promises of the three witches had also filled in him a kind false confidence and remembered the prophesies of the spirits that no one born of a woman's womb could kill him. He also believed in the soothsaying that he could never be vanquished until Birnam woods would come to Dunsinane which he thought was impossible. So he shut himself up in his own castle which was thought to be absolutely impregnable and waited for Malcolm to invade it.

Finally, a day came, when a messenger approached him, pale and trembling with fear,

almost unable to report to Macbeth of what had seen and yet averred that, as he stood on the hill for his watch, he chanced to see the Birnam and perceived the woods to be moving. “Liar”, roared Macbeth, “if you speak false, you will be hanged alive upon the next tree till famine ends your life.”

By now Macbeth had begun to doubt the equivocal sayings of the three spirits. He never feared of being vanquished till Birnam woods would advance towards Dunsinane, and now the woods did move. “However,” said Macbeth, “if this which he vouches be true, let us take us arms and move out. There is no fleeing from hence, nor staying in here. I begin to weary of the sun and wish my life is at an end.” Saying these he sallied forth upon the besiegers who had now reached the castle.

The strange sight of the moving woods was easily solved. When the besieging army advanced towards the castle through the woods of Birnam, Malcolm like an astute general instructed all his soldiers to hew down a bough and bear it before him so that he could conceal the actual number of invaders to Macbeth. This marching of soldiers with boughs in their hands had appeared, from a distance, like moving woods and the messenger was evidently frightened. Thus the words of the spirits bought to pass, in a sense different from that in which Macbeth understood and so he lost his confidence.

A fierce skirmish took place in which Macbeth slaughtered all those who challenged him until he faced Macduff and remembering the caution of the spirit who had counseled him to stay away from the thane of Fife, he would have turned back but Macduff who had been seeking him through the whole fight, opposed his turning, and a fierce contest ensued. Macduff reproached him and called him a tyrant, murderer, hell-hound and a villain for brutally slaughtering his wife and his innocent children. Then Macbeth remembered the words of the spirit and boldly proclaimed, “I bear a charmed life which must not yield to a man born naturally of a woman.” At this Macduff snubbed him and declared that never born of a woman, never as the ordinary man is naturally born, but was untimely taken out from his mother’s womb.

Macbeth lost his strength and resoluteness. He lamented, “in future a man should never believe the lying equivocations of witches and juggling spirits who deceive us in words that have double meanings; and while they keep their promises literally, they disappoint us by providing different meanings.” He then refused to fight against Macduff. Macduff who abhorred him, scornfully told him that they would imprison him and demonstrate him to the

laity as a tyrant, quite like the way monsters are displayed. “Never.” said Macbeth, “I will not live to kiss the ground before young Malcolm’s feet.” His valiance returned with despair and he threw upon Macduff who after a vicious struggle overpowered him and severed his head and presented it to the young and lawful new king. Malcolm, then, ascended the throne amid acclamations of the noblemen and the people of Scotland.

Word Notes

Esteem : respect and admiration

Thane : the title given to a royal official in medieval Scotland

Prophesied : predicted

Envoy : messenger

Spurred : encouraged

Compunction : a feeling of guilt that prevents wrong-doing

Freize : wooden fabric

Abhorrent : detestable

Inordinate : excessive

Phantasm : what exists in the imagination.

Somnambulism : sleep-walking

Impregnable : unable to be captured

Skirmish : a brief fight

Vouches : confirms that something is true or accurate

Reproached : scolded

Equivocations : use of language with double meanings

