

## PRIMAVERA

In the woodland forest, tapestried with green,  
canopied with  
rustling leaves, yellow with the peeping toadstool, gay  
with coves and  
grassy meadows, dark with somber witching places, ( though  
the haggish  
maid has departed, burying her sunburnt weeds under the  
damp mold of  
last year's shrubbery), where the leafy shapes of new  
plants and flowers push forth their giddy heads, about the  
pathways and the trees, there runs a creature.

A being of no age , tiny and fat. For attire he  
wears a garment sewn of green and orange leaves which, as  
he runs through the forest, fly out  
everywhere, from his rumbling tub, from the stems of his  
stubby fingers,  
from the neck of his shirt; that is to say, the leaf of his  
neck. Fear not,  
gentle cowslip, gaping adder's tongue, pungent anise! Only  
the milkweed  
shall his foot tread underneath , it being , when all is  
said and done, only a foul weed) . Indeed, all weeds will  
crack and crumble under his pointed leaf shoes. Verily  
does he rolls about like a raincloud, so much of a  
puffball is he!

As you may surmise, he is a jester. But so merry a  
jester! He croons at the top of his lungs, and can tumble  
over a barrel. What a merry death rattle does he cough up  
in his throat! Ah! let this springtime singer be! Though,  
by my word, what a beard he has! It drops to the pointed  
tips of his toes, sweeping the grassy carpet with its  
weedy floss. Or perhaps better said: flossy weeds. Fear  
only that he may stumble over it, so full is he of grape  
intoxication; again, 'twere better said, intoxicated  
grapes. In either case he is drunk. Trust only that he does  
not carpet the ground with his vomit, so filled is it with  
rushmeal. And insects will slobber over it.

But already he has run on ahead! I must hasten to  
catch up with  
him. I must not lose sight of this fantastical little  
pixie! Why, at this very  
moment, unless we stop him, he may be busily at work,  
striping the trees of their bark!

Indeed! indeed! That's exactly what he is doing; and  
eating it, too! He loves birch-bark; abhors the elm; sucks  
maples for dessert. Stop! Stop! Oh please stop! We plead in

vain. The spoiled woodland devil will continue on, despite our pleading, until his appetite be appeased have also learned that he likes to sleep in cypresses at night, hate the insects that buzz about him relentlessly, and is annoyed by the birds flittering on or about his shoulders.

Crunch! Snarch! Scrouffle! Oh, jester: we do not want to hear your gustatory mumbling, your sustenanced rhetoric, even if it is bark! Ah me: it is easier to talk to a wall that it is to make mischievous fools relent their devilishness. He is very hungry, for a fact, and a hearty soul without rancor.

Thereupon, having finished with his termite dish, he wipes his mouth on a large cabbage, presses his belly, withdraws a leaf from his shirt on which are penned numerous words and notes; then, flicking the insects off his nose with a free index finger, he sings:

" In the rushy leaf-meal lan'  
Where the toad doth chase the mole  
And the leaf doth wash the bowl  
And the mouse peeps from the hole  
Sing I loud of nature's clan!

Foxes, sparrows, pigeons, owls  
Termites, rattlesnakes and fowls  
Ducks that gibber at their jowls  
Possums suckling little sows  
I drown out the moos of cows!

Life is dull when spring is past  
From the cold there's no relief  
Saplings bundled up in grief  
Drop their tears from every leaf  
All condemn the winter's blast!

Drown your woes in seas of wine!  
Oceans bubbling not with brine  
But with juice of fruity vine!  
Bathe your nose in scenty thyme  
And your arms in sticky pine!"

Not bad for a clown! Not nearly so bad as some of the things I've done! Halloo, sir clown! Come hear my

wretched verse, the scribblings of a witch-maimed hand!  
But he ignores me and, replacing his pen behind his ear,  
flies away out of the darkness of the tree-shadowed forest  
onto a sunlit path, a carpet of pine nettles underneath a  
canopy of pines. Oh, how he rolls like the sun, ( now that  
we have observed the sun to roll. ) ! And continues  
singing , though he's forgotten his own words. Instead he  
mutters absently, over and over again: " Drown your joys  
in the weeds of lime. " And hums. Well, I won't make any  
excuses for him. He's one of those irresponsible sorts that  
it's a waste of time to blame for anything.

By my word - what do we see now? In a clearing hard  
by the road there stands a traveler , a stranger to these  
woods. He is tall, elderly and sturdy. His face lies hidden  
beneath a long, full beard, his back straight and unbent by  
the years. He wears a thick, pleated blue cape, his green  
mantle is wreathed with sedge, his feet protected by high  
black boots. In his earth-colored shoulder bag he collects  
sprigs of pine as he uses his oaken staff to chase away the  
squirrels who annoy him by their curiosity, brushing his  
face with their bushy tails. By his hat we know him to be a  
man of some distinction, perhaps a philosopher, or even a  
scholar. We meet and exchange greetings. The clown is the  
first to speak:

" Hail, worthy traveler! What brings you here to this  
land of  
bouncing carpets ? For carpets be bounceable indeed when  
made of sharp  
nettles, though causing one to bounce, rather than  
permitting themselves  
to be bounced upon! "

" Hail, worthy jester! From far distant lands have I  
journeyed to this  
ancient clime, to pluck the time-honored first-born pine  
sprigs of the early  
spring. Eagerly did I hurry from the ice palace of the  
winter, beyond the  
northern extremity of that star which, like a spur, rests  
at the tip of the  
Bear's tail. And now, in the dew-steeped morning of the  
Nature's rebirth, do I pluck these new stars of life that  
See! - See! already overflow my rude pack with their green  
sparkle!"

" How now once more, my worthy fellow!" muses the  
thought-filled  
jester, his fingers poised against his lips, " if for a  
sprig of pine you would

journey the length of a star , how many stars indeed would you be forced to jump over if you wanted a piece of the sun? Yet here am I, before you!" And he trips up his heels and kicks in a bowl.

" Then must I humble myself before you, oh wond'rous creature", replies the stranger, "who by the unlimited power of God now spills before mine eyes. But listen to me , famed singer and honored friend - you must help me. I have somehow lost my way into this lonely wood and I greatly fear that, left to my own devices ere the setting of the sun, ( who I now learn is your father), I will not make my way out of it . Would you therefore be my guide? If you will run and roll ahead of me, I will follow you, rude and sure, on my sturdy staff. And let God grace our voyage."

" Why, by all the pesky birds on my shoulder, that's a right good proposition! But first you must tell me who you may be, for if you do not I may, perforce, turn you into a ragweed and chew on you. Or it may be that I will transform you into a mole, that is , a creature fearing the sun, which is the same as to say, my poor eyes will never behold you more.

The stranger, in no way discomfited, replies:

" I am a scholar, a man well versed in the ways of God. Through the long lonely nights over many years have I studied that I might understand something of the nature of matter and mind. And as my understanding is scarcely increased by all this labor, so will I never be able to cease from search and study, though I will soon be an old man. Then this staff, which now merely serves me for protection, will have also to carry me.

Every year at spring's commencement do I again set forth from my tiny cottage to gather these morning sprigs of pine, as you have seen me doing. And now I seek to return to that hermitage, secret from the eyes of men, from whence I issued. Yet never has it befallen me before that I have lost my way. "

" Well; that is very good; very good indeed. And so, wise sir, I would

just like to know: how do you propose to get to where you want to go; which is to say, from whence you've come?"

The impertinent clown! The ever facetious buffoon!

" That is to say, my good and holy seer: if you intend to return from

whence you've come, after having come from where you're going, and that in a straightforward manner with no back-tracking or circumlocution, I see a riddle: no, better, I propound one; to wit: If Achilles chase the hare from whence it's come to where it's going, then when Achilles comes to where it's been, the frightened little bushy-tail will have already moved on. This being so, Achilles will never catch the hare. Indeed he will but waste the whole time coming and going, which makes him not very much different from yourself, from what I can make out.

But let me propose another, and that more to the point: In the morning the sun comes eastward to the day and goes westward to the night. Am I not correct in this, wise man?"

" Indeed jolly clown, you are, most certainly."

" But I have observed him at night to catch in a bed of rushes and tangle himself up entirely. Can you explain this to me?"

" Indeed, clown. That was the moon you saw, not the sun."

" Very clever! Very clever! I would not have thought of that, by which I mean to say, I would not have thought of it if you had not done the thinking for me; for which you are called a wise man and a scholar. I would pay you well for it too, were it not that my purse is stuffed only with leaves."

" But come, come, delightful creature! Let us not dally further. My heart begins to sink beneath its burden of care. I would soon be gone. Hopefully I may wave farewell to the sun from the casement of my study. My reading is heavy, for my understanding has but poorly advanced. Many candles will burn and yet will I not see to the end of it. As by God's providence a man's life is short, and is indeed quickly reckoned, so my remaining years can be numbered on the fingers of my hands, and possibly yours. Verily will I sing eternal praises unto the Lord if a single beam of the light of Truth e'er grace the prism of mine eye before I die. So direct my steps,

spinner of the sunlight, and sing us a song the like of which assailed my ears at our meeting."

" Well then, I will sing you little more than a piece of a song, for although you may like the piece, the whole may prove tedious. Let's be on, for a fact! Which way, did you say? Ah, yes; to the north! So; away!!"

And off they set, the scholar in step behind the jester, his greenwood mantle rising and falling with the vigorous thrust of his arm against his staff, until once more they enter the depths of the wood, the fool running along ahead. From time to time he circles back, crying : "Beware! Beware!"

The scholar stops and asks , "Where is the danger?" , raising his voice as his impetuous guide is nowhere to be seen. In a moment the fool comes running back, from behind, from the sides, from, anywhere, shouting : "Behind you!" or, "Before you!" , or , "To the sides!"

See them arriving underneath a nut tree! The merry fool shouts, "Take care ! Take care !" Again the scholar calls to him, "Where is the danger?"

" From above, fool!" Oh, look what the fool has done, who calls other men fools! As if the whole tree were to fall down upon him, the wise trustworthy soul is besieged by a shower of nuts! The impertinent little devil is in the branches, jumping and prancing about.

" Cease, fool, cease!" shouts the scholar , covering his head with a hood and warding off the hail of nuts with his staff. The clown jumps off the branch, shakes the dust from his leafy coverings, sticks an index finger to the side of his nose, and scolds:

" Be jolly today, sire, and mind not the fall of a few nuts on your expensive pate. For, by the name of truth, it is well said of difficult problems, that they are hard nuts to crack. And it is better to endure nuts than to be full of them, which is a sorry state indeed and belongs in an asylum. And, if I rain nuts on you, you may well say, " Nuts to me!", which means, "Nuts to you!", and go about your business. But come along, I'll take you."

And off they go again , into the heart of the ageless wood, the jester singing:

"Oh beware the clumps of grass  
Shun the mystic roots of weeds  
Eat the adder's tongue and seeds  
And the chicory, fingering beads!

See the mighty ball of fire  
Dimmed by twilight's shadow bleak  
Soaking in the woodland creek  
Washing crimson body sleek

Gather herbs of bone and thyme..."

" Hey there, singer! Bone's not an herb!"

" Gather herbs of *knitbone* and thyme  
Henbane grows above the glen  
There reclines the witches' den  
Hidden from the ways of men.

Morn's sweet dawn doth mark the cock  
The cock doth mark the dawn  
Crow, then, crower, on the rock  
For the new day that is born!"

" A wretched verse, singer! 'Twould not have sounded harsher to the ear if, instead of the cock, you had used the elephant instead! But I am not now in the mood for elephantine verse, so heavy are their clod-hoppers."

Now he sings a finer verse, with a rainbow in it:

" Watch the crabgrass hiss in pain  
Fie! Could'st think of fairer grain  
Dazzler rainbow in the skies  
Nourishment for crabbed eyes!"

How gaily, how lightly he trips along! Verily he is like the sunbeam in the forest shade, falling like a drop of honey on some unpresuming blade of grass, making it to glow like a blushing princess, though no more deserving than the rest, of the gift which has descended upon it.

Then does he suddenly run back, to anxiously pull at the hand of the seer: "Master! Master!" he cries, " Beware! In front of you! The tuskèd boar!" and hides in the pleats of his cloak. But the wise man is ready for him:

"Dispel your fears, my worthy companion. There are no boars in this forest. If ever there were any, they disappeared long ago on spits. Come, let us rest in this place, under the shade of this spreading beech, for in the late afternoon I feel the need of some refreshment, which gladly will I share with thee - and with thee !"

By the latter 'thee' I assume he means the narrator of this saga, that is to say, myself.

Behold us now as we seat ourselves beneath the generous canopy of the beech , laying out a flower embroidered tablecloth on the grass, that soon will be holding cakes and milk and slices of fruit, so that we may eat in the gentle haven of the sun's creation which is the cool shade. O Flora! Fleurs-de-lis and hexagons, rondelettes, octahedra and prisms! Yet since when do prisms grow on stems? Reconsider carefully: for if such be not the shape of their pollen, then how explain the honeycomb? And beware the bee, for he stings.

" Sire: may I tell you a story of the unfathomed depths of the woods, where even death is fruitful as it enriches the soil?"

" Go to it story-teller, and with a will. Only do not make it too gruesome , for..."

" You wish to keep the food in your stomach. Agreed. Very well: there

was , not too far from here , it must be four years ago or more, but not too much, which is no fault of mine, a reindeer who lived in a cave."

" I never knew reindeer lived in caves. "

" Only those who have enough sense to imitate the bears who, notwithstanding their bearish clumsiness have remarkable heads on their shoulders, sleeping when they are not wanted, that is to say, in winter.

Well, to retreat from my digression and recount from that return, he lived



in a cave, which might then be called a deer cave, with a loving doe and a little faun, hatched out one day on a bushel of straw...."

" Hatched out? Come now, my friend, that goes too far! "

" Why certainly, sir! With all your wisdom, I suspect that this must be incomprehensible to you. Yet , if it was not hatched, then it follows that warm-blooded animals do not lay eggs and, by the logic of this, they sprout their young! Thus do the hydra and the amoeba, which latter so hates its own foul appearance that it tears itself apart in rage and becomes two. Thus, even as a plot is hatched: so the faun was hatched!"

" Very well, the faun was hatched- you weary me - proceed."

" On a certain evil day in summer, when life was hot and everything flying about, an eagle, beaked, peaked and clawed, that is, having claws, ( though his feathers also looked as though they'd been clawed) , an ominous cackling monster, swooped down from the heavens, flapping his wings like an eagle..."

" That makes sense."

" From which remark the conceit of eagles who find about themselves no others worthy of imitation - seized the poor faun in its' claws, its' innocent hide bleeding with scratches from the unequal battle, soared into the air and rode over the forest. For, even as a deer resembles a colt , so could the eagle have been said to have been riding on its back, were not its cries so pitiful as to rend even the hardest of hearts. As she watched the kidnapping of her child, its mother wept near to death, while its father would have broken his last antler, and they were a hefty set, in rage."

"Then was a council of forest creatures called, meeting one fine summer afternoon to judge how best to catch the culprit and bring him to his punishment. We made a crafty lot; I being, as usual master plotter. What should happen, but that, in the middle of our scheming, the haughty bird himself, resembling more the serpent in his maligned wickedness, did light above our council, ( in which we both counselled , that is, consoled the poor deer, and

councilled , that is, schemed to catch the high flyer ), flapping his wings, all the while making a loud cackling commotion , and dropped the bleeding tongue of the faun, still hot with its blood and life, right into our midst! Ah, we jumped, let me tell you! We would have made a fine pack of dancers, were someone there to play the tambourine!

The woodland creatures considered the abduction of this faun an unpardonable sacrilege. Failing to understand this, my story will be a waste of your time, and certainly of mine. For although it is not wrong for the boar to tusk moles, ( it being granted that there are no boars ) , nor for dogs to make rabbits their mess, yet it has been decreed by the queen herself, she who rules over all creatures dwelling in this populous countryside , and whose every word is Divine Law, that it is forbidden for the eagle to crave the flesh of the deer. There are many such things which you will never learn in schools or from books, sire, about the ways of the forest creatures and the laws that govern them."

" But why is that, singer?"

" Why, sire? It is the unbreakable law of the forest, differing from most unbreakable things in that you may break it; but woe to you.

Well: it was a brave volunteer of a robin which we tied to a thorn bush, chirping piteously as if in the throes of death. As we would not hurt the bird, we smeared the surrounding bush with the tongue of the deer , with additional pieces of meat speared on the neighboring twigs. Then did each creature hide beneath plant and hollow, in barky trees and the lofts thereof, so that nearly the entire forest was hidden thereabouts. One could not have seen a soul, if animals do have souls, which is pointless to dispute.

Soon afterwards did we observe the swooping wings of the wicked bird, veritable spacious caverns pocketing the sky , as it came falling from the heights of heaven down onto its powerless victim. And the eagle would have quickly devoured the robin, evil thing that it was, delighting in its seeming state of bruising, and even more at the thought of bruising it again in the act of devouring it , had not the bushes shook and the leaves bristled with the hasty ushering forth of all the forest's creatures who, with no weapons other than their sharp teeth, rent the eagle from limb to limb and feather to feather -( by my faith! I would not speak of such sights! ) - so that the gore

spilled. And now that I have told you a story, pray give me a penny!"

"That will I do, certainly. It was a fine story, assuredly - though rather sad." The scholar stands perplexed for a moment, recovers himself to hand over the penny, and asks:

"Tell me more about this queen."

"Oh, but she is tall, and she walks beneath the trees. Her crown is of elmwood and her wand of holly. Her robes, woven from delicate threads of birch-bark, fall soft as silk about her upright and slender form..."

But we need not listen further to his description since, merely by turning around we may behold, now coming into view from some mysterious haven in the forest, the queen herself, treading softly beneath the trees on sandals carved from chalcedony, until she reaches our side.

The tip of her wand glitters with spider's webs. Her hands are soft, as if formed of the inner membranes of water lilies. A gossamer veil wraps about her face above which hovers a silver glow. How she resembles a cathedral in her fluted robes! Outwards from her presence one hears a sad, quiet and resinous music, that filters upwards through the trees, ringing with the overtones of a still sweetness, stirring neither the air nor the leaves.

How heavenly she is, queen of the woods, spiritual mother of all the

woodlands' creatures! So dainty is her footfall, that even the grass yields to it with pleasure; so rejuvenating her presence that trees, grass, the very air sparkle as from a sudden deposition of the morning dew. We continue to marvel at the spectacle as her domain of holiness embraces our little party, enhances our surroundings with its cloak of majesty.

The seer and I rise to give homage, as the sun-burnt fool rolls about the grass like a piece of the sun tangled in the vines. At last he bows before her feet, and she touches his leaf-knitted head with her holly wand.

"Hail, holiness!" In such wise does the scholar announce himself: "I am a lowly traveler through this happy domain in search of the warm sustenance of knowledge. It is for lack only of this that my despairing heart is ashen and starves. How fortunate am I, that my

dimming vision may encompass thy form before mine eyes eternal closing by the bitter hands of death. Lead my steps, I pray you; far have they wandered far from the great path; long have I tarried in life's bewildering thicket; long have I stumbled about as if in the depths of a dark cavern.

I implore you, reveal something to me of the mystery of Good and Evil, for minister you are of God, and knowledgeable of his ways. I would that you admit me to your band to your band of rustic creatures, to do you honor unto your dying day.

In the sweet pines this morning, in the rejuvenating dawn light, when the spunsilk rays of the rising sun bathed me in the glorious colors of the burgeoning spring, permeating everywhere like the invigorating purity of cool waters, I heard a singing message of God, so beautiful and sweet that at the hearing of it my very eyes smarted in delight. I knew then that it could not have originated in the singing of the birds, mingled though it was with their sweet chirpings.

Beholding the approach of your person through the forest, it appeared to me that I was once more listening to this sweet singing. Now know I full well that in this mystic song lies buried that Truth for which my seeking heart has labored all these many years."

Though indicating by a sign that she pays heed to his questions, the queen does not reply at once, but bids Harlequin, her subject, rise, asking him in tones of liquid silver:

"Where are my gentle children, honest servant?"

"O see, O see, my queen! See them everywhere!

Everywhere in the wild, wild wood, clamoring about thee in an eternal song of joy! For heavenly is thy ministry, lowly thy creatures, and I like a lamb in thy fold.

Oh, trumpet through this gladdening springwild land the suntime day, and trip over the snake at the quake of the duck!"

And he has spoken of a truly miraculous thing: within the span of an instant the sun's aura, formerly blocked by the densely clustered bodies of the tall trees, has spread a brilliant illumination over these forested domains. Behold, how, within the golden hedgery and pristine grass, and in the unspent grove, each tiny creature, hare, bird and deer, bear, wolf, fox, pigeon and owl, titmouse and mole, beaver and fly, grub, snail, the

feathered and the furred, the massive stag and even the wayward eagle, is bowed in reverence before its' gentle woodlands queen; and how all, in chattering, chitter and quack, tither and bark, proclaim together with a life- anxious clamor their love and obedience to their protectress, spiritual mistress and mother of the trees.

Yet as we continue to gaze, spellbound in her circle of magic, the spectacle fades before our very eyes, abandoning us once again to the holy shadows of the trees, the ethereal light of the queen's radiance, and the sparkle of her jeweled diadem.

Now she turns to the seer, his earthen pack spread open beside him on the grass , its emerald treasures gleaming, and addresses his questions:

" Earnest seeker, holy seer, man of God! A noble life have you lived!

Were your years longer in prospect, your eyes as strong as they once

were, when, at the beginning of your quest and in the teeming prowess of your youth, you gave the full measure of your strength to the sequestered

practice of laborious scholarship, I would send you back once more to your

homely study, your casemented library, rich in heavy tome and the worm-

eaten manuscript, illuminated by many a skilled medieval hand. However,

truly meriting , as you do, your due portion of truth , ( for there be few indeed who are proved more honest in their quest or stronger in their faith), it is not fitting that your eyes should eternally close in the sleep of ignorance.

Therefore be it known, that in your journey out of these melancholy

shades, this prankish clown as your guide, you will be blessed with some powerful revelation, the exact manner of which I cannot reveal further, but that will , to

gratify and crown your labors, afford you a glimpse of that Truth, for the sake of which you have invested all

the energies of your manhood . Then may you confidently return to your hermitage, to devote your final years to the

composition of a book which shall pass on to others that vision with which your sight will be graced .

Now must I go : and so should you."

We gaze, dumb with awe, as her form evaporates in slow degrees from the shadow of a mirage to complete invisibility, nor do we cease to wonder, or Harlequin rise from his kneeling, for some time afterwards.

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And immediately we set off. Once again do jester and seer stride through the woods, beneath the shades of many varieties of tree, pressing much greenery under foot, never tiring, so that I, all fast paced and out of breath, must hasten to keep up with them! To the fore dances the clown. He skips in the air, twirling thrice before landing on one foot, then tumbles backwards, losing his hat. The which, a well-beaten greenwood duster, he then retrieves and shakes at his feet, pouring down a heap of spring flowers from its magical store. And again he sings :

"Hop, Skip , Prance  
I Can Dance  
All Back Payments  
In Advance

Lurch, Creak, Quirk  
Writhe and Jerk  
Clumsy Grace  
Demands Hard Work"

Climbing a short ways up a steep hill between trees, we emerge above a sheltered glen onto a fertile meadow. "Why, that be a marvel indeed!" cries the clown, " Seer, come hither, quickly, and tell me what you make of these antics, although you must not ask: "Where is the danger?" for you will get a sorry answer. Come see for yourself! Come and see!"

Behold! In the upper part of the meadow, to the amusement of the jester and the confounding of the seer, stands a huge stone monument, hewn , (by whom or what is beyond conjecture by anyone present) , from the limestone block that occupies its site. It depicts a grotesque Chimera squatting on its hind paws, the whorled wrinkles of its lion's face contorted to the hideous egregiousness of a monster. It has the trunk of a horse and the cloven hooves of a goat; while feathers from every species of bird jut from its neck and ankles, off its belly and from underneath the curved tail twisting like a greedy snake. More potent an image of horror ne'er was carved by sculptor, then, or now, or at any time!

In amazement gawks the seer: "What be this thing?"

"Why , master, there's more. Look on."

While they have been talking , a crowd of little woodland sprites, of fairies and elves compounded from pieces of plants and parts of animals, has been congregating from the many hidden alcoves in the forest into the center of the field. Some stand before the statue; others jump up onto it; yet others balance on its tail. An odd individual sits on the grass directly in front of its' horrible face and gazes into the suffering whirlpools of its eyes.

" Actors, sire ! And a play! A play! Foolish seer, for you gape in confusion like a fool, though you be called a wise man! A sylvan act of fantasy, for it will be no more than one act, though I have no information as to the number of scenes. I will tell you no more than the title and the name of its characters; to tell more would spoil the show. For play it hath name by the author, a good carpenter of names. You may behold him over to your right, snug in a bag of grass, scribbling all over a piece of bark with a pen dipped in moonshine. He is a poetical writer, leaning not overmuch to social drama, rather does he tend more to the direction of philosophical fantasy; which is what you will see today. To recapitulate, for I can never hope that you will follow the chain of my reasoning - "

" I have yet to learn its name, you silly fellow."

" Oh! As to that, the play is called:

*ON THE LAMENT FOR THE DEATH OF A BEAUTIFUL MAIDEN*

, which must signify, as it appears to me, that the play does not dwell overmuch on the death of said maiden, but will be mainly preoccupied with certain moralistic considerations concerning the lament thereof..."

" Oh, I don't want to see it!" cries the seer in exasperation, " Who has any use for such pedantic rubbish! Much rather would I be sitting in my study alone, indulging in my own hair-splitting, than to sit for hours watching others do it!"

" Why, sire! Don't speak so! It is a well versed play, though coming as it does from little creatures, but little versed. Look further!"

A wrinkled creature, by the which I gather his extreme age, ( though it is no easy matter to judge the age of such tiny creatures ) , a piece of cabbage for a nose, radish

tops for eyes, dog's legs and an old man's withered face, with the miniature tail of a hare peeping out from behind, the whole o'ertopped with a great feathered cap, tossing a fuzzy green mantle like the town cryer's, now, to the accompaniment of the buzzing of fairy wings all around, steps before the face of the monster. He adopts all ceremonial postures befitting his station; then unwinds a scroll of ragweed wrapped about a spindle twig, and reads the prologue :

PROLOGUE

"Fate;  
Mate.  
Doom;  
Gloom.  
Wife;  
Strife.  
Woe;  
Too Slow,  
To Ease,  
The Heart,  
From Its  
Aching  
Angry,  
Smart.  
Can This Tripping,  
Skipping,  
Verse  
Carry  
Such A  
Woeful  
Hearse?  
Can This Stumbling,  
Mumbling,  
Rime,  
Beat the Ears  
Of Master  
Time?"

(Sheds tears. Drops the lament on the table; exits)

By this last phrase I assume him to be making a reference to Death, which is the master of our time, and remark as much to the sage. But he bids me be still, merely commenting that he is beginning to find ballad meter tedious. To this I can give no reply. But the fool reassures him



that the rest of the play will be including some heroic couplets. This appears to relieve him greatly; and presently he asks again,

" Who be these creatures walking upon the grassy stage, human in aspect though dwarfed from a dwarf?"

" They are, sire, in order of their appearance: The Maiden's Father, that's the fat one over there; the father's Friend , conspicuous by the plume in the crown of his cap and weighted down through a notable fondness for carrots; Solemn Priest, a sallow figure with yellowed crab- apple for a skull ; two Philosophers, mock rabbits dressed in shaggy robes. The pair of elves at the right bearing the black box are none other than the Pall-Bearers of the deceased Maiden , whom , there being no reason why it should be otherwise, we must imagine to be lying inside it. He that stareth into the Monster's face of woe is a star-gazing loon, who loves orange juice, knows nothing, and spends his days in the composition of dreams and fairy tales.

As for the rest: they are, all and severally, servants, courtiers, handmaidens, well-wishers, gaping throng, madding crowd ( though lettuced) and, in general, creatures who always know how to put their noses into everything and deliver sensible suggestions. Quiet! Hark! It begins:

FATHER: (Picks up the lament from the table; examines it):

Something in this letter paper galls me  
Eats my heart out with its imperfection  
Ruins sleep, troubles sense, appalls  
me!

Wouldst peruse and speak, twain  
intellection?

(The seer turns to me and comments: " 'Tis ten-syllabled, certainly, though with little of iambic, as I hear an anapest near the beginning. Besides, its a bad jingle."

"Quiet, sire." says the clown," Hear the play:")

1st PHILOSOPHER:



dismissed  
wilderness  
alone.  
thee!

Art straightway of thy services  
Be thou dismissed from my service,  
And from this household to the  
Will thou be driven, friendless and  
Curst be even the wolves that devour

Exit Chambermaid, bearing the child. Flies hither  
and yon about the meadow , she eventually arrives at the  
Star-Gazer seated upon the grass

CHAMBERMAID:

Hey! Over there!  
You! Tell me!  
What am I to do with this brat?

The Star-Gazer rises, examines the child curiously.  
Stares into the face of the Chimera. Pauses for a moment,  
lost in thought,. Scratches behind his ear, and says:

STAR-GAZER:

Ahem, milady; an easy answer : Feed it to  
the monster!

CHAMBERMAID:

Here, take it  
It's yours!  
Good riddance!

STAR-GAZER:

Give o'er the unsuckled one.

She passes the child to him and exits. As a host of  
fairy creatures blast horns, beat tam-tams and toot fifes  
and piccolos, the Star-Gazer stuffs the child into the  
yawning maw of the Monster. The music mounts to  
a deafening crescendo. Ceases abruptly.

*Such be the justice of Nature  
Ruling all that lives  
Unto the final day.  
Follow how every link  
In the chain of circumstance  
Brings to each and all  
A private doom, a preordained woe,*

*Which no man 'scapes.*

The Star-Gazer returns to his place in the grass and gazes, once again, dumbfounded, into the eyes of the beast. The scene now shifts to the foreground, where stand the two philosophers, still earnestly debating the piece of spun ragweed:

COTYLEDONUS:

It is manifestly evident to my sense, Coleopterus, that although Fate, Gloom, Woe, Strife, etc., fit well enough together, Mate and Wife form a group separate unto itself, and thereby unsettling, in no small measure, the prevailing mood of this high elegiac ode. What think ye?

COLEOPTERUS:

In substance, Cotyledonus, in substance; but not in the details. For who, having been married even once, will dispute that Strife and Wife must fit together? Nor can one deny a plausible connection as well between Fate and Mate! But (looks around in confusion), where's the father for the babe?

COTYLEDONUS:

That's anyone's guess; (whispers in his ear): the brat 's a whoreson bastard!

FATHER: (Rushes in upon them):

Who be the worthless knave devoid of  
shame  
rumors  
spread?  
chambermaid  
Apprised ye not how I this moment past  
Did send away the sharp-tongued  
said,  
Forever banished from the sight of all  
For like slander of my name?  
My worthy friend; repeat what thou hast  
throat!  
And I will rattle thy brains in thy

FRIEND (Hurries to Father's side) :

Peace, my Lord. Restrain thy rage  
Fate hath otherwise decreed,  
Taking, as ever, its' own course

And not ours.

FATHER:

What is the meaning of this ?

FRIEND:

Canst thou not, beneath thy window's  
casement hear

The angry riot of the crowd?

CROWD:

BLOOD! BLOOD!

FRIEND:

They want blood, friend

("It hath oft been observed that the crowd wants  
blood." comments the sage.)

PRIEST ( Rises up from the crowd, shaking a  
parslied fist) :

Fiend! Curst by God!  
Who loosed his sole relation on the  
wild,  
exposing him to the skies, helpless  
and weak,  
To die!

FATHER:

Friend! Friend! What is his meaning? Am  
I unbrained?  
These words be surely demons of the  
mind !

FRIEND:

The banished maid, unmindful of your  
words  
Stole to the woods your daughter's  
hapless child  
And fed him quickly to the monster  
Chimera  
Who mortal beings give the name of  
Fate.  
Then,  
Gore and blood alike spilling to the  
ground,  
His famished lips well pleased by his  
greedy swill  
Back to the woods she hied, where now  
she lives

An outcast, common renegade and thief.

FATHER:

Oh! Horror! Horror!  
Oh! Instant death descend upon this  
head  
Too bruised by mortal care! Now hear,  
my citizens!  
Scout up a band of scurvy ne'er-do-  
wells  
Get ye post- haste to the woods, and  
bring her back  
Dead or alive, it matters naught ;  
For if she be alive, she'll strangled  
be  
By my own hands! Out with you! Alas,  
alack!

The Father, bent over with grief, is comforted by the Friend. Re- enter the two philosophers, still wrangling over the lament:

COTYLEDONUS:

Methinks that the part beginning "Too  
Slow" accelerates at a fearsome pace,  
that is to say .....too fast! Eh,  
Coleopterus?

COLEOPTERUS:

Well spoken, Cotyledonus. And calling  
it  
stumbling, mumbling verse is no excuse  
for it all the same. Beating the ears of Master Time, he  
ought not beat ours as well.

COTYLEDONUS:

Very true, Coleopterus, very  
true...although "Doom", and "Gloom"  
move slowly enough. So slowly, indeed, does the meter  
creak that it seems to me I hear the grinding axles of  
the solemn hearse as it moves . That's a clever idea- a  
bold idea! Indeed, it gives the poem some merit.

COLEOPTERUS:

Maybe so; yet all the same it lacks a proper  
ending. Having grown so wide bellied in the  
middle, I should have expected it to  
taper off again at the end and die in a whisper, thus:

Gloom  
Doom  
Death, ending in a whisper (  
whispered)

COTYLEDONUS:  
That about does it. Let's deliver the  
verdict  
Master! Master!

They approach the Father, but stop, surprised at what  
they see :  
Is something the matter, my Lord?

FRIEND:  
Did you but apprehend his sorrow, you would  
not dare speak such pleasantries . Well, what have you  
got say?

FATHER:  
Grief! Oh grief! Unceasing woe!

COLEOPTERUS:  
We have- ahem-come to critical  
agreement,

That is to say, the critical moment of  
agreement, by which I mean, the moment at which our  
criticisms agree! As to the worth of this poem, (coming to  
the heart of the matter) that is to say , the lugubrious  
ode written upon the decease of your ill-fortuned  
daughter, ( begging your pardon), it is our considered  
opinion that , on the whole, it lacks substance yet is not  
without merit. Our advice, by which I mean that of  
Cotyledonus and myself, is that it be given back to this  
scribe with instructions that he rewrite it. He is not a  
bad scribe, so we believe, although deficient in sound  
literary culture....

FATHER:  
Give me that wretched scrap! ( Tears it  
from their hands)

Rewritten, rewritten indeed!  
Two deaths should be placed thereupon  
Not one - and presently three! ( Tries  
to stab himself with a long sliver. The  
Friend prevents him.)

FRIEND:  
Desist, your Lordship!

Control your distemper!  
Restrain your grief!  
Calm your passions !  
....But ho - what comes hither?

Enter Crowd, dragging in the chambermaid by the arms  
and hair.

CREATURE IN CROWD:  
Behold the vile criminal!

CROWD:  
Beat her! Hang her!  
That murdered the poor babe in the  
woods!

FATHER:  
No; let her go. I cannot kill her.

CROWD:  
Give her to us, then ! We'll tear her limb  
from limb!

FATHER:  
No. Let her go, I tell you!  
Not you, nor I, shall do her any harm.  
Too caught up am I in my bitter grief  
Too full of the day's suffering  
I forgive her not, yet will I set her  
free  
T' was not she that did the deed, 'twas  
Fate  
She but the midwife to this tragedy  
And on her door no writ of judgment  
hangs.

Release her.  
( Covers his face with his hands, orders the chambermaid  
away )

Go! Go! You must never return  
To blacken our days  
With your evil ways!

CROWD:  
Go! Go! You must never return  
To blacken our days



With your evil ways! ( She flies away)

FATHER:

death  
heart  
Now, my good friend: lead me to bed  
I greatly fear the strain of so much  
Has broken my spirit, weakened my aged  
And numbered my hours.

Enter in haste , Pall-Bearers carrying a new coffin:

PALL-BEARER I:

Your Lordship! It is all over!

PALL-BEARER II:

Ay; 'tis finished.

FATHER:

What means this, 'Tis finished'?  
Come, Come! Speak up!

PALL-BEARER I:

The scrubbing wench is dead!

PALL-BEARER II:

dagger;  
stairs  
Ay! Smote in the back with a smoking  
That suddenly, while descending the  
'Twas a bloody ugly sight.  
( Looks away in disgust )

FATHER:

finished  
path  
bed,  
Thus hath Fate decreed, and thus  
Never is it granted humankind  
To gain foreknowledge of its destined  
Nor transcend its mortality. Take me to  
I am weary with such a heavy message.

Exeunt All: Father, leaning on his friend's arm,  
followed by pall- bearers, then the two philosophers, the  
rest to the piping of a fairy orchestra. Enter Star-Gazer

STAR-GAZER:

*Struggling 'gainst his massy chains,*

*Man stay victim to hideous Fate;  
Dare not its dictums contravene  
Or it will catch thee unawares  
And crunch thee in the monstrous teeth!*

FINIS/APPLAUSE

It takes but a moment and the players are gone,  
without a trace! Save there remains a flitting and a  
buzzing, which also cease. The stone statue along remains  
, standing at the center of the grassy meadow.

" Bestir thyself my merry clown! Let us hasten to be  
off. I do believe we shall arrive at my cloistered den ere  
sunset; but we must make haste, for I perceive that,  
although the sun has tried to hide himself behind the cloud  
covering , yet is he ever anxious to depart. That play,  
methinks, carried a deep message. Once safely settled in, I  
will begin the writing of my great treatise for the  
enlightenment of all living beings. So, jester, I say to  
you - ( pausing only long enough to cry, "Hail, Holy queen  
of the wood!" ) Let us set off!"

" Hi Ho Master. I'm right behind you, though you wish  
me to go to the fore. I think that poses a riddle, but what  
it says I've forgotten . I will tumble then, to please you  
; and give me a penny, will you, for my services, not  
wanting to be your bonds slave though pressed into the act?  
Well: Away!"

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