COMUS

PRELUDE

From L'Allegro

Hence loathed Melancholy,
Of Cerberus, and blackest Midnight born,
In Stygian cave forlorn,
’Mongst horrid shapes, and shrieks, and sights unholy.

Come thou goddess fair and free,
In heav’n yelep’d Euphrosyne,
And by men, heart-easing Mirth,
Whom lovely Venus at a birth
With two sister Graces more
To ivy-crownèd Bacchus bore.

Haste thee nymph, and bring with thee
Jest and youthful Jollity.
Come, and trip it as ye go
On the light fantastic toe,
And in thy right hand lead with thee,
The mountain-nymph, sweet Liberty;

And if I give thee honour due,
Mirth, admit me of thy crew
To live with her, and live with thee,
In unreprovèd pleasures free:

Now let Hymen oft appear
In saffron robe, with taper clear,
And pomp, and feast, and revelry,
With mask, and antique pageantry;
Such sights as youthful poets dream
On summer eves by haunted stream.

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And ever against eating cares,
Lap me in soft Lydian airs,
Married to immortal verse,
Such as the meeting soul may pierce
In notes with many a winding bout
Of linkèd sweetness long drawn out,
With wanton heed, and giddy cunning,
The melting voice through mazes running,
Untwisting all the chains that tie
The hidden soul of harmony;

These delights if thou canst give,
Mirth, with thee I mean to live.
COMUS

The first Scene discovers a wild wood.

The ATTENDANT SPIRIT descends or enters.

SPIRIT. Before the starry threshold of Jove’s court
My mansion is, where those immortal shapes
Of bright aërial spirits live insphered
In regions mild of calm and serene air.

Some men there be that by due steps aspire
To lay their just hands on that golden key
That opes the palace of eternity.
To such my errand is.

But to my task.
   Neptune, besides the sway
Of every salt flood and each ebbing stream,
Took in by lot imperial rule of all the sea-girt isles
That, like to rich and various gems, inlay
The unadorned bosom of the deep.

   But this Isle
(The greatest and the best of all the main),
He quarters to his blue-haired deities;
And all this tract that fronts the falling sun
A noble Peer of mickle trust and power
Has in his charge, with tempered awe to guide
An old and haughty nation, proud in arms.
Here his fair offspring, nursed in princely lore,
Are coming to attend their father’s state,
And new-intrusted sceptre.

But their way
Lies through the perplexed paths of this drear wood,
The nodding horror of whose shady brows
Threats the forlorn and wandering passenger;
And here their tender age might suffer peril,
But that, by quick command from sovran Jove,
I was despatched for their defence and guard.

And listen why; for I will tell you now
What never yet was heard in tale or song,
From old or modern bard, in hall or bower.

Bacchus, coasting the Tyrrhene shore,
On Circe’s island fell. (Who knows not Circe,
The daughter of the Sun, whose charmèd cup
Whoever tasted lost his upright shape,
And downward fell into a grovelling swine?)

This Nymph
Had by him, ere he parted thence, a son
Much like his father, but his mother more,
Whom therefore she brought up, and Comus named.

He, ripe and frolic of his full-grown age,
At last betakes him to this ominous wood,
And, in thick shelter of black shades imbowered,
Excels his mother at her mighty art;
Offering to every weary traveller
His orient liquor in a crystal glass,
To quench the drouth of Phoebus;
which as they taste
Soon as the potion works, their human count’nance,
(The express resemblance of the gods) is changed
Into some brutish form of wolf or bear,
Or ounce or tiger, hog, or bearded goat,
All other parts remaining as they were.

And they, so perfect is their misery,
Not once perceive their foul disfigurement,
But boast themselves more comely than before,
And all their friends and native home forget,
To roll with pleasure in a sensual sty.

Therefore, when any favoured of high Jove
Chances to pass through this adventurous glade,
Swift as the sparkle of a glancing star
I shoot from heaven, to give him safe convoy,
As now I do.

But first I must put off these my sky-robes,
And take the weeds and likeness of a swain
That to the service of this house belongs,
Who, with his soft pipe and smooth-dittied song,
Well knows to still the wild winds when they roar,
And hush the waving woods.

But hark, I hear the tread
Of hateful steps; I must be viewless now.

COMUS enters, with a charming-rod in one hand, his glass in the other.

With him a rout of monsters, headed like sundry sorts of wild beasts,
but otherwise like men and women, their apparel glistering.

They come in making a riotous and unruly noise, with torches in their hands.
COMUS.
Now the gilded car of day
His glowing axle doth allay
In the steep Atlantic stream;
And the slope sun his upward beam
Shoots against the dusky pole,
Pacing toward the other goal
Of his chamber in the east.

Meanwhile, welcome joy and feast,
Midnight shout and revelry,
Tipsy dance and jollity!

Rigour now is gone to bed;
And Advice with scrupulous head,
Strict Age, and sour Severity,
With their grave saws, in slumber lie.

We, that are of purer fire,
Imitate the starry quire,
Who, in their nightly watchful spheres,
Lead in swift round the months and years.

The sounds and seas, with all their finny drove,
Now to the moon in wavering morrice move;
And on the tawny sands and shelves
Trip the pert fairies and the dapper elves.
By dimpled brook and fountain-brim,
The wood-nymphs, decked with daisies trim,
Their merry wakes and pastimes keep.

What hath night to do with sleep?
Night hath better sweets to prove;
Venus now wakes, and wakens Love.
Come, let us our rights begin;
’Tis only daylight that makes sin,
Which these dun shades will ne’er report.
Hail, goddess of nocturnal sport,  
Dark-veiled Cotytto!  
Stay thy cloudy ebon chair,  
Wherein thou ridest with Hecat’, and befriend  
Us thy vowed priests, till utmost end  
Of all thy dues be done, and none left out.  
Come, knit hands, and beat the ground  
In a light fantastic round.

_Dance._

Break off, break off! I feel the different pace  
Of some chaste footing near about this ground.  
Some virgin sure, benighted in these woods!  
Now to my charms.

Thus I hurl  
My dazzling spells into the spongy air,  
Of power to cheat the eye with blear illusion.

I, under fair pretence of friendly ends,  
And well-placed words of glozing courtesy  
(Baited with reasons not unplausible),  
Wind me into the easy-hearted man,  
And hug him into snares.

When once her eye  
Hath met the virtue of this magic dust,  
I shall appear some harmless villager  
Whom thrift keeps up about his country gear.

But here she comes; I fairly step aside,  
And hearken, if I may, her business here.

_The LADY enters._
LADY. This way the noise was, if mine ear be true,
My best guide now. Methought it was the sound
Of riot and ill-managed merriment,
Such as the jocund flute or gamesome pipe
Stirs up among the loose unlettered hinds,
When, for their teeming flocks and granges full,
In wanton dance they praise the bounteous Pan,
And thank the gods amiss.

I should be loth
To meet the rudeness and swilled insolence
Of such late wassailers; yet, oh! where else
Shall I inform my unacquainted feet
In the blind mazes of this tangled wood?

My brothers, when they saw me wearied out
With this long way, resolving here to lodge
Under the spreading favour of these pines,
Stepped, as they said, to the next thicket-side
To bring me berries, or such cooling fruit
As the kind hospitable woods provide.

But where they are, and why they came not back,
Is now the labour of my thoughts.
    This is the place, as well as I may guess,
Whence even now the tumult of loud mirth
Was rife, and perfect in my listening ear;
Yet nought but single darkness do I find.

What might this be? A thousand fantasies
Begin to throng into my memory,
Of calling shapes, and beckoning shadows dire,
And airy tongues that syllable men's names
On sands and shores and desert wildnesses.

These thoughts may startle well, but not astound
The virtuous mind.
I believe that God
Would send a glistening guardian, if need were,
To keep my life and honour unassailed...

Was I deceived, or did a sable cloud
Turn forth her silver lining on the night?

I did not err: there does a sable cloud
Turn forth her silver lining on the night,
And casts a gleam over this tufted grove.

I cannot hallo to my brothers, but
Such noise as I can make to be heard farthest
I'll venture; for my new-enlivened spirits
Prompt me, and they perhaps are not far off.

The Song.

Sweet Echo, sweetest nymph, that liv’st unseen
   Within thy airy shell
   By slow Meander’s margent green,
And in the violet-embroidered vale
   Where the love-lorn nightingale
Nightly to thee her sad song mourneth well:
Canst thou not tell me of a gentle pair
   That likest thy Narcissus are?

     O, if thou have
   Hid them in some flowery cave,
   Tell me but where,
Sweet Queen of Parley, Daughter of the Sphere!
So may’st thou be translated to the skies,
And hold a counterpoint to all Heaven’s harmonies!

COMUS. [aside] Can any mortal mixture of earth's mould
Breathe such divine enchanting ravishment?
Sure something holy lodges in that breast,
And with these raptures moves the vocal air
To testify his hidden residence.
How sweetly did they float upon the wings
Of silence, through the empty-vaulted night,
At every fall smoothing the raven down
Of darkness till it smiled!
   Such sober certainty of waking bliss,
I never heard till now. I'll speak to her,
And she shall be my queen.—

Hail, foreign wonder!
Whom certain these rough shades did never breed.

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

COMUS. What chance, good Lady, hath bereft you thus?
LADY. Dim darkness and this leafy labyrinth.
COMUS. Could that divide you from near-ushering guides?
LADY. They left me weary on a grassy turf.

COMUS. By falsehood, or discourtesy, or why?
LADY. To seek i’ the valley some cool friendly spring.
COMUS. And left your fair side all unguarded, lady?
LADY. They were but twain, and purposed quick return.

COMUS. Were they of manly prime, or youthful bloom?
LADY. As smooth as Hebe’s their unrazored lips.
COMUS  Two such I saw under a mantling vine,  
That crawls along the side of yon small hill,  
Plucking ripe clusters from the tender shoots;  
Their port was more than human, as they stood  
I took it for a faery vision  
Of some gay creatures of the element,  
That in the colours of the rainbow live,  
And play i’ the plighted clouds.

    I was awe-strook,  
    And, as I passed, I worshipped. If those you seek,  
It were a journey like the path to Heaven  
To help you find them.

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

COMUS.  Due west it rises from this shrubby point.

    I know each lane, and every alley green,  
    Dingle, or bushy dell, of this wild wood,  
    And every bosky bourn from side to side,  
    My daily walks and ancient neighbourhood;

    And can conduct you, lady, to a low  
    But loyal cottage, where you may be safe  
    Till further quest.

LADY.  Shepherd, I take thy word,  
And trust thy honest-offered courtesy,  
Which oft is sooner found in lowly sheds,  
With smoky rafters, than in tapestry halls  
And courts of princes.

    Shepherd, lead on.
Exeunt.

Enter the TWO BROTHERS.

ELDER BROTHER. Unmuffle, ye faint stars; and thou, fair moon, Stoop thy pale visage through an amber cloud, And disinherit Chaos, that reigns here In double night of darkness and of shades.

SECOND BROTHER. Or, if our eyes Be barred that happiness, might we but hear The folded flocks, Or sound of pastoral reed with oaten stops, Or whistle from the lodge, or village cock Count the night-watches to his feathery dames, ’Twould be some solace yet, some little cheering, In this close dungeon of innumerous boughs.

But, Oh, that hapless virgin, our lost sister! Where may she wander now, whither betake her From the chill dew, amongst rude burs and thistles? Perhaps some cold bank is her bolster now, Or ’gainst the rugged bark of some broad elm Leans her unpillowed head, fraught with sad fears.

What if in wild amazement and affright, Or, while we speak, within the direful grasp Of savage hunger, or of savage heat!

ELDER BROTHER. Peace, brother: be not over-exquisite To cast the fashion of uncertain evils; For, grant they be so, while they rest unknown, What need a man forestall his date of grief, And run to meet what he would most avoid? Or, if they be but false alarms of fear, How bitter is such self-delusion!
I do not think my sister so to seek,  
As that the single want of light and noise  
(Not being in danger, as I trust she is not)  
Could stir the constant mood of her calm thoughts,  
And put them into misbecoming plight.

Virtue could see to do what Virtue would  
By her own radiant light, though sun and moon  
Were in the flat sea sunk. And Wisdom’s self  
Oft seeks to sweet retired solitude.

He that has light within his own clear breast  
May sit i’ the centre, and enjoy bright day:  
But he that hides a dark soul and foul thoughts  
Benighted walks under the mid-day sun;  
Himself is his own dungeon.

SECOND BROTHER. ’Tis most true  
That musing Meditation most affects  
The pensive secrecy of desert cell,  
Far from the cheerful haunt of men and herds.  
But Beauty, like the fair Hesperian tree  
Laden with blooming gold, had need the guard  
Of dragon-watch with unenchanted eye  
To save her blossoms, and defend her fruit,  
From the rash hand of bold Incontinence.

You may as well spread out the unsunn’d heaps  
Of miser’s treasure by an outlaw’s den,  
And tell me it is safe, as bid me hope  
Danger will wink on Opportunity,  
And let a single helpless maiden pass  
Uninjured in this wild surrounding waste.

Of night or loneliness it recks me not;  
I fear the dread events that dog them both,  
Lest some ill-greeting touch attempt the person  
Of our unownèd sister.
Elder Brother. Brother,
Where an equal poise of hope and fear
Does arbitrate the event, my nature is
That I incline to hope rather than fear,
And gladly banish squint suspicion.
   My sister is not so defenceless left
As you imagine; she has a hidden strength,
Which you remember not.

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

Elder Brother. I mean that too, but yet a hidden strength,
Which, if Heaven gave it, may be termed her own.

'Tis Chastity, my brother, Chastity:
She that has that is clad in complete steel,
And, like a quivered nymph with arrows keen,
May trace huge forests, and unharboured heaths,
Infamous hills, and sandy perilous wilds.

Some say no evil thing that walks by night,
In fog or fire, by lake or moorish fen,
Blue meagre hag, or stubborn unlaid ghost,
That breaks his magic chains at curfew time,
No goblin or swart faery of the mine,
Hath hurtful power o’er true Virginity.

So dear to Heaven is saintly Chastity
That, when a soul is found sincerely so,
A thousand liveried angels lackey her,
Driving far off each thing of sin and guilt,
And in clear dream and solemn vision
Tell her of things that no gross ear can hear.
But, when lust
Lets in defilement to the inward parts,
The soul grows clotted by contagion,
Imbodies, and imbrutes, till she quite lose
The divine property of her first being.

Such are those thick and gloomy shadows damp
Oft seen in charnel-vaults and sepulchres,
Lingering and sitting by a new-made grave,
As loth to leave the body that it loved,
And linked itself by carnal sensualty
To a degenerate and degraded state.

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

SECOND BROTHER. Methought so too; what should it be?

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

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

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

Enter the ATTENDANT SPIRIT, habited like a shepherd.

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

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

SECOND BROTHER. O brother, ’tis my father’s shepherd, sure.
**Elder Brother.** Thyrsis! whose artful strains have oft delayed
The huddling brook to hear his madrigal,
And sweetened every musk-rose of the dale.
How camest thou here, good swain? Hath any ram
Slipped from the fold, or young kid lost his dam,
Or straggling wether the pent flock forsook?
How couldst thou find this dark sequestered nook?

**Spirit.** O my loved master’s heir, and his next joy,
I came not here on such a trivial toy.
But, oh! my virgin Lady, where is she?
How chance she is not in your company?

**Elder Brother.** To tell thee sadly, Shepherd, without blame
Or our neglect, we lost her as we came.

**Spirit.** Ay me unhappy! then my fears are true.
**Elder Brother.** What fears, good Thyrsis? Prithee briefly shew.

**Spirit.** I’ll tell ye. ’Tis not vain or fabulous
What the sage poets, taught by the heavenly Muse,
Storied of old in high immortal verse
Of dire Chimeras and enchanted isles,
And rifted rocks whose entrance leads to Hell;
For such there be, but unbelief is blind.

Within the navel of this hideous wood,
Immured in cypress shades, a sorcerer dwells,
Of Bacchus and of Circe born, great Comus,
Deep skilled in all his mother’s witcheries,
And here to every thirsty wanderer
By sly enticement gives his baneful cup,
With many murmurs mixed, whose pleasing poison
The visage quite transforms of him that drinks,
And the inglorious likeness of a beast
Fixes instead, un moulding reason’s mintage
Charactered in the face.
Night by night
He and his monstrous rout are heard to howl
Like stabled wolves, or tigers at their prey,
Doing abhorred rites to Hecate
In their obscurèd haunts of inmost bowers.

This evening late (by then the chewing flocks
Had ta'en their supper on the savoury herb
Of knot-grass dew-besprent, and were in fold)
I sat me down to watch upon a bank
With ivy canopied, and interwove
With flaunting honeysuckle, and began,
Wrapt in a pleasing fit of melancholy,
To meditate my rural minstrelsy,
Till fancy had her fill.

But ere a close
The wonted roar was up amidst the woods,
And filled the air with barbarous dissonance;
At which I ceased, and listened them awhile,
Till an unusual stop of sudden silence
Gave respite to the drowsy frightened steeds
That draw the litter of close-curtained Sleep.

At last a soft and solemn-breathing sound
Rose like a steam of rich distilled perfumes,
And stole upon the air, that even Silence
Was took ere she was ware, and wished she might
Deny her nature, and be never more,
Still to be so displaced.

But, oh! ere long
Too well I did perceive it was the voice
Of my most honoured Lady, your dear sister.
Amazed I stood, harrowed with grief and fear;
And ‘O poor hapless nightingale,’ thought I,
‘How sweet thou sing'st, how near the deadly snare!’
Then down the lawns I ran with headlong haste,
Through paths and turnings often trod by day,
Till, guided by mine ear, I found the place
Where that damned wizard, hid in sly disguise
(For so by certain signs I knew), had met
Already, ere my best speed could prevent,
The aidless innocent lady, his wished prey.

She gently asked if he had seen such two,
Supposing him some neighbour villager.
Longer I durst not stay, but soon I guessed
Ye were the two she meant; with that I sprung
Into swift flight, till I had found you here;
But further know I not.

SECOND BROTHER. O Night and Shades,
How are ye joined with Hell in triple knot
Against the unarmed weakness of one virgin,
Alone and helpless! Is this the confidence
You gave me, brother?

ELDER BROTHER. Yes, and keep it still;
Lean on it safely. This I hold firm:
Virtue may be assailed, but never hurt,
Surprised by unjust force, but not enthralled.
If this fail,
The pillared firmament is rottenness,
And earth’s base built on stubble.

But come, let’s on!
Against the opposing will and arm of Heaven
May never this just sword be lifted up.
But, for that damned magician — let him be girt
With all the grisly legions that troop
Under the sooty flag of Acheron,
Harpies and Hydras, or all the monstrous forms
'Twixt Africa and Ind — I’ll find him out,
And force him to return his purchase back,
Or drag him by the curls to a foul death,
Curs’d as his life.

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

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

SPIRIT. Care and utmost shifts
How to secure the Lady from surprisal
Brought to my mind a certain shepherd lad,
   well skilled
In every virtuous plant and healing herb
That spreads her verdant leaf to the morning ray.

He loved me well, and oft would beg me sing;
Which when I did, he on the tender grass
Would sit, and hearken even to ecstasy,
And in requital ope his leathern scrip,
And show me simples of a thousand names,
Telling their strange and vigorous faculties.
Amongst the rest a small unsightly root,
But of divine effect, he culled me out.
   The leaf was darkish, and had prickles on it,
But in another country, as he said,
Bore a bright golden flower.
He called it Hæmony, and gave it me,
And bade me keep it as of sovran use
’Gainst all enchantments, mildew blast, or damp,
Or ghastly Furies’ apparition.

I pursed it up, but little reckoning made,
Till now that this extremity compelled.
   If you have this about you
(As I will give you when we go) you may
Boldly assault the Necromancer’s hall;

Where if he be, with dauntless hardihood
And brandished blade rush on him: break his glass,
And shed the luscious liquor on the ground;
But seize his wand. Though he and his curst crew
Fierce sign of battle make, and menace high,
Or, like the sons of Vulcan, vomit smoke,
Yet will they soon retire, if he but shrink.

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

*The Scene changes to a stately palace, set out with all manner of deliciousness.*

*Soft music, tables spread with all dainties.*

*COMUS appears with his rabble, and the LADY set in an enchanted chair: to whom he offers his glass; which she puts by, and goes about to rise.*
COMUS. Nay, lady, sit. If I but wave this wand,
Your nerves are all chained up in alabaster,
And you a statue, or as Daphne was,
Root-bound, that fled Apollo.

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

COMUS. Why are you vexed, lady? why do you frown?
Here dwell no frowns, nor anger; from these gates
Sorrow flies far. See, here be all the pleasures
That fancy can beget on youthful thoughts,
When the fresh blood grows lively, and returns
Brisk as the April buds in primrose season.

And first behold this cordial julep here,
That flames and dances in his crystal bounds,
With spirits of balm and fragrant syrups mixed.

   Not that Nepenthes which the wife of Thone
In Egypt gave to Jove-born Helena
Is of such power to stir up joy as this,
To life so friendly, or so cool to thirst.
Why should you be so cruel to yourself,
And to those dainty limbs, which Nature lent
For gentle usage and soft delicacy?

But you invert the covenants of her trust,
And harshly deal, like an ill borrower,
With that which you received on other terms,
Scorning the unexempt condition
By which all mortal frailty must subsist,
Refreshment after toil, ease after pain.
   But, fair virgin,
This will restore all soon.
LADY. ’Twill not, false traitor! ’Twill not restore the truth and honesty That thou hast banished from thy tongue with lies. Was this the cottage and the safe abode Thou told’st me of? What grim aspects are these, These ugly-headed monsters? Mercy guard me! Hence with thy brewed enchantments, foul deceiver!

COMUS. O foolishness of men! that lend their ears To those budge doctors of the Stoic fur, And fetch their precepts from the Cynic tub, Praising the lean and sallow Abstinence!

Wherefore did Nature pour her bounties forth With such a full and unwithering hand, Covering the earth with odours, fruits, and flocks, Thronging the seas with spawn innumerable, But all to please and sate the curious taste?

And set to work millions of spinning worms, That in their green shops weave the smooth-haired silk, To deck her sons; and (that no corner might Be vacant of her plenty) in her own loins She hutch’d the all-worshipp’d ore and precious gems, To store her children with.

If all the world Should, in a pet of temperance, feed on pulse, Drink the clear stream, and nothing wear but frieze, The All-giver would be unthanked, would be unpraised, Not half his riches known, and yet despised;

And we should serve him as a grudging master, As a penurious niggard of his wealth, And live like Nature’s bastards, not her sons.
List, lady; be not coy, and be not cozened
With that same vaunted name, Virginity.

Beauty is Nature’s coin; must not be hoarded,
But must be current; and the good thereof
Consists in mutual and partaken bliss,
Unsavoury in the enjoyment of itself.

If you let slip time, like a neglected rose
It withers on the stalk with languished head.

Beauty is Nature's brag, and must be shown
In courts, at feasts, and high solemnities,
Where most may wonder at the workmanship.

There was another meaning in these gifts;
Think what, and be advised; you are but young yet.

**LADY.** I had not thought to have unlocked my lips
In this unhallowed air, but that this juggler
Would think to charm my judgment, as mine eyes,
Obtruding false rules pranked in reason’s garb.
      I hate when vice can bolt her arguments
And virtue has no tongue to check her pride.

Impostor! do not charge most innocent Nature,
As if she would her children should be riotous
With her abundance. She, good cateress,
Means her provision only to the good,
That live according to her sober laws,
And holy dictate of spare Temperance.
If every just man that now pines with want
Had but a moderate and beseeming share
Of that which lewdly-pampered Luxury
Now heaps upon some few with vast excess,
Nature’s full blessings would be well dispensed
In unsuperfluous even proportions,
And she no whit encumbered with her store.

Shall I go on?
Or have I said enow? To him that dares
Arm his profane tongue with contemptuous words
Against the sun-clad power of chastity
Fain would I something say—yet to what end?

Enjoy your dear wit, and gay rhetoric,
That hath so well been taught her dazzling fence;
Thou art not fit to hear thyself convinced.

Yet, should I try, the uncontrollèd worth
Of this pure cause would kindle my rapt spirits
To such a flame of sacred vehemence
That dumb things would be moved to sympathise,
And the brute Earth would lend her nerves, and shake,
Till all thy magic structures, reared so high,
Were shattered into heaps o’er thy false head.

**COMUS.** She fables not. I feel that I do fear
Her words set off by some superior power.
I must dissemble,
And try her yet more strongly.—

Come, no more!
This is mere moral babble, and direct
Against the canon laws of our foundation.
I must not suffer this; yet ’tis but the lees
And settlings of a melancholy blood.
But this will cure all straight; one sip of this
Will bathe the drooping spirits in delight
Beyond the bliss of dreams. Be wise, and taste.

The BROTHERS rush in with swords drawn, wrest his glass out of his hand, and break it against the ground.

His rout make sign of resistance, but are all driven in.

The ATTENDANT SPIRIT comes in.

SPIRIT. What! have you let the false enchanter scape?
O ye mistook; ye should have snatched his wand,
And bound him fast. Without his rod reversed,
And backward mutters of dissevering power,
We cannot free the Lady that sits here
In stony fetters fixed and motionless.

Yet stay: be not disturbed; now I bethink me,
Some other means I have which may be used,
Which once of Melibœus old I learnt,
The soothest shepherd that e’er piped on plains.

There is a gentle nymph not far from hence,
That with moist curb sways the smooth Severn stream:
Sabrina is her name: a virgin pure;
Whilom she was the daughter of Locrine,
That had the sceptre from his father Brute.

She, guiltless damsel, flying the mad pursuit
Of her enragèd stepdame, Gwendolen,
Commended her fair innocence to the flood
That stayed her flight with his cross-flowing course.
The water-nymphs, that in the bottom played,  
Held up their pearled wrists, and took her in,  
Bearing her straight to aged Nereus’ hall,  
   where she revived,  
And underwent a quick immortal change,  
Made Goddess of the river.

Still she retains  
Her maiden gentleness, and oft at eve  
Visits the herds along the twilight meadows,  
Helping all urchin blasts, and ill-luck signs  
That the shrewd meddling elf delights to make,  
Which she with precious vialled liquors heals:

For which the shepherds, at their festivals,  
Carol her goodness loud in rustic lays,  
And throw sweet garland wreaths into her stream  
Of pansies, pinks, and gaudy daffodils.

And, as the old swain said, she can unlock  
The clasping charm, and thaw the numbing spell,  
If she be right invoked in warbled song;  
For maidenhood she loves, and will be swift  
To aid a virgin, such as was herself,  
In hard-besetting need.

This will I try,  
And add the power of some adjuring verse.

Sabrina fair,  
   Listen where thou art sitting  
Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave,  
   In twisted braids of lilies knitting  
The loose train of thy amber-dropping hair;  
   Listen for dear honour’s sake,  
Goddess of the silver lake,  
   Listen and save!
Listen, and appear to us,
In name of great Oceanus.
By scaly Triton’s winding shell,
And old soothsaying Glaucus’ spell;
By Leucothea’s lovely hands,
And her son that rules the strands;
By Thetis’ tinsel-slippered feet,
And the songs of Sirens sweet;
By all the Nymphs that nightly dance
Upon thy streams with wily glance:
Rise, rise, and heave thy rosy head
From thy coral-paven bed,
And bridle in thy headlong wave,
Till thou our summons answered have.
    Listen and save!

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

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

Gentle swain, at thy request
    I am here!
**SPIRIT.** Goddess dear,
We implore thy powerful hand
To undo the charmèd band
Of true virgin here distressed
Through the force and through the wile
Of unblessed enchanter vile.

**SABRINA.** Shepherd, ’tis my office best
To help ensnared chastity.

Brightest Lady, look on me.

Thus I sprinkle on thy breast
Drops that from my fountain pure
I have kept of precious cure;

Thrice upon thy finger’s tip,
Thrice upon thy rubied lip:

Next, this marble venomed seat,
Smeared with gums of glutinous heat,
I touch with chaste palms moist and cold.

Now the spell hath lost his hold;
And I must haste ere morning hour
To wait in Amphitrite’s bower.

*SABRINA descends, and the LADY rises out of her seat.*

**SPIRIT.** Virgin, daughter of Locrine,
Sprung of old Anchises’ line,
May thy brimmèd waves for this
Their full tribute never miss
From a thousand petty rills,
That tumble down the snowy hills.
Come, Lady; while Heaven lends us grace,
Let us fly this cursèd place,
Lest the sorcerer us entice
With some other new device.
Not a waste or needless sound
Till we come to holier ground.

I shall be your faithful guide
Through this gloomy covert wide;
And not many furlongs thence
Is your Father’s residence,
Where this night are met in state
Many a friend to gratulate
His wished presence, and beside
All the swains that there abide
With jigs and rural dance resort.

We shall catch them at their sport,
And our sudden coming there
Will double all their mirth and cheer.

The Scene changes, presenting Ludlow Town, and the President's Castle.

Then come in Country Dancers;

after them the ATTENDANT SPIRIT, with the two BROTHERS and the LADY.

SPORT, MIRTH AND CHEER

(i.e. a slide announcing the five stanzas from L’Allegro)
Come thou goddess fair and free,
In heav’n yclep’d Euphrosyne,
And by men, heart-easing Mirth,
    Haste thee nymph, and bring with thee
Jest and youthful Jollity.

Come, and trip it as ye go
On the light fantastic toe,
And in thy right hand lead with thee,
The mountain-nymph, sweet Liberty;
    And if I give thee honour due,
Mirth, admit me of thy crew
To live with her, and live with thee,
In unrevòd pleasures free:

Sometimes with secure delight
The upland hamlets will invite,
When the merry bells ring round,
And the jocund rebecks sound
To many a youth, and many a maid,
Dancing in the chequer’d shade;
And young and old come forth to play
On a sunshine holiday.

Now let Hymen oft appear
In saffron robe, with taper clear,
And pomp, and feast, and revelry,
With mask, and antique pageantry;
Such sights as youthful poets dream
On summer eves by haunted stream.

And ever against eating cares,
Lap me in soft Lydian airs,
Married to immortal verse,
Untwisting all the chains that tie
The hidden soul of harmony;
    These delights if thou canst give,
Mirth, with thee I mean to live.
SPIRIT. Back, shepherds, back! Enough your play
Till next sunshine holiday.

DO NOT READ THE STAGE DIRECTION, BUT GIVE IT TIME
He presents the Brothers and the Lady to their Father and Mother.

Noble Lord and Lady bright,
I have brought ye new delight.
Here behold so goodly grown
Three fair branches of your own.

To the ocean now I fly,
And those happy climes that lie
Where day never shuts his eye,
Up in the broad fields of the sky.
There eternal Summer dwells,
And west winds with musky wing
About the cedarn alleys fling
Nard and cassia’s balmy smells.

But now my task is smoothly done,
I can fly, or I can run
Quickly to the green earth’s end,
Where the bowed welkin slow doth bend,
And from thence can soar as soon
To the corners of the moon.

Mortals, that would follow me,
Love Virtue; she alone is free.

FINIS