

Two Gentlemen of Verona

by William Shakespeare

adapted and retold by Charles and Mary Lamb

reformatted and with glosses by Kim Stegall

There lived in the city of Verona two young gentlemen, whose names were Valentine and Proteus, between whom a firm and uninterrupted friendship had long subsisted [existed]. They pursued their studies together, and their hours of leisure were always passed in each other's company, except when Proteus visited a lady he was in love with. And these visits to his mistress, and this passion of Proteus for the fair Julia, were the only topics on which these two friends disagreed; for Valentine, not being himself a lover, was sometimes a little weary of bearing his friend forever talking of his Julia, and then he would laugh at Proteus, and in pleasant terms ridicule the passion of love, and declare that no such idle fancies [imagination] should ever enter his head, greatly preferring (as he said) the free and happy life he led to the anxious hopes and fears of the lover Proteus.

One morning Valentine came to Proteus to tell him that they must for a time be separated, for that he was going to Milan. Proteus, unwilling to part with his friend, used many arguments to prevail upon Valentine not to leave him. But Valentine said: "Cease to persuade me, my loving Proteus. I will not, like a sluggard, wear out my youth in idleness at home. Home-keeping youths have ever homely wits. If your affection were not chained to the sweet glances of your honored Julia, I would entreat you to accompany me, to see the wonders of the world abroad; but since you are a lover, love on still, and may your love be prosperous!"

They parted with mutual expressions of unalterable [unchangeable] friendship. "Sweet Valentine, adieu!" said Proteus. "Think on me when you see some rare object worthy of notice in your travels, and wish me partaker of your happiness."

Valentine began his journey that same day toward Milan; and when his friend had left him, Proteus sat down to write a letter to Julia, which he gave to her maid Lucetta to deliver to her mistress. Julia loved Proteus as well as he did her, but she was a lady of a noble spirit, and she thought it did not become her maiden dignity too easily to be won; therefore she affected [pretended] to be insensible [unable to sense] of his passion and gave him much uneasiness in the prosecution of his suit.

And when Lucetta, offered the letter to Julia she would not receive it, and chid [rebuked] her maid for taking letters from Proteus, and ordered her to leave the room. But she so much wished to see what was written in the letter that she soon called in her maid again; and when Lucetta returned she said, "What o'clock is it?"

Lucetta, who knew her mistress more desired to see the letter than to know the time of day, without answering her question again offered the rejected letter. Julia, angry that her maid should thus take the liberty of seeming to know what she really wanted, tore the letter in pieces and threw it on the floor, ordering her maid once more out of the room. As Lucetta was retiring, she stopped to pick up the fragments of the torn letter; but Julia,

who meant not so to part with them, said, in pretended anger, "Go, get you gone, and let the papers lie; you would be fingering [playing with] them to anger me."

Julia then began to piece together as well as she could the torn fragments. She first made out these words, "Love-wounded Proteus"; and lamenting over these and such like loving words, which she made out though they were all torn asunder, or, she said WOUNDED (the expression "Love-wounded Proteus" giving her that idea), she talked to these kind words, telling them she would lodge them in her bosom as in a bed, till their wounds were healed, and that she would kiss each several piece to make amends.

In this manner she went on talking with a pretty, ladylike childishness, till, finding herself unable to make out the whole, and vexed at her own ingratitude in destroying such sweet and loving words, as she called them, she wrote a much kinder letter to Proteus than she had ever done before.

Proteus was greatly delighted at receiving this favorable answer to his letter. And while he was reading it he exclaimed, "Sweet love! sweet lines! sweet life!"

In the midst of his raptures he was interrupted by his father. "How now?" said the old gentleman. "What letter are you reading there?"

"My lord," replied Proteus, "it is a letter from my friend Valentine, at Milan."

"Lend me the letter," said his father. "Let me see what news."

"There is no news, my lord," said Proteus, greatly alarmed, "but that he writes how well beloved he is of the Duke of Milan, who daily graces him with favors, and how he wishes me with him, the partner of his fortune."

"And how stand you affected to his wish?" asked the father.

"As one relying on your lordship's will and not depending on his friendly wish," said Proteus.

Now it had happened that Proteus's father had just been talking with a friend on this very subject. His friend had said he wondered his lordship suffered his son to spend his youth at home while most men were sending their sons to seek preferment [promotion] abroad.

"Some," said he, "to the wars, to try their fortunes there, and some to discover islands far away, and some to study in foreign universities. And there is his companion Valentine; he is gone to the Duke of Milan's court. Your son is fit for any of these things, and it will be a great disadvantage to him in his riper [older] age not to have traveled in his youth."

Proteus's father thought the advice of his friend was very good, and upon Proteus telling him that Valentine "wished him with him, the partner of his fortune," he at once determined to send his son to Milan; and without giving Proteus any reason for this

sudden resolution, it being the usual habit of this positive old gentleman to command his son, not reason with him, he said: "My will is the same as Valentine's wish." And seeing his son look astonished, he added: "Look not amazed, that I so suddenly resolve you shall spend some time in the Duke of Milan's court; for what I will I will, and there is an end. Tomorrow be in readiness to go. Make no excuses, for I am peremptory [unwilling to listen to reason]."

Proteus knew it was of no use to make objections to his father, who never suffered him to dispute his will; and he blamed himself for telling his father an untruth about Julia's letter, which had brought upon him the sad necessity of leaving her.

Now that Julia found she was going to lose Proteus for so long a time she no longer pretended indifference; and they bade each other a mournful farewell, with many vows of love and constancy. Proteus and Julia exchanged rings, which they both promised to keep forever in remembrance of each other; and thus, taking a sorrowful leave, Proteus set out on his journey to Milan, the abode of his friend Valentine.

Valentine was in reality, what Proteus had feigned to his father, in high favor with the Duke of Milan; and another event had happened to him of which Proteus did not even dream, for Valentine had given up the freedom of which he used so much to boast, and was become as passionate a lover as Proteus.

She who had wrought this wondrous change in Valentine was the Lady Silvia, daughter of the Duke of Milan, and she also loved him; but they concealed their love from the duke, because, although he showed much kindness for Valentine and invited him every day to his palace, yet he designed to marry his daughter to a young courtier whose name was Thurio. Silvia despised this Thurio, for he had none of the fine sense and excellent qualities of Valentine.

These two rivals, Thurio and Valentine, were one day on a visit to Silvia, and Valentine was entertaining Silvia with turning everything Thurio said into ridicule, when the duke himself entered the room and told Valentine the welcome news of his friend Proteus's arrival.

Valentine said, "If I had wished a thing, it would have been to have seen him here!" And then he highly praised Proteus to the duke, saying, "My lord, though I have been a truant [one who ignores duty] of my time, yet hath my friend made use and fair advantage of his days, and is complete in person and in mind, in all good grace to grace a gentleman."

"Welcome him, then, according to his worth," said the duke. "Silvia, I speak to you, and you, Sir Thurio; for Valentine, I need not bid him do so."

They were here interrupted by the entrance of Proteus, and Valentine introduced him to Silvia, saying, "Sweet lady, entertain him to be my fellow-servant to your ladyship."

When Valentine and Proteus had ended their visit, and were alone together, Valentine said: "Now tell me how all does from whence you came? How does your lady, and how thrives your love?"

Proteus replied: "My tales of love used to weary you. I know you joy not in a love discourse."

"Aye, Proteus," returned Valentine, "but that life is altered now. I have done penance for condemning love. For in revenge of my contempt of love, love has chased sleep from my enthralled [enchanted] eyes. O gentle Proteus, Love is a mighty lord, and hath so humbled me that I confess there is no woe like his correction nor no such joy on earth as in his service. I now like no discourse except it be of love. Now I can break my fast, dine, sup, and sleep upon the very name of love."

This acknowledgment of the change which love had made in the disposition of Valentine was a great triumph to his friend Proteus. But "friend" Proteus must be called no longer, for the same all-powerful deity Love, of whom they were speaking (yea, even while they were talking of the change he had made in Valentine), was working in the heart of Proteus; and he, who had till this time been a pattern of true love and perfect friendship, was now, in one short interview with Silvia, become a false friend and a faithless lover; for at the first sight of Silvia all his love for Julia vanished away like a dream, nor did his long friendship for Valentine deter him from endeavoring to supplant [get rid of] him in her affections; and although, as it will always be, when people of dispositions naturally good become unjust, be bad many scruples [ethics] before he determined to forsake Julia and become the rival of Valentine, yet he at length overcame his sense of duty and yielded himself up, almost without remorse, to his new unhappy passion.

Valentine imparted to him in confidence the whole history of his love, and how carefully they had concealed it from the duke her father, and told him that, despairing of ever being able to obtain his consent, he had prevailed upon Silvia to leave her father's palace that night and go with him to Mantua; then he showed Proteus a ladder of ropes by help of which he meant to assist Silvia to get out of one of the windows of the palace after it was dark.

Upon hearing this faithful recital of his friend's dearest secrets, it is hardly possible to be believed, but so it was that Proteus resolved to go to the duke and disclose the whole to him.

This false friend began his tale with many artful speeches to the duke, such as that by the laws of friendship he ought to conceal what he was going to reveal, but that the gracious favor the duke had shown him, and the duty he owed his grace, urged him to tell that which else no worldly good should draw from him. He then told all he had heard from Valentine, not omitting the ladder of ropes and the manner in which Valentine meant to conceal them under a long cloak.

The duke thought Proteus quite a miracle of integrity, in that he preferred telling his friend's intention rather than he would conceal an unjust action; highly commended him, and promised him not to let Valentine know from whom he had learned this intelligence, but by some artifice [deception] to make Valentine betray the secret himself. For this purpose the duke awaited the coming of Valentine in the evening, whom he soon saw hurrying toward the palace, and he perceived somewhat was wrapped within his cloak, which he concluded was the rope ladder.

The duke, upon this, stopped him, saying, "Whither away so fast, Valentine?"

"May it please your grace," said Valentine, "there is a messenger that stays to bear my letters to my friends, and I am going to deliver them."

Now this falsehood of Valentine's had no better success in the event than the untruth Proteus told his father. "Be they of much import?" said the duke.

"No more, my lord," said Valentine, "than to tell my father I am well and happy at your grace's court."

"Nay then," said the duke, "no matter; stay with me awhile. I wish your counsel about some affairs that concern me nearly."

He then told Valentine an artful story, as a prelude to draw his secret from him, saying that Valentine knew he wished to match his daughter with Thurio, but that she was stubborn and disobedient to his commands.

"Neither regarding," said he, "that she is my child nor fearing me as if I were her father. And I may say to thee this pride of hers has drawn my love from her. I had thought my age should have been cherished by her childlike duty. I now am resolved to take a wife, and turn her out to whosoever will take her in. Let her beauty be her wedding dower, for me and my possessions she esteems not."

Valentine, wondering where all this would end, made answer, "And what would your grace have me to do in all this?"

"Why," said the duke, "the lady I would wish to marry is nice and coy and does not much esteem my aged eloquence. Besides, the fashion of courtship is much changed since I was young. Now I would willingly have you to be my tutor to instruct me how I am to woo."

Valentine gave him a general idea of the modes of courtship then practiced by young men when they wished to win a fair lady's love, such as presents, frequent visits, and the like.

The duke replied to this that the lady did refuse a present which he sent her, and that she was so strictly kept by her father that no man might have access to her by day.

"Why, then," said Valentine, "you must visit her by night."

“But at night,” said the artful duke, who was now coming to the drift [meaning] of his discourse, “her doors are fast locked.”

Valentine then unfortunately proposed that the duke should get into the lady’s chamber at night by means of a ladder of ropes, saying he would procure him one fitting for that purpose; and in conclusion advised him to conceal this ladder of ropes under such a cloak as that which he now wore.

“Lend me your cloak,” said the duke, who had feigned this long story on purpose to have a pretense to get off the cloak; so upon saying these words he caught hold of Valentine’s cloak and, throwing it back, he discovered not only the ladder of ropes but also a letter of Silvia’s, which he instantly opened and read; and this letter contained a full account of their intended elopement. The duke, after upbraiding [scolding] Valentine for his ingratitude in thus returning the favor he had shown him, by endeavoring to steal away his daughter, banished him from the court and city of Milan forever, and Valentine was forced to depart that night without even seeing Silvia.

While Proteus at Milan was thus injuring Valentine, Julia at Verona was regretting the absence of Proteus; and her regard for him at last so far overcame her sense of propriety [correct behavior] that she resolved to leave Verona and seek her lover at Milan; and to secure herself from danger on the road she dressed her maiden Lucetta and herself in men’s clothes, and they set out in this disguise, and arrived at Milan soon after Valentine was banished from that, city through the treachery of Proteus.

Julia entered Milan about noon, and she took up her abode at an inn; and, her thoughts being all on her dear Proteus, she entered into conversation with the innkeeper—or host, as he was called—thinking by that means to learn some news of Proteus.

The host was greatly pleased that this handsome young gentleman (as he took her to be), who from his appearance he concluded was of high rank, spoke so familiarly to him, and, being a good-natured man, he was sorry to see him look so melancholy; and to amuse his young guest he offered to take him to hear some fine music, with which, he said, a gentleman that evening was going to serenade his mistress.

The reason Julia looked so very melancholy was, that she did not well know what Proteus would think of the imprudent [unwise] step she had taken, for she knew he had loved her for her noble maiden pride and dignity of character, and she feared she should lower herself in his esteem; and this it was that made her wear a sad and thoughtful countenance.

She gladly accepted the offer of the host to go with him and hear the music; for she secretly hoped she might meet Proteus by the way. But when she came to the palace whither the host conducted a very different effect was produced to what the kind host intended; for there, to her heart’s sorrow, she beheld her lover, the inconstant Proteus, serenading the Lady Silvia with music, and addressing discourse of love and admiration

to her. And Julia overheard Silvia from a window talk with Proteus, and reproach him for forsaking his own true lady, and for his ingratitude his friend Valentine; and then Silvia left the window, not choosing to listen to his music and his fine speeches; for she was a faithful lady to her banished Valentine, and abhorred the ungenerous conduct of his false friend, Proteus.

Though Julia was in despair at what she had just witnessed, yet did she still love the truant Proteus; and hearing that he had lately parted with a servant, she contrived, with the assistance of her host, the friendly innkeeper, to hire herself to Proteus as a page; and Proteus knew not she was Julia, and he sent her with letters and presents to her rival, Silvia, and he even sent by her the very ring she gave him as a parting gift at Verona.

When she went to that lady with the ring she was most glad to find that Silvia utterly rejected the suit [courtship] of Proteus; and Julia--or the page Sebastian, as she was called, entered into conversation with Silvia about Proteus's first love, the forsaken Lady Julia. She putting in (as one may say) a good word for herself, said she knew Julia; as well she might, being herself the Julia of whom she spoke; telling how fondly Julia loved her master, Proteus, and how his unkind neglect would grieve her. And then she with a pretty equivocation [untruth] went on: "Julia is about my height, and of my complexion, the color of her eyes and hair the same as mine." And indeed Julia looked a most beautiful youth in her boy's attire.

Silvia was moved to pity this lovely lady who was so sadly forsaken by the man she loved; and when Julia offered the ring which Proteus had sent, refused it, saying: "The more shame for him that he sends me that ring. I will not take it, for I have often heard him say his Julia gave it to him. I love thee, gentle youth, for pitying her, poor lady! Here is a purse; I give it you for Julia's sake."

These comfortable words coming from her kind rival's tongue cheered the drooping heart of the disguised lady. But to return to the banished Valentine, who scarce knew which way to bend his course, being unwilling to return home to his father a disgraced and banished man. As he was wandering over a lonely forest, not far distant from Milan, where he had left his heart's dear treasure, the Lady Silvia, he was set upon by robbers, who demanded his money.

Valentine told them that he was a man crossed by adversity, that he was going into banishment, and that he had no money, the clothes he had on being all his riches. The robbers, hearing that he was a distressed man, and being struck with his noble air and manly behavior, told him if he would live with them and be their chief, or captain, they would put themselves under his command; but that if he refused to accept their offer they would kill him.

Valentine, who cared little what became of himself, said he would consent to live with them and be their captain, provided they did no outrage on women or poor passengers.

Thus the noble Valentine became, like Robin Hood, of whom we read in ballads, a captain of robbers and outlawed banditti; and in this situation he was found by Silvia, and in this manner it came to pass.

Silvia, to avoid a marriage with Thurio, whom her father insisted upon her no longer refusing, came at last to the resolution of following Valentine to Mantua, at which place she had heard her lover had taken refuge; but in this account she was misinformed, for he still lived in the forest among the robbers, hearing the name of their captain, but taking no part in their depredations [plundering], and using the authority which they had imposed upon him in no other way than to compel them to show compassion to the travelers they robbed.

Silvia contrived to effect her escape from her father's palace in company with a worthy old gentleman whose name was Eglamour, whom she took along with her for protection on the road. She had to pass through the forest where Valentine and the banditti dwelt; and one of these robbers seized on Silvia, and would also have taken Eglamour, but he escaped.

The robber who had taken Silvia, seeing the terror she was in, bade her not be alarmed, for that he was only going to carry her to a cave where his captain lived, and that she need not be afraid, for their captain had an honorable mind and always showed humanity to women. Silvia found little comfort in hearing she was going to be carried as a prisoner before the captain of a lawless banditti.

“O Valentine,” she cried, “this I endure for thee!”

But as the robber was conveying her to the cave of his captain he was stopped by Proteus, who, still attended by Julia in the disguise of a page, having heard of the flight of Silvia, had traced her steps to this forest. Proteus now rescued her from the hands the robber; but scarce had she time to thank him for the service he had done her before he began to distress her afresh with his love suit; and while he was rudely pressing her to consent to marry him, and his page (the forlorn Julia) was standing beside him in great anxiety of mind, fearing lest the great service which Proteus had just done to Silvia should win her to show him some favor, they were all strangely surprised with the sudden appearance of Valentine, who, having heard his robbers had taken a lady prisoner, came to console and relieve her.

Proteus was courting Silvia, and he was so much ashamed of being caught by his friend that he was all at once seized with penitence and remorse; and he expressed such a lively sorrow for the injuries he had done to Valentine that Valentine, whose nature was noble and generous, even to a romantic degree, not only forgave and restored him to his former place in his friendship, but in a sudden flight of heroism he said: “I freely do forgive you; and all the interest I have in Silvia I give it up to you.”

Julia, who was standing beside her master as a page, hearing this strange offer, and fearing Proteus would not be able with this new-found virtue to refuse Silvia, fainted; and they were all employed in recovering her, else would Silvia have been offended at being thus made over to Proteus, though she could scarcely think that Valentine would long persevere in this overstrained and too generous act of friendship. When Julia recovered from the fainting fit, she said: "I had forgot, my master ordered me to deliver this ring to Silvia."

Proteus, looking upon the ring, saw that it was the one he gave to Julia in return for that which he received from her and which he had sent by the supposed page to Silvia. "How is this?" said he. "This is Julia's ring. How came you by it, boy?"

Julia answered, "Julia herself did give it me, and Julia herself hath brought it hither."

Proteus, now looking earnestly upon her, plainly perceived that the page Sebastian was no other than the Lady Julia herself; and the proof she had given of her constancy and true love so wrought in him that his love for her returned into his heart, and he took again his own dear lady and joyfully resigned all pretensions [claims] to the Lady Silvia to Valentine, who had so well deserved her.

Proteus and Valentine were expressing their happiness in their reconciliation, and in the love of their faithful ladies, when they were surprised with the sight of the Duke of Milan and Thurio, who came there in pursuit of Silvia. Thurio first approached, and attempted to seize Silvia, saying, "Silvia is mine."

Upon this Valentine said to him in a very spirited manner: "Thurio, keep back. If once again you say that Silvia is yours, you shall embrace your death. Here she stands, take but possession of her with a touch! I dare you but to breathe upon my love."

Hearing this threat, Thurio, who was a great coward, drew back, and said he cared not for her and that none but a fool would fight for a girl who loved him not.

The duke, who was a very brave man himself, said now, in great anger, "The more base and degenerate in you to take such means for her as you have done and leave her on such slight conditions."

Then turning to Valentine he said: "I do applaud your spirit, Valentine, and think you worthy of an empress's love. You shall have Silvia, for you have well deserved her."

Valentine then with great humility kissed the duke's hand and accepted the noble present which he had made him of his daughter with becoming thankfulness, taking occasion of this joyful minute to entreat the good-humored duke to pardon the thieves with whom he had associated in the forest, assuring him that when reformed and restored to society there would be found among them many good, and fit for great employment; for the most of them had been banished, like Valentine, for state offenses, rather than for any black crimes they had been guilty of. To this the ready duke consented. And now nothing

remained but that Proteus, the false friend, was ordained, by way of penance for his love-prompted faults, to be present at the recital of the whole story of his loves and falsehoods before the duke. And the shame of the recital to his awakened conscience was judged sufficient punishment; which being done, the lovers, all four, returned back to Milan, and their nuptials were solemnized in the presence of the duke, with high triumphs and feasting.