

Taming of the Shrew Summary

Lucentio loves Bianca but cannot court her until her shrewish older sister Katherina marries. The eccentric Petruccio marries the reluctant Katherina and uses a number of tactics to render her an obedient wife. Lucentio marries Bianca and, in a contest at the end, Katherina proves to be the most obedient wife.

Act I

Taming of the Shrew begins with a group of hunting nobleman tricking a drunken tinker named Christopher Sly into believing he is a lord. The noblemen give Sly a disguised young page as his supposed wife. They entertain him at their house with a play by a group of travelling actors.

The student Lucentio arrives in Padua to further his studies. He hears that the merchant, Baptista, has two daughters. When he sees Bianca, the pretty younger daughter, he decides he must woo her. Bianca already has two suitors, Gremio and Hortensio, although she cares for neither. Bianca's father, Baptista Minola, says Bianca may not marry before her strong-willed older sister, Katherina.

Lucentio hears that Baptista Minola is going to hire tutors for Bianca, and disguises himself as a Latin tutor in order to woo her. The elderly Gremio hires the disguised Lucentio to woo Bianca on *his* behalf. Hortensio also disguises himself as a musician to obtain access to her. Tranio, Lucentio's servant, dresses as Lucentio to convince Baptista to let Lucentio marry Bianca.

If I be waspish, best beware my sting

— TAMING OF THE SHREW, ACT 2 SCENE 1

Act II

At the same time, Petruccio, a young, confident man from Verona, arrives to visit Hortensio, his friend. He learns about Katherine and resolves to court her, aided by both Gremio and Hortensio. Baptista is enthusiastic about Petruccio's suit, since Katherine is a burden to him. She continually quarrels with her sister and father. Although she is resistant to Petruccio's advances, he will not be deterred and fixes their wedding day.

Act III

While everyone prepares for the wedding, the disguised tutors Hortensio and Lucentio compete for Bianca's affections. At the church the next day, Katherine unwillingly awaits her bridegroom. Petruccio finally arrives late, dressed in outlandish clothes, and he causes a scene. After the ceremony, he immediately leaves for Verona with his new wife.

Act IV

On reaching her new home, Katherine is mistreated by Petruccio and his servants and is refused food and rest. Petruccio's aim is to 'tame' Katherine, while pretending to act out of a desire for her benefit. Eventually, worn down by her husband's behaviour, Katherine submits and agrees to all Petruccio's whims. In exchange, she has his permission to visit her father in Padua. On the journey, the couple meet Vincentio, Lucentio's wealthy father. Petruccio tests Kate's obedience, asking her to say that the sun is the moon and that an old man is a beautiful young woman.

My tongue will tell the anger of my heart, or else my heart concealing it will break.

— *TAMING OF THE SHREW, ACT 4 SCENE 3*

Act V

The three eventually reach Padua. Hortensio, rejected by Bianca, has already married a wealthy widow. They also find that Tranio, still dressed as Lucentio, has succeeded in convincing Baptista to let Lucentio marry Bianca. A pedant (school teacher) has posed as Vincentio, Lucentio's father, to give his blessing to the match. Meanwhile, the real Lucentio has organised a secret wedding with Bianca, which they carry out. When the real Vincentio arrives and discovers a pedant posing as him and Tranio in his son's clothes, Lucentio is forced to confess to the whole plan. He tells them about his new marriage to Bianca.

Undismayed, Baptista holds a wedding feast for both his daughters. As the men relax after their meal, Petruccio devises a scheme to prove whose wife is the most obedient. Bianca and the widow fail to come to their husbands when called. But Katherine returns immediately and firmly tells the women the proper duties of a wife.

Back in the real world, the visiting players leave. Christopher Sly is abandoned to sleep off his dream of the taming of a shrewish wife.

This is a way to kill a wife with kindness

— *TAMING OF THE SHREW, ACT 4 SCENE 1*