

The Taming of the Shrew (as told by Jim Weiss)

Characters:

1. Lucentio (a young scholar, son of a rich father)
2. Baptista Minola (Wealthy merchant of Padua)
3. Katherina (Minola's fiery elder daughter)
4. Bianca (Minola's gentle younger daughter)
5. Gremio (Bianca's elder suitor)
6. Hortensio (Bianca's younger suitor)
7. Petruchio (Treasure-seeking adventurer, Katherina's husband)
8. Servants (2-3)
9. Hortensio's Wife (maybe not needed...)
10. Priest
11. City Folks (2-4)

Crash! Pow! Bam! Doors slammed, glass vases shattered against the fire place, chairs were flung against the wall, or hurled out the window. There were screams of panic and fear and racing footsteps from those trying to get out the way, or those running to stop the uproar.

It was all just another day in the family home of Baptista Minola, a rich merchant in the beautiful Italian city of Padua. Passers by would stop and shake their heads, and be grateful they didn't have a daughter such Señor Minola's to make such a dreadful racket. Actually, Señor Baptista Minola had 2 daughters, there was the beautiful, peaceful, sweet-natured younger daughter, Bianca, whom anyone would be delighted to have for a daughter. But then there was Bianca's older sister, Katherina. She had the temper of a wild animal, a shrew in fact. No one could control her. Poor Señor Minola. And poor Bianca too, she was often the victim of her older sister's screaming and wild acts. What made it worse, was this: both young women were now old enough to marry. Gentle Bianca had men lining up to marry her. But despite a rumor that their father would pay a lot of money to any man who would marry her, one temper tantrum from Katherina was enough to scare off any man. And Baptista Minola had set a rule: No one would marry Bianca until first the fierce Katherina was wed.

So things stood on the day young Lucentio came to town. Lucentio's wealthy father had given him money to attend the university at Pavia. As he stood in a doorway looking across at the university, Lucentio instructed himself:

“Breathe in the knowledge of the great thinkers of this place, Lucentio. Study virtue and how to do good deeds in the world.”

But as he stood there, who should come along the corner but Señor Minola, along with his two daughters. The explosive Katherina, and the courteous Bianca. Lucentio took one look at Bianca, and all thoughts of philosophy flew out of his head. All he wanted at this moment was to stay and gaze at this gentle young beauty. Then he noticed accompanying her father were two men, each of which were asking permission to marry Bianca.

“Enough, Gentlemen!” Señor Minola was telling them. “You know my mind, that is not to give away my youngest daughter before I have a husband for the elder. Either of you have the permission to court the Katherina.”

“To cart her, you mean!”, said the first of the suiters, rich old Gremio. “She ought to be carted away! She's too rough for me. But you, Hortensio,”, and he turned to the other, younger man who wished to marry Bianca. “Would you take Katherina?”.

Fiery Katherina slipped in front of her father and looked him in the eye. Being talked about like a sack of flour or a barrel of wine in her fathers warehouse made her furious. Still, she tried to speak to her father with some respect.

“Sir, would you bargain me away to whichever of these fools wanted me?”

And she glared at Hortensio, who nervously moved so that Señor Minola was between him and Katherina.

He asked her father “Señor, why should you shut Bianca away from the world to pay the price for her sisters rude tongue. Why not let her marry?”

But Señor Minola wouldn't change his mind. “And since I know she most loves music and poetry, if you gentlemen know of any music masters, or scholars, whom I might engage to instruct her, please send them to me for Bianca, and...for Katherina also. I would look upon it with great favor.” And Señor Minola and his daughter's went into their house.

The two frustrated suiters turned to one another. Hortensio said “Gremio, there must be a man somewhere, if we could find him, would take Katherina with all her faults--and all the money her father would give to have her wed away.”

“I'd rather be horse-whipped!”, replied Gremio.

“And I. But since Katherina, single, keeps Bianca single also, let us be friends in this. Let us find such a man who will take Katherina as his wife and remove her from our way. Then you and I will be fair rivals again. Done?”

“Done!”

And having agreed, the two men went their separate ways. Meanwhile, having heard the entire encounter from his place of hiding, the young scholar Lucentio stared open eyed at the door through which Bianca had passed. He was overcome with the suddenness of the emotion for her.

“I burn, I pine, I perish if I don't have this modest girl as mine. I saw sweet beauty in her face. She spoke, and with her breath she did perfume the air. Ahh... But how can I reach her when her father guards her so closely.

Wait, I have it: Her father looked to get her some excellent teachers. Well I am a scholar,

I shall assume the role of school-master and teach Bianca! Teach her they ways of my love, that is.”

And off he went to find old Gremio.

That night, Bianca's other suiters, Hortensio sat in his front room, wondering where he might find a man to marry the temperamental Katherina. In the street outside, he heard a voice he recognized. It was a friend of his, a rough and tumble adventurer named Petruchio. One glance out the window at that rugged figure put an idea into Hortensio's head. There was no man better than Petruchio to have on your side in a fight. And wasn't he, Hortensio, in the fight of his life just now? A battle for Bianca. This was too good a chance to throw away. And so he brought Petruchio inside, and gave him food and drink, and made him comfortable. And at last he said to him, “Petruchio, my good, good friend. Let us speak frankly, “I know you are always in need of gold. What if, once and for all, you could all the gold you needed?

Petruchio sat up. “Tell me more, Hortensio.”

“I know a woman...”

“A woman?”

“Petruchio, shall I be straight with you and say she has the temper of a shrew? And yet I promise you she shall be rich. No, very rich. But you're too much my friend. I would not wish her on you.”

“Nay, Hortensio, between such friends as we, few words are needed. If there's one rich enough to be my wife—since wealth is the reason for my wedding dance—may she be as old as wine dusted with age, as wrinkled as some ancient scroll or page, as ruckus storms on the Adriatic sea—If she is rich, it's all the same to me. I've come to live wealthily in Padua. If wealthy, then happily, in Padua.”

And so in Petruchio, Hortensio had the man for Katherina. But the next day, on the way to the Minola home, they met Hortensio's rival, Gremio, in the street.

“Good morning, Señor Hortensio.”

“Good day, Señor Gremio. Let me introduce to you the answer to our troubles. Petruchio, who comes to woo fair Kate.”

Gremio, who was terrified of Katherina looked wide eyed and asked “Err, did you tell him?”

“Everything.”

Gremio turned to Petruchio “But will you woo this wild cat?”

“That I will.”

Gremio said, "But look, I too bring a present of sorts for the home of Señor Minola."

And he waved to indicate a figure approaching. It was Lucentio, the young scholar who had fallen so deeply in love with Bianca.

"This is a scholar, newly arrived in our fair city," explained Gremio. "Coincidentally, he introduced himself to me when he was most needed. He shall tutor my beloved Bianca."

As all of them approached the Minola home, little did they know what was happening there. Katherina had cornered her sister Bianca and caught her by the wrists. The idea that their marriages should be looked upon merely as some kind of business deal, with no thought to how they might feel about it, infuriated Katherina. Bianca, who was beautiful, but had never had an original idea in her life, simply accepted it as the way things were. She couldn't understand why her wild-eyed sister was once again threatening her and saying:

"Confess, Bianca. Of all your suiters, whom do you love? Don't lie to me, or I'll know it, and you'll be sorry."

"Believe me sister, of all men alive, I never yet beheld that special face which I could this love more than any other."

Katherina did not believe her.

"You lie! Is it Hortensio, or Gremio?"

"If you want either one, then you may have him. I'll even plead for you on your behalf."

"Now I see why you love music!" shouted Katherina "you play in any key yourself. [huh?] Don't you see what they're doing to us?"

But Bianca didn't understand. And in her frustration with the one person she desperately wanted as an ally, Katherina slapped Bianca.

Just then, in came their father.

"Stop!" he exclaimed. He sympathized with his poor Bianca and criticized Katherina as ungrateful. "Why did you do this to Bianca who has never wronged you!? When did she ever say a bitter word to you?"

"It's her silence that maddens me!" said Katherina

And out she ran slamming the door behind her. The noise was followed instantly by a knocking on the front door. Señor Minola not knowing [if he was?] coming or going, rushed down and opened it accompanied by Bianca, who was afraid her sister would return.

Immediately, a party of men entered “Señor Gremio, Señor Hortensio. But who are these gentlemen?”

Gremio waved the scholar Lucentio forward and introduced him as a teacher for Bianca. Lucentio, looking appropriately serious was soon off with Bianca in the garden courtyard and beginning to “teach her”. She responded almost at once to the handsome, quick-witted young man.

Meanwhile, the adventurer Petruchio was impatient to be introduced to Katherina. He could picture the gold that her father would give him. “Good Morning, Sir. Have you not a daughter called Katherina? Fair and virtuous.”

“I have a daughter, Sir, called Katherina.”

And soon they were talking about weddings, and striking a bargain as to what wealth would come Petruchio if he could marry Katherina. Señor Minola couldn't quite believe it was possible. And he said the riches would come only after Petruchio had won Katherina's love.

“What that is nothing, for I tell youm Father. I am as difficult as she's proud-minded. I'll go find here.” said Petruchio.

On the way, he thought how he would begin his careful plan to marry Katherina.

“If she screams at me, I'll just reply she sings as sweetly as a nightingale. Or if she frowns, I'll say she looks as clear as morning roses, newly washed with dew. If she tells me to leave, I'll give her thanks as if she's asked me stay by her a week. If she refuses marriage, I will smile and say I crave the day when we'll be wed.--But here she comes.”

“Good morning Kate. For that's your name, I hear.”

“They call me Katherine that speak of me.”

“You lie, you lie! For you are called Plain Kate, or Bonny Kate, and sometime's Kate the Cursed.”

She turned on him with anger in her eye, but he rushed on.

“But Kate, the prettiest Kate in all the world. Hearing your mildness praised in every town, your virtues told, your beauty so acclaimed. Yet, clearly not as well as you deserved. I am moved to woo you for my wife.”

“Moved? Moved? Whatever moved you here, let it remove you!”

And the battle was on. She screamed, he laughed. She ran, he caught her. She cursed, he kissed. She slapped him, and then he said “If you strike me again, then I shall strike back.”

“If you do strike me you're not a gentlemen.”

Petruchio laughed and dodged as she aimed a kick at him.

Just then Katherina's father stuck his head into the room, being careful to keep his distance from her. Petruchio turned to him and said “We've struck it off at once! I tell you sir, with me she has been modest as a dove. So to conclude, we have agreed together that [up?]on Sunday is our wedding day.”

“I see you hanged on Sunday first!” said Katherina

“Sir, she says she'll see you...ha ha ha...a little joke” lied Petruchio. “We agreed between us that she would continue this temperamental image in front of others. Although with me it's been all kisses and words of love. Give me your hand, sweet Kate, and let's go talk.”

And squeezing her hand so tightly she couldn't get away, he drew her quickly from the room, while Señor Minola ran off to announce the glad news.

Doubly glad for Bianca's suiters. For old Gremio was now finding his scholar a little too attached to Bianca—and she to him. Meantime, word spread like wild-fire through Pauda that the famous Katherina was to [be] wed. Everyone planned to attend, just to see what sort of madman would marry her. And they were not disappointed.

You see, there was only way to calm Katherina. He was going to turn right back upon her the wild sorts of behavior she had used on others for so long. Only in this way might she come to realize how dreadful it was, and look for another way to behave.

And so on the wedding day Petruchio appeared wearing a ridiculous outfit he had put together from his oldest, must thread-bare, clothes. He was rude throughout the ceremony, interrupting and shouting at the priest, stomping his feet to hurry him along. Then, ended by turning to his bride and giving her a kiss so loud you could hear it at the back of the church.

But at least, said the guests, she is wed—if only to a man more mad than she. Finally, when everyone gathered to go into the wedding feast, Petruchio suddenly announced the newly married couple needed to leave at once, and could not stay! His father-in-law, Señor Minola, was totally surprised. “Let me beg you to stay” he said.

“Father, it cannot be.” answered Petruchio.

Then to everyones shock, Katherina looked sweetly at him and said “Then, let me beg you.” She was trying to be polite on her wedding day but finding it very difficult. “Let me, beg you” she repeated.

“I am content.” he said, smiling at her.

“Are you content to stay?”

“No. But I am content you begged me. We must be off.”

And they were out the door like a shot. And thus began the marriage of Petruchio and Katherina.

All through the long night time they rode. Katherina still in her wedding gown, and wondering what sort of lunatic she had married. When at last they reached Petruchio's castle, the servants not expecting them so soon, had not made the warm, delicious dinner that should have greeted the bride when she arrived at her new home. The frightened servants scrambled to avoid the curses that Petruchio rained down upon them.

“You call this food!?” he shouted, flinging at them the platters of leftovers they had hurriedly assembled. “You shame me before my beautiful bride!”

Katherina was so exhausted from riding all night, and so hungry after unexpectedly missing their wedding feast in Padua, that she would have eaten almost anything.

“Please, husband,” she asked “let us dine.”

“This is not fit for you, my sweet Kate” said Petruchio, throwing the last of the food into the fire. “Tomorrow we shall eat.”

And he led them upstairs to their chambers, thinking to himself “This is my way. I'll see to it that she stays tired, and hungry, and nervous. I'll even find some fault with the way the bed is made and tear it apart. Then I'll claim it's all because it's not good enough for her. And thus I'll wear out of her her mad and head-strong humor. This is the way to kill a wife with kindness.”

And he laughed to himself as he went.

On her part, Katherina thought “Why does he act this way towards me?”. Then she stopped short hearing an echo of her father's question about her own behavior.

She became even more confused next day when she saw Petruchio unlock a huge chest of coins, which he mentioned to his servant which had come from Señor Minola for having married Katherina.

“Why?” she wondered “if he had married her for money did Petruchio not just leave her alone? Why bother with her at all?”

But the truth was that Petruchio was fascinated by Katherina's beauty and wit, even when the wit was directed against him. She was the first woman he had known that was as spirited as he.

“In fact”, he thought rubbing a space where she had slapped him, “perhaps a bit too spirited.”

During the days that followed, Katherina had little food and less rest. She caught sight of

herself in a mirror and saw in herself the same weary expression she was used to seeing on those she had terrorized. Just then Petruchio came in with a full and excellent meal. And he announced to her, “and now my honey-love, we will return unto your father's house after we eat. And when you've dined, the tailor and the jeweler await for your pleasure.

She was overjoyed. First, she ate her fill. Then the tailor brought a parade of gorgeous gowns, and the jeweler yards of sparkling gems. But no matter how grand they were, Petruchio rudely sent them away, always insisting over her protest “they weren't good enough for her.”

At last they left for her fathers home laden with boxes of what she thought were her old clothes. Actually Petruchio had filled her trunks with beautiful new things.

Now riding by her side he stole a glance at her, surprised to find her so beautiful when her expression was not distorted with anger. He began to regret the confusion he was bringing to her. Yet he continued, hoping that at some point there would be no need for such trickery.

And as they made their way towards Padua, everything was bubbling over in that city. For that very day, the scholar Lucentio had convinced Bianca to elope before her father could force her to marry someone else. Katherina and Petruchio arrived in Padua only to find her father Señor Minola surrounded by a crowd of helpful friends and curious onlookers looking all over for his missing daughter Bianca.

Just then, the crowd parted and into the circle Bianca walked hand-in-hand with her teacher. But he looked different somehow. And not only because he dressed in the clothing of a rich young man, he carried himself differently now. The two of them came before her father and bent their knees.

“Pardon, sweet father.” said Lucenio, which only confused Señor Minola.

“Pardon, dear father.” said Bianca. “There is much to explain.”

And in the end, all were well contented.

All except Bianca's other suiters. Gremio tossed up his hands in anger, while Hortensio, upon seeing that Bianca was out of his reach, remembered a rich widow who had flirted with him and went off to find her.

Katherina especially was delighted. First, because her sister had finally taken matters into her own hands in picking a husband. Second, upon discovering that she herself would be so beautifully dressed at Bianca's wedding feast. And seeing Petruchio smile at her delight, Katherina suddenly understood her own situation. She realized that Petruchio may have married her for gold, but he had gone on to break her old patters because he valued something about her.

“Could they”, she wondered “begin to create a kind of relationship that neither one had

ever experienced. One using both their strengths, based on their high spirits and wit? And was it possible love might play a part too?" The thought left her both excited and frightened. And she wondered how she could show Petruchio that she wanted to try. She glanced at him thoughtfully as the two of them sat with Lucentio and Bianca at the banquet table.

Even Hortensio was happy, for he had lost no time and married the rich widow that very day. At one point, all the women retired into the other room, to talk over the events of the day, leaving the gentlemen behind.

Hortensio joked to his old friend "Well, Lucentio and I are happily wed. And you, Petruchio, how has married life been for you? Married to Katherine, ha ha ha ha..."

And amid great laughter, Señor Minola turned and said "In truth, my son Petruchio, I think you have for a wife the most difficult women alive."

"Well I say no sir," said Petruchio "I'll prove it. Let each of us new husbands send for his wife. And she comes first, her husband will win whatever we wager."

"Good," said Hortensio, "What's the wager?"

"A hundred crowns!" shouted Lucentio, and there where gasps. That was a great deal of money. But Lucentio, confident at Bianca's love, rushed on.

He called to an elderly servant "Bid my gentle wife come to me." Then he sat back and waited. But Bianca was busy showing off her gown and her new ring to the other women at the feast, and she didn't want to be interrupted.

The servant returned and reported "Sir...she is...busy, and cannot come."

Lucentio felt deeply embarrassed, and very upset at losing such a huge bet. Then Hortensio said "Servant, go and find my wife, and beg her to come."

"Beg?" teased Petruchio "That is not good."

Soon the servant returned to the worried Hortensio and bowed.

"What does my wife say? She is coming, is she not?" asked Hortensio.

"Sir...she says"

"Out with it man, out with it!"

"She will not come."

To general laughter Petruchio shook his head. "She will not come. Worse and worse. Servant, go to my wife and tell her I command her to come at once."

Señor Minola, hearing this, shook his head in disbelief “Command Katherina? She will not come.”

“If not, that is my bad fortune.” answered Petruchio, trying to look sure of herself. But he was certain he would loose. The proud Katherina would only reply with some sharp insult.

“But look, here comes the servant back” [who said this?? Petruchio?]

And indeed there was the servant, looking amazed, for behind him glided Katherina. And she was bringing with her Bianca, and Hortensio's wife, grasping each by an elbow to make sure they came. Behind them came all the guests, drawn by the surprising sight.

And then appearing to speak to the women in the room, but really speaking to Petruchio only, Katherina advised “Do not furrow your brow, and look with such a threatening eye on your husband. My mind [has been?] as big as one as yours, my heart as great to trade word for word, and frown for frown. But now I see that I was wrong. I am ashamed that women are so simple. To offer war where they should ask for peace. I will honor my husband, as should you. And place your hands below your husbands foot in respect, as now I do.”

And too everyone's astonishment, the shrew Katherina bent her knee before her husband Petruchio, stretched forth her hand, and laid it before his booted foot. And then, she held her breath. She was deliberately going to far with her comments, looking now at Petruchio, hoping he would since her true meaning. That she wanted peace between them, if she would accept her as his loving equal. Would he understand? Would he accept her fully? Or laugh, and make her look foolish. Petruchio looked at her. He knew already her intelligence, her humor and beauty. But this, this, was something new and surprising. Was it possible that this marriage he had stumbled across a treasure greater than her fathers gold?

He smiled, and said “Now there's a [wench??], and reaching down he took her hand in his own and gently drew her to her feet, then looked straight into her eyes and said “Come on and kiss me, Kate.” And with that kiss, they both felt they were truly husband and wife. The guests, always delighted at a happy ending sent up a great cheer as Petruchio and Katherina started for the door.

Just before they slipped out into the night, Petruchio turned back and called to Lucentio and Hortensio “Was I that won the wager, which was right, and having won...” and he and Katherina smiled at one another “...God give you good night!” And as they moved together out into the moonlight, the night air was [retch?] with the sound of Katherina's gentle laughter.