

1

HE was the plaintiff, I was the accused,
 Fortune the judge, who did the trial commence,
 His wits and mine the jury (stark unused),
Cupid the suborner, love the offence.
 Once the accuser had put forth his plaint
 (O that he was some untapped ruth dissembling!),
 The justice bade me speak without constraint,
 But woe had tied my tongue, and left me trembling.
 ‘What’s this?’ quoth she, ‘Why do you quake to speak?’
 I answered not, although my heart was bawling.
 She grew displeased, and in a fit of pique,
 Condemned me to a penalty appalling:
 ‘Since to refrain from speech you thus presume,
 The silence of your love shall be your doom.’

2

As brave *Prometheus*, having stol’n that fire
 Which by the Thunderer was from mortals hidden,
 Did bear the brunt of his horrendous ire:
 An endless retribution, torture-ridden;
 As, every day, the liver of the thief
 Was into fodder for *Jove’s* eagle made,
 And, every night, grew back (much to his grief)
 And blissful death was evermore delayed;
 So is my heart by *Cupid’s* darts ensnared,
 Then healed by hope, then soon besieged again.
 And yet the heart of my heart’s thief is spared
 From such recurrent, mischief-laden pain.
 Such are the laws of love: the thief goes free
 And his poor victim must reproved be.

3

THE faults that mar you, and purloin my peace
 Are all within an ashen Thread contained,
 To wear which cursed cord you never cease
 That in a ring of vice your worth lies chained.
 No dreadful cankerworm could e'er surround
 The slender waist of any lily white
 Such that its beauty, being in baseness bound,
 Would to my eyes comprise a sadder sight.
 Must Prejudice, and Perjury, and Pride
 Be sheltered, whilst Pity's no pity shown?
 Fair! Let that rightful queen in you reside;
 Oust her usurpers, and their wiry throne.

By scores of tongues your praises shall be bred
 If you release your worth and shed the Thread.

4

WHEREFORE do others harbour no concern
 For hapless virtue, which is thus immured?
 Must I alone that wretched Thread discern,
 Whilst to its grasp the rest remain inured?
 With what persuasive spells have you devised
 The hiding of your worthiness to hide?
 And in what garments are your flaws disguised
 As noble traits, which all but me misguide?
 I see: Your real merits are those charms,
 Which thus contribute to their own confinement;
 Your beauty is that garb, which fools disarms,
 And makes them misconceive your rare refinement.

O that I were as ignorant as they!
 For my perception leads to my decay.

5

No more, dear friends, relay to me no more
 His noxious jeers, those beasts who love to maul me;
 I, who have died a thousand times before,
 May not revive if further deaths befall me.
 If you espy them stumbling o'er his lips,
 Then in your sturdy minds immure them all;
 But make no mention of this blest eclipse
 Till age permits me to dismiss his gall.
 For if I should detect their presence there
 I'll make you free them with beseeching guile,
 And drown once more in deathly, dark despair
 To see them maim my feeble peace the while.
 So much I crave to know the direful truth
 That I would fain befoul with deaths my youth.

6

Lo, in a hall illumed with honour's light
 I stand content before a friendly horde
 Which cheers amain, applauding in delight
 As I receive some coveted award.
 But my eyes roam the throng in search of him,
 For whose ambrosian praise I languish most,
 And find him sulking still, scornful and grim,
 Not clapping once, rebelling 'gainst the host.
 At once the plaudits cease, the praise subsides,
 And doleful darkness fills the silent room;
 My bold resolve is wholly choked besides,
 And lucent rapture finds its inky tomb.
 All honours fade to dust if he disdains them,
 And yet my eyes leave not the sight that pains them.