

Taming of the Shrew Summary from Spark Notes

In the English countryside, a poor tinker named Christopher Sly becomes the target of a prank by a local lord. Finding Sly drunk out of his wits in front of an alehouse, the lord has his men take Sly to his manor, dress him in his finery, and treat him as a lord. When Sly recovers, the men tell him that he is a lord and that he only believes himself to be a tinker because he has been insane for the past several years. Waking in the lord's bed, Sly at first refuses to accept the men's story, but when he hears of his "wife," a pageboy dressed in women's clothing, he readily agrees that he is the lord they purport him to be. Sly wants to be left alone with his wife, but the servants tell him that a troupe of actors has arrived to present a play for him. The play that Sly watches makes up the main story of *The Taming of the Shrew*.

In the Italian city of Padua, a rich young man named **Lucentio** arrives with his servants, Tranio and Biondello, to attend the local university. Lucentio is excited to begin his studies, but his priorities change when he sees Bianca, a beautiful, mild young woman with whom Lucentio instantly falls in love. There are two problems: first, Bianca already has two suitors, Gremio and Hortensio; second, Bianca's father, a wealthy old man named Baptista Minola, has declared that no one may court Bianca until first her older sister, the vicious, ill-tempered **Katherine**, is married. Lucentio decides to overcome this problem by disguising himself as Bianca's Latin tutor to gain an excuse to be in her company. Hortensio disguises himself as her music teacher for the same reason. While Lucentio pretends to be Bianca's tutor, Tranio dresses up as Lucentio and begins to confer with Baptista about the possibility of marrying his daughter.

The Katherine problem is solved for Bianca's suitors when Hortensio's friend **Petruchio**, a brash young man from Verona, arrives in Padua to find a wife. He intends to marry a rich woman, and does not care what she is like as long as she will bring him a fortune. He agrees to marry Katherine sight unseen. The next day, he goes to Baptista's house to meet her, and they have a tremendous duel of words. As Katherine insults Petruchio repeatedly, Petruchio tells her that he will marry her whether she agrees or not. He tells Baptista, falsely, that Katherine has consented to marry him on Sunday. Hearing this claim, Katherine is strangely silent, and the wedding is set.

On Sunday, Petruchio is late to his own wedding, leaving Katherine to fear she will become an old maid. When Petruchio arrives, he is dressed in a ridiculous outfit and rides on a broken-down horse. After the wedding, Petruchio forces Katherine to leave for his country house before the feast, telling all in earshot that she is now his property and that he may do with her as he pleases. Once they reach his country house, Petruchio continues the process of "taming" Katherine by keeping her from eating or sleeping for several days—he pretends that he loves her so much he cannot allow her to eat his inferior food or to sleep in his poorly made bed.

In Padua, Lucentio wins Bianca's heart by wooing her with a Latin translation that declares his love. Hortensio makes the same attempt with a music lesson, but Bianca loves Lucentio, and Hortensio resolves to marry a wealthy widow. Tranio secures Baptista's approval for Lucentio to marry Bianca by proposing a huge sum of money to lavish on her. Baptista agrees but says that he must have this sum confirmed by Lucentio's father before the marriage can take place. Tranio and Lucentio, still in their respective disguises, feel there is nothing left to do but find an old man to play the role of Lucentio's father. Tranio enlists the help of an old pedant, or schoolmaster, but as the pedant speaks to

Baptista, Lucentio and Bianca decide to circumvent the complex situation by eloping.

Katherine and Petruchio soon return to Padua to visit Baptista. On the way, Petruchio forces Katherine to say that the sun is the moon and that an old man is really a beautiful young maiden. Since Katherine's willfulness is dissipating, she agrees that all is as her husband says. On the road, the couple meets Lucentio's father, Vincentio, who is on his way to Padua to see his son. In Padua, Vincentio is shocked to find Tranio masquerading as Lucentio. At last, Bianca and Lucentio arrive to spread the news of their marriage. Both Vincentio and Baptista finally agree to the marriage.

At the banquet following Hortensio's wedding to the widow, the other characters are shocked to see that Katherine seems to have been "tamed"—she obeys everything that Petruchio says and gives a long speech advocating the loyalty of wives to their husbands. When the three new husbands stage a contest to see which of their wives will obey first when summoned, everyone expects Lucentio to win. Bianca, however, sends a message back refusing to obey, while Katherine comes immediately. The others acknowledge that Petruchio has won an astonishing victory, and the happy Katherine and Petruchio leave the banquet to go to bed.