

“**G**COME NOT HERE, good Ambrosio, to any of those ends thou sayst,” quoth Marcela; “but only to turn for mine honour, and give the world to understand how little reason have all those which make me the author either of their own pains or of Chrysostom’s death; and therefore I desire all you that be here present to lend attention unto me, for I mean not to spend much time or words to persuade to the discreet so manifest a truth. Heaven, as you say, hath made me beautiful, and that so much that my feature moves you to love almost whether you will or no; and for the affection you show unto me, you say, ay, and you affirm, that I ought to love you again. I know, by the natural instinct that Jove hath bestowed on me, that each fair thing is amiable; *but I cannot conceive why, for the reason of being beloved, the party that is so beloved for her beauty should be bound to love her lover*; although he be foul; and, seeing that foul things are worthy of hate, it is a bad argument to say, I love thee, because fair; and therefore thou must affect me, although uncomely. But set the case that the beauties occur equal on both sides, it follows not, therefore, that their desires should run one way; for all beauties do not enamour, for some do only delight the sight, and subject not the will; for if all beauties did enamour and subject together, men’s wills would ever run confused and straying, without being able to make any election; for the beautiful subjects being infinite, the desires must also perforce be infinite. And, as I have heard, true love brooks no division, and must needs be voluntary, and not enforced; which being so, as I presume it is, why would you have me subject my will forcibly, without any other obligation than that, that you say you love me? If not, tell me, if Heaven had made me foul, as it hath made me beautiful, could I justly complain of you because you affected me not? How much more, seeing you ought to consider that I did not choose the beauty I have! for, such as it is, Heaven bestowed it gratis, without my demanding or electing it. And even as the viper deserves no blame for the poison she carries, although therewithal she kill, seeing it was bestowed on her by nature, so do I as little merit to be reprehended because beautiful; *for beauty in an honest woman is like fire afar off, or a sharp-edged sword; for neither that burns nor this cuts any but such as come near them*. Honour and virtue are the ornaments of the soul, without which the fairest body is not to be esteemed such; and if that honesty be one of the virtues that adorneth and beautifieth most the body and soul, why should she that is beloved, because fair, adventure the loss thereof, to answer his intention which only for his pleasure’s sake labours that she may lose it, with all his force and industry? *I was born free, and, because I might live freely, I made election of the solitude of the fields. The trees of these mountains are my companions, the clear water of these streams my mirrors. With the trees and waters I communicate my thoughts and beauty. I am a parted fire, and a sword laid aloof. Those whom I have enamoured with my sight, I have undeceived with my words*. And if desires be sustained by hopes, I never having given any to Chrysostom, or to any other, it may well be said that he was rather slain by his own obstinacy than by my cruelty. And if I be charged that his thoughts were honest, and that I was therefore obliged to answer unto them, I say, that when in that very place where you make his sepulchre, he first broke his mind unto me, I told him that *mine intention was to live in perpetual solitude, and that only the earth should gather the fruits of my solitariness and the spoils of my beauty; and if he would, after this my resolution, persist obstinately without all hope, and sail against the wind, what wonder is it that he should be drowned in the midst of the gulf of his rashness?* If I had entertained him, then were I false; if I had pleased him, then should I do against my better purposes and projects. He strove, being persuaded to the contrary; he despaired, ere he was hated. See, then, if it be reason that I bear the blame of his torment. Let him complain who hath been deceived; let him despair to whom his promised hopes have failed; let him confess it whom I shall ever call; let him vaunt whom I shall admit: but let him not call me cruel or a homicide, whom I never promised, deceived, called, or admitted. Heaven hath not yet ordained that I should love by destiny; and to think that I would do it by election may be excused. And let this general caveat serve every one of those which solicit me for his particular benefit. And let it be known, that if any shall hereafter die for my love, that he dies not jealous or unfortunate; for whosoever loves not any, breeds not in reason jealousy in any, nor should any resolutions to any be accounted disdainings. *He that calls me a savage and a basilisk, let him shun me as a hurtful and prejudicial thing; he that calls me ungrateful, let him not serve me; he that’s strange, let him not know me; he that’s cruel, let him not follow me: for this savage, this basilisk, this ingrate, this cruel and strange one, will neither seek, serve, know, or pursue any of them*. For if Chrysostom’s impatience and headlong desire slew him, why should mine honest proceeding and care be inculped therewithal? If I preserve mine integrity in the society of these trees, why would any desire me to lose it, seeing every one covets to have the like himself, to converse the better among men? I have, as you all know, riches enough of mine own, and therefore do not covet other men’s. *I have a free condition, and I do not please to subject me*. Neither do I love or hate any. I do not deceive this man, or solicit that other; nor do I jest with one, and pass the time with another. The honest conversation of the pastorals of these villages and the care of my goats, do entertain me. *My desires are limited by these mountains; and if they do issue from hence, it is to contemplate the beauty of heaven—steps wherewithal the soul travels toward her first dwelling.*” And, ending here, without desiring to hear any answer, she turned her back and entered into the thickest part of the wood that was there at hand, leaving all those that were present marvellously admired at her beauty and discretion.