

CYNTHIA'S REVELS

Ben Jonson

Enter three child actors, struggling over a cloak.

- 1 CHILD: Pray you away; why, fellows! Gods so, what do you mean?
- 2 CHILD: Marry, that you shall not speak the prologue sir.
- 3 CHILD: Why, do you hope to speak it?
- 2 CHILD: Ay, and I think I have most right to it: I am sure I studied it first.
- 3 CHILD: That's all one, if the author think I can speak it better.
- 1 CHILD: I plead possession of the cloak: gentles, your suffrages, I pray you.
- 3 CHILD: I'll play nothing in the play: unless I speak it.
- 1 CHILD: Why, will you stand to most voices of the gentlemen? let that decide it.
- 3 CHILD: O, no, sir gallant; you presume to have the start of us there, and that makes you offer so prodigally.
- 1 CHILD: No, would I were whipped if I had any such thought; try it by lots either.
- 2 CHILD: Faith, I dare tempt my fortune in a greater venture than this.
- 3 CHILD: Well said, resolute Jack! I am content too; so we draw first. Make the cuts.
- 1 CHILD: But will you not snatch my cloak while I am stooping?
- 3 CHILD: No, we scorn treachery.
- 2 CHILD: Which cut shall speak it?
- 3 CHILD: The shortest.
- 1 CHILD: Agreed: draw. [*They draw straws.*] The shortest is come to the shortest. Now, sir, I hope I shall go forward without your envy.
- 2 CHILD: A spite of all mischievous luck! I was once plucking at the other.
- 3 CHILD: Stay Jack: I'll do somewhat now afore I go in, though it be nothing but to revenge myself on the author; since I speak not his prologue, I'll go tell all the argument of his play afore-hand, and so stale his invention to the auditory, before it come forth.
- 1 CHILD: O, do not so.
- 2 CHILD: By no means.
- 3 CHILD: (*Advancing To The Front Of The Stage. The Other Two Interrupt, And Endeavour To Stop Him.*) First, the title of his play is "Cynthia's Revels," as any man that hath hope to be saved by his book can witness; the scene, Gargaphie, which I do

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vehemently suspect for some fustian country; but let that vanish. Here is the court of Cynthia whither he brings Cupid travelling on foot, resolved to turn page.

1 CHILD: Pray thee, no more.

2 CHILD: Stop his mouth.

3 CHILD: Where am I now? at a stand!

2 CHILD: Come, leave at last.

3 CHILD: O, the night is come (*'twas somewhat dark, methought*), and Cynthia intends to come forth; that helps it a little yet. All the courtiers must provide for revels; they conclude upon a masque, the device of which is --

2 CHILD: Come, we'll have no more of this.

1 CHILD: Tut, this was but to show us the happiness of his memory. I expected some such device.

3 CHILD: O, you shall see me do that rarely; lend me thy cloak.

1 CHILD: Soft sir, you'll speak my prologue in it.

3 CHILD: No, would I might never stir then.

2 CHILD: Lend it him, lend it him:

1 CHILD: Well, you have sworn. [Gives him the cloak.]

3 CHILD: I have. Now, sir; suppose I am one of your genteel auditors, that am come in, having paid my money at the door, with much ado, and here I take my place and sit down: I have my three sorts of tobacco in my pocket, my light by me, and thus I begin. (*At the breaks he takes his tobacco.*) By this light, I wonder that any man is so mad, to come to see these rascally tits play here -- They do act like so many wrens or pismires -- not the fifth part of a good face amongst them all. -- most lamentable things, like the pitiful fellows that make them -- poets. By this vapour, an 'twere not for tobacco -- I think -- the very stench of 'em would poison me - A man were better visit fifteen jails -- or a dozen or two of hospitals -- than once adventure to come near them. How is't? well?

1 CHILD: Excellent; give me my cloak.

2 CHILD: Stay; you shall see me do another now: but a more sober, or better-gather'd gallant; that is, as it may be thought, some friend, or well-wisher to the house: and here I enter.

3 CHILD: What? upon the stage too?

1 CHILD: Yes; and I step forth like one of the children, and ask you. Would you have a stool sir?

2 CHILD: A stool, boy!

1 CHILD: Ay, sir, if you'll give me sixpence, I'll fetch you one.

2 CHILD: For what, I pray thee? what shall I do with it?

1 CHILD: O lord, sir! will you betray your ignorance so much? why

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throne yourself in state on the stage, as other gentlemen use, sir.

2 CHILD: Away, wag; I would speak with your

AUTHOR: Where is he?

1 CHILD: Not this way, I assure you sir; we are not so officiously befriended by him, as to have his presence in the tiring-house, to prompt us aloud, stamp at the book-holder, swear for our properties, curse the poor tireman, rail the music out of tune, and sweat for every venial trespass we commit, as some author would, if he had such fine enghles as we. Well, 'tis but our hard fortune!

2 CHILD: Nay, crack, be not disheartened. O (*I had almost forgot it too*), they say, the ghosts of some three or four plays departed a dozen years since, have been seen walking on your stage here; take heed boy, if your house be haunted with such hobgoblins, 'twill fright away all your spectators quickly.

3 CHILD: By my faith, Jack, you have put me down: here take your cloak, and promise some satisfaction in your prologue.