

The Rake's Progress

Synopsis

PART 1

It's springtime, and Tom Rakewell enjoys a carefree life in the countryside with his love Anne Truelove. He dismisses her father's concerns about his reluctance to get a job and instead entrusts himself to Fortune.

A stranger, Nick Shadow, appears with unexpected news: Tom has inherited money from an unknown uncle and is now a rich man. Tom immediately hires Nick as his servant and agrees to pay him in "a year and a day." As they leave for London, Tom promises to send for Anne and her father as soon as he is settled. The Progress of a Rake begins.

Now in London, Tom is entranced by life in the big city. Nick takes him to a brothel where Tom shows off to the owner Mother Goose. While uneasy and lamenting his betrayal of Anne, he accepts Mother Goose's invitation.

Months have passed and Anne has not heard from Tom. Worried, she decides to set out for London to find him.

Tom is disgusted and bored with his new life. Nick proposes an absurd idea: Tom should marry Baba the Turk, the famed bearded lady. This would be a way for Tom to prove he is free of any common constraints. Newly infused with energy, Tom agrees.

Anne arrives in London and finds Tom. Ashamed and remorseful, he tells her to go home. Anne reassures him of her love but when Baba appears, Tom confesses that he is now married. Anne leaves deeply hurt as Tom and Baba are cheered by an excited crowd of onlookers.

- Intermission -

PART 2

Tom's marriage to Baba and her constant chattering have become unbearable. He is so annoyed that he violently silences her and falls into a deep sleep. Nick enters with a strange machine. When Tom wakes he tells him about a dream he had of a machine that turns stones into bread. Nick presents it to Tom, who wants to use it to solve global hunger and find redemption in Anne's eyes. Naively he leaves the business affairs to Nick.

A few months later the business has failed and Tom and Nick are on the run from deceived creditors. Anne is back in London looking for Tom to give him a second chance.

The famous auctioneer Sellem has been hired to auction off all of Tom's possessions. A curious auction item turns out to be Baba herself, who angrily orders everybody to leave. However, when she sees Anne in the crowd she urges her to try to save Tom, who still loves her.

Still on the run, Nick and Tom finally arrive at a graveyard. "A year and a day" have passed and it is now time to settle the account. When Tom says he has no money, Nick Shadow shows his true face and wants Tom's soul instead. However, he offers a reprieve: they can gamble for it. Tom, placing his trust in the Queen of Hearts, calls upon Anne. When her voice is heard, Shadow realizes he has lost and condemns Tom to insanity. Tom imagines himself as Adonis, waiting for Venus.

Tom is at Bedlam, an insane asylum. His fellow inmates mock his belief that Venus will visit him. The keeper admits Anne, whom Tom believes to be Venus. He confesses his sins, and they envision their timeless love. Anne sings Tom to sleep. Her father comes to take her home and Tom awakens to find her gone.

"For idle hands and hearts and minds the devil finds a work to do"