

***THE GOLDEN
ASSE***

BOOK VI

By

Lucius

Apuleius "*Africanus*"

THE SIXTH BOOK

THE TWENTY-THIRD CHAPTER

How Apuleius carried away the Gentlewoman, and how they were taken againe by the theeves, and what a kind of death was invented for them.

By and by the theeves came home laden with treasure, and many of them which were of strongest courage (leaving behind such as were lame and wounded, to heale and aire themselves) said they would returne backe againe to fetch the rest of their pillage, which they had hidden in a certaine cave, and so they snatched up their dinner greedily, and brought us forth into the way and beate us before them with staves. About night (after that we had passed over many hilles and dales) we came to a great cave, where they laded us with mighty burthens, and would not suffer us to refresh our selves any season but brought us againe in our way, and hied so fast homeward, that what with their haste and their cruell stripes, I fell downe upon a stone by the way side, then they beate me pittifully in lifting me up, and hurt my right thigh and my left hoofe, and one of them said, What shall we do with this lame Ill favoured Asse, that is not worth the meate he eats? And other said, Since the time that we had him first he never did any good, and I thinke he came unto our house with evill lucke, for we have had great wounds since, and losse of our valiant captaines, and other said, As soone as he hath brought home his burthen, I will surely throw him out upon the mountaine to be a pray for wild beasts: While these gentlemen reasoned together of my death, we fortun'd to come home, for the feare that I was in, caused my feet to turne into wings: after that we were discharged of our burthens, they went to their fellowes that were wounded, and told them of our great tardity and slownesse by the way, neither was I brought into small anguish, when I perceived my death prepared before my face: Why standest thou still Lucius? Why dost thou not looke for thy death? Knowst thou not that the theeves have ordained to slay thee? seest thou not these sharpe and pointed flints which shall bruise and teare thee in peeces, if by adventure thou happen upon them? Thy gentle Magitian hath not onely given thee the shape and travell of an Asse, but also a skinne so soft and tender as it were a swallow: why dost thou not take

courage and runne away to save thy selfe? Art thou afraid of the old woman more then halfe dead, whom with a stripe of thy heele thou maist easily dispatch? But whither shall I fly? What lodging shall I seek? See my Assy cogitation. Who is he that passeth by the way and will not take me up? While I devised these things, I brake the halter wherewith I was tyed and ran away with all my force, howbeit I could not escape the kitish eyes of the old woman, for shee ran after me, and with more audacity then becommeth her kind age, caught me by the halter and thought to pull me home: but I not forgetting the cruell purpose of the theeves, was mooved with small pity, for I kicked her with my hinder heeles to the ground and had welnigh slaine her, who (although shee was throwne and hurled downe) yet shee held still the halter, and would not let me goe; then shee cryed with a loud voyce and called for succour, but shee little prevayled, because there was no person that heard her, save onely the captive gentlewoman, who hearing the voice of the old woman, came out to see what the matter was, and perceiving her hanging at the halter, tooke a good courage and wrested it out of her hand, and (entreating me with gentle words) got upon my backe. Then I began to runne, and shee gently kicked mee forward, whereof I was nothing displeased, for I had as great a desire to escape as shee: insomuch that I seemed to scowre away like a horse. And when the Gentlewoman did speake, I would answeere her with my neighing, and oftentimes (under colour to rub my backe) I would sweetly kisse her tender feet. Then shee fetching a sigh from the bottome of her heart, lifted up her eyes to the heavens, saying: O soveraigne Gods, deliver mee if it be your pleasure, from these present dangers: and thou cruell fortune cease thy wrath, let the sorrow suffice thee which I have already sustained. And thou little Asse, that art the occasion of my safety and liberty, if thou canst once render me safe and sound to my parents, and to him that so greatly desireth to have me to his wife, thou shalt see what thankses I will give: with what honour I will reward thee, and how I will use thee. First, I will bravely dresse the haire of thy forehead, and then will I finely combe thy maine, I will tye up thy rugged taylor trimly, I will decke thee round about with golden trappes, in such sort that thou shalt glitter like the starres of the skie, I will bring thee daily in my apron the kirkels of nuts, and will pamper thee up with delicates; I will set store by thee, as by one that is the preserver of my life: Finally, thou shalt lack no manner of thing. Moreover amongst thy glorious fare,

thy great ease, and the blisse of thy life, thou shalt not be destitute of dignity, for thou shalt be chronicled perpetually in memory of my present fortune, and the providence divine. All the whole history shall be painted upon the wall of our house, thou shalt be renowned throughout all the world. And it shall be registred in the bookes of Doctours, that an Asse saved the life of a young maiden that was captive amongst Theeves: Thou shalt be numbred amongst the ancient miracles: wee beleieve that by like example of truth Phryxus saved himselfe from drowning upon the Ram, Arion escaped upon a Dolphin, and that Europa was delivered by the Bull. If Jupiter transformed himselfe into a Bull, why may it not be that under the shape of this Asse, is hidden the figure of a man, or some power divine? While that the Virgin did thus sorrowfully unfold her desires, we fortun'd to come to a place where three wayes did meet, and shee tooke me by the halter, and would have me to turne on the right hand to her fathers house: but I (knowing that the theeves were gone that way to fetch the residue of their pillage) resisted with my head as much as I might, saying within my selfe: What wilt thou doe unhappy maiden? Why wouldst thou goe so willingly to hell? Why wilt thou runne into destruction by meane of my feet? Why dost thou seek thine own harme, and mine likewise? And while we strived together whether way we might take, the theeves returned, laden with their pray, and perceived us a farre off by the light of the Moon: and after they had known us, one of them gan say, Whither goe you so hastely? Be you not afraid of spirits? And you (you harlot) doe you not goe to see your parents? Come on, we will beare you company? And therewithall they tooke me by the halter, and drave me backe againe, beating me cruelly with a great staffe (that they had) full of knobs: then I returning againe to my ready destruction, and remembering the grieffe of my hoofs, began to shake my head, and to waxe lame, but he that led me by the halter said, What, dost thou stumble? Canst thou not goe? These rotten feet of thine ran well enough, but they cannot walke: thou couldest mince it finely even now with the gentlewoman, that thou seem'dst to passe the horse Pegasus in swiftnesse. In saying of these words they beat mee againe, that they broke a great staffe upon mee. And when we were come almost home, we saw the old woman hanging upon a bow of a Cipresse tree; then one of them cut downe the bowe whereon shee hanged, and cast her into the bottome of a great ditch: after this they bound the maiden and fell greedily to

their victuals, which the miserable old woman had prepared for them. At which time they began to devise with themselves of our death, and how they might be revenged; divers was the opinions of this divers number: the first said, that hee thought best the Mayd should be burned alive: the second said she should be throwne out to wild beasts: the third said, she should be hanged upon a gibbet: the fourth said she should be flead alive: thus was the death of the poore Maiden scanned betweene them foure. But one of the theeves after every man had declared his judgement, did speake in this manner: it is not convenient unto the oath of our company, to suffer you to waxe more cruell then the quality of the offence doth merit, for I would that shee should not be hanged nor burned, nor throwne to beasts, nor dye any sodaine death, but by my council I would have her punished according to her desert. You know well what you have determined already of this dull Asse, that eateth more then he is worth, that faineth lamenesse, and that was the cause of the flying away of the Maid: my mind is that he shall be slaine to morrow, and when all the guts and entrailes of his body is taken out, let the Maide be sowne into his belly, then let us lay them upon a great stone against the broiling heate of the Sunne, so they shall both sustaine all the punishments which you have ordained: for first the Asse shall be slaine as you have determined, and she shall have her members torne and gnawn with wild beasts, when as she is bitten and rent with wormes, shee shall endure the paine of the fire, when as the broyling heat of the Sunne shall scotch and parch the belly of the Asse, shee shall abide the gallows when the Dogs and Vultures shall have the guts of her body hanging in their ravenous mouthes. I pray you number all the torments which she shall suffer: First shee shall dwell within the paunch of an Asse: secondly her nosethrilles shall receive a carraine stinke of the beast: thirdly shee shall dye for hunger: last of all, shee shall finde no meane to ridde her selfe from her paines, for her hand shalt be sownen up within the skinne of the Asse: This being said, all the Theeves consented, and when I (poore Asse) heard and understood all their device, I did nothing else but lament and bewayle my dead carkasse, which should be handled in such sort on the next morrow.