

Amoretti LXVII: Like as a Huntsman

BY EDMUND SPENSER

Like as a huntsman after weary chase,
Seeing the game from him escap'd away,
Sits down to rest him in some shady place,
With panting hounds beguiled of their prey:
So after long pursuit and vain assay,
When I all weary had the chase forsook,
The gentle deer return'd the self-same way,
Thinking to quench her thirst at the next brook.
There she beholding me with milder look,
Sought not to fly, but fearless still did bide:
Till I in hand her yet half trembling took,
And with her own goodwill her firmly tied.
Strange thing, me seem'd, to see a beast so wild,
So goodly won, with her own will beguil'd.

Summary

The lover says earlier my condition was like a hunter (chasing his beloved to trap her) who after a weary chase and having ultimately realized that the prey (beloved) has escaped away, sits down to rest in some shady place with hounds tired and panting. So after a long pursuit when I was tired and had given up or forsaken the game, I saw the gentle deer (beloved) returned the same way to quench her thirst at the next brook. There she looked at me with gentle looks, did not fly away, but remained there without any fear till I caught hold of her and firmly tied her with her own goodwill. It seemed quite strange to me that so wild a beast was won over by me so easily; perhaps she was beguiled by her own will (desire).

Analysis

The lover compares himself to huntsman who has been in pursuit of his prey (lady-love) but this chase has completely exhausted him, because his game has escaped. Thus his chase or hunt

has been a vain exercise. He describes the 'chase' as 'heavy chase', using a transferred epithet, to mean that the chase has made him heavy, tired and exhausted, because it has proved to be a vain attempt: In a dejected mood, the lover-hunter feels desperate and tired and sits down to relax in a shady place along with his 'hounds who are panting because of their failure to capture the prey. The 'hounds' should not be interpreted literally but understood metaphorically, for they allude to his desires, thoughts and even strategies to ensnare the beloved, for both in thought and action. the poet has been pursuing his suit.

The lover has pursued the lady for a considerable time now, but all his attempt have been futile and of no avail. His beloved is proud and arrogant and she would not surrender to his desires. The lover gives up the chase having realized the futility of his assay. The word 'assay' could also mean that he had attempted to drink and taste rather prematurely and did not realize the fact that hunting and killing the deer were not appropriate measures. It only means that he failed to comprehend the true meaning of lover-beloved relationship, their significance and value. He had acted like a greedy huntsman who tries to capture his beloved by using force. But the use of force turns out to be a vain exercise. The beloved cannot be won by passion, greed and force.

Now that the huntsman (the lover) has realized his folly, sits down. He has decided to forsake the hunt and the prey. No sooner does the realization dawn on the lover-hunter, than a miracle happens. He observes the same gentle deer returning the same way without any fear looking for the next brook where she could quench her thirst, for she could also be equally thirsty. The deer's drinking at the brook is an indication of her longing for God; water is emblematic of godliness and purity. Love implies purity and godliness. The lover had forgotten this when tried to chase his beloved, for which he might have been punished but for the quick and mild response of the deer (beloved). The beloved's mood undergoes a change when the poet realizes his folly. She returns, she is a gentle, forgiving and loving, a Christ-figure. She looks at him gently and mildly without any sign of fear or hatred. The lover holds her trembling hand and she gently yields or surrenders. Alluding to Christ, Spenser's deer submits perhaps like Christ. As Christ forgives his worshipers and yields his selfless love, the deer (beloved) likewise surrenders to the lover. In fact it is the Christian values—self-realization and repentance followed by patience and perseverance which are rewarded. In the surrender of the beloved the Church and Christ are united only when Church becomes an abode of patience. The lover repents his hasty and foolish action, and God (or Beloved) who had forsaken him ultimately forgives him and surrenders.

