

Summary: Act I, scene i

A young man named Lucentio arrives in Padua with his manservant, Tranio. Lucentio was educated in Pisa and Florence and has come to Padua to further his studies at its famous university. As he announces to Tranio, he is young and eager to learn new things. Tranio pleads that they should not forget the pleasures of life in their academic pursuits. The noisy entrance of a crowd interrupts their discussion.

The crowd is composed of Baptista Minola; his daughters, Katherine and Bianca; and Bianca's two suitors, older men named Hortensio and Gremio. Most of the noise comes from Katherine, who seems to be caught up in a rage, screaming and cursing at everyone present. When Baptista informs the suitors that they are free to court Katherine, but that he will not allow Bianca to marry before Katherine does, they respond that no one would ever marry a devil like her. Katherine threatens them with violence in return. Amid all the noise, though, Lucentio takes particular notice of Bianca, who behaves much more mildly than her sister. After Baptista leaves with his daughters, Hortensio and Gremio agree that they have but one option: to look for someone to wed Katherine. However, they are not optimistic about their chances of finding a willing man. In the meantime, they say, they will also look for a schoolmaster for Bianca—Baptista had mentioned that he was looking for one, and they hope to earn favor with Bianca's father by helping him.

The old men walk away, and Lucentio gushes to Tranio that he has fallen in love with Bianca and is determined to court her. Knowing that he cannot do so publicly, given Baptista's forbiddance, he resolves to woo her in secret. He suddenly recalls that Hortensio and Gremio mentioned procuring a schoolmaster, and he decides to disguise himself as a teacher in the hope that by tutoring Bianca he will be able to declare his love for her and win her heart. Tranio, for his part, will pretend to be Lucentio and study at the university. Biondello, Lucentio's other servant, arrives in a timely fashion and agrees to help with the deception.

At this point, the main story—which is being presented as a play for Christopher Sly—fades for a moment, and Sly reemerges. He declares briefly that he is enjoying this entertainment, but he implies that he would prefer to be left alone with his wife.