

# Ladies to Love

by Miya Shimada

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This project is an imaginative description of the relationships between philosophy, fortune, wisdom, and folly. These dynamics are described through a prosimetric conversation between the unnamed Dante-like character and the Beatrice-like portrayal of Lady Philosophy from Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy*. Lady Philosophy explains her role as the love of Lady Wisdom from Proverbs and warns of the deceitful nature of Lady Fortune and Lady Folly. Ultimately, she directs the pilgrim to their true and proper Beloved. My hope is that the female figures referenced in this piece teach readers to look towards and desire higher things in a world of empty promises vying for our love.

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And at this point, I could not help but interject as my desire stirred within me and my spirit urged me forward.

“To Solomon were all riches given  
For what he asked he received,  
For what he sought he found.<sup>1</sup>  
He wrote of one more precious than rubies,  
One surpassing silver and gold.<sup>2</sup>  
Night and day I have sought her;  
Hill and valley I have searched.  
Have I found you at last, my love?  
Your foe has long tempted me:  
The honey-sweet lips of Lady Folly,  
The enchanting call of her voice.  
When pressed against mine,  
The taste of good fortune consumes me.  
When sung mournfully,  
The poison of Muses smothers me.  
Say I have found you, my love.”

“I am your love,” says she, “but I am not your lady.” She looked upon me with a compassionate rebuke that tended my warm longing into a flaming desire stronger than what had yet possessed me.

“Teacher,” I reply, “your meanings are hard for me.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kings 3 (ESV).

<sup>2</sup> Proverbs 3:13-15 (ESV).

<sup>3</sup> Esolen, Anthony, and Dante, *Inferno*. (New York: Random House Publishing, 2003), 23.

“My child, your search is upright and your heart pure.<sup>4</sup> Your longing to find the Lady is a longing for what is good and will receive favor from God.<sup>5</sup> She was with Him in the creation of the world.<sup>6</sup> As a child is the delight of her father, so she was the delight of The Creator, rejoicing in the understanding He had given her of his plan for the man he created.<sup>7</sup> Blessed is the one who finds her!<sup>8</sup> She brings riches beyond gold and wealth beyond silver, endowing goods that fickle Fortune cannot touch.<sup>9</sup> Those with Fortune's good live in fear of her ever-turning wheel, but Wisdom's lover lives at ease in her safety.<sup>10</sup>

“My son, the LORD has given you what you seek, so seek with all your heart!<sup>11</sup> But beware of the lesser things – you must never love the search instead of the searched for, never the means instead of the ends, never the love instead of the beloved. I am not to be loved, but to be love – I will wed you to your beloved.

Look not to me, but through me!  
Troilus with his mighty heart  
Tumbled headlong for his love.  
All days and nights the knight there lay

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<sup>4</sup> Proverbs 21:8 (ESV).

<sup>5</sup> Proverbs 18:22 (ESV).

<sup>6</sup> Proverbs 8:22-29 (ESV).

<sup>7</sup> Proverbs 8:30-31 (ESV).

<sup>8</sup> Proverbs 8:34-35 (ESV).

<sup>9</sup> Proverbs 8:18-19 (ESV).

<sup>10</sup> Proverbs 1:33 (ESV).

<sup>11</sup> Proverbs 2:6 (ESV).

Dreaming, pining, mourning.  
His beloved captured all his thoughts,  
The inner and outer man conquered.  
Despite man's best plans and efforts,  
They are slaves to women of Fortune.  
Subject to her fickle favor,  
He wept the brooch twice gifted.  
But in his death he rose above  
Where vision once was fixed  
And laughed at woeful man below.  
How foolish is the one  
Whose gaze does not look past!  
The most beautiful of women,  
Worthy above all creatures,  
Points the one who loves her beyond.  
Lady Folly calls for man,  
But true beauty points to higher things,  
Guiding to and through the heavens.  
Blessed Beatrice, condemned Criseyde!  
Beware of lesser loves."<sup>12,13</sup>

I sat for a while, considering and savoring her words. My desire for my lady still burned inside me, but uncertainty of my search crept up and slowly gripped me. So I said to the lady, "Madame, I could not be more grateful for your correction. Your beauty increases in my eyes with the lesson you teach, yet you have aided my desire to reach beyond you. Surely, you are blessed!

"In your kindness, I am confident you will cure my lack of understanding on one matter. The Lady I seek, the one whom none can be desired over, seems now so far off.<sup>14</sup> I fear she is too far beyond me, and I may search in vain! You, Lady Philosophy, are made to point beyond yourself. I beg of you to tell me where and how far I must continue!"

With a bright smile, she replied, "My dear, the way to Wisdom is before you! Those who seek her shall find her.<sup>15</sup> I told you in riddle that I am the love you seek, and now I will reveal meaning to you plainly.

<sup>12</sup> Coghill, Nevill, and Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*. (London: Penguin Books, 1971).

<sup>13</sup> Esolen, Anthony, and Dante, *Paradise*. (New York: Random House Publishing, 2004).

<sup>14</sup> Proverbs 3:15 (ESV).

<sup>15</sup> Proverbs 8:17 (ESV).

"I, Philosophy, am the act of being in love with Wisdom. What a joy it is to serve her, my beloved master! The LORD has gifted mankind with me – night and day, I lead them to the worthy Lady. I delight as I wed them together and see Wisdom enter the hearts of men, gifting knowledge that is pleasant to the soul.<sup>16</sup> Rejoice, my son, for you have found the love of Wisdom! Let me be your guide, and the bride you seek is yours. We will rejoice together in your union. Blessed are you, a man with me as his guide, and blessed am I, the one who points beyond!

"Lady Folly with her wily tricks takes many forms. She is Fortune with sweet lips of honey, kissing and drawing away, nurturing a dependence in men on her worthless goods.<sup>17</sup> She intoxicates men in the times of her favors, and she is the Muse poisoning men with mourning when she takes the sweetness away, prostituting herself by his bedside. And most deceitful of all, she turns men against me by inducing them to love me. She strips my honor in serving my lady with the false honors of mankind's praise!

"Woe to the one who weds Philosophy! Apart from serving Wisdom, I am nothing. Though the men talk in the terms of the wise, they are the most foolish of all. Though they speak of higher things, they are the lowest of men! Lady Folly lays beside them in her perfumed bed, stroking their heads, whispering in their ear empty knowledge that corrupts the soul.<sup>18</sup>

"To them, I bestow none of my blessings. Though they marry my name, they do not know me – I am not made to lie in bed with man. My child, follow me quickly! Let me lead you to my master. Philosophy cannot be done for the sake of Philosophy alone, and the one that believes the whorish lie surely lies in their grave while alive.<sup>19</sup> Though they believe I am with them in bed, petting them and inflating them with knowledge superior to all creation, that can never be. It is truly the prostitute they are wedding – she cloaks herself with my name! I am the love of Wisdom, and without Wisdom I cease to be. Woe to the one who marries Lady Folly!"

<sup>16</sup> Proverbs 2:10 (ESV).

<sup>17</sup> Proverbs 5:3-4 (ESV).

<sup>18</sup> Proverbs 7:17 (ESV).

<sup>19</sup> Proverbs 7:27 (ESV).

“I praise the God above  
For the nature of Philosophy  
Though she attends me in all things,  
My bride she will not be.  
With joy we delight together,  
Her as servant, I as spouse.  
For how wonderful is our Lady!  
Our Beloved is more precious than rubies;  
Our Beloved surpasses silver and gold.  
Blessed is Philosophy,  
And blessed the one she guides!”

**Bibliography**

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